New research identifying the challenges of international school headship and the qualities needed for effective leadership
Good international schools are exciting, inspirational places.

I have spent time in dozens of schools in Asia and Europe and this has been the impression I have formed. On each occasion, I have come away feeling energised and humbled both by the children and the staff who educate and care for them.

My time with Heads, pupil admissions teams or HR Managers also revealed that international schools are extremely challenging organisations to run successfully, that it takes considerable skill and particular personal qualities to succeed as a leader. Indeed, during one of my early trips, I was shocked by the statistics people shared about the short tenure of many international school headships.

At RSAcademics we support Boards of Directors seeking to appoint outstanding leaders. We also help Heads and Boards perform to their best by conducting appraisals and reviews and offering training and coaching.

For all these reasons, I thought we ought to look more rigorously into what it takes to be a successful leader of an international school and to share this knowledge as widely as possible.

This research would not have been possible without the generosity and trust of many people. Julian Whiteley (UWC Thailand) and John Gwyn Jones (PIS Laos) deserve special mention – thank you both for all you have done to help us, in so many ways. To KHDA in Dubai, thank you too for your support of this project. Chris Charleson (ISL Qatar), Trevor Rowell (COBIS), Ed Wickins (Kowloon Learning Campus, Hong Kong), and Jonathan Hughes D’Aeth (Repton, Dubai) have all provided valuable commentary on earlier drafts. Also I should like to thank Claire Oulton and Jean Sullivan for their help with editing.

I should also like to thank publicly Mark Roelofsen and Rhona Greenhill at IPSEF, whose conference in Asia in March 2016 was such a useful and dynamic occasion. Also, thank you Dieuni Welihinda at Westminster Education Forum and Tania Donoghue at FOBISIA for helping us share our findings with wider audiences.

And of course, to every Head, Deputy and Board member who has taken part in this… THANK YOU for taking the time, for being honest and for recognising the importance of this area of research. We were struck by the generosity of so many participants who took a great deal of time to provide very detailed responses. We hope that you, above all, will be pleased with what we have produced.

And finally, I would like to mention my big brother, Barry, who has analysed all the responses, conducted additional interviews with many of the participants and written the report itself. This research has benefitted enormously from his many years of international work experience in several organisations in Asia, the Middle East, North America and Eastern Europe before joining RSAcademics in 2014. Thank you Barry!

Russell Speirs
Founder and CEO
RSAcademics Ltd
August 2016
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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Our previous UK based research – ‘The Art of Headship’

In 2012, as part of the development of our recruitment services for UK schools, we undertook research with leaders of UK independent schools into what makes an excellent Head. This resulted in our report ‘The Art of Headship’, a copy of which can be downloaded from RSAcademics.co.uk

Four years on, and with the appointment of well over 100 Headships under our belt, we are looking at this same question for international schools.

This report builds on our earlier research by focusing on the additional aspects of leadership which are particular to, or of even greater importance in, an international school context. It’s what one might call ‘The Art of Headship Plus’.

There are two main areas of focus:

1 What are the particular or additional challenges of leading international schools?
2 What are the particular or additional qualities of successful international school leaders?

HOW TIMES HAVE CHANGED!

An experienced international Head told us how his colleagues in his home country reacted many years ago when he first decided to move abroad: “So which of the three Ms are you?” they asked, “mercenary, missionary or misfit?”

Nowadays, leading an international school outside the familiarity of your home country is increasingly seen as hugely demanding and personally developmental. Perhaps in the future, international experience in education will be regarded in the same way as it is in the business world – as a distinct advantage, if not a pre-requisite, for securing a top job.
Diversity of schools and importance of context
A key theme to emerge from our research is the diversity of schools and the importance of 'fit', i.e. matching the individual leader with the school context.

There is a huge difference, for example, between:
• a new start up school in Changzhou, China, which is part of a for-profit group owned by a local proprietor, with a bilingual curriculum and a vast majority of local national students; and
• a 90 year old school in Singapore, set up as a not-for-profit trust with elected Parent Governors, and nearly all expatriate western students.

This was explained by one respondent as follows:

“International schools are not homogeneous – they are unique products of history, culture (local and organisational), ownership structure, parent and student body, curriculum framework and socio-economics. There is no single model of excellence. Heads need to find the right fit. To change the school to fit the Head, therein lies disaster”.

We hope our report supports both schools and candidates by exploring this diversity, the importance of fit, and therefore the required due diligence to make informed career and selection decisions.

Having said that, it is clear from responses from very different schools that there are many common themes to emerge. This report identifies these and illustrates how they apply in different contexts.

The aim of our research
Our aims are to:
• help Heads in international schools become even better in their role;
• provide inspiration for those hoping to become international Heads in the future;
• help Boards as they go about supporting and developing their senior staff and existing Heads;
• guide Boards in the appointment of Heads;
• provide information to help Boards and candidates undertake due diligence to ensure a good ‘fit’;
• facilitate understanding between Heads and their Boards;
• help us at RSAcademics develop new tools for assessing the suitability of candidates, thus giving our clients a distinct advantage when it comes to making headship appointments.

How this report is organised
The first part of our report is all about the challenges, issues and difficulties of international school leadership. We have clustered these into seven main headings with examples and illustrative quotations from research participants.

We then look at the qualities needed to be successful: the strategies that leaders employ; the skills and abilities that seem to be most important; and the underlying personal attributes that seem to make most difference.

Given the importance of the school context and fit, we have added a final section aimed at helping candidates and school Boards think about what type of school they are or want to be, and what type of leader matches this. In addition, we have included some thoughts on governance, which many Heads see as the most important aspect of fit. This is aimed at helping candidates consider the impact of the governance set-up and how it operates in practice.
There has never been a time like now for international English-medium education. We have unprecedented growth of international schools, fantastic career opportunities for established and prospective leaders, and tremendous personal development to be gained through leading in a complex and diverse environment.

We hope this report adds to the thinking and development of this exciting sector and contributes to its continuing success.

Terminology
In this report we use the term ‘Head’ to refer to the leader of a school - a position that might be called Principal, Head Teacher, Headmaster or Headmistress, CEO or Director in different schools.

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Questions for reflection
In our report we have put together a few possible questions that readers may want to consider. Of course, not all questions will be relevant, but it could be that a few trigger additional thoughts or ideas that may be of personal benefit.

Some questions may be most relevant to current Heads reflecting on their own leadership. In addition there are questions relating to governance, that are also aimed at Board members.

Above all, we hope that Heads, senior leaders and Boards can discuss many of the questions together, as a team, listening to and learning from each other.
What do we mean by an ‘international school’?
There would appear to be no universally agreed definition, but for the purpose of this report we mean:

**A school located in the Asia or Gulf regions which teaches, mainly in English, a UK, US or IB curriculum.**

This would therefore exclude some particular international schools teaching, for example, a French curriculum, but includes schools with a majority of local national students.

Research method
In early 2016 we contacted the Heads of over 150 schools in Asia and the Gulf Region. We asked them to complete a questionnaire describing their role, the challenges and qualities needed for success. We asked them to provide some background information about their school and themselves, and described the context of their school and what they were trying to achieve – i.e. what ‘success’ means for them.

We also asked the Heads to forward the questionnaire to one of their senior colleagues, such as a Deputy Head or Finance Director, and a member of the Board, with the aim of including three respondents from a school.

In addition to commenting on their own experience and learning, respondents also commented more generally on what they see as common challenges and developments within the sector, and described the qualities of particularly successful leaders they have worked with.
Focus on Asia and Gulf States
We have chosen to focus on international schools within the Gulf Region of the Middle East and across Asia because these are the areas of greatest growth. Survey respondents work in the countries shown in dark green.

Survey respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Head</th>
<th>Board Member</th>
<th>Deputy Head</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>52</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>Gulf</td>
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See Appendices for further details about the response sample.
What is it about leading an international school that is particularly challenging? Our earlier UK report ‘The Art of Headship’ described the huge range of skills required for leading a school. However, it would seem that leadership in an international context brings additional complexity across a greater diversity of issues.

The challenges associated with complexity and diversity are the key threads which run through responses from all types of international school. Perhaps we could summarise them as:

**The challenge of developing and implementing a unified and unifying vision within a diverse context.**

The main challenges to emerge from our research fit under seven headings: Parents, Students, Staff, Governance, External Environment, School Change and Personal. We will look at each of these headings in the pages which follow.
THE CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL HEADSHIP

- Expat parent characteristics
- Diverse parent expectations
- Lost in translation
- Local parent characteristics
- Transience and ‘third culture kids’
- Curriculum – demands and transitions
- EAL - English as an Additional Language
- Shortages and retention
- Recruitment practices
- Managing diversity
- Expat staff
- Complexity and dysfunction
- Cultural dissonance
- Managing diversity
- Lack of delegation
- Parent Boards
- Regulations, legalities and norms
- Managing ambitious fast growth
- Change and instability within schools
- Isolation, lack of support or guidance
- Family pressures
- Complexity and diversity
- Governance
- Schools
- Parents
- Personal
- Staff
- SEND
Parents

"The greatest gap in my knowledge as a new Head was the ‘international parent’ and how best to support / challenge / liaise and engage with them. They are a different breed!"

"Dealing with parents can be the most rewarding aspect and also the most soul destroying part of the job."

"Dealing with very difficult families is the hardest part of the job...keep some parents close and other parents closer!"

"Parents in international schools have very high expectations, and equally high anxieties. In a school like ours (virtually all expats) they have displaced their family to pursue professional goals. There is huge potential for trauma, guilt, etc."

"Parents in international schools rely on the school for their own personal needs and interactions and can be over-involved."

"International communities are easily subject to bouts of paranoia. This is especially true if there are bored ‘trailing spouses’, who have left highly paid jobs to follow their partners to a new location overseas. If the working partner then has to travel, the potential for paranoia increases. Add in a coffee shop on school premises and you create a perfect storm for school-focused anxiety and gossip to flourish. In the face of this, the Principal needs to be very resilient, especially if they lack support from their Board! Board members may even attend the same coffee shop..."

What is it about parents in an international school setting that is particularly challenging? We have pulled together four main themes from the responses received:

Expats parent characteristics

Many respondents talk about the greater anxiety of expat parents and the greater intensity of parent relations. In many locations, parents are closely connected with each other around national or linguistic groups, and more involved in their school than they are in their home country. Away from home, their social lives, especially for non-working spouses, may revolve around the school community and, in some locations, families may live in the vicinity of the school.

Having a close-knit and highly involved school community is a strength – but it can also exaggerate anxieties or accelerate issues when things go wrong.
A key challenge of any school leader is to make changes to develop the school whilst minimising any short term drop in standards. This temporary drop is sometimes called an ‘implementation dip’.

In international schools, the scrutiny of expat parents (and parent governors) may mean less breathing space or tolerance for an implementation dip. It’s hard to make changes when you are being watched so closely. The intensity of relations with parents and their heightened anxiety could influence schools to become more risk averse. It’s also interesting to note how this might contradict the ethos and learning culture at the school.

“We are dealing with precious cargo and in parents’ eyes, the most precious cargo, so there is often very little room for mistakes and experimentation, which is contrary to what we are trying to instil in our learning programme.”

Many expat parents are first time buyers of private education: their employer may pay or they may have no choice in their location but to choose a fee paying school. It is possible that they underestimate the need to build a relationship with the school and may default to seeing their relationship with the school like any other commercial transaction.

“Generally, our parents view themselves as fee-paying customers of a prestigious brand – and they expect us to treat them in the same way.”
“Some expat parents may show staff, and indeed the Head, less professional respect than you may find in a domestic school. Even in a sellers’ market like Singapore with long waiting lists this can still apply.”

“Diverse parental expectations covers all aspects of education: homework, assessment and reporting, extra-curricular activities, food, and curriculum structure.”

“The polarity between local expectations and that of some liberal western expat communities can be particularly extreme.”

“Diverse parental expectations covers all aspects of education: homework, assessment and reporting, extra-curricular activities, food, and curriculum structure.”

“The challenges of international headship / Parents

Diverse parent expectations

Whilst high parent expectations are common across schools we work with, domestic and international, the expectations of parents at international schools are much more diverse. This is perhaps most easily illustrated by the ‘East meets West’ debate about education priorities – e.g.:

- Some western parents may place great importance on sport and music opportunities, value student-centred learning through discovery etc.
- Some local parents may place more value on lots of homework, and see a teacher-driven approach as the route to academic success.

This diversity creates additional communication challenges, the need for compromise and adds complexity.

Schools, however, may have 30, 40 or even 50 different nationalities among the parent body, with a similarly wide range of views, expectations and beliefs about education and indeed all aspects of school life.

“Fundamentally all parents want the best for their kids. That means they want someone competent who they can trust and is able to help ensure the success of their children. This is challenging because some parents may simply see success as academics, whereas others are less concerned with academics, for example. Heads need a narrative and then be on message with it as much as possible.”

“Expectations vary massively. Attitudes towards safeguarding, punctuality, absence, etc. also vary.”
Parents’ expectations often reflect the way teaching is done in their home country and not liberal western methodologies. It is difficult to get parents to accept the differences - especially the use of textbooks and other resources and rote learning v skills-based learning.

Typically Asian parents are highly committed to good grades, strong content knowledge and, while they appreciate it, may assign less value to critical thinking and reflection.

It is also interesting to note how the occupation of parents can be a factor in parental expectations:

“The culture of international schools is very much dependent on the nature of parents that send their children there and these can be very different in different places. Some communities are business oriented and have a business management style of parenting and expectations from the school. Others, such as ours, are international aid and humanitarian oriented, so the community includes more freestyle approaches to parenting from some but not others. This range of views from parents in these communities can be far more difficult to manage.”

Some Heads have particularly noticed differences when moving schools:

“Singapore was full of A-type personalities, but then moving to Phuket, Thailand, the parent group is completely different, more relaxed and far less competitive.”
Lost in translation: the cultural iceberg

Communicating with many nationalities or with a local parent body is likely to lead to misunderstandings of language and culture. At the very least this means more time and effort communicating, and it could result in escalation of conflict.

“The language barrier is enormous. Very few of our parents are able to communicate in English, leading to frequent misunderstandings.”

“Working with a predominately non-English speaking parent community increases the difficulty with both written and oral communication. From school newsletters to homework sheets, it’s not just the translation task but rather the interpretation of meaning that can be problematic.”

“Often there is a need for careful translation. This is essential but time-consuming, and quite often diplomatic subtleties can be lost, messages misconstrued, and World War Three inadvertently ignited!”

The iceberg analogy categorising cultural differences has been around for about 40 years, and illustrates nicely the complexity of dealing with different cultures.
Even if you work successfully on translation and dealing with language differences there are a whole range of other issues that complicate parent relations:

“Parental expectations, as well as how they interact with staff (local and international), can vary immensely and it can take a while to understand this when a high percentage of the parents represent one culture that you are less familiar with. An international Head needs to understand this culture as quickly as possible as it is very easy to mishandle a situation and have it spiral out of control, and often having absolutely no idea that it has even happened. It can be extremely difficult to get to the heart of an issue if the individual/group of parents are not accustomed to giving honest feedback even when asked directly.”

Part of this includes the unseen affiliations and allegiances between parents that influence opinions and may require different communication strategies.

“When there has been a “crisis” (twice during my 10 years) I have been amazed by the strength of view and how quickly a blaze can start. The unseen links between parents are very strong and difficult to appreciate in normal times. At these times the very different cultural perspectives quickly became apparent and the issues were very difficult to resolve.”

“A majority of local parents are very easily led by a minority of misinformed, self-interested parents (the words ‘sheep’ and ‘lemming-like’ come to mind). A good Head understands this and works at defeating the grapevine by communicating the facts through as many communication channels as possible.”

“In many Asian countries, there is one mother in the form who is more influential than others, possibly due to wealth, connections or family. All the other mothers will defer to this “Alpha Mum”, and so it is very important if you are trying to reach an agreement that the alpha mum is included. Otherwise you will be wasting your time.”
Local parent characteristics

In some international schools the majority of students are local to the country and often learning part or all of the curriculum in English as a second language. The parent body is therefore predominately made up of local nationals. Many respondents highlighted particular issues associated with local parents, and although these vary by location, one very common theme was ‘unrealistic expectations’.

Part of any Head’s job is to explain and sell the school vision. However it would seem that, perhaps especially when interacting with local parents, international Heads are required to spend much more time on this, including going back to fundamentals about the curriculum and what the school means by a ‘good education’.

Many school leaders also talked about the challenges their expat staff face in communicating with local parents.

It may be much easier for an expat faculty to engage expat parents than local parents. Local parents may have less time and, despite the best efforts with translation, and with staff trying to understand local culture, schools may find it much harder to get local parents as involved.

“Parents enrol their children in an international school and expect unrealistic results in a very short time. If the student does not perform according to their unrealistic expectations they blame the school as being poor.”

“Sometimes expectations are crazy, literally.”

“You have two parents, four grandparents and one child – to whom all their expectations and funds are channelled.”

“As we have grown bigger, I deal with more and more problems with teachers and parents. In most cases these are focused on “how” things have been done, rather than what was actually done.”

“Bridging various communities has been hard with expats keen to be involved and a local community more isolated through weaker English and longer work commitments.”

“Local parents have their own agenda for enrolling their kids in our school. They expect big miracles from us but we are only able to deliver small miracles!”

“I spend more time than usual with potential parents and families outlining the school’s mission, vision and educational programme. I am open in encouraging them to check other schools in the area to ensure they know what they are getting themselves into.”

“New teachers can often feel intimidated by some vocal parents before they realize that often it is a cultural difference or a mismatch in expectations NOT a personal complaint.”

“Many parents send their children to the school to learn English; the fact that we teach the British curriculum is often of secondary importance, and we keep having to explain to them the importance and rationale of this curriculum.”

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Respondents also highlighted a number of characteristics specific to parents at their particular location. Some examples include:

“Parents in our location are sometimes nervous about residential trips and buying into this ‘risk-taking’ ‘resilience-building’ element of our curriculum.”

“There are particular problems with cultural-revolution grandparents and one-child-only parents and students. Trying to get parents to contribute positively is truly challenging. Getting a few key people onside is useful.”

“Parents here are lacking in parental skills as the children are raised by maids and nannies which develops a learned helplessness - of course it is always the teacher’s fault.”

Questions to consider: Parents

What else could you do to channel the energy and interest of expat parents to the benefit of your school?

What’s the best way to explain the concept of the ‘implementation dip’ to gain greater parental understanding?

How might you better induct ‘first time buyers’ of education?

Which aspect of your school’s ethos or mission takes most effort to explain and get buy-in? What could you do differently?

What are the predominant occupations/cultures/backgrounds of parents and how might this influence their way of interacting?

Who are the key influencers within your parent body and how might you work with them most effectively?

Who in your team, or amongst the parent body, can you rely on to help your understanding of the cultures of different parent groups?

How could you make it easier for parents, especially those from the host country, to engage with school life and support their child’s learning?

How important is word of mouth in your school’s reputation?

How do you find out what parents most like about your school and what they least like or find frustrating?
THE CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL HEADSHIP: STUDENTS

**STUDENTS**

When considering the challenges of international school headship, respondents were much more likely to mention staff, parents and governors than students. In our questionnaire, students were typically mentioned as a source of joy, energy and great job satisfaction.

There are, however, certain factors relating to international school students that present greater complexity and management challenges.

**English as an Additional Language (EAL)**

Students may need to cope with several different languages – those spoken at home, at school and in the host country. Limited grounding in different languages can lead to the phenomenon of semi-lingualism in which students are not fully competent in any one language, including their own mother-tongue. This results in difficulties for some students in finding what is often called a ‘Language A’ or ‘First Language’ for examination purposes.

The key EAL issue, however, is how a school integrates students of varying levels of English, including very limited English. This requires additional resources, and time, and presents additional teaching challenges.

In schools with a high transient student population, these integration issues are non-stop, with new students joining throughout the academic year.

**Transience and ‘Third Culture Kids’**

This term refers to children who grow up, or at least have part of their developmental years, in a culture different to their parents. They move from their home culture to a second culture abroad, and develop a ‘third culture’, different to either. This is complicated further, of course, by moving again and again and ending up with almost no roots, or by having parents from different cultures.

Many respondents praise students for their resilience, compassion, adaptability, emotional maturity and how they just make the most of their situation. However, respondents were well aware of the pressures and disorientation that can arise.

“The transitions our communities experience must be paid attention to, planned for and structured to achieve the inherent potential for growth. Otherwise we run the risk of eroding educational opportunities, or worse yet, leaving individuals scarred from the experience. There is huge potential for great learning...but it doesn't happen without careful thought and planning.”

“The school also operates as an independent school in Hong Kong – it does not fit neatly into the category of a local school or an international school. For example, most students carry more than one passport (the average is around three), which means that our students are mostly both host nationals and internationals at the same time. The formation of cultural identity is therefore quite complex.”

“The biggest challenge is trying to provide an international standard curriculum at all grades while the majority of students enrolling have limited English language skills.”
Schools may have different standards of what is acceptable when compared with a student's home culture - for example, in relation to teenagers' independence. It is easy for children to grow apart from their parents, or develop almost dual personalities, as they juggle and negotiate between the different value systems.

These issues may be exaggerated at boarding schools or when parents do not speak English and school communications such as letters and emails are translated (and even replied to!) by the students.

Curriculum – demands and transitions between schools
Related to the concept of Third Culture Kids are demands by parents to provide additional curriculum relating to the national identity of their children. They want the school to support their quest to preserve their child's home culture by, for example, providing mother-tongue lessons – even if this is after school and at additional cost.

Differences in curriculum make transitions between schools a challenge. This is most obvious when moving to a location which has limited curriculum choices, but even where children are moving to a school with the same IB or national curriculum there may be local differences, e.g. a legal requirement in UAE to take Islamic Studies, the need to study Thai Language and Culture in Thailand.

In addition, children transferring between north and south hemispheres may be transferring in the middle of an academic year.

SEND – Special Education Needs and Disabilities
It would seem that international schools are often not informed by prospective parents about special needs, or that they are harder to diagnose since they could be part of a language or another integration problem. It may also be that some schools within the sector, under pressure to deliver high results, may discourage SEND applications, and this, together with less recognition or openness about SEND in certain cultures, may mean fewer diagnoses and declarations.

“Schools ask “has your child got special education needs?” but it is often not declared by prospective parents. It could be that they think it will damage their chances to get into a school, or that a problem such as dyslexia has not been diagnosed but has presented as one of language due to moving countries so often.”

“Students are incredibly resilient and are more likely to adapt to a changing environment than their parents, but the impact of moving country/school every few years does have an impact on them as they find ways to cope. It can be very isolating to move to a school in which there is a dominance of one culture (often the host country), especially when this includes another language that is not representative of the language of instruction. Students can become very isolated and excluded and the school needs to be aware of this and take the necessary action to try to create an inclusive environment.”

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Questions to consider: Students

How might you better induct new students into your school, especially those who arrive during the school year?

How well do you know your students? How different are the views and needs of different student groups?

How do you collect student opinions? How do you take account of potential differences between students of different culture/nationality/background in how willing they are to speak up?

Do you spend enough time with students?

How do you ensure that you and your staff are aware of the different educational backgrounds of students and the consequences for their integration?

What additional options are there for you to support third culture students in a transient community – e.g. to help with loss of identity, friends and stability?

What could you do to develop prospective parents’ knowledge and openness about SEND?

How do you keep in touch with students (and their parents) after they have left your school, to ensure they remain well-disposed towards your school?

STAFF
When identifying challenges, we found Heads much more likely to speak of staff than students.

“It is a feature of international schools that staff cause more issues than students. The Head has to negotiate a wide variety of personal and professional issues.”

“We have identified four main aspects of leadership of staff from the comments by respondents.

Staff shortages and retention
Given the growth in the market, especially in the geography we have covered in this survey, it is no surprise to hear that staff shortages were a major concern in several locations.

“We have a greater responsibility to employees as their whole life (accommodation, family etc.) is invested in their post.”

“The competition within East Asia means that a fine IB qualified teacher is in great demand. It’s a pity that the supply is not sufficient.”
Some see staff turnover as an inevitable result of employing expat teachers and the prevailing practice of short term contracts.

“Building respect and commitment through generating a sense of belonging to a shared set of ideals and mixing this with a school culture that recognizes and acknowledges contribution – these are key aspects of staff retention. Recruiting essentially builds on what you are already doing to retain existing staff. In a world of online reviews and other social media, there are few secrets.”

However, this picture was mixed, with some school leaders, perhaps in larger or more attractive locations, being more optimistic and reflecting on the importance of getting the fundamentals right.

“There are no local people to call on, no supply teachers, so if you don't replace leavers you are in difficulties.”

“The recruitment market is becoming increasingly more competitive and therefore recruitment is not just about selecting the right person, but attracting the right applicants. Packages need to improve in some places and we have done this here.”

“I often say that the most important part of my job is putting the right staff in front of our students. Attracting and retaining quality staff is fundamental. Ensuring that the needs of expats (whether they be young single staff, families or experienced colleagues) are identified and met is key.”

“Outstanding international Principals typically have a high staff retention rate despite adverse geographical circumstances. The reverse also applies, even in good circumstances weaker Principals struggle to retain staff.”

“The challenges of staff turnover (25% across the sector) should never be underestimated.”

“Teacher retention is also a challenge, as many do 2 to 3 years and therefore we do not have as much continuity as I would like.”

“Currently international schools are increasingly having to rely on a new breed of “backpacker” teachers, who desire no more than a superficial service to education. This type of teacher seeks short term contracts and moves readily around the world/region. Recruitment continues to be the greatest obstacle for schools – shortage of skills, changing motivations, diminishing ideals.... loss of professionalism.”

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“For British schools overseas to continue to recruit the calibre of staff they will need to maintain their provision, salaries will need to continue to be market-leading. Additionally schools will increasingly need to make enhanced continuing professional development part of their remit and benefits packages as teachers come to realise their value as global commodities.”
Recruitment practices
With the school growth and higher staff turnover it is no surprise that recruitment is a major activity for the vast majority of schools surveyed, and indeed many Heads single this out as the most important part of their job. However, it is often much more challenging than in a domestic context due to the remote location of applicants and the limited time with candidates.

Some people see the Recruitment Fair approach as being phased out and offer advice on alternative good practice.

"This is the most important – but also most time consuming part of the job. However, every minute spent getting the decision right in recruiting is a day saved in cleaning up the mistakes of a poor decision."

"With remote candidates, the typical model of a recruitment fair is far from satisfactory and involves fast decisions by both parties and a leap of faith."

"The problem of recruiting is that it is all done by Skype so it is difficult to assess their teaching abilities. Normally we would prefer candidates to perform a demo lesson. Level of English is very variable amongst staff."

"Following submission of a letter and CV teachers are asked to answer five specific questions relating to our school. This tends to sort out those who are genuinely interested. Curriculum leaders are involved in shortlisting and Skype interviews. By the time a candidate meets face-to-face with the head teacher they may have had up to three Skype interviews. All appointed candidates have to submit a criminal records check. Induction sessions are run to help new staff integrate into the local cultures. Staff are also offered a bonus for signing for two years rather than one year. We review our package annually and we believe it is competitive, helping us retain our staff."

"In the past, I have been shocked by the poor recruiting capabilities of many senior academic staff and Heads, including a tendency to renew contracts for staff who do not meet the required standards. Because numbers of staff leaving at the end of each academic year reflects on the school, and the Head, and suggests dissatisfaction (in addition to the message sent to parents) past Heads have tended towards a short term view leading to above average retention figures during their tenure but leaving a legacy of damage through weak decision making for their successor to clean up."

"When recruiting directly from the home country, ensure that applicants are given as much information as possible. This is done best in a relaxed informal atmosphere, so that the teacher feels looked after and although they may not have been to this country before, they will be able to cope. I think that the most important thing to learn at the interview is whether the teacher will fit in with the conditions they will find themselves in."

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Managing a diverse staff

As with parents and students, schools may have dozens of different nationalities and cultures among the staff. This means that any aspect of leadership and management, whether it is giving feedback at appraisal, running a staff meeting, delegating, or communicating a change, is going to have the potential for additional complexity as language, culture and background can impact upon the situation.

For example, we heard of one Head’s first staff meeting which was completely dominated by a few expat teachers from cultures where you are more likely to speak up. The school changed their approach to collect feedback online beforehand. This meant staff could read each other’s comments and people in general were more willing to comment.

There may also be fundamentally different approaches among staff – perhaps reflecting the “East meets West” debate over pedagogy – and additional challenges of leading a diverse staff towards a common purpose.

“One of the main challenges is to bring about a sense of common purpose from the diversities within the staff.”

“The Head needs to be prepared to work with staff who come from very different teaching environments, and may adopt methodologies and pedagogies which are poles apart from the Head’s own.”

Models of effective team work often highlight the need for trust and productive conflict as prerequisites to achieve high performance. It is easy to see how these aspects could be harder to foster when staff lack the relatedness that comes from common characteristics or culture.

“The challenges of a diverse workforce are apparent in the difficulties we have of getting beyond friendly ‘congeniality’ to real ‘collegiality’ and a context of high challenge and high support. With colleagues who value one another as friends inside and outside the classroom, and who also accept that ‘different perspectives are valid’ (both GOOD things) it can sometimes be hard to have that level of professional challenge appropriate to high performing teams. Creating the context for this is the most important part of the role of the leader since this is the groundwork for developing organisational capacity for self-sustaining school improvement. Good models of appraisal, Professional Learning Communities, collaborative planning and reflection, etc. all support this work.”
One particular challenge mentioned was employee relations between expat and local staff on different terms and conditions even if they do the same or similar jobs. In some parts of the Gulf region, where the vast majority of the population are expats, this may include different salaries and terms for different expat nationalities.

“Sadly however, on the Malaysian education scene today the gulf between the foreign teachers and the local teachers grows ever wider and is a cause for concern. There is no secret locally as to what foreign teachers in some schools earn and consequently their sometimes inappropriate behaviour, for example in cafes, bars and more public places, leaves them vulnerable and open to criticism.”

Some schools see this as inevitable and necessary, other schools have adopted a different approach:

“A Head may need to adapt his mind-set and accept that teachers from different countries command different salaries. Life is not fair and wages are not all equal in the Middle East, albeit the same job may be being done. Heads sometimes have to abandon principles and accept the dynamics of the region. This can be tough.”

“We have an equity policy between expat and local staff and hence, I believe, very good relations between the two groups at an individual level. I am appalled that most international schools in the country – and in the developing world – do not have this policy. It also raises the hackles of nationalist governments and imperils international education itself.”

The additional challenges of managing expat staff

In addition, there are numerous challenges associated with leading, mobilising and managing an expat workforce, for example:

- **Time:** the Head is likely to get involved in developing and adjudicating policy decisions on terms and conditions, with all the possible queries that might relate to questions over relocation, housing, travel home, health insurance, family/spouse concerns, allowances, tax etc.

- **Local regulations:** relating to visas, tax, accompanying family members, employment law. This varies hugely between countries – from ‘not an issue’ to a ‘major added complexity’. In complex bureaucratic situations, this may require excellent local expertise usually from host-country senior administrative staff.

- **Given the above, there are often additional requirements for an experienced and highly capable HR Department.** The required number of HR Staff per employee may need to be much higher – maybe twice that of a domestic school – and larger schools may require an expat HR section with an expat HR manager.
• The additional demands on families, support for settling in, stress and need for resilience. This is discussed further below.

• In many locations, the expat staff community are likely to be closely knit, perhaps living in the same location and most likely having a social life revolving around the school. Perhaps in the same way as expat parents, this is potentially a strength, but could also mean anxieties and issues are exaggerated.

• Rather than “trailing spouses”, it is common to find teaching couples. A decision to appoint one, may require offering a job to the other.

“International” is a bit of a tribe when it comes to the teachers. One needs to be in touch with that tribe and, with their support, things will often fall into place with the other groups. I think some international Heads coming overseas for the first time fall down when it comes to this, as they are focused on the cultural differences of the country, but fail to realize the more subtle differences in the teaching tribe.”

“Make sure to have a top notch HR department for welcoming and settling new arrivals.”

“My job is just as much pastoral for staff as it is for children”

Questions to consider: Staff

What can you do to encourage professional development and career growth of key staff within your school?

What has most impact on your ability to retain the best staff?

How could you use technology to improve recruitment?

What schools do you compete with when recruiting staff and what differentiates your school?

What do you do to make your school stand out from other potential employers during the recruitment stage?

What else could you do, over the longer term, to develop your profile and reputation as a great place to work?

Which staff issues take up most of your time?

How can you best ensure your HR Department has the capability and capacity you require? In which areas does your HR department need to improve?

Which staff matters could you delegate more, or could be anticipated and dealt with proactively?

What are the key lessons from recruitment mistakes?

Do you employ local nationals on your leadership team? Could you employ a local national as your Bursar / Chief Operating Officer/Finance Officer/Business Manager?

Can you identify your possible successor from within your organisation and what can you do to organise tailored developmental experiences for this individual?
GOVERNANCE
This is often described as the biggest challenge for Heads of international schools. It is seen as the number one reason that Heads leave earlier than anticipated and, in the view of many Heads, seems to be biggest issue facing international schools, with the vast majority of respondents reporting varying degrees of dysfunction.

“I am the 6th Head in 11 years!”

“The first Board Chair you work with hires you, the second tolerates you, and the third fires you.”

“A Head coming from their home country cannot at all expect the defined, regulated and predictable structures of a governing body to which s/he is used. It requires a strong mind and nimble feet!”

“The big issue, in my view, is Governance. The quality of this varies enormously. With some notable exceptions, it is generally not good. The challenges come equally in some of those schools owned for profit (80%), and in others dominated by parental governance structures. Boards too often lack clear structure, or fail to develop it as they grow and change; some lack clear procedures and records; some even lack any clear written rules or articles.”

“There are all types of operation, from trying to work with a remote Board which you are lucky to get to meet once per year, to all-parent group who would meet regularly for 5-6 hours after school if you wanted.”
Whilst there are huge variations between schools, many of the issues to do with governance relate to:

- Clarity of purpose and processes
- Board make-up
- Conduct of the individuals concerned

These are the sorts of issues that are covered in a Governance Review or governance training and guidelines (e.g. COBIS Code of Good Governance) or CIS Accreditation Governance and Leadership Standards and Indicators. They apply irrespective of the structure of the Board or whether it is a not-for-profit Trust or an owned for-profit enterprise.

In addition to these common issues, there are dysfunctions that are particularly associated with certain types of Boards – e.g. Parent Boards with high turnover of members, or Proprietor Boards run by non-educationalists with unrealistic expectations. These are explained further below.

**Complex, confusing and dysfunctional structures**

We heard of some Boards which seem to be set up in such a complex way that decision-making and clarity are always going to be a challenge. Examples include multiple layers of authority (perhaps if the school is part of a group or has a national affiliation), local political involvement and remote Boards. This all leads to, amongst other things, a lack of clarity about who decides what, duplication of reporting and authority and operational inefficiencies.

“International schools can sometimes have a challenge that most UK based schools do not experience. Governors are often unable to visit the school as often as their UK-based counterparts, which can present challenges as governors can be susceptible to “snap shot” / “bitesize” overtures and gossip relating to school performances. Not managed well, this can be potentially destabilising for the school's leadership team and community.”

“It’s vital to understand the differences in culture and practice. Also, where there is a holding company, it is important to be aware of and navigate a path through the tensions which might exist.”

“This is incredibly complex in my situation. I have five different groups that I report to and communication between those groups relies on me. Formal documentation that defines how these groups work together and interact is sketchy.”

“There is a slight confusion of the chain of command with a Board of Governors and a Holding Company, personnel overlap and private investment from individuals.”

“This is a real challenge particularly in an environment where there is a very political supra school organisation. For most of the time things proceed calmly and positively but when there has been a crisis the insecurity and lack of some form of external point of reference has proved very difficult to manage.”
Cultural dissonance
It is not uncommon for a Board to be made up mostly or entirely of local nationals, even if the school has a largely international faculty and students. The Head’s interaction with the Board is therefore the key interface between these cultures with all the potential misunderstandings and conflicts.

“In Hong Kong international schools the governance structure often gives prominence to local voices either directly through parent or community representatives or through formal governance structures and links with the Hong Kong Government. In these contexts the relationship between the Principal and the Governing Body is the interface between international and local cultural voices. There is the potential for linguistic and cultural miscommunication in this relationship and it is therefore not surprising it is challenging.”

“If the Board is made up entirely of local nationals, there can be huge differences in expectations and understandings which can make or break the job.”

“Before I started, I wish I had known more about how to work with local Board members – this has taken a long time and caused loads of issues at first. I am now better able to understand their perspectives and have learned how to ‘better manage’ my Board.”

“A growing number of new international schools, particularly in Asia, are propriety schools. Learning to work with school owners, especially within another culture, can be really complex.”

“85% of teachers are international but 100% of my Board are local – and none have ever been to an international school or been involved in international education before.”
Lack of delegated authority
The boundary between Executive Board responsibilities and the Head’s management of the school is a common cause for concern amongst Heads. This is certainly an issue within many domestic schools, as well as international schools, with many Heads feeling that Boards interfere and do not delegate sufficiently. In international schools, however, this would appear to be a bigger and more often mentioned concern.

This can be an issue irrespective of the structure, ownership or charitable / profit model.

“Defining the boundaries between the role of governance and school leadership needs to be a priority and discussed openly and frankly. Having a clear understanding of what is strategic planning and decision-making for governance and what are day to day operational matters for school leadership to deal with is essential.”

Particular issues relating to for-profit, proprietary schools
These are now the majority model across the Asia and Gulf regions and the typical set up for new schools. It is important to stress that our data shows a mixed picture on the pros and cons of this model. It is certainly not as simple as seeing charitable trusts as good governance and profit seeking as less good. It is worth noting, for example, that proprietor schools may give greater stability.

However, many respondents reported issues which they associate with proprietary, for-profit schools. Some people see an inherent conflict of interest between providing a quality education and making a profit – at least in the short term. Others express concern that many people recently investing in education do not understand enough about it, and therefore may set unrealistic growth or profit targets, or not recognise the complexity in setting up, running or managing change in a school. In fact some people even commented that they hoped this report would help them get that message across.
Particular issues relating to for-profit, proprietary schools

“It is infinitely easier to work with a stable Board of school owners.”

“It's a juggling act working for non-educationalists.”

“In proprietary schools governance can be a challenge – especially if the business office is not always answerable to the Head. With family-owned schools, the family is supportive and proud of the heritage of the school but at times they will want to do things their preferred way.”

“The key things to successful governance are: having great people on the Board; great relationships between the Head and the Board members (especially the Board Chair or owner); and for there to be great relations among Board members. There can be good Boards and bad Boards in any Board structure. There is a danger in thinking the structure of the Board is more important than the people and the relationships among those people.”

“I have experienced working with a founding owner...and am now working with representatives of a group who own the school. The former can be likened to working with a father figure, very proud of and paternalistic in his decisions. Of course there were pressures to perform financially, but those took a back seat to relationships. In a more corporate context, decisions become more driven by protocols, corporate policies and the ultimate purpose of the organization, to make money. It doesn't mean good things don't happen...in fact some very good things are unfolding within that corporate context, but it does have a different feel to it at the leadership level.”

“I believe governance can be just as challenging in a not-for-profit school (with a Board of parents) as in a ‘for-profit’.”

“The school has struggled since its inception with the Board sacking a procession of Heads that were unable to satisfy the Board's desire for short term profits above all else.”

“I suspect that the profit-driven proprietorial nature of the schools and having to put profit before pupils grinds a lot of Headteachers down. Not-for-profit Heads seem to stay longer, but in some parts of the world, these schools also are the most established schools and are often top of the local food chain.”

“In a ‘for-profit’ school, often there is a conflict of interest between the Head and owner.”

“Large organisations have a stranglehold on all aspects of international education, and too many decisions are being made by people who never set foot in classrooms and very rarely in the schools themselves.”

“In Europe, independent schools usually have charitable status and governors are fully in control of the school and its assets, and Heads generally have an easier time with lines of authority/responsibility being clearly defined/agreed. In contrast, international schools are generally owned by investors (with or without a Board of governors) which often leads to conflict regarding the Head's lines of authority.”

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Particular issues associated with Parent Boards

Some Parent Boards are particularly prone to high turnover, with all the additional efforts required to find and induct new members, build their understanding and combat the lack of continuity.

Some Board members may struggle to understand or execute their role – i.e. that it is to represent the interests of the whole school rather than their children and friends. They may therefore find it hard to resist involvement in particular operational matters.

Conflict of interest, often mentioned in relation to school owners, is therefore also relevant to parent governors.

Some Heads also expressed concerns over confidentiality when some parent governors have strong affiliations to their parent network.

“My Board is largely parent Governors. I try to be supportive as essentially parents run this school (and technically own it – although it is owned in common by elected Governors). There is one Governor remaining from when I took up my post two and a half years ago. This turnover makes ensuring continuity a difficult task.”

“Some constitutions are extraordinary: a full parent Board with tenure limited to two years. You have a continuous group of people who don't know what governance is and focus on their pet projects.”

“Between the new principal (me!) being appointed and starting the job, 75% of our parent Board had changed.”

“Our Board is self-perpetuating and largely parent-based and so there is a relatively high level of turnover with Board members in keeping with the general expat population shifts. Keeping the Board aligned, current on topics and history and from being near-sighted around their own student needs is also a bigger challenge as a result.”
Questions to consider: Governance

Which of the challenges related to governance described here might apply most at your school?

How effective is the Board – e.g. how does the Board’s set up and operation compare with recommended governance good practice such as CIS or COBIS guidelines?

What could you do to streamline or simplify your governance structure?

How clear and distinct is the role of the Board compared with the role of the Head? What scenarios could you discuss to highlight ambiguities and establish greater clarity?

Have you conducted a governance review or arranged training for the Board?

What could be done to encourage stability or continuity of the Board? Alternatively, do you need to make changes to achieve a different mix of skills?

As a Chair of the Board, what do you think your Head values most about you?

As a Head, what do you think your Chair of the Board values most about you?

Does the Head have a regular appraisal – e.g. a 360 degree performance – appraisal every two years? Do you have the next one scheduled?

When the Chair of the Board and Head discuss performance of the Head, what key aspects will be discussed? Is there a joint understanding of what is important?

What are the reasons previous Heads have not stayed longer in post?

Is there an opportunity for a prospective Head at the recruitment stage to ask questions ‘off the record’ – for example to a recruitment consultant?

How effective are your arrangements for recruiting and selecting a new Head? Have you had external advice? Are you clear what you need and how to find and assess this?
EXTERNAL LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

Aspects under this heading, perhaps more than any other, vary between locations. Clearly there are some location-specific issues such as infrastructure problems (transport, internet, supplies etc.), pollution, earthquakes, floods, coups or even armed conflict. However, in many other aspects, while the details differ from one location to another, a clear picture emerges from our research of additional complexity, ambiguity, uncertainty and instability in many local environments in the Asia and Gulf region.

Part of the challenge is dealing with the unfamiliar (e.g. how to deal with the local education authority inspection), but there are also challenges associated with instability, pace of change and uncertainty.

“I think the Principal sits between the political world outside the school and the professional world of the school. I have been a Head for 20 years and the professional world is fairly predictable. Holding people to account, student exclusions, curriculum change etc. are always difficult but there is usually precedent and there is always a way through. The political world is unpredictable and much more difficult to manage. It remains the hardest part of my job.”

In addition, there are locations where providers of support services to schools are less established or effective. Services such as maintenance, catering or expat accommodation, for example, may need to be managed in-house or at least monitored more closely by the school, all adding to the management task.

**Competition and pace of market changes**

Whilst we are not attempting to compare the level of competition or market pressure of an international school with domestic markets, we detect that in many international environments, the market changes much more quickly.

**Changes in demand**

Those schools with a high proportion of expat pupils are prone to potentially dramatic changes in demand for places, driven, for example, by:

- changes in the economy – where the employment levels of expats may be much more precarious and reactive to changes than local employees (e.g. in relation to the oil price);
- changes in rules relating to mobility of labour and employment of foreigners;
- changes in the law on who is allowed to attend an international school.
THE CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL HEADSHIP / EXTERNAL LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

Changes in supply
Many school leaders report rapid changes in the supply of schools in their locality – on a scale and pace inconceivable in a developed market.

“The principal challenge is that Dubai has moved from under-supply of school places to excessive over supply in the space of four years.”

“I believe there are approximately 100 international schools in Bangkok alone, and 160 officially licensed international schools in Thailand. The challenge over the past four years of my tenure has been to increase enrolment. Much of my headship has been concerned with the development of a strategy to do this.”

“We are having to fight harder for a decreasing number of expat families as we are not allowed to admit local (Chinese passport) students.”

“Five major schools have been opened on the island competing for the same students.”

Regulations, legalities and norms
We are not going to attempt an analysis of the many and varied situations in which schools operate across the regions, but we are able to draw out a few common themes.

Many Heads talk about the need for trusted local advice to navigate and understand what is important and what is a false alarm. They highlight the ambiguity of situations with contradictory or unclear requirements, the complexity of dealing with local agencies, how what is written and what is practised may not relate, the impact of connections and corruption, and how ignorant one can feel when faced with a completely new situation.

Some illustrations are shown on the following pages.
“Ours is a very litigious country and if parents do not get the answer they wish this is sometimes a route they will pursue. Connections and who you know can then impact on the outcome and/or pressure exerted to get a desired outcome.”

“A difficult area in some countries is how open to be about just how little the School can protect staff in certain circumstances. The normal rules that might apply back home in respect of justice and fairness may just not apply.”

“Staff are the vital aspect of a Head’s work. Primarily one needs a fantastic HR department to help guide staff through the maze of regulations.”

The impact on parent relations

“We faced an issue last year when a British boy collided with an Iranian boy whilst running around at break-time. The Iranian lost half a tooth in the collision and wished to try the British boy under Sharia Law and have his toothed knocked out in retaliation or at least have blood money paid to compensate for the shame. It took weeks of painful and diplomatic negotiation between both sides to have the Iranian climb down and for the British family to acknowledge that it would be prudent for them to pay some kind of compensation. An environment where you have several judicial systems acting in tandem and the plaintiff is able to choose whichever system they prefer adds an additional dimension to life in international schools.”

In relation to staff

“There are many issues complicating staff recruitment in the Middle East: gender issues, obtaining a visa (this goes through several Ministries, validation of documents, with changes to rules every now and then), bringing your family over etc.”
"A Head in Dubai must keep up to date with the school inspection process. It happens every year and constantly changes. The pressure of annual inspections leaves little room for genuine long term development."

"Arabic, UAE Social Studies and Islamic Studies are core subjects on a par with English, Maths and Science. This has required considerable investment of time, money and resources into subject areas which are not our speciality."

"The current challenge is the implementation of the Bilingual Programme which is unsupported by the Ministry of Education."

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"The current challenge is the implementation of the Bilingual Programme which is unsupported by the Ministry of Education."

"In our case, the Head has to be involved in legal matters far more than I imagine is the case in most schools because the legal status of the school is not defined. Its original letters of establishment are no longer appropriate for the current legal environment and this causes much anguish for all involved in the overall school management, but especially for the Head."

"Holding a high ethical standard while making sure that the local law and regulations (which were not written with your school in mind) still work for you is another of the juggling acts the international school Head enjoys."

"Middle Eastern countries often have unbelievably complex legal structures where Federal and Municipal laws may contradict each other."

"Trying to run a competitive English Curriculum/IGCSE/IB school when 20% of timetable time must be ring-fenced for Arabic and Islamic studies. The need for much gentle and careful diplomacy to overcome the problems of celebrating other non-Islamic festivals."

"Be prepared to take plenty of deep breaths! The Head can find themselves at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to local government, laws and regulations. Often times nothing seems to make sense and you can feel like the most ignorant person in the room. Showing your frustration can make things even worse. Find someone you can trust, and whom can be relied upon to translate when necessary and give you honest direction in the more tricky, or culturally sensitive, moments."

"Holding a high ethical standard while making sure that the local law and regulations (which were not written with your school in mind) still work for you is another of the juggling acts the international school Head enjoys."

"Middle Eastern countries often have unbelievably complex legal structures where Federal and Municipal laws may contradict each other."

"My 30+ years in international schools and six years as regional IB DP manager gives me lots to go with, but I am still a babe in the Chinese woods."

"There are huge cultural differences in a country where no doesn't mean no – it is negotiable and everyone has a price. This country is in a constant state of civil disobedience – just observe the driving!

In relation to the curriculum and standards

Dealing with government departments and following local legal requirements
Questions to consider: 
**External local environment**

Which aspects of local regulations are most important? Are these your area of focus? Who is the best person to help you with these?

How could the Board help in understanding local regulations and practices?

What additional school services could you outsource?

What practices could you put in place or what investigations could you undertake to better anticipate changes in the supply and demand for international schooling in your location?

Which schools do you compete with when recruiting students and what differentiates your school?

Why do parents choose your school? Why do non-joiners go elsewhere?

**SCHOOL COMMUNITY GROWTH AND CHANGE**

**Managing ambitious, fast growth**

A key feature of many of the schools surveyed was fast growth. We were struck by the pace of growth at many schools and the sheer scale of many schools’ plans:

“The expansion has been rapid over the past 3 years from 65 students to over 1400.”

“The biggest challenge right now is managing our ambitious growth plans – from 300 students in the opening year last year, to 650 this year, to 950 next year and so on to capacity of just under 2000.”

“The school was established in 2011 and is a part of a township. It opened with ages 3 - 12 year olds with 131 students, and has grown to 3 - 18 year olds with 900 students. There are 55 nationalities, with locals comprising 50% of the cohort.”

“We are currently at 2,400 of the targeted 3,300 students on that site.”

“In my current role, I have overseen the planning, development and launch of a S$200 million (about US$130m) international school in Singapore.”
Several Heads commented on the complexity of managing growth – including how this is not always appreciated by investors / owners.

This includes the ‘nuts and bolts’ of the school:

“Schools run on traditions and norms – accepted and known ways of doing things. In some domestic schools these may date back decades or longer. Imagine starting with a blank slate and having to decide on every minute aspect of the school, whether it’s uniform details or use of lockers as well as of course the bigger issues of curriculum design and buildings. It’s hugely complex and a completely different challenge to just running a school.”

It also includes the challenge of maintaining the ethos and standards while expanding:

“As we grow so quickly, a major challenge that I face is that we do not lose sight of our vision, mission and purpose as a school. How do I maintain a small school, individual feel when we are growing at such a fast pace?”

We mentioned the concept of an ‘implementation dip’ – i.e. how making improvements to a school can result in a short term drop in standards. The same can be said of growth – with every new cohort of students or additional new faculty creating additional challenges to maintain standards.

Change and instability within the school community

Although already referred to within the sections on Staff, Students and Parents, it may be worth recapping this point. For schools with a high proportion of expat teachers and parents, constant change among the school community may be the norm. This could mean say, 20-25% of students, teaching staff and parent governors leaving (and being replaced) every year – not including any planned growth at a school.

It is worth considering how different this is to a domestic school setting and the practical impact it has on admissions, records, recruitment, HR, induction, accounting, planning – and that’s before you have considered other organisational aspects such as team building and communications.

“A tradition is defined as something you did once last year! Learn to expect the unexpected. Learn to tolerate ambiguity.”

“International schools are often very dynamic places, and that is why they can be such interesting places to work.”

“This is a far less stable working environment than that enjoyed in state or independently run schools back home, with international schools subject to instability of local political and community support and constantly dealing with relatively high turnover of students, their parents and staff.”
Questions to consider: School community growth and change

How clear are you on the growth objectives you are planning to achieve? How aligned are the Board and Head?

How realistic are growth and profit targets? How do you know?

What are the key challenges in achieving your growth objectives?

Apart from parents, students and the Board, who are your other stakeholders – i.e. people whose opinion about the school matters? What strategies do you have for communicating with them?

Is there anything that could be done to reduce the student turnover in the school or, if not, reduce the impact of this?

PERSONAL AND FAMILY PRESSURES
Isolation and lack of support and guidance

We read about issues of both a professional and personal nature. Leading any organisation is often an isolated situation – “it’s lonely at the top”. On the professional side, however, in many international environments there may be far fewer possible resources to draw on when faced with a crisis or particularly tricky issue.

It’s often less clear how to handle a formal sensitive matter, and if or how to involve the authorities. Procedures may be less developed, if at all.
Connections through networks and Associations can be of particular value in these situations, e.g. BSME, AISH, MEIBA, FOBISIA, COBIS, IPSEF etc.

“The one thing I wish I had known before I started was how and where to reach out for support.”

“Systems are internally generated – there is none of the process-driven fall-backs available to someone with national guidelines/support systems to fall back on.”

“It is tough! It wears you out and the crises are often unpredictable and debilitating. When I reflect on the two occasions when I got close to giving up and leaving they were both as a result of not being in control of the forces that were pushing and pulling me. The lack of an external frame of reference, way of operating, professional code makes you very vulnerable.”

“Being a Head is a very lonely job. Heads need support either from a network of other Heads or external services.”

“Dealing with issues such as child protection and other serious social, emotional and behavioural aspects of children’s education can be challenging as the resources that would be available in national systems may not be accessible in the host country. Schools need to be more self-reliant in these areas and deal with issues with sensitivity and care depending on the host country culture and expectations.”

On a personal level, depending on the location, some Heads may feel rather isolated socially since most of their community is linked to the school.

“It can be very lonely. You are the only person in your school who does your job. Everyone thinks it’s easy to make the decisions but they rarely have the full picture. It’s hard to have friends inside the school community.”

“It can be a very lonely job as your colleagues are often your friends in an international school and very few of my staff I would wish to allow to get too close to me.”

“One thing I wish I had known before was the impact on ‘personal’ relationships with colleagues. I have some very strong personal relationships that are all built on a professional basis – I have very few personal relationships that are built on friendship.”

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Family pressures

Family issues are a ‘deal-breaker’ and could become the most important aspect when considering a job move.

Spouses may have given up jobs to make the move, children may change schools, or families may live apart during term time.

Problems can start with the relocation and the basics of settling in – e.g. stress relating to visas, bank accounts, transferring money, driving licence, insurance etc. The family leaves behind its familiar environment, friends, relatives and support structures.

There may be a honeymoon period of a couple of months where everything is exciting and new. Then the reality may set in – especially for the spouse who may not be working and therefore alone during the day with the children at school.

There are examples of new Heads and their families moving to a new location without ever having visited. They may find that what was presented during the recruitment process or though internet searches is different to the reality.

The package may be good but the family did not fully take account of additional expenses, loss of pension or anticipate currency fluctuations.

“Spouses may find themselves alone and in a new culture. Do they make the most of it? If not it could put real strains on a marriage.”

“Living abroad has its challenges. Several of our turnover situations were due to personal family issues outside the control of the school that pulled a Head back to a home country.”

Questions to consider: Personal and family pressures

What else could be done at the recruitment stage to ensure the family understand the decision they are taking?

What else could be done early on to help the family integrate into their new environment?

What additional social contacts could be nurtured outside the school community?

Reflecting on this entire section describing the challenges of international school headship:

Which of the leadership challenges identified in this report do you encounter most often? Which take up most of your time?

Which of these challenges are you most able and least able to manage? What would need to happen to address these better?
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What are the qualities needed to be successful in leading an international school through all these challenges?

We have focused our attention on the particular and additional qualities needed in this role rather than trying to describe all the qualities that might apply to leaders of any organisation or to leaders of domestic schools (which we covered in our earlier UK report – ‘The Art of Headship’).

In doing so, we are not trying to say that there is one type of successful international school leader, one range of qualities, or one recipe for success. Indeed we explore the importance of taking the time to match a leader to the particular school context in section four of this report: “the importance of fit and need for due diligence”.

We were struck however, by the amount of common ground that emerged from our research, and it is these common themes that we describe below.

We asked leaders – existing Heads, Board Members, and Deputies to share their insights into what, in practice, seems to make a difference. They drew on their own experience and also talked about the best leaders they have worked with. They commented on their own learning curves and the difference between working back home and now working internationally. They commented on why some leaders succeed and others do not.
We have organised our respondents’ extensive comments and ideas into three related categories:

- **Actions and approaches**: the strategies adopted to meet the challenges; how Heads might prioritise their efforts; the approach or style that seems to work best most often.

- **Skills and strengths**: learned abilities and natural inclinations; the types of intelligence that enhance these skills.

- **Beliefs and values**: the likely core perceptions, attitudes and outlook of successful Heads; survey respondents’ hypotheses of some of the more personal qualities that might be behind individuals’ success; the type of person who is likely to succeed.

Our illustration recognises that these qualities are interrelated and range from observable activities and behaviours through to less tangible qualities.

**Actions and approaches**

Influence and engage diverse groups towards a unified school vision

One of the big differences between leading a school and leading another equivalent size enterprise, such as commercial business, is the range and intensity of stakeholder relationships one needs to manage in a school. In an international school the much greater diversity within these groups creates an even greater need for skilful communication.
The school leader needs to be able to corral all the various groups with their different perceptions, expectations, cultures, needs and languages towards what the school is trying to achieve. The Head needs to achieve people's buy-in, acceptance, understanding or acquiescence – knowing when to stand firm and knowing when to compromise.

“Above all it’s about the ability to bring together pretty different groups of stakeholders and hold onto a central vision. This takes strength of character and a little bit of stubbornness as the driving forces of an international school are so much more varied than a national one.”

“Manage upwards effectively – investing time and effort to build these critical relationships
Successful Heads prioritise time and effort to work effectively with their Board(s). Apart from anything else, it is the cost of getting this wrong that can undo all good work elsewhere. Obviously this is important in any school, but as explained in section two, in an international school environment there are many more challenges to overcome, and it would seem that the greater willingness of many Boards to hire and fire leads to many early departures. In this respect several Heads likened leading an international school to being a football manager!

“This is a PhD in itself. Be flexible; give the relationships time to develop and do the reading to understand how different business cultures function.”

“The capacity to connect well with a wide range of stakeholder groups. People need to feel heard and supported, even when decisions don't go their way. The capacity to read situations and make decisions in the here and now, all the while keeping in mind the long term goals and strategies designed to achieve them. The ability to reach compromises, between yourself and others, and brokering compromises between multiple stakeholder parties.”

“Running an international school is completely different to running one in your home country – the local context is vital to being successful. Understanding when to compromise and when to be stubborn is an art form in Asian culture when dealing with a Board of Directors.”

“The single ‘key’ relationship in the school links the Head to the chair of the governing body. This relationship must be managed carefully and sustained through potential misunderstandings or changes in personnel. In most cases when a school implodes it is precipitated or accelerated by a dysfunctional relationship between the Head and the Board chair. Self-perpetuating Boards are the most stable and professionally attuned to the needs of a developing school. Elected Boards tend to generate ‘single issue’ Board members.”

“Tremendous people skills are needed to make sure Board members feel they are adding value to their roles as governors. They need training to be sure they understand the roles of strategic governance vs. operational involvement.”

“It’s important to be approachable to parents who often feel intimidated by Heads of School when they are not confident in English.”

“It is essential to persuade parents that they and the teachers are on the same team, working for the benefit of the children.”
Demonstrate an honest and open approach to build trust with stakeholders

Many school leaders pinpoint honesty as a key to long term effective relationships, avoiding temptation to downplay issues or sweep things under the carpet. This seems to be particularly important in dealings with parents, staff and Boards. It is obviously part of managing upwards and influencing stakeholders, but was mentioned by so many respondents that we thought we should highlight it with a separate heading.

It would seem that Heads need to be politically astute without being seen as ‘political’.

“Be honest in dealings with parents. If you try and hide things, someone finds out and trust is lost - tell the truth even when it may cause you problems because it builds better relationships in the long term. Trust is everything”

“Be brutally honest when recruiting teachers, do not gloss over problems because that will be the very item the teacher cannot deal with.”

“I believe that staff that fail at our school usually do so because they do not communicate openly and fairly with parents.”

“Many studies confirm that trust in the Head of School is critical to both hiring and keeping teachers. It is also critical to parents’ perception of the school.”

“Always be willing to meet with parents. If there is a lobby group - invite all members to a coffee morning - it is better to respond in the open than have trouble boiling beneath the surface. Heads should never allow themselves to be bullied by parents - teachers are very sensitive to this.”

“The key from day one in dealing with the Board was to be completely honest and open with them and not try to be political. Admit your mistakes, celebrate your successes and be open in your approach as the truth will always come out.”
Take a ‘solutions focus’ to solving problems and resolving issues

The reality of many Heads’ lives, day to day, hour to hour, is focused on resolving problems. The volume, complexity and potential for crises are enormous, perhaps particularly in international schools, and it would seem that successful Heads see these as opportunities rather than burdens. They resolve issues, broker compromises and mediate between parties. They keep calm and find positive outcomes.

“You work hard and long because schools are dynamic, not static, and problems arise constantly. One must be ready to solve problems all day and into the night.”

“The ability to find myriad ways to achieve the right educational outcome, despite the obstacles and barriers, social, cultural and financial which can dog the existence.”

“One of the ultimate skills of the Head is to see themselves as chief problem-solver. Every Head will be presented with daily “crises”, however great or small. The ability to see one’s role as the chief negotiator and resolver of these issues for the greater good of the bigger picture is vital.”

“Keep calm and find positive outcomes.”

“When the problems become the reason to enjoy work, to display one’s empathy and ability to broker solutions between different parties for the mutual benefit of all then the position becomes incredibly fulfilling. If a Head were to re-frame that and see every ‘crisis’ as a stressful burden then quite quickly the role would become untenable.”
Focus on staff and recruitment
It would appear that in international schools the people management part of the job is greater, more time consuming and more complex. Dealing with expat staff issues and policies, for example, is likely to involve the Head much more than in a typical staff agenda, and the strategies required to attract and retain staff could become a major part of the school’s success.

Successful international Heads may have a leaning towards the people part of their leadership role. They may see themselves as people leaders as much as educationalists. They may think in terms of ‘people strategy’ and in general they are willing and interested to be more hands-on in staff matters. The most often quoted aspect of this is the skill to select and retain the right staff.

“The best Heads will know how and why their staff are teaching in their schools, what motivates them to stay and what will motivate them to leave. Relinquishing your roots, your family, your friends, for an expatriate life can be incredibly lonely and there has to be something which motivates good staff to make the move and then commit to it for the sake of the school.”

“I was responsible for supporting new staff in a start-up school. I gave 24/7 support for new foreign teachers from day one of their appointments to day one of the school year. For years I was given loving feedback on how those people felt valued and supported. They stayed and they contributed.”

“Most Heads, like drivers, consider themselves above-average recruiters. This can’t be the case. Heads must develop a competitive strategy for attracting and retaining staff as gone are the days of just running an ad and then convincing people in interview to join.”

“Ability to identify appropriate employees is critical to success. Ability to move on those who are either underperforming or are not an appropriate fit for the school.”

“Ensure you hire a Head who is an HR specialist.”

The challenge of building capacity in an international school may be greater, given the transient nature of staff. Because of high turnover of Heads, a key requirement for international schools, often neglected, is succession planning.

“So many international schools fragment once a ‘good leader’ leaves; but this is, in my opinion, one of the areas that some leaders do not pay enough attention to. Developing sustainable systems and spending time developing high potential staff are two of the top priorities.”

“There’s a need to be creative in order to overcome the challenges of distance and time zones differences when interviewing and recruiting new staff. It’s critical to have clear and strong systems in place to ensure the recruitment process is as efficient and effective as possible to overcome such challenges pertinent to an international setting.”
Manage change effectively

Leading an international school requires dealing with much more change than a typical domestic school. This includes changes in the market, the school community (e.g. turnover of staff and students) and, in some locations, changes to local regulations – e.g. relating to inspection or curriculum. This is in addition to more planned changes such as ambitious growth within a school.

Change management, especially in the business world, has been a major topic of interest and research over recent years with models, processes and theories suggested to help leaders in this aspect of their role.

It would seem that a key aspect of successful international headship is gauging when and how to lead change. In particular this includes recognising the complexity and context of the school and judging when to press the accelerator and when to pause to allow consolidation; when to consult and when to direct.

"The Head should be knowledgeable and sensitive about the school’s context and able to negotiate a shared united vision from the diversity found in the school to manage a pace of change that is challenging and respectful of the past.”

"Knowing that even when the solution seems (or perhaps really IS) obvious, schools are intensely complex and highly political organisms and so actually realising that solution will take longer than it reasonably should. Decisions that can be taken, enacted and have results in business can simply take SO much longer in schools and on one level this is unacceptable (if student learning is compromised while we go through a ‘process’ to make the needed change). On the other hand, knowing that the change cannot be made WITHOUT the process means that sometimes the patience to go slow at first, in order to go fast later, can be really hard.”

"Most school Heads have good ideas. Not all have the capacity to detail the steps to be undertaken to bring about change. A great Head I worked with did this by knowing who to pick to manage change and continued to monitor how that change was being implemented. He periodically stepped in to encourage and applaud, predicted and smoothened out pitfalls. He communicated to the community how far we had come, what the next steps were. All this built a sense of community and resilience – essential in schools where change and development are part of the oxygen of what makes schools stand out.”

“Knowing that when I knew something needed changing, I bided my time and picked the right time to change it.”

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"Knowing that when I knew something needed changing, I bided my time and picked the right time to change it.”
Build personal support mechanisms, take charge of personal well-being

The job has huge potential for stress. In many locations, Heads feel isolated with very limited support or even contacts outside the school community. It would be easy to become a victim of such circumstances, but successful Heads take charge of the situation to make the best of it. They look after themselves – mentally, physically and spiritually, they 'sharpen the saw' rather than just work harder 'chopping down the trees'. As mentioned above, it is crucial to build support networks of other local and international Heads.

"The best Heads understand that the most important person you lead is yourself. Knowing your skill set, your emotions and ensuring that you look after yourself is fundamental to leading and managing others."

"Heads in international schools have so much more freedom than their European counterparts and sometimes I feel they do not utilise this freedom as much as they should."
“As the School Head you can actually control a lot of things – including how to approach your job. I wish someone would have told me that.”

“I do want to make sure I have mentioned how crucially important it is to learn how to look after yourself physically, emotionally and dare I say, spiritually. You spend so much of your day giving emotionally...if you don’t have a regular way to replenish your soul, it will shrivel. And then you can’t be your best for those you serve.”

“A high degree of self-understanding is critical to long term success – how to manage stress and competing demands, how to maintain personal physical and emotional health, etc.”

“Establish a group of friends who have nothing to do with work.”

“You have to set aside time to relax and pursue your own interests, otherwise you can’t do the job properly – or set a positive, sustainable example to other people (staff and pupils). Learn the local language, play music, take exercise, read a book, take a nap. We don’t expect our smartphones to run forever without recharging, why do we think we are any different?”

Questions to consider: Actions and approaches

Which group of stakeholders do you engage with most effectively / least effectively?

How much time do you spend developing your relationship with the Board? If you spent more time on this what would you do?

What type of problems that you deal with energise you? What type of problems do the opposite?

Do you have an HR strategy?

How would you judge the pace of change in your school – e.g. too fast, too slow, about right? Are the Board and the Head aligned on this view?

As a leader, who supports you? Who can you confide in? What additional connections could you make?

Are you developing a network of Heads whom you can seek support, advice and guidance from?

What can you build into your routines which may develop your resilience, stamina and well-being?

How do you manage your time? How effective is your work life and home life balance?
SKILLS AND STRENGTHS

Cross-cultural competence

This term may sum up what many leaders describe as necessary to thrive in the diversity of an international school. It refers to an ability to understand people from different cultures and engage with them effectively. It includes an interest and curiosity in others and in their differences, rather than, for example, always operating from your own frame of reference. It requires some effort to acquire sufficient knowledge – e.g. by extensively reading up about the history and culture of the country. It also requires self-awareness to understand the impact you may have on others or what is going wrong, and the ability and willingness to adapt.

"Get to know the country you live in. Take an interest, read the papers, understand what is going on and how people think. International educators are often terrible at this."

"Be culturally sensitive and aware. Understand that Rome was not built in a day - but it can be burned down that quick... so have the humility to know that as a new Head time needs to be spent building trust and confidence with stakeholders."

"Strong intercultural awareness and respect, and the capacity to act appropriately based on the context of any given situation."

"You will be wrong often, you are out of your culture and there is no 'world culture' on which you can rely; regardless of how long you have been travelling."

"A knowledge of cultural biases is also crucial. Muslim, Indian and British families can all have very different values and expectations. Being able to navigate diplomatically through inter-cultural waters is an absolute necessity."

"Joining the international education circuit requires one to commit to new experiences and cast aside dogma. Leadership is about working with people and to do that you have to get to know and understand them."

"Above all, the ability to cross the cultural divide and understand the country, its practices, systems etc. in which he has chosen to live. Without empathy and understanding of how the local system works and of the values and expectations of the parents for their children, then the position in which he finds himself will quickly become untenable."

One practical example of developing intercultural understanding is through the Head meeting regularly with students to ensure that the student voice was heard. While this is common practice in many domestic schools – e.g. through School Councils, it was suggested that it was even more important in an international setting. This is partly because of the potential for greater diversity of student needs and opinions as well as the challenge that some student nationalities may be less willing to speak up.
Contextual intelligence

International Heads cannot expect to manage situations based on their experience. They will often be faced with completely new situations and need to be able to read these, adapt their approach and indeed tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity. Successful Heads need to understand the limits of their knowledge and be able to apply and adapt their knowledge in situations which are different from where it was developed.

“What makes a successful Head internationally is their adaptability to the context at hand. What is successful in one setting may not be successful in another.”

“An ability to nuance leadership styles to maintain high school standards whilst recognizing the needs of colleagues.”

“The Head needs to have the ability to understand what is important for a certain person at a certain time, no matter who they are in the school community, and respond appropriately - a case of all things to all people in some respects. This requires insight, empathy, compassion as well as boundless energy and commitment.”

“Being able to read people and know when they need to take the time to find out more. Being a Head is about people first so make them your priority and the rest will follow.”

“Adaptability - the capacity to become what is needed of the leader in any given situation.”

“You simply have to play the game, whatever it may be. You are in their court/country and that is your reality.”

“Success requires an understanding of the cultural mix of the staff and adjusting styles of leadership as required to get the best result out of each individual.”

“The Ministries we deal with leave very little room for change so if you do not adapt to their style you will go mad!”
Diplomacy
The art of diplomacy – dealing with others and making progress without causing bad feeling – is at the core of the Head’s skill set. In the international school context, with so much opportunity for misunderstandings, it would seem that a cautious, thoughtful and careful approach will often pay dividends.

“You are an ambassador for your country and your school at all times, in every situation.”

“You need diplomacy in bucket loads – you must be a seasoned diplomat.”

“You need to be very diplomatic and aware of the difference in expectations from different nationalities. Be strong and firm and yet able to listen and reflect on any concerns.”

“Take a big breath, and don’t react too quickly. Keep calm, and give measured responses.”

“The most important knowledge needed is in the art of diplomacy and negotiation.”

“A Head needs to be able to work with a huge diversity of people in a diplomatic and positive way. Each daily interaction is really important for the individual and you have to constantly remind yourself of the need to be sensitive to mood.”
Resilience and a sense of calm
Successful Heads are composed, self-assured and project a positive, calm presence – irrespective of how they might be feeling inside. They need the drive and strength of character to cope gracefully, overcome setbacks and remain positive.

They are intensely aware of the impact their mood and demeanour has on the school community. They need to display this resilience in what might be extremely stressful, exposed and unfamiliar situations.

Some people commented how aspects of success are only seen in the long term, so Heads need to be willing to operate with very limited short-term affirmation.

Resilience and calm were factors often noted by respondents when asked to describe a school leader they particularly admire.

“You need unflinching optimism...sometimes what I refer to as ‘Irrational Optimism’.”

“I worked in the Middle East during a series of revolutions and the Head was always calm, always asked opinions about what to do next and then made the best decision given the information available. It was enormously stressful but because he didn't panic, it made it easier for everyone else.”

“It will test your character to the limits of human endurance and if you are not prepared for that price, don't take on leadership of a school.”

“Never show frustration.”

“Crudely put, it's no place for wimps.”

“The best Head I am thinking of has the ability ....but wears it all lightly, with a sense of humour and a disposition which communicates that this is not as tough as it sounds, but is actually fun....and the reason we all went into international education in the first place. My own weakness is that although I feel I have the knowledge, skills and understanding to be that ‘great’ Head....I currently wear it all a bit too heavy and this doesn't give the spring in the step needed from staff to enjoy the journey of school improvement as much as they could/should.”

“I think the constant stress in a role like this wears people out. It can look easy, but it's not. It can be lonely. It can be full of pressure to perform, relentlessly and mercilessly measured in sometimes very public ways. One universal truth is that there will always be someone who is upset with you, for something you have done or not done, said or not said. But...if you can take the heat in the kitchen, so to speak...it is an awesomely rewarding job!”
Empathetic – but also skilfully assertive when needed
Successful Heads need to draw a balance between showing empathy but also standing firm on principles; between listening and making decisions; between adapting to situations and giving consistent direction. In an environment where you are constantly being pulled in different directions by conflicting demands and diverse expectations, these judgements are crucial. This was particularly noted by respondents in their dealings with parents and the Board. Heads need to know what they stand for and when to take a stand, and how to do so without alienating key stakeholders.

“We have to be good listeners and empathise with parents, but we often have to make them understand what our mission and values are, which is why we make decisions that may be in conflict with their desires.”

“You need empathy for others – and by that I mean truly caring, not just coming across as caring, combined with a laser-like focus and steely resolve not to lose sight of that which is most important – the well-being and education of our students.”

“What sets the best Heads apart? A very firm but slightly hidden passion and idealism”.

“Parents must be invited to get involved in their child’s education. However, the school must also set very clear expectations and must be willing to say no to parents too.”

“Key challenge: maintaining a balance between listening to parents and accommodating their views and requests, while remaining firmly committed to the underlying values and principles of the school. Our parent body tends to be over-involved, so channelling that energy in positive directions can be tricky.”

“It is also really hard knowing that sometimes you simply have to be the bad guy, that people will not agree with or understand the decision...and you need to live with that and be comfortable. You have to be happy to be able to please most of the people at least some of the time, and build enough political capital that they will live with you and support you the rest of the time! And usually, that is possible, if you know what you are doing and the results are, on balance, showing evidence that kids are learning better.”

“What is the worst Head transmits sporadic and ill-informed pressures from Boards to his/her faculty and students and hides behind “The Board has asked me to...”

“Make sure that the expectations in the contract are clear and realistic. Be open, firm, and consistent. Do not tolerate inappropriate intervention in the daily running of the school – nip it immediately if it shows its face.”

“Parents must be invited to get involved in their child’s education. However, the school must also set very clear expectations and must be willing to say no to parents too.”

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Technical knowledge – international best practice pedagogy, school accreditation

We were struck by how often pedagogical knowledge was mentioned as a critical competence for the top job in a school. It was, for example, mentioned much more so than during our research into UK school leadership – where perhaps this requirement was taken as read or delegated.

It may be that the focus on academic results and scrutiny of teaching in international schools, perhaps especially in some Asian cultures, as well as the perennial debate amongst staff and parents on Eastern vs Western approaches, mean that the Head has got to be able to hold their own in these discussions and lead the path the school is taking.

It seems that international Heads are asked much more often to explain the school’s approach to learning, or to adjudicate over issues such as classroom practice and homework.

International schools starting from scratch or coping with a high turnover of academics staff need to be more deliberate in how they define good learning and best teaching practice.

“When staff are coming from such a diverse range of backgrounds, their understanding of outstanding teaching and learning is highly inconsistent. A successful Head needs to be clear in defining the expectations for classroom practice from the earliest point.”

“The increasing reliance on international benchmarks and standardised assessment comparisons needs a Head who is strong pedagogically to guide the direction of the school.”
“The Head needs to spend lots of energy creating and explaining a shared vision and agreement as to what constitutes good teaching.”

“Strong pedagogical background – understanding best practice from around the world is crucial, as well as being able to lead change to implement this.”

“A more specific task that Heads lead is in the area of school accreditation. Accreditation is seen by many as crucial for their brand and provides a significant opportunity to align the school community. Heads therefore need the knowledge and skill to navigate through the choice of accrediting agencies and direct the process.”

“International Accreditation can be a crucial factor in leadership of international schools since it serves many purposes. The process brings together the entire school community in an educational venture that helps everyone understand many aspects of the school – very important in international communities.”

“The most important knowledge areas are the curriculum, latest education best practice including use of technology, how to manage the whole school team.”

“The Head plays an important role in guiding a school through the process and establishing the teams that involve the entire community and lead to demonstrable improvements. This includes navigating through the plethora of potential international accrediting agencies such as CIS, NEASC, Penta, MSA, AdvancED etc.”

Questions to consider: Skills and strengths

Who else could support and advise you on cross-cultural communications and in understanding the local environment? Could Board members do more in this aspect?

If you were a better leader what would you be doing differently?

In which areas of leadership are you strongest and least strong? How could you organise your work to play to your strengths and operate “work-arounds” or enlist others’ support in other areas?

Which type of situations are you more likely to misread?

How has your view changed of the location and culture you now live in?

What one experience might give you additional cultural insights?

What differences are there between your key staff and what they need from you?

When do people see you as least calm?

When did you not take a stand on an issue but now, with hindsight, wish you had done so?

Are you up-to-date on leading international pedagogical research and thinking?

How could the Board support you more in achieving some of the above?
BELIEFS AND VALUES

Self-belief and a strong vision guided by principles

Faced with so many new situations, different perspectives and expectations, it is perhaps even more important for an international Head to be clear on what they stand for and be able to convey this.

When we asked people to reflect on the best international Head they had worked with, they commented on:

- a quiet, understated certainty
- truth to self
- openness and transparency
- clarity of vision
- “He could communicate better than anyone I have known”
- honesty and integrity
- hold and articulate clear values and moral purpose
- high moral compass – guided by the mission of the school and a deeper personal ethical standard.

“Dealing with so many cultures, situations and leadership challenges, you must have a strong set of beliefs – you can't make it up as you go along!”

“Cultural sensitivity, yes, but an awareness that limitless relativism is a real danger. So, there need to be root values reinforced by the Head. Some expected behaviours are non-negotiable. If, like us, you have no flag over your door, there is a temptation to be all things to all people which must be avoided.”

“Integrity and authenticity

Much has been written about integrity and authenticity in leadership. This has especially been the case in the business and political worlds, perhaps in reaction to the recent financial crash and other corporate mismanagement failures.

“It is important to have a strong personal and professional identity and be clear about your purpose and beliefs”
In our survey, 'Integrity' was one of the most often described qualities of a successful Head. In addition, respondents often described related qualities that are seen as part of authentic leadership such as self-awareness, self-knowledge, consistency, openness in dealing with others etc.

Authentic leaders understand their ‘backstory’ – what made them into the person they are today – and are able to use skilful, appropriate disclosure to explain their values and motivations. They make sense to others who see thoughtful, balanced and consistent decision making.

“Strong relationship building with absolute integrity that is visible.”

“The best Heads hold and articulate clear values and moral purpose and lead with integrity. Personal integrity is as important as executive skill in business dealings.”

“What I would most like to be remembered for? Integrity.”

“First and foremost, they have a deep respect for the community they serve and through their actions, they earn the trust and respect of their community.”

“First and foremost, they have a deep respect for the community they serve and through their actions, they earn the trust and respect of their community.”

“The usual qualities apply wherever you are. Integrity especially. You have to adapt in an international school, sure, but integrity trumps everything else.”
**Courage**

A theme of courage ran through a lot of the descriptions of successful Heads. As well as all the usual reasons that leaders need courage, such as dealing with performance issues, being in the spotlight, delegating etc., there also seem to be particular or additional factors relating to international headship. We have highlighted two particular examples:

1. **The courage to disagree.** Given the diversity of stakeholders’ expectations – e.g. those of parents, you may inevitably have to disagree more.

   “The best Heads have the bravery to question edicts from above. Often international schools will be ‘governed’ by an unnatural combination of, sometimes competing, bodies. Trying to please them all can be impossible, so the ability to question and guide these bodies, including focussing them on sound educational principles, is paramount.”

2. **The courage to operate outside your comfort zone.** You are putting yourself in situations which you don’t understand, where you will make more mistakes, and although you are the boss, you need to ask for help.

   “Often times nothing seems to make sense and you can feel like the most ignorant person in the room.”

   “While there are many requirements for a successful Head, one trait that remains, for me, is a Head who is open to suggestion and willing to step out of his/her comfort zone to do what is right for the students.”

   “Sometimes you simply have to be the bad guy – people will not agree with or understand the decision, and you need to live with that and be comfortable. You have to be happy to be able to please most of the people at least some of the time.”

   “Often times nothing seems to make sense and you can feel like the most ignorant person in the room.”

   “While there are many requirements for a successful Head, one trait that remains, for me, is a Head who is open to suggestion and willing to step out of his/her comfort zone to do what is right for the students.”

   “There will be plenty of instances in which you have never found yourself before, and it is ok to admit to yourself that you feel completely clueless and even helpless; these are the times in which you should not feel rushed to make a decision.”

   “Nothing can prepare you for it. You learn on the job, you learn from your mistakes. Don’t be frightened of making mistakes and don’t blame others when you do.”
Self-development orientation

Successful Heads dealing with unfamiliar challenges, instability and change need to have an appetite and ability to learn quickly. They need to ‘fail well’ – taking some risk and learning from mistakes.

They need to understand themselves and be willing to learn and adapt. They are aware of their impact and are skilled at tuning in and adapting their approach.

Respondents also stressed the need for Heads to set a highly visible example – for example by participating in professional learning alongside colleagues.

“You need to know what challenges you and work on it.”

“You need to be a life-long learner – prepared and proficient in finding ways to learn about new aspects of the job – from small issues almost every day to up-skilling an area.”

“Setting an example as leaders of learning, one anecdote that springs to mind is of a school leader who was bringing in a new planning template (the Understanding by Design model). He took an afternoon off his schedule to sit in a room and write unit plans until he had mastered it himself. This was remarkable and gave him a real professional authority in the eyes of the staff.”
Valuing advice – good at getting support

A key factor is knowing when to ask for help and being proficient at taking advice. Heads need to have the courage to ask for help and may need to recognise that, in many cultures, junior colleagues will not offer feedback or advice to the boss.

They may need to be quite explicit in seeking advice and skilled at knowing when to ask and who to trust. As mentioned above, developing a network of trusted local and international Heads can provide much needed insight and support.

An international Head is likely to have more gaps in their knowledge and therefore needs to ensure that their senior team has people who can support on these topics.

“Find a local you can trust and lean on them constantly for advice.”

“You need to have very good local facilitators in the team i.e. those who know the language and the systems/customs.”

“Get a good solicitor who will provide official and unofficial advice. Work hard at getting to understand the local culture. I have a local PA and that has been tremendously beneficial.”

Valuing difference and diversity

When you hear of something being done completely differently do you think “how fascinating”, or do you say to yourself “that’s a bit odd”?

“We do have a diverse community in terms of nationalities, but this is one of the things that we celebrate instead of worrying about culture clash. One of our fundamental values is that of quality and appreciation of each other’s differences.”

“You need to be open to advice – good at finding quality advice and taking it on Board.”

“The best Head I know understood what he was and wasn’t good at, and recruited people who perfectly complemented his skills and those of others so that there was an effective team of autonomous senior and middle leaders.”

“In work find someone you can trust to give you honest cultural insight and guidance, and make sure you make it clear to them that you not only want this, but you really need it.”
It would seem that success requires curiosity in people different to oneself – being open to new ideas and perspectives, and celebrating and learning from differences. In particular, many respondents state that the worst mistake to make is to try to blindly impose things that worked back home.

“Understand what you cannot change and roll with it. Respect and celebrate cultural differences.”

“Openness to ideas and practices from around the educational world. Intercultural sensitivity. A deep and abiding interest in celebrating and learning from difference.”

“Don’t assume that your own country’s education system is best. Some of the best teachers that I have seen have come from countries you may least expect, i.e. don’t have preconceived ideas. Give everyone a chance.”

“We should not be neo-colonialists.”

“International means not national. The Head who is convinced that everything is superior in his country of origins should work there, not in an international school.”

“The main reason Heads get sacked: having a “... in my previous school we did this” attitude.”

“Not everything can be done like you did back home. Adapt and adjust - stop whining!”
You can also tell from the descriptions of many respondents the enthusiasm they have for their role. They relish the privilege and opportunity of working abroad, rather than look to be compensated for the hardship.

“People at my age back home are looking to retire. I’m thinking “where next”? “

“It’s probably the most life enriching thing I have done and both my wife and I feel lucky.”

“When selecting a new Head it’s important they recognise that they are blessed to be in such a position and that they take that responsibility seriously. It is not a job.”

Questions to consider: Beliefs and values

How did you become the type of person and leader you are today? What might have shaped you – for example, what were the most difficult experiences you had to overcome? What have you always been most passionate or curious about? Who had greatest influence in your life?

What sort of leader are you? Do others see that or agree? What sort of leader do you want to be?

What do you stand for? What would other people say?

How could you skilfully disclose more about yourself so that people understand you better?

What situations are outside your comfort zone? When was the last time you felt this?

Do you learn quickly and “fail well”? When was the last time you failed and what did you learn?

From whom do you get advice? What could you do to encourage others to give honest opinions? How ‘coachable’ are you?
A key theme to emerge from our research is the importance of the fit of a Head to a school, and the need for candidates and Boards to undertake due diligence to assess this. This requires a Board to understand the essential nature of their school and agree whether and how they want to change or reinforce this.

Fit, of course, is important in any school, domestic or international, but it would seem that the diversity of international school contexts makes this even more important, or at least, more likely to go wrong.

**WHAT IS A TYPICAL TENURE OF AN INTERNATIONAL HEAD?**

Based on historical research and more recent anecdotal evidence, we understand that there is significant variation, but estimate an average tenure of just under 3 years for Head positions in Asia and the Gulf.

In many cases employment ends when the parties do not renew a fixed-term contract.
"Due diligence should be done. Whilst you can't foresee everything I believe at least half of the issues I now know about would have been avoided."

"I think there are many different types of international schools – international curriculum schools, domestic curriculum serving international students, service learning led schools, exam factories, academies, etc. The biggest mistake I see Heads make is to seek to make the school fit them and their previous experience – this can be traumatic and rarely survives their departure. Heads are guardians, temporary, their long term impact is limited – their job is to make the school the best type of school that it is – or move it towards international best practice – not to make it into a different school based on their own history or idiosyncrasies."

"Heads fail because they are a bad fit for the school; a recruitment blunder. They might be good at what they do, but what they do might be wrong for that particular school."

"The most important factor is mission fit and committed support to the mission and values of the school. Cultural fit to the ethos of the school and the organisational culture related to roles, decision-making etc. Experience with complexity of the organisation in terms of scope, budget, types of decisions needed and the like."

"The importance of fit and need for due diligence"

"At one time we need a Head who shows great leadership ability who can bring the community together. And yet, at certain points, we want a Head that is more academically focused. Different stages of the school requires different types of leadership."

"The main reason Heads leave early is choosing the wrong school and not selecting a situation that suits you as a person."

"It would be easy to write a thesis on this, but it must be said that getting the chemistry right for the school in question may be more important than what a Head knows. At any given time, there are many potential candidates for a Head's position who have the knowledge, skills, and experience to run a school, but can they run this particular school? That is about chemistry, rather than knowledge about education, leadership, management, curriculum, labour laws, culture, and a myriad of other knowledge domains (all of which are important, by the way)."

"I feel there needs to be a strong match between the personal belief of the candidate and the culture of the school (its heritage, current challenges and its vision for the future)."
A questionnaire to help candidates explore their fit to a potential vacancy

We have tried to ‘unpack’ this concept of fit to identify the potential factors in play when considering the ‘fit’ of a candidate to an international school. We thought it might be most helpful to try to do this by designing a questionnaire which helped candidates reflect and explore this themselves. It may be that those aspects rated as ‘high’ warrant further exploration by candidates.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of international schools that may influence fit</th>
<th>Rating e.g. low, medium, high</th>
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<tr>
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<td>How different are these to my own?</td>
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<td>The degree of dislocation or hardship of the location – e.g. as suggested by quality of living index</td>
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<td>The potential demands and impact on family</td>
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<td>The degree of influence or control on the Head - e.g. from being part of a group or affiliation resulting in less independence</td>
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<td>What has been the turnover of previous incumbents?</td>
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**Aspects of international schools that may influence fit**

- The degree of influence or **control on the Head** - e.g. from being part of a group or affiliation resulting in less independence.
- The complexity of **managing upwards** – e.g. number of stakeholders, likely lack of clarity (see also section below specifically on governance).
- How much might I have to adapt my own **education ethos and vision** to fit the needs of the school and local culture and regulations?
- Looking at the value the school places on **academic v non-academic** education, how different is this to my own values?
- Looking at the importance the school places on **process, structures, systems, reporting, data** etc. how different is this to my own appetite?
- The extent of **instability, disruption and uncertainty** within the local environment.
- The extent of **change** to manage.
- Is there a prevalent occupation of **parents** (shorthand for type of parent)? To what extent might I have to **change my style** or approach to work best with them?
- What is the **turnover of staff**?
- What is the **turnover of students**?
- What is the **turnover of governors**? (see also section on governors below)
- What has been the **turnover of previous incumbents**?
Candidates’ enquiry into effective governance

Probably the most mentioned concern by Heads is Board dysfunction. What can Heads do before taking up a new position to assess what they are getting into? Some candidates may be reluctant to enquire about this during a selection process for fear of being seen as difficult. We have therefore included some ideas for both how candidates could enquire as well as what they might ask about.

Ideas for candidates – how to find out more and who can help you:

• If there is a recruitment agent – use them. A good agent will have spent time with key governors. Ask the agent awkward questions and see them as an ally in helping you understand the school context and if it's right for you.

• Search online, including internationalschoolsreview.com.

• Speak with the current post-holder – what do they wish they had known at the start? Or if there has been a high turnover of leaders, speak to the previous incumbent who may be more able and willing to speak.

• Associations such as EARCOS, ACAMIS, MEIBA and COBIS are often happy to be approached to offer feedback on the current status of a school, or suggest other knowledgeable contacts. While offered with discretion, such feedback can often be helpful.
• Find out as much as you can about the Chairperson. Seek an opportunity to meet him/her outside the formal selection process. It is important to be assured that the leader of the Board has a good grasp of the issues important to the school, and also that a constructive and cordial relationship can be developed.

• Either at final interview or before contractual acceptance, ask for access to a full set of annual accounts – to verify that the school is financially healthy or viable, and that it takes financial probity seriously.

Ideas for candidates – what to look for / questions to ask:

• What is the make-up of the Board, the tenure of members, the mix of skills, including who on the Board best understands education?

• Who are the key stakeholders – e.g. holding company, group, partnerships, investors, regional organisation, role of regulators and ministries, ex-officios, parent-school or affiliations/franchise. What do these parties do in theory and practice?

• What is the Head’s involvement in setting strategy? What is the Head’s expected attendance at key meetings – or specifically, are there any forums where the Head is not invited?

• What is the Board’s view, or at least the Chairperson’s view, on the delineation between the Board’s and Head’s responsibility? If a parent, for example, contacts a Board member with a concern about teaching, how do they think this should be handled?

• Do any school staff report to the Board rather than reporting to the Head?

• How often do the Chairperson and Head typically meet?

• Which documents are available, e.g. a set of accounts, the Board’s Articles and Instruments of Governance – such as constitution, inspection reports.

• What is the School Development Plan – in particular the profit (if applicable) and growth forecasts? How were these targets developed and how realistic are they?

• Where family or dependents are concerned, check that any expectations about employment, visas, or education are discussed and agreed.

Of course, no school is a perfect fit and no governance practice is perfect. Candidates will use their own judgement about the balance of evidence, and this section of our report is offered to help candidates consider these important issues.

With the continuing growth of international schools, especially within our survey region, and the prevalence of brand new schools, it would seem increasingly important for Heads and Boards to do as much as they can to match leaders and schools. One aspect of this – the alignment of expectations between the owners and prospective Heads – is perhaps the single most important aspect emerging from our research.

If you have any comments or questions about this report, we at RSAcademics would love to hear from you. Please contact the author BarrySpeirs@RSAcademics.co.uk
APPENDIX 1 FURTHER ANALYSIS OF OUR RESPONDENT SAMPLE

RESPONDENTS (108)

**Asia**
- Head: 52
- Board member: 9
- Deputy Head: 20

**Gulf**
- Head: 24
- Board member: 1
- Deputy Head: 2

ANALYSIS OF THE HEADS IN OUR RESPONDENT SAMPLE (76)

**Nationality**
- UK: 36
- US or Canada: 7
- Australia / New Zealand: 7
- Other: 8

**International experience before current headship**
- more than 20 years: 13
- 11 to 20 years: 22
- 3 to 10 years: 20
- less than 3 years: 3
- First international position: 17

**Length of current headship**
- 11 to 20 years: 6
- 3 to 10 years: 29
- less than 3 years: 40

**Number of headships (including current)**
- 1 headship: 26
- 2: 24
- 3 or more: 24

**Gender**
- Male: 61
- Female: 14
APPENDIX 1 FURTHER ANALYSIS OF OUR RESPONDENT SAMPLE

ANALYSIS OF SCHOOLS (76)

Number of students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 1500</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000 to 1500</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 to 999</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 500</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% of students who are local nationals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Local Nationals</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 75%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 75%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 49%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 25%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Curriculum included

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student age group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nursery / Kindergarten</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior / Primary</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How long the school has been established

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishment Period</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>over 20 years</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 20 years</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 10 years</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 3 years</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Type of governance or ownership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Governance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charitable Trust or equivalent</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For profit</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The following people agreed to be named as participants in our research. We thank them and those who also took part anonymously.

Shalini Advani School Director
David Baldwin Headteacher
Chris Bromham Principal
Chris Charleson Head
Craig Coutts Head of School
Dale Cox Head of School
Andrew Dalton Principal
Derrick Duggan Principal
Chris Edwards Head of College
David Edwards Head of Education
Gordon Espley-Jones Principal
Thomas Farrell Superintendent of Schools
Geoffrey Fisher Head of Academy
Rachel Friedmann Head of School
Paul Friend Principal
Kate Fuller Primary Principal
Darren Gale Principal
Martin George Headmaster
Steven Geraghty Executive Principal
Costas Gikas Principal
Anne Gurnett Headteacher - Primary
Craig Halsall Headmaster
David Hicks School Principal
Graham Hill Director
Pathways School India
Horizon School
Uptown School
International School of London Qatar
Yokohama International School
Shekou International School
The International School @ ParkCity
St Mary’s Catholic High School
UWCSEA
GEMS World Academy (Singapore)
Traill International School
Kaohsiung American School
Aga Khan Academy Hyderabad
Carmel School
North London Collegiate School Jeju
Alice Smith School
Springdales School
Epsom College in Malaysia
International School Brunei
As Seeb International School
Kuwait English School
Haileybury
Emirates International School
English School of Mongolia
India
Dubai, UAE
Dubai, UAE
Doha, Qatar
Yokohama, Japan
Shenzhen, China
Malaysia
Muhaisnah, Dubai
Singapore
Singapore
Bangkok, Thailand
Kaohsiung, Taiwan
Hyderabad, India
Hong Kong
South Korea
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Dubai, UAE
Bandar Enstek, Malaysia
Brunei
Oman
Salwa, Kuwait City
Kazakhstan
Dubai, UAE
Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
APPENDIX 2 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Peter Hogan
Sally Holloway
Stephen Holroyd
Jonathan Hughes-D’Aeth
John Gwyn Jones
Stephen Keegan
Cheryl Anne Keegan
Mike Lambert
Pelham Lindfield Roberts
James MacDonald
Gerard MacMahon
Jake Madden
Simon Mann
Malcolm McKenzie
Anuradha Monga
John Moore
Dan Moore
Rashmi Nnadkeolyar
Simon O’Connor
Glenn Odland
Helen Olds
Matthew Parr
Sharl Prinsloo
Malcolm Pritchard
Andy Puttock
Tarek Razik

Principal
Head of School
Principal
Headmaster
Deputy Director
Head of K-12 school
Principal
Headmaster
Head of College
Head of School
Master
Head of School
Head of School
Head of School
Principal
Head of School & CEO
Principal
Principal
Head of School
Head of School
Principal
Head of School
Head of School

Regent's International School, Bangkok
KIS International School
Shrewsbury
Repton School
Panyathip International School
Hillside World Academy
Ningbo Huamao International School
Dubai College
UWC Mahindra College
NIST International School
Wellington College International Shanghai
Dar Al Marefa Private School
British School Manila
Keystone Academy
Bangalore International School
The British School Kathmandu
Bromsgrove International School
Delhi Private School
Jumeirah College
Canadian International School
British School Manila
Nagoya International School
Sohar International School
The Independent Schools Foundation Academy
British School of Beijing, Shunyi
International School of Beijing

Bangkok, Thailand
Bangkok, Thailand
Bangkok, Thailand
Dubai, UAE
Laos
Singapore
Ningbo, China
Dubai, UAE
Pune, India
Bangkok, Thailand
Shanghai, China
Dubai, UAE
Philippines
Beijing
India
Nepal
Bangkok, Thailand
Dubai, UAE
Dubai, UAE
Singapore
Manila, Philippines
Japan
Sohar, Oman
Hong Kong
Beijing, China
Beijing, China
APPENDIX 2 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Neil Richards  Headmaster  British International School Phuket  Thailand
Bradley Roberts  Principal  St. Joseph’s Institution International  Singapore
Trevor Rowell  Chairman  COBIS
Alan Runge  Head of School  Hong Kong International School
Graeme Salt  Headmaster  Dulwich College Seoul
Roger Schultz  Head of School  Alice Smith School
Helen Searle  Head Teacher - Prep  Kuwait English School
Amber Singh  Head of Secondary  Emirates International School Jumeirah
Patrick Solomon  Head Teacher  The British School Salalah
Mark Steed  Director  JESS Dubai
Lalitha Suresh  Principal  GEMS Our Own Indian School
Riki Teteina  Head of School  Phuket International Academy School
Val Thomas-Peter  Head of School  Bangkok International Preparatory and Secondary School
John Todd  Headmaster  Dulwich College Suzhou
Warren Townsend  Head of Secondary  Sohar International School
Martin Towse  Principal  St. Christopher’s International Primary School
Harvey Trump  Head of Secondary  Regent International
Gwyn Underwood  Head of School  Beijing BISS International School
Riegardt van Heerden  Head of Primary  Sohar International School
Simon Watson  Principal  Kolej Tuanku Ja’afar
Julian Whiteley  Chief Executive  Phuket International Academy School
Ed Wickins  Executive Principal  Kowloon Learning Campus
Shelly Luke Wille  Head of School  Chadwick International
Paul Wood  Executive Principal  YK Pao School, Secondary Division
Thailand
Singapore
UK
Hong Kong
South Korea
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Kuwait
Dubai, UAE
Salalah, Oman
Dubai, UAE
Dubai, UAE
Phuket, Thailand
Bangkok, Thailand
Suzhou, China
Sohar, Oman
Penang, Malaysia
Dubai, UAE
Beijing, China
Sohar, Oman
Malaysia
Phuket, Thailand
Hong Kong
Songdo, South Korea
Shanghai, China