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It's not just about workload: a case study into the retention of Heads of Mathematics (HoMs) in secondary schools in Northern England.

Bryony Black

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Education

The University of Sheffield
Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Education

October 2019

Abstract

This study explores the possibilities for the retention of Heads of Mathematics (HoMs) in secondary schools in England. There has been a shortage of teachers of mathematics in England for at least 60 years and in recent years, the Government has been accused of an over-emphasis on recruitment to the profession rather than the retention of those already teaching.

Whilst there is a strong body of research into teacher retention, this largely focuses on those in the early years of their careers, before they have taken on additional responsibility. There is sporadic research into the role of the HoM but this does not yet form a coherent body. This study aims to address the gap in the knowledge base by exploring the role of the HoM and the experiences of those in the role in order to understand reasons why HoMs stay in the role or choose to leave. The study uses this exploration to offer policy makers and Head Teachers recommendations to enable improved retention of HoMs.

Focusing on the perspectives of HoMs, this research takes a case study approach, involving three narrative data collection methods: focus groups, one-to-one interviews and audio diaries. Data are analysed thematically using a Foucauldian lens, focusing on the power relations experienced and developed by HoMs in a performative culture.

The study finds that the role of the HoM is narrowly constructed through the need to respond to three tactics of neoliberal governmentality: performance measures, new national policy and Ofsted inspections. HoMs' experiences of the role are significantly affected by their Head Teachers' responses to the performative demands placed on them. HoMs employ a range of resistances in order to make their role workable.

The findings of the research suggest that the pressure on a Head Teacher to meet performance targets in order to achieve a positive Ofsted outcome and maintain a school's position in the education 'market' can damage the relationship between a Head Teacher and their HoM. It is therefore argued that national policy change is needed to allow Head Teachers to develop more effective working relationships with those in middle leadership positions in schools.

This study takes forward the debate about teacher retention, extending it to a consideration of those in positions of responsibility, whilst highlighting the need for further research in this area.

Acknowledgements

I am hugely indebted to the study's participants, without whom I would have been unable to complete the thesis. The most enjoyable and rewarding part of the whole process was talking to you and listening to your stories.

I am grateful to everyone in the 2013 EdD cohort: I was so lucky to find myself amongst such a supportive, humble group of people. I have lost count of the number of daft questions I have asked over the last few years, and there has always been someone there to answer, or to admit that they do not know either!

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr Chris Winter, for her incredible enthusiasm for the study. Thanks, too, to Professor Pat Sikes, who offered an alternative perspective in the final months.

My colleagues at work have been very patient with me, and particularly in the closing stages of the thesis have enabled me to take a step back to focus on my studies. I really appreciate that.

So many friends have offered their support and joined in my many distraction techniques when needed. Thank you to all of you, but particularly to Victoria, Catherine, Vicky, Niamh, Adreeja, Jane and Frank.

Without my family, this whole undertaking would have been impossible:

My parents instilled in me the belief that I can do anything I set my mind to, and that I can set my mind to anything.

My sisters, Joanna, Eleanor and Hilary, offer me unstinting support and so much laughter and fun.

My step-daughters, Mia and Evie, have always believed in my ability to complete this study, and their confidence in me has made a huge difference at the most challenging times.

I could not have even contemplated starting the EdD programme without the support of my husband, Richard. It has been an interesting and challenging six years – let's get that camper van now!

To Noah: after all those visits to the Ark Hotel, it's time to have your mum back.

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Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University’s Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This is a study about teacher retention. In particular, it focuses on the retention of Heads of Mathematics (HoMs)¹ in non-fee-paying secondary schools in northern England. The aim of the study is to understand the way in which the role of the HoM is constructed and shed light on the experiences of those undertaking the role in order to find ways to improve retention in the role. The focus of the thesis came initially from personal experience: within my local area, without thinking hard I can name schools in which the HoM had been teaching for fewer than five years prior to taking on this significant leadership role, schools where the HoM has chosen to step down or moved on and a replacement has not been found despite repeated recruitment cycles and departments in which a second in department has agreed to stand in as HoM until a replacement can be found. These situations suggest an issue with both recruitment and retention of HoMs. Having undertaken the role of HoM myself I am aware of its potential impact on the experiences of both other staff and pupils, and I am also aware that the significant increase in accountability measures in recent years has led to the role becoming highly pressurised and much less attractive than it may have been in the past.

In this introductory chapter I outline the reasons for my research choice, from a personal, local and national perspective, putting the study into context and identifying and explaining the problem the study aims to deal with. I then give a background to the approach I have taken and explain the structure of the thesis to come.

¹ Secondary schools in England are structured in subject departments, and each department has a defined member of the team who is paid a higher salary to take on the responsibility of leadership of that subject area. A HoM is therefore a teaching member of a mathematics department who has overall responsibility for the mathematics provision in their school.

1.2 Context of the study

In order to put the study in context I share three stories from my own working life, both as a HoM and more recently as a teacher educator based in a university:

Story 1

On GCSE results day in August 2007, I, the HoM in a school in challenging circumstances² in northern England, was met with grave faces by the school leadership team. I dreaded to discover what had happened. Then they told me: the mathematics General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)³ results had taken a dip. The previous year, 48.5% of pupils had achieved a C grade, and this year it was just 47%. This was within a context where three years previously we were at 26%, but that was not considered to be relevant: performance had dropped and we needed an inquest.

Story 2

On a Tuesday morning in January 2008, when I was HoM in the same school, I stood in the classroom awaiting the arrival of my Year 11 intervention⁴ class. With this small class of 12 pupils I had spent the previous term building strong relationships and had developed a culture where the pupils were confident to discuss mathematics, share challenges they faced and admit when they did not understand a concept.

That day, as I greeted the pupils, I did not recognise them all. Some had been in my class the previous week; others should have been in the parallel English intervention class. I checked the class register on the computer and found a whole new set of pupils on the list. I asked the pupils what was going on. "Oh – some people have been given new timetables", they informed me. They didn't

² In this study I consider 'challenging circumstances' to mean schools situated in areas of economic deprivation with high numbers of pupils eligible for Free School Meals.

³ GCSEs are the examinations taken by all students in England at the age of 16. Strong passes in at least 5 subjects including English and mathematics are necessary to move to the next stage of education.

⁴ Intervention classes are commonly set up to enable a teacher to focus on a particular group of pupils who are at risk of not achieving a grade 4 at GCSE.

know why. I was sure that there must have been an administrative error: my class wouldn't suddenly change without any discussion, particularly since I was the HoM and had worked hard with my department to develop strategies to ensure that our pupils succeeded at GCSE.

I was wrong. The leadership team had been analysing data from mock examinations⁵ and had noticed that some pupils in the English intervention class had achieved a C grade. The same applied to some pupils in my mathematics group. They had therefore been switched. There had been no discussion with the pupils or the teachers involved; the numbers were enough to precipitate the change.

Story 3

In September 2014, now in a new role as mathematics Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGDE)⁶ tutor, I was meeting with a potential new school partner to plan some joint working. He talked about the school in which he worked, its context, their aims in raising achievement, and then he described his department: "I've got two 1s, two 2s and a 3". He was describing the teachers in his department by their Ofsted rating: when they had been observed teaching, their lessons had been rated as 1 (outstanding), 2 (good) or 3 (requires improvement), and they were now labelled by these grades.

Each of these stories gives a brief snapshot into the world in which HoMs function. Story 1 gives some indication of the pressure on a HoM to ensure that their department performs well against national accountability measures, and the problems they may face if there is any reduction in performance; story 2 demonstrates that, whilst the pressure is on the HoM to perform, they may not always be in control of the ways in which they aim to address the externally imposed performance measures; story 3 gives an insight into the common language of HoMs, and also gives

⁵ Examinations set by schools to prepare students for the terminal examinations, and to check on progress towards target grades.

⁶ PGCE is the qualification required to become a teacher in England.

some indication of the dehumanisation that can occur when schools focus heavily on performance and outcomes. It is within this context that I chose to undertake the study.

1.3 Nature of the problem

The shortage of HoMs in my area is not a local problem, and teacher shortages are not confined to this role. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC), in January 2018, reported that there is a “growing sense of crisis for schools in England struggling to retain and develop their teachers” (House of Commons, 2018, p. 3), stating starkly that “The Department [for Education] has failed to get a grip on teacher retention” (op cit., p. 5). The same report confirms that “The number of qualified teachers leaving for reasons other than retirement increased by 2.1 percentage points from 6.0% (25,260) of the qualified workforce in 2011 to 8.1% (34,910) in 2016” (House of Commons, 2018, p. 5), and states that the Government does not have a clear understanding about why this is happening or what they can do about it. Having spoken with teaching unions, the Department for Education (DfE) had found that ‘workload’ is a key issue, along with a lack of access to high quality continuing professional development (CPD), the pace of curriculum change and increasing class sizes, although the way in which the data is collected means that the report is not able to offer any more depth as to why these are issues or what those in schools feel should be done about them.

The Government is concerned about teacher retention in general, and this is an even greater problem in mathematics, which has been termed a “shortage subject” for over 60 years. Neil Straker reported in 1988 a growing problem over the previous 30 years (Straker, 1988), whilst in 2007 The Royal Society reported that there was, “a serious shortage of [science and mathematics teachers] particularly in England” (Royal Society, 2007, p. 11). More recently, data published by the DfE shows that almost one fifth (300 out of 1690) of all teaching vacancies in English secondary schools in November 2017 were for mathematics posts (DfE, 2018).

A range of approaches has been employed by the Government to encourage more people to join the mathematics teaching workforce, including offering ever larger bursaries (DfE, n.d.) to encourage

people to train to teach, and allocating non-specialist Teach First teachers to mathematics (Teach First, nd). However, despite these efforts the shortage persists, and in fact the PAC found that the Government has focused its investment too much on encouraging more people to train to teach, at the expense of considering ways to retain them once they qualify and begin their careers (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2018).

1.4 Significance of the study

There are two main gaps in our current understanding of the issue of retention of HoMs that mean this thesis has the potential to make a significant contribution to the debate: firstly, the information from the government's investigations and other research into the recruitment and retention of teachers is partial. The focus is on patterns of behaviour but the reasons for these patterns are not discussed. In fact, the DfE admits that,

A natural limitation is that administrative data cannot capture a range of personal and professional reasons that may influence someone's decision to leave the profession. (DfE, 2018, p. 25)

Secondly, whilst there is plenty of research into the retention of teachers in general, and particularly those in the early years of their careers, there is very little focusing on HoMs. Teachers in this position of responsibility will experience very different pressures from classroom teachers and so they merit consideration in their own right.

In order to understand issues of retention it is necessary to be clear about the role that the HoM is expected to perform. It is therefore surprising that there is also very little research into the role of the HoM. Much research into school leadership is available (see, for example, Sanzo, 2012, Torrance, 2013), and there is a bewildering array of guide books explaining how to be an excellent school leader (35,000 in an initial internet search). In contrast, an internet search gave me two books specific to mathematics leadership (Johnson Wilder and Lee, 2010 and Bevan (ed.), 2005) and a range of generic pocket books about middle leadership. Whilst there is academic research available regarding the HoM, it is sporadic and does not yet form a cohesive body of knowledge.

The issue in mathematics leadership is likely to become a broader issue of middle leadership in schools. School examination outcomes have been measured and compared for 25 years, and these results are published nationally so that anyone who wishes to can find schools that perform particularly strongly or weakly. Until 2016, the focus of these comparisons was on pupils achieving 5 grades or C or above at GCSE, and those grades must include English and mathematics. However, in 2016 the Government introduced new performance measures, Progress 8 and Attainment 8 (DfE, 2015), which consider pupils' progress and achievement in six curriculum subjects. Whilst English and mathematics still make up half of this measure, with each considered to be 'worth' two GCSEs, the new measure potentially places other subjects into the same pressurised environment as mathematics and English. This is therefore a key time for a focus on subject leadership.

1.5 Focus and aims of the research

Having given a background and rationale for my study I now clarify its aims and the approach taken to achieve those aims. My research focuses on the role of the HoM in secondary schools in Northern England, and on the experiences of those who undertake the role. In taking this focus I hope to better understand the tensions that HoMs experience in their work, and how they deal with those tensions in order to continue in their roles. At the same time, I attempt to understand why not everyone chooses to remain in the role.

The aim of my work is to identify some of the contributing factors in successful retention of HoMs and therefore to offer some recommendations for policy makers and Head Teachers that may help in the future recruitment to and retention in this role.

1.6 Research questions

In order to focus my study I consider three key questions. These are kept simple in order to offer scope to explore the role and the experiences of HoMs from a range of angles. The questions focusing my study are:

1. How do HoMs perceive their role?
2. What experiences of fulfilling their role do HoMs report?
3. What affects HoMs' decisions to remain in or leave their post?

The first question aims to understand the constitution of the role of HoM from both a policy and a practice perspective. Agee (2009) argues that, "Qualitative research questions...need to articulate what a researcher wants to know about the intentions and perspectives of those involved in social interactions" (p. 432), and this approach is taken in question two, which involves listening to current HoMs and those who have chosen to leave the role to understand their experiences. The third question allows the development of an understanding of the decisions made by HoMs, which in turn makes it possible to offer recommendations about how to retain HoMs. Throughout the study, however, I maintain awareness that I am considering the experiences of a limited number of HoMs.

1.7 Scope

This research is a semi-participatory study (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995) that takes a case study approach (Yin, 2014), with the case being "the HoM". I investigate this role, first broadly and then gradually narrowing down to a small number of key individuals. I began the study by surveying all teachers of mathematics in 90 schools in the north of England. The survey had a dual purpose: firstly, to give a broad picture of the priorities of mathematics teachers and leaders in the area and secondly, to identify potential participants in the rest of the research.

Following this initial survey three groups were identified for further investigation: those who became HoMs early in their careers, those who did so when they had more than five years' teaching experience, and those who had chosen to leave the role. These participants then decided their own level of participation in the project. In total, fourteen HoMs from fourteen different schools took part in the face-to-face elements of the research.

The findings offered focus on leadership of one subject within one particular area of the country but it is hoped that they will be relevant for departmental leadership beyond this area.

1.8 Theoretical perspective

Throughout the study, and particularly in the analysis and discussion of my findings I employ a theoretical perspective based on Foucauldian concepts of power, resistance and neoliberal governmentality. This approach offers a useful lens through which to view the construction of the role of HoMs and the ways in which it is experienced in practice, whilst also enabling me to consider my own research in the context of research carried out by others in this area.

The use of theory in educational research is contested, and Thomas (2007), for example, argues that theoretical frameworks can “constrain thought within their boundaries” (p. 31). However, I did not begin this study with a theoretical frame and work from there, and this therefore reduced the perceived risk of being “constrained” by theory. The need to engage a specific set of theoretical concepts became evident as I came close to the data collection phase of the study, and I therefore did not feel that I was restricted by those ideas but that they helped me to understand the situation in which participants worked. Adams, Cochrane and Dunn (2011) argue that “theory...urges us to think more carefully about our taken-for-granted values, our motivation and our place in the research process” (p. 2), and the use of theory therefore assisted in the planning of the data collection. They go on to comment that, “theory can initiate the creation of other possibilities and new understandings” (p. 3), which reflects the process of analysis and discussion.

It was clear from early in the research process that the Foucauldian interpretation of power relations was relevant to my study, and, as Gillies argues, Foucault’s consideration of the exercise of power, “helps raise questions about freedom [and] about professional autonomy” (Gillies, 2013, p. 22), which were issues that became evident as I conducted the literature review.

As a novice in the use of theory in research, and in particular the use of the work of, and inspired by Michel Foucault, I do not claim that this is a Foucauldian study, rather that the use of Foucauldian analytics has helped me to “open up the discourse for new solutions and responses to be constructed” (Gillies, 2013, p. 24). Foucault argues that undertaking critique involves, “showing that things are not as obvious as people believe, making it so that what is taken for granted is no longer taken for granted” (Foucault in Faubion (ed), 1994, p. 456), and this is a process I undertook in the study.

1.9 Outline of the thesis

Following this introductory chapter, my thesis is structured around five further interconnected chapters that guide the reader through the research process and its findings. In chapter two I begin by outlining the policy background to the role of the HoM. I then consider literature relating to teacher retention and attrition, before critically analysing literature regarding the role of the HoM. Finally, I introduce the theoretical framework employed. Here I consider Foucauldian interpretations of power, resistance and neoliberal governmentality before going on to discuss their extension to performativity and self-responsibilisation and the way in which these concepts connect with leadership in schools.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach adopted in the study, justifying the methods used and explaining my approach to analysis. In this chapter I explore the ways in which the approach helps to answer the research questions. Chapter four addresses the first two research questions by offering an analysis of the data collected. Chapter five focuses on a discussion of my findings that helps to answer the third research question. Finally chapter six concludes the thesis, offering suggestions for future research, policy and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical background

2.1 Introduction

This chapter has three main aims. Firstly, it aims to position the role of the HoM within the national policy context in order to understand the political influences on its constitution. Secondly it addresses Abrahams' (2012) three reasons for presenting a literature review as part of a research project: to demonstrate an understanding of the research currently available into the topic being investigated, to illustrate gaps in the field that will be addressed by the work, and in some cases also to share "a 'Eureka!' moment of insight based on an aggregation of published literature" (p. 189). Finally, the literature review aims to explain and justify the use of a theoretical framework and consider the ways in which that framework contributes to a developing understanding of the experiences and decision-making of the HoMs in the study.

Throughout the chapter, I take my research questions as a guide:

1. How do HoMs perceive their role?
2. What experiences of fulfilling their role do HoMs report?
3. What affects HoMs' decisions to remain in or leave their post?

The literature review is divided into seven sections. I begin by providing a background to the role of the HoM by placing it in its policy context. I then offer a critical reflection on relevant literature, focusing in Section 2.3 on retention and attrition of teachers, and in Sections 2.4 and 2.5 on research into the role and experiences of HoMs. In Section 2.6 I introduce the theoretical perspective that underpins my study. This perspective is based on Foucault's conceptualisation of power, neoliberal governmentality and resistance. Section 2.7 follows directly from this theoretical perspective into a discussion of two key concepts emerging from that work: performativity and self-responsibilisation. The way in which the ideas from this theoretical perspective impact on the work of school leaders is

considered in the final section. I conclude the chapter by connecting the literature review with the rest of the study. I hope that by conducting this broad range of research in the literature review, I will have “set the stage for understanding where a particular body of research began, is currently, and should go in the future” (Rozas and Klein, 2010, p. 394).

2.2 Policy Context

Before discussing research literature into the role of the HoM, I begin by placing the role in its historical context. Over the last 60 years the role of Head of Department⁷ (HoD) in a secondary school has been significantly affected both directly and indirectly⁸ by Government policy developments and guidance, and in this section I begin by outlining these two sets of policy developments in a table in order to offer a timeline from the 1950s to the present day. I then consider both direct and indirect policies in combination in order to highlight the ways in which the two interact, considering the ways in which these policies are likely to have impacted on the experiences of participants in the study.

Decade	Direct policy	Indirect policy
1950s	Designation of the role of Head of Department by the Burnham Committee (Burnham Committee, 1956)	
1980s	Cockcroft Report (Cockcroft, 1982) comments on the importance of leadership in mathematics.	Development of National Curriculum (DES, 1988)
1990s	National Standards for Subject Leaders (TTA, 1998) published.	Introduction of Ofsted inspections and school league tables (National Archives, n.d.)
2000s	National training programme for middle leaders (Leading from the Middle) introduced (NCSL, 2003)	Introduction of Performance Management (DfEE, 2000) in schools

⁷ A generic term referring to the leader of any subject department in a secondary school in England.

⁸ Direct policy focuses explicitly on the role of HoD or HoM, whilst indirect policy relates to developments that are school-wide but will have an impact on the HoD or HoM because of their position in school.

		National Strategies introduced in secondary schools (DfE, 2011). Refined league tables including 5A*-C including English and Maths (Wilson and Piebalga, 2008)
2010s	National Professional Qualification for Middle Leaders introduced (DfE, 2012)	Progress 8 measures introduced (DfE, 2015) New National Curriculum (2013), GCSEs and A levels (2014-17)

Table 1: Policy developments affecting the role of HoM 1950-2019

2.2.1 Original introduction of the role

The role of the HoD in schools was first identified in 1956 by the Burnham Committee in their directive for the (then) Ministry of Education regarding teachers' salaries. At that time a range of salaries was offered for Local Education Authorities to select from with the instruction that "the LEA should have regard to the size of the department and its importance in the curriculum" (Burnham Committee, 1956, p. 43). Priority was given to schools that taught subjects to GCE Advanced Level⁹, where the LEA was told that it "shall" establish HoD posts, whereas in schools just teaching to GCE Ordinary Level¹⁰, the LEA "may" do so. At this point, no other information was given about what the role should involve, and it was simply specified in financial terms.

In 1960 the London County Council identified six key activities of the HoD. The first three of these focused on organisation of the resources and curriculum, and the other key areas were liaison with other departments, provision of "academic leadership" (London County Council, 1960) and arranging departmental meetings. At this early stage, the focus was on the day-to-day work involved in running a department, but elements of more strategic work were also evident, particularly in the academic leadership and inter-departmental liaison.

⁹ The qualification taken by students at the age of 18. Strong grades at Advanced Level mean the student will easily gain access to University.

¹⁰ The qualification taken by students at the age of 16 at that time. This was then replaced by the GCSE.

2.2.2 Developments in the 1980s

A Government report following the National Secondary Survey (DES, 1980) offered several suggestions relating to improving mathematics teaching in secondary schools, but the only mention of mathematics leadership was the recommendation to offer heads of mathematics “in-service training” (p. 44), and the focus at that time was on ensuring departments were fully staffed rather than on making changes to the way mathematics departments worked.

The first major national work looking specifically at the role of the HoM came in the Cockcroft report (Cockcroft, 1982). This report was a key document for those involved in mathematics education, and was produced following a review commissioned by the Labour Government of 1977, which Brown (2014) argues marked a significant step in the move towards a National Curriculum in England. Whilst the report focused mostly on the teaching of mathematics, it was clear that the view of the committee was that the HoM was key in ensuring that mathematics departments ran effectively. The Cockcroft Committee named the key functions of the HoM, which in their view did not differ hugely from those identified by London County Council twenty years earlier, although the focus had changed slightly. Cockcroft viewed the production of schemes of work as top of the agenda, arguing that this not only aided the teachers in planning their lessons but also “it is by this means that the mathematics department makes clear its aims and objectives” (paragraph 510). The addition of points relating to “monitoring of the teaching in the department” and “playing a full part in the professional development...of those who teach mathematics” (paragraph 508), however, marks a significant development in the expectations placed on a HoM: not only should they ensure the smooth running of the department, but they should also take a role in checking that others are working to a high standard. In a research project considering HoMs, published seven years after the Cockcroft Report, Ernest (1989) stated that “The teachers neither appear to value greatly nor attend to...teacher appraisal” (p. 327), warning quite rightly, however, that there would be “increased

performance expectations of heads of department following the discussion of their role in Cockcroft” (p. 335).

2.2.3 1990s-2000s: Ofsted, The National Strategies and Performance Management

Following the introduction of a National Curriculum for England and Wales (DES, 1988), there began a period that extends to today in which governmental control over schools had increased significance. This had an important impact on the role of the HoM. Turner (1996), for example, stated that “it is the middle managers in any secondary school who have the delegated responsibility for the introduction, implementation and evaluation of a variety of educational policies at the subject level” (p. 204), pointing out that from 1990 onwards, “the job of interpreting and implementing a plethora of Government initiatives...really began to significantly affect the workload of heads of department” (p. 207). The role of the head of mathematics began to include ever increasing challenges in which external pressures needed to merge with the internal demands of their own department.

Part of the centralisation of educational control at this time is evident in the nationalisation of the inspection of schools marked by the introduction of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in 1992. The Education (Schools) Act of 1992 (National Archives, n.d.) stated that all schools in England and Wales must be inspected and a report of the findings of each inspection must be made public. The approach to inspections has developed considerably since Ofsted’s inception, but at the time it marked the start of an era that continues to today, in which schools can be compared by the publication in league tables of both their Ofsted reports and their GCSE and A Level outcomes.

Despite this centralisation of many aspects of schooling, it was not until 1998 that any specific national guidance about the role of the HoD was issued. At that time, the first National Standards for Subject Leaders (Teacher Training Agency¹¹ (TTA), 1998) were introduced, which were then

¹¹ The Teacher Training Agency, set up in 1994 and replaced by the Teacher Development Agency in 2005, was a body focused on the pre- and in-service training of teachers.

incorporated into the Teachers' Standards Framework (DfES 2001, cited in Burrows, 2004). The 1998 standards aimed to "set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and attributes which relate to the key areas of subject leadership" (p. 3), and made clear the value placed on the role of subject leadership in schools. The TTA claimed that "the standards are intended to aid development rather than being barriers to progression in the profession", adding that "they provide the basis for a more structured approach to appraisal" (p. 2). The introduction of these Standards was a key part of the development of performance management in schools, which was launched in 2000 (DfEE, 2000), with the statement that, "Performance management is a way of helping schools improve by supporting and improving teachers' work, both as individuals and in teams" (p. 3). The launch materials argue that, "Good management, with clear expectations and appropriate support will go a long way towards identifying and handling any weaknesses in performance". (p. 9) Clearly, then, the TTA's reassurance was probably necessary at a time when those in the position of HoM or aspiring to that position may have, quite rightly, felt threatened by the new requirements and the assessment of their performance.

At the same time as the introduction of the Standards, the new Labour Government had launched "one of the most ambitious change management programmes in education": The National Strategies (DfE, 2011). The aim of the programme was "to drive improvements in standards through a focused programme of managing changes in the way that core subjects are taught in classrooms" (DfE, 2011). Whilst the focus was on developing classroom teaching, plenty of guidance was also given to HoDs, including through such documents as, "Securing improvement: the role of subject leaders" (DfES, 2002), "The National Strategies' Programmes of Support for the National Challenge: Leading Core Subjects" (DCSF, 2008a) and "The Role of the Subject leader in raising standards in mathematics" (DCSF, 2008b). Within all of these documents, the importance of the subject leaders was emphasised, although with different aims in mind: the 2002 document claimed that "They provide the leadership, subject expertise and enthusiasm that teachers need in order to understand and implement the Strategy" (p. 1), whilst the 2008b document states that "A mathematics subject

leader's principal responsibility is to ensure that their school's ambitions for high quality teaching and learning in mathematics, leading to high levels of achievement for all pupils, are shared and pursued by all those who teach or support the subject" (p. 1). In the early stages of the Strategies, then, the focus was on ensuring that schools took part and used the materials provided, whilst later some broader aims could be considered.

Following the introduction of the Standards, and during the period of the National Strategies, continuing the normalisation of the English education system, a national programme of training, entitled "Leading from the Middle" was developed by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in 2003. The NCSL stated that:

the core purpose of the programme is to develop and enhance the leadership effectiveness of middle leaders so that they are better able to contribute fully to raising standards in schools. (NCSL, 2003)

This national training programme for middle leaders was aiming at more than improving middle leadership: it made assumptions about the best approach to leadership and encouraged homogeneity in middle leaders' approaches to leadership across the country. A focus on improving performance was at the heart of the programme, with sessions entitled, for example, "coaching to improve team performance" (NCSL 2003), and it was assumed that this was everyone's aim. Whilst I may now have some misgivings, having taken part in the programme myself I felt at the time that it was some of the best professional development I had ever had. It allowed me time to think about my position in school, my approach to developing my staff, and forced me to face the more challenging aspects of my work, such as working with staff who were resistant to change. It did not, however, encourage me to question the systems I needed to comply with, although that did not concern me at the time.

2.2.4 2010 – present: the coalition and Conservative governments

Between 2010 and the time of this study, the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition followed by the Conservative Government launched educational reforms through two key White Papers: The Importance of Teaching (DfE, 2010) and Educational Excellence Everywhere (DfE, 2016). The same agenda of the previous government, of school improvement through monitoring performance, is still evident. However, the official focus is now on school-led improvements rather than national direction and support.

A key signifier of the new direction was when, in 2010, the National Strategies programme came to an abrupt end. The resources were archived and a final evaluation was produced, stating that

Given the progress made during the lifetime of the National Strategies it is appropriate to take stock of the English 'school system improvement journey' and to acknowledge that the time is right for central Government to step back from much of the central provision and initiatives that have been developed over recent years and to consolidate resources and decision-making at school level, allowing schools to determine their own needs and to commission appropriate support. (DfE 2011, p. 3)

This marked the beginning of a significant change in Government discourse with a new focus on schools leading improvements from within. The 2010 White Paper, The Importance of Teaching states that, "We believe that public services will improve most when professionals feel free to do what they believe is right, and are properly accountable for the results" (p. 66). However, the new approach is not straightforward: at the same time as the new 'freedom' was offered, the Government introduced sweeping changes to curriculum and assessments in both primary and secondary schools, and tightened the accountability measure associated with the assessments.

The new National Curriculum was introduced in 2013 and by 2016, the Government stated that, "We have set a new gold standard for reformed GCSEs, which will be more academically demanding"

(DfE, 2016, p. 92). At the same time, new performance measures, Progress 8 and Attainment 8¹² (DfE, 2017a) were introduced to help rank schools, with “a focus on an academic core at KS4” (DfE 2017, p.5). These new performance measures were then used to identify underperforming schools that may need an Ofsted inspection:

Ofsted uses risk assessment to ensure that its approach to inspection is proportionate and so that it can focus its efforts where it can have the greatest impact. Risk assessment has two stages:

- Stage one involves an assessment of each school, based on analysis of publicly available data.
- Stage two involves a more in-depth desk-based review of a wider range of available information.

The outcomes of the risk assessment are used differently depending on the previous inspection grade of the school. (Ofsted, 2016, p. 8)

This approach meant that a school with disappointing examination results was now more likely to be inspected than one with good results, regardless of any other factors. The outcomes of the inspections have significant consequences, particularly for Head Teachers: “Maintained schools and PRUs that are judged to be causing concern will be subject to an academy order”. (Ofsted 2019). This means that if a school has a poor inspection, then control of that school will be removed from the Head Teacher.

Considering all three of the policies discussed here: new National Curriculum, new performance measures and increased significance of poor performance in inspection, it is hard to identify where the ‘freedom’ supposedly offered by the Government might lie. The progress measures are used to determine which schools are succeeding and which are failing, and the consequences of failure are so significant that it is likely that a Head Teacher’s focus will be, in the main, on achieving strong enough results to avoid that failure.

¹² Progress 8 considers pupils’ progress across 6 key subjects. “Progress” is measured against their outcomes in national tests taken at the age of 11 that are used to predict outcomes at 16. Attainment 8 considers attainment in those same six subjects but does not connect this to prior attainment.

At the same time as the changes to curriculum and accountability, responsibility for training middle leaders was devolved to schools, with the DfE arguing that “Through the new Teaching Schools¹³ network, we expect the National College¹⁴ to enable many more clusters of schools to offer their own high quality ‘middle leader’ development programmes” (DfE, 2010, p. 27). This approach continued to develop, and by 2016 the DfE argued that

As the school-led system becomes stronger, schools themselves will increasingly take the lead in growing the next generation of leaders: spotting, nurturing and managing talented staff, identifying diverse candidates for leadership in sufficient numbers, and ensuring that current and prospective leaders get the professional development they need. (DfE, 2016, p. 41)

In addition to the new measures that influence curriculum choice in schools, in 2013 the coalition Government introduced a national qualification for subject leaders: the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leaders (NPQML). This was despite the government’s claim of a move to local leadership. This qualification is the latest addition to a suite of qualifications aimed at those in leadership positions in schools: the National Professional Qualification for Headship is the longest-standing (first introduced in 1997, becoming mandatory for all first-time Head Teachers from 2009) whilst more recently the National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership (NPQSL) was introduced at the same time as the NPQML. These qualifications suggest a desire from policy-makers to clarify the role of leaders in schools, and possibly also offer a way of assessing the effectiveness of leaders when schools are inspected.

In order to achieve the NPQML (National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), 2014¹⁵) middle leaders are tested on seven “competencies”, which give a good idea of what the HoD role is currently assumed to be:

¹³ Teaching Schools are defined as “strong schools led by strong leaders that work with others to provide high-quality training, development and support to new and experienced school staff”. (DfE, 2017b)

¹⁴ The National College for School Leadership was a government-funded organisation that ran training programmes for all levels of leadership in schools.

¹⁵ The training materials have been updated since the time of the study. The quotes here are from the materials relevant when the study was undertaken.

- Modelling excellence in leadership of teaching and learning
- Learning focus
- Inspiring others
- Self-awareness
- Relating to others
- Developing others
- Holding others to account

Within each of these competencies are numerous bullet points explaining what is expected. The first 6 points relate to having a vision and purpose, ensuring that the team understand this and helping everyone to work towards the same aim. The final point, however, could potentially make the rest challenging to implement. Heads of department are expected to “introduce new, different or higher standards of performance”, “hold others to account for performance”, “clearly spell out the consequences of non-compliance” and “regularly monitor the progress of others”, (NCTL, 2014, p. 3) which could have a detrimental effect on hard-won positive relationships within a department. Interestingly, there is very little mention of the day-to-day tasks of a head of mathematics, and no mention at all of the selection of an appropriate curriculum, deploying staff effectively or managing budgets: perhaps these attributes are assumed, and the focus here is on the leadership and monitoring aspect of the role.

2.2.5 Concluding comments

Since 1956, when the role of a subject leader was introduced in schools in England, we have moved from a financial incentive aimed at ensuring that someone looks after the day-to-day running of a department through a phase of guidance for those in the role to the present day where those in the role can work towards a nationally recognised qualification that can be measured against a set of criteria. Whilst this current approach makes the role more clearly defined than in the past, it is clear that a plethora of indirect policy developments, along with the introduction of this qualification, has led us to a situation in which a HoM is likely to feel under huge pressure to perform and to ensure that their team performs in order to maintain their school’s position in public league tables.

2.3 Teacher retention and attrition

Having placed the role of the HoM into its historical policy context, I now move on to focus on research literature relating to teacher retention and attrition, in order to begin to consider some of the factors that may have an impact on a HoM's desire to remain in post.

The issue of teacher attrition is not new and not confined to England. There exists a large international body of research into teacher retention and attrition, from large-scale meta-analyses of the literature (see, for example, Borman and Dowling, 2008, Guarino, Santibanez and Daley, 2006, Schaefer, Long and Clandinin, 2012) to small-scale narrative studies (Smith and Ulvik, 2017, Schaefer and Clandinin, 2011, for example) focusing on the specific experiences of individual teachers. A bigger challenge is to find retention and attrition research at the level of the HoD or HoM since a large proportion of the literature focuses on those who leave the profession in the earliest years of their careers (e.g. Hong, 2012, Buchanan, Prescott, Schuck, Aubusson, Burke and Louviere, 2013). A consideration of this literature is a useful first step in identifying experiences of HoMs that may influence their decisions about remaining in post. However, someone who has chosen to become a HoM has already demonstrated some longer-term commitment to their school and to teaching, and so some of the issues identified in the general literature may not apply within the context of this study. I therefore consider the literature with some caution.

A clear pattern emerges in the research around teacher retention: attrition is usually connected to one of two or three key areas, described by Smith and Ulvik (2017) as, "personal [or] professional negative experiences" (p. 928) and by Towers and Maguire (2017) as "personal, professional and situational factors" (p. 946). Previously, Mancuso, Roberts and White (2010) offered three very similar categories to those of Towers and Maguire: "teacher characteristics, school characteristics and organizational conditions" (p. 308), where "teacher characteristics" might include their age, the number of years they have been teaching, their gender, family situation and so on, "school characteristics" refers to, for example, the size of the school, the socio-economic background of the

school population, or the school's location, and the third category, "organizational conditions" might relate to, for example, the salary they are paid, the hours they are expected to work, the amount of freedom or support they experience or their relationships with colleagues.

Considering more specific challenges, two meta-analyses (Borman and Dowling, 2008 and Guarino et al., 2006) find similar reasons for teacher attrition, including, "lack of support from administrators, student discipline issues and lack of input and decision-making power" (Borman and Dowling, 2008, p. 398). In Barmby's (2006) study, pupil behaviour was also high on the list of reasons for teachers leaving the profession, whilst at the opposite end both Borman and Dowling (2008) and Guarino et al. (2006) find that one main contributory factor for retention is the support and mentoring of teachers, particularly in the early years of their career.

Terms such as 'burnout' and 'excessive workload' feature highly within the literature on teacher attrition, and these two issues are regularly offered as reasons for teachers leaving the profession. In two separate large-scale studies, teachers cited 'workload' as their top reason for considering leaving the profession (Barmby, 2006 and Rhodes, Nevill and Allan, 2004), although the term was not analysed in either article, with the assumption apparently being made that the teachers who left or wanted to leave the profession simply felt that they had too much to do. I would suggest that it is unlikely that someone choosing to take on the more responsible role of HoM has experienced significant issues with workload in their previous role. However workload may once again become an issue with the change in responsibilities, and there is more to workload than simply the quantity of work expected.

Within the category of "professional reasons" for leaving teaching, several studies consider external factors beyond individual schools, and in particular the recent increase in accountability and performance measures that schools must meet. Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor and Diaz (2004), for example, found that North Carolina's "school-based accountability system has exacerbated the challenge that schools serving low-performing students face in retaining and attracting high-quality

teachers” (p. 251). This study was solely an analysis of data relating to numbers of teachers remaining in particular schools over time, and no qualitative data was used, so reasons for the loss of teachers can only be speculated about, but their conclusion that, “simply increasing the pressure on the personnel in low-performing schools may not be the best way to improve the performance of low-performing students” (p. 270) hints at the potential impact of the recent increases in performance measures for schools in England. However, these performance measures are not new, and it could be argued that participants in my study were well aware of the measures they would face when taking on their role and chose to do so anyway. It may be, however, that experiencing these measures first-hand as a HoM is very different from being aware of them as a teacher of mathematics with no additional responsibilities.

Three recent papers focus exclusively on the impact of school leaders on the retention of teachers (Hulpia, Devos and Van Keer, 2009; Mancuso et al., 2010; Urick, 2016). Mancuso et al., through their research in international schools, found that “those teachers who believed their school head was *more* effective were *less* likely to move from their current school” (p. 316). This “effectiveness” was related to the level of support and respect they offered their staff, and whether they included them in developments and worked with them to solve problems. An observation offered was that “School heads need to be more aware of how their daily interactions with teachers impact retention” (p. 320). Whilst Hulpia et al. (2009), in their Belgian study, were more interested in job satisfaction than retention, it could be argued that these two are strongly linked, and their conclusions resonate strongly with those of Mancuso et al.; they argue that “cohesion of the leadership team and the amount of leadership support was strongly related to organizational commitment, and indirectly to job satisfaction” (p. 2).

An important factor identified throughout the literature that has an impact on teacher retention is that of relationships and support within school. For Buchanan et al. (2013) this was the first of six identified themes related to retention of early career teachers, and they argue that “collegiality

[such as the sharing of expertise and resources] can serve as a morale-booster to newcomers...” (p. 118), whilst feelings of “isolation” (op cit.) increase the likelihood of leaving. Rhodes et al. (2004) found that “a raft of positive interpersonal relationships” (p. 77) encouraged teachers to remain in role, arguing that school leaders who focused on developing positive relationships within school were likely to see greater retention of their staff. I would argue that this element is likely to be even more important for HoMs, who may themselves have worked hard to develop strong relationships with their own departmental team, meaning that they have more invested in a school than a newcomer.

Both Hong (2012) and Towers and Maguire (2017) argue that a large part of the decision to stay in or leave teaching relates to the teacher’s own approach and their resilience within a challenging work setting. Towers and Maguire, who studied the reasons experienced teachers remained in or left a particular London school, commented that “teachers...who stayed in their schools were able to manage the pressures of accountability and they found ways of protecting themselves from the worst excesses of bureaucratic demands” (p.953), whilst Hong (2012) argues that “leavers held beliefs that imposed heavy burdens on themselves, which may have created stress and burnout” (p. 417). However, some, including Towers and Maguire (2017) argue that it should not be necessary to find ways to function within such a challenging environment, and that the consideration of teacher resilience is flawed. Smith and Ulvik (2017), for example, suggest that teachers leaving the profession is perhaps a sign of their agency rather than their lack of resilience, whilst Schaefer et al. (2012) argue that we should be investigating ways to “sustain” rather than “retain” teachers.

Some studies (e.g. Wilhelm, Dewhurst-Savellis and Parker, 2000, Barmby, 2006) discussed here produce lists of factors affecting teacher retention whilst others (e.g. Mancuso et al., 2010, Smith and Ulvik, 2017) group these into categories, including “personal” or “contextual” factors. However, both of these approaches have limitations, and as Schaefer et al. (2012) argue, “although studying individual and contextual conceptualisations in a separate way may be easier, it does not frame the

problem in a way that takes [beginning] teachers' whole lives in all their complexities into account" (p. 116). I would argue that in addition it does not take into account the very different interactions between personal and contextual factors for each individual teacher, or in the case of my study, each HoM. Therefore, in this study I use the ideas discussed here as a basis for discussion with participants but focus on listening to their discussions about their experiences.

2.4 The role of the HoM

Having considered general research into teacher retention and attrition, I now focus on critically reviewing literature relating to my first research question: How do HoMs perceive their role? I begin by clarifying the meaning of the term 'role'. I then move on to discuss the aims of a HoM as indicated in the literature before considering the complex nature of the role and the internal and external influences on a HoM. I focus on developments in these areas since the 1970s.

2.4.1 Meaning of the term "role"

Linton (1936) argues that a role is "the sum total of the cultural pattern associated with a particular status" (p. 113), suggesting that "performance" of a role involves both attitudes and behaviour. In the case of the HoM, the status is just that: the HoM. The role is then what the HoM does in order to fulfil the status. Crucially, Jenkins (2008) argues that "any status can be *done* in a variety of ways, depending on the individual occupant(s), contextual constraints and possibilities and the demands of significant others" (p. 164), and that the role is unlikely to be straightforward since "much is improvisatory within the interactional ebb and flow of the human world" (p. 165). Therefore I should not necessarily expect in my research to clarify what the role *is* but in fact the ways in which the role is interpreted and experienced by those with the status of HoM and those with whom they work, and within the literature review to critique existing research pertaining to that role.

2.4.2 Aim of HoM

In order to more fully understand the role of the HoM, I begin by considering research focusing on their aim. This helps to clarify how the 'attitudes' (or aims) of a HoM might affect the way in which they enact their role.

The Teacher Training Agency (TTA) in 1998 stated that the "core purpose of the subject leader" was, "to provide professional leadership and management for a subject to secure high quality teaching, effective use of resources and improved standards of learning and achievement for all pupils" (p. 4).

This stated purpose is reiterated in the policy documentation of the 2000s, in which it is stated, for example, that

A mathematics subject leader's principal responsibility is to ensure that their school's ambitions for high quality teaching and learning in mathematics, leading to high levels of achievement for all pupils, are shared and pursued by all those who teach or support the subject (DfE, 2008, p. 1)

However, more recently, in the NPQML assessment guidance, the focus moves away from subject-level aims to a more general, "to demonstrate that you can deliver successful and sustainable school improvement in your own school setting" (NCTL, 2014). The two core modules in this qualification allow middle leaders to "Learn how to develop, improve and sustain high-quality teaching within a team and identify strategies to help close gaps in attainment" and to "Learn how to implement whole-school policies with your team in a systematic and consistent way" (p. 11), suggesting that the aim of the HoD might be, in part, to help improve teaching and in part to learn to conform with what is expected by others.

Some are sceptical about the aim of the HoM, suggesting that in fact it is to normalize the education of their students. Busher, Hammersley-Fletcher and Turner (2007), for example, argue that

they are expected to promote developments in teaching and learning, said to be improvements, that will bring teacher practice in a school more closely in line with central Government and/or senior management education policy (Busher et al., 2007, p. 407)

This interpretation concurs with the current NPQML training and assessment, in which this expectation is made explicit. In this study I aim to clarify the aims of my participants, in order to consider whether these align with national expectations and how they construct their own role.

2.4.3 Complexity of the role

Having considered the likely aims of a HoM I now go on to reflect on literature regarding the attitudes of others involved in its construction in order to understand the complexity of the role.

There are numerous references in the literature to the idea that the role of HoD or HoM can be messy and hard to define. Weller (2001), for example, points out that, “simultaneously they may be coordinators, change agents, enforcers of policy, disseminators of information, and motivators” (p. 74), going on to argue that HoDs are “torn in their loyalties between the principal and their teachers” (p. 73). This argument is not a new one, and considering research since the 1970s gives an indication of the changes in emphasis within that complexity and whether they have an impact on participants’ experiences.

in 1977, Hall and Thomas concluded, having taken responses to a questionnaire from 39 heads of mathematics, that “the role of the head of the mathematics department in a secondary school is a complex and obscure one” (Hall and Thomas, 1977, p. 30), arguing that “the functions of the head of mathematics...may be considered to be representative and managerial” (p. 34). In the first of these functions, “the departmental head interprets the headteacher’s philosophy for the school to his department and makes known the needs of his department to the headteacher” (op cit.), whilst in the second, the head of mathematics “is concerned with organisation, direction and control” (p. 35). This final aspect was described thus: “control is exercised in the supervision of the work of the department and in the maintenance of standards” (p. 35), but this was focused on the members of the department who were not qualified rather than on the whole departmental team.

By 1989, Paul Ernest argued that “the head of the secondary school mathematics department is receiving increasing recognition” (Ernest, 1989, p. 319), and his research gives a picture of how HoMs viewed themselves, and the aspects of their work that they valued at that time. Following interviews with a range of HoMs, Ernest divided their role into six key “descriptive categories” (p. 323), five of which focus on the practicalities of running a department, with just one (human resources) looking at the leadership and management of the staff within the team. As discussed in Section 2.2.2, Ernest pointed out at this point that post-holders’ views on their roles as departmental leaders did not entirely fit with the externally stated role, such as that describe in the Cockcroft Report (Cockcroft, 1982). For the leaders themselves the most important aspects of their work were supporting their team, ensuring a suitable curriculum and looking after administrative activities.

In the mid-1990s the attention of the school improvement agenda turned to “school effectiveness” (see, for example, Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore, 1995, Reynolds, 1995). Harris, Jamieson and Russ (1995) took this research and began to apply it to departments within schools, pointing out that “little work has been undertaken on departmental effectiveness” (p. 284). In looking at what makes an “effective” department it is also possible to glean key information about the expectations of the role, and so here I consider some of this work. Harris et al. (1995) interviewed a small number of HoDs in schools that had identified these HoDs as “effective” based on pupil attainment in their subject at GCSE, in order to better understand the approaches that led to these achievements. They divided the role into:

- **Managing the department**, which included setting a clear vision, managing resources and monitoring teachers and pupils
- **Influencing teaching and learning**, which included selecting what they viewed as a suitable syllabus, observing colleagues and giving feedback, setting up clear routines and understanding their subject and having a clear picture about how it should be taught

- **Dealing with external influences**, which included the impact of the National Curriculum, Ofsted, the catchment area of the school and the support or otherwise of parents.

Harris et al. (1995) describe a surprisingly positive approach to the external influences, suggesting that the effect of recent Ofsted inspections “seemed beneficial” (p. 296), and that “heads of department...knew that they were being held accountable for the results in their subject, but in the accelerating departments this was not viewed as a threat” (p. 287). It appeared that the HoDs felt that this monitoring helped them to identify underperforming members of their teams and deal with them. In this study, however, only those departments viewed as “effective” were considered, and so there are limitations to these comments, and not everyone agreed with them. Turner (1996), for example, argues that monitoring of one’s own team could have a negative impact, pointing out that “the delicate control-autonomy balance may disturb good departmental relationships” (p. 213).

The focus of the definitions of the role of the HoD continued to move significantly through the 1990s, and Busher and Harris (1999) identified the four key areas of responsibility as acting as a bridge between policy and practice, forming the group identity of the department, improving staff and student performance and liaison and representation. There are two key areas of development here: firstly there is a move away from specifying the routine tasks of the HoD, and secondly there is a stronger emphasis on performance and monitoring members of the departmental team.

More recent research has a clear focus on the leadership element of the role of HoD and on dealing with underperforming members of the team who may undermine the progress of the department as a whole. For example, Aubrey-Hopkins and James (2002) found that a key element of the subject leader’s role was “to improve the practice of those teachers, typically a very small minority, whose practice was in some way unsatisfactory” (p. 316). This proved a challenging task, and “For all the SLs there was a constant tension between the desire to ensure conformity to a common set of standards whilst respecting the autonomy of individual teachers” (p. 317).

Whatever the focus, HoDs hold an ambiguous position in the structure of a school. As Busher et al. (2007) argue,

middle leaders...have to link the decision-making of senior management to the decisions and practices in their own departments...but, in doing so, risk having members of their departments question whether they are really part of the department or merely agents of the senior staff (Busher et al., 2007, p. 412)

Striking a balance between implementing top-down strategies and devising approaches that they feel will benefit their department is likely to be one of the biggest challenges for a HoM, and this is something I discuss in the Analysis chapter.

2.4.4 Influences on the construction of the role of HoM

Many potential influences on the HoM have been mentioned in the exploration of the development of the role over the last 40 years, and here I draw these together. Turner and Bolam (1998) attempted to develop a framework through which the complex role of the HoD could be understood more clearly. The framework is based on the assumption that the central aim of the HoD is to “influence the quality of teaching and learning in their subject” (p. 373); whilst this assumption is not necessarily true for all HoMs, it is reasonable to assume that this is at least part of their work. Here I present an adapted version of the framework, to offer some ideas as to the influences that might affect the construction of the role of the HoD, and in particular the HoM:



Figure 1: Influences on the role of HoM (adapted from Turner and Bolam, 1998)

Not all HoDs will necessarily view their role in the same way, and their views are likely to be influenced by some of the features identified in the above diagram. For example, Glover, Miller, Gambling, Gough and Johnson (1999) found that the more experienced HoDs felt that they were managers, with one stating that they were “a professional amongst professionals with responsibility for making sure that the department is well-run”, whilst newer HoDs saw their roles as leaders: “driving the subject and team forward and playing our part in school policy development” (p. 332). More recently, Fitzgerald and Gunter (2006) reported a participant in their study stating that, “I am a leader of learning within my management of other teachers, inspiring others in the profession of teaching” (p. 7).

Indeed it is not just the HoDs themselves who may view their role in different ways: school leaders and also members of the HoM’s department have their own views on this, and so the HoM’s beliefs cannot exist in isolation and they may find themselves reacting to others’ beliefs about their role as much as enacting what they consider to be important.

2.4.5 Concluding comments

Through analysis of literature over the last 40 years, it has become evident that the role of the HoM is messy, complex and not always easy to define. It has also become clear, however, that the role has changed significantly since its inception, and that there is a broad range of influences on the experiences of those in the role, both internal and external. The combination of these influences will have a significant impact on the retention or otherwise of HoMs.

2.5 Placing this study in the context of others

In the previous section, I clarified the meaning of the term 'role' and the ways in which it has been interpreted in relation to the HoD and HoM in recent years. I now move on to consider research specifically into the experiences or perspectives of HoMs, in order to position my own study within the field.

In attempting to position my work within the context of other research relating to HoMs, I consider studies that focus on both middle leadership *and* the perspectives or experiences of the middle leaders in question. Focusing my search in this way leads to a very small selection of research studies, and, in fact, throughout the last 30 years, much of the research available about the role of the HoD in general and the head of mathematics in particular bemoans a dearth of research into that role (see, for example, Harris et al., 1995, Turner, 1996, Aubrey-Hopkins and James, 2002 and Busher et al., 2007).

Leithwood (2016) provides an overview of 42 research papers that consider middle leadership. Whilst Leithwood's focus was on successful departmental leadership and the contribution HoDs make to the performance of a school rather than on the retention of HoMs, he claims that his search "likely represents, reasonably well, the complete body of evidence about departments and department heads in English-speaking educational systems" (p. 118), and his work is therefore useful in helping to ensure that my own literature search is as thorough as possible.

Many of the generalisations in Leithwood's study refer to texts that are more than ten years old, suggesting a lack of recent literature, and many of these generalisations no longer ring true in my own experience in schools or in my discussions with HoMs. For example, Leithwood argues that many HoDs do not think that it is their responsibility to lead departmental improvements, and also that the HoDs are keen to avoid observing colleagues in the classroom. Both findings surprise me and suggest that some of the literature regarding HoDs is rather dated.

From the studies Leithwood has considered, he draws together some "conditions which enable significant department-head leadership" (p. 134), and, whilst these do not necessarily relate to retention, it could be argued that, if these enabling factors are present in a school, the HoM may be more likely to stay in their role than if the factors were absent. Of particular interest for my research is the suggestion that both "an unusually strong school-wide emphasis on teaching and learning" and "systematic use of student assessment data for purposes of instructional improvement" (p. 134) help HoDs to work effectively. However, Leithwood took these generalisations from just five small studies, and he points out that it is hard to identify which factors are most important, arguing that there is space for further research in this area.

In undertaking my own literature search, I found nine key articles that have a focus on the perceptions of HoDs. Only two of these have a specific focus on HoMs, and these were published in 1977 and 1999. More recent studies tend to have a focus on middle leaders in general, rather than on a specific subject, and whilst some of their findings can be related to mathematics, it becomes clear that experiences are very different for subject leaders in different subject areas in school.

None of the studies I found had a direct focus on retention of HoDs: Hall and Thomas (1977) considered what the role itself was, Perry, Howard and Tracey (1999) focused on HoMs' beliefs about the teaching and learning of mathematics, Harris et al. (1995) and Harris (2001) had a focus on the contribution of HoDs to school improvement, Rhodes and Brundrett (2008) asked a range of people in school what makes a school "a good training ground for leadership development?"

(Rhodes and Brundrett, 2008, p. 18), and Thorpe and Bennett-Powell (2014) considered middle leaders' development needs following a training programme. However, in all cases, it was possible to identify some connections with the idea of retaining HoMs and to identify some of the likely experiences of my participants.

Here I consider some of the emergent themes from research conducted after 2000, since this is most likely to connect to my participants' own experiences. Whilst, as mentioned, these themes are not necessarily focused on retention of HoMs, a consideration of the positive experiences or requirements of those in the role gives a good idea of some aspects that are likely to support somebody remaining in the role. Within all of the relevant literature the strongest themes relate to teamwork and collegiality within a supportive environment that also has high expectations, both within the department and in the school as a whole, with this approach allowing risk-taking, or at least, "controlled risk-taking" (Rhodes and Brundrett, 2008, p. 20). Many HoDs within these studies also cited a need for training for their role, suggesting that with training might come confidence and a greater likelihood that they will remain in the role. More recently, both Rhodes and Brundrett (2008) and Thorpe and Bennett-Powell (2014) report HoDs suggesting that support from coaches or mentors in school helps them in their role, and along similar lines, Thorpe and Bennett-Powell (2014) mention that HoDs appreciate being involved in school-wide decision making rather than being told what to do.

2.5.1 Concluding comments

This analysis of relevant research into the experiences of HoMs clarifies that there is limited research into those experiences, and they are often analysed generically rather than with a focus on mathematics or any other subject. Some general themes emerged about positive working conditions for HoMs, and these tended to concur with the literature regarding teacher retention. However, none of the studies identified combined a discussion of retention with that of the role of

the HoM. Whilst this is disappointing it does leave space for my study to offer a new perspective on HoMs' experiences and the way in which they relate to career decisions.

2.6 Theoretical perspective

Having put this study into its political and historical context, I now go on to introduce the theoretical background that provides a framework for comprehension of the role of the HoM and the experiences of those undertaking the role. May (2011) argues that, "For social research to intellectually develop and to be of use in understanding or explaining the social world, we [social researchers] need theory and theory needs research" (p. 30). He points out, however, that

Monolithic social theories and one-dimensional approaches to research cannot fully explain the workings of societies or understand social relations. Instead, we have a constant relationship between social theory and social research in which both are modified through combinations of reflection, experience and systematic interrogation. (May, 2011, p. 27)

This is true for my work: the focus on the discourse of improving performance, and on leaders' roles in this process, led me to consider the ways in which Foucault's conceptualisation of power, resistance and governmentality can go some way to explain or clarify the construction of the role of HoM. Listening to participants and analysing their experiences in relation to this theoretical background gives the opportunity to return to and possibly develop a new interpretation of elements of the theory.

In this section I consider Foucault's developing understanding of power, resistance and governmentality, considering the ways in which these concepts connect to my study. I then go on to discuss two key concepts that draw on the Foucauldian perspective that are particularly relevant to this study: performativity and responsabilisation. These are then considered in a discussion of theories of school leadership to help develop an understanding of the enactment of leadership by Head Teachers in participants' schools. I draw these ideas together in order to help reflect on my findings from the literature and to look forward to the processes of data collection and analysis.

2.6.1 Power

Foucault's work on power extends through a number of his key works: in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977) he develops a theorisation of power that helps to analyse the "micro" power relations that may influence individuals. This is extended further in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, where Foucault further refines his focus on local power relations. Together this work has led to a deeper understanding of how external influences are enacted by individuals within the system. Foucault states that power is "the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (Foucault, 1990, p. 93).

Foucault consistently argues that power is not something that is possessed by the 'powerful' and exerted over others. In *Discipline and Punish* he explains that it is "a network of relations, constantly in tension" (p. 26); in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* he talks of "the multiplicity of force relations" (Foucault, 1990, p. 92) and in his 14 January 1976 lecture he states that "power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation" (Foucault et al., 2004, p. 98). By 1984, he had further developed these ideas, arguing that relations of power are "the procedures by which people's conduct is governed" (Foucault, 1984, p. 9). Whilst Foucault argues that we should consider power relations within an organisation from the bottom upwards using an "ascending analysis of power" (Gordon (ed), 1980, p. 99), this does not have to mean that power is viewed only from the very bottom of a hierarchy. Rather, the idea of adopting an ascending analysis of power is to inspect how power is 'produced' through multiple, mundane, everyday activities. This ascending analysis of power can be used to explain how all actors behave as they do. Given that power can be understood according to a net-like formation, I explore how HoMs are constituted by relations of power within that network.

Through my literature review and early discussions with my participants, it became clear that a HoM negotiates power relations with senior leaders in school, with members of their own department, and with both pupils and their parents. These relations are affected by other power relations within

the structure, such as those between policy-makers and examination boards, policy-makers and senior leaders and so on (see Figure 2 for a diagrammatic representation of Foucault's "net"). As I will argue in the analysis chapter, it is likely that that the closer their connection to the HoMs the more impact they will have on their experiences.

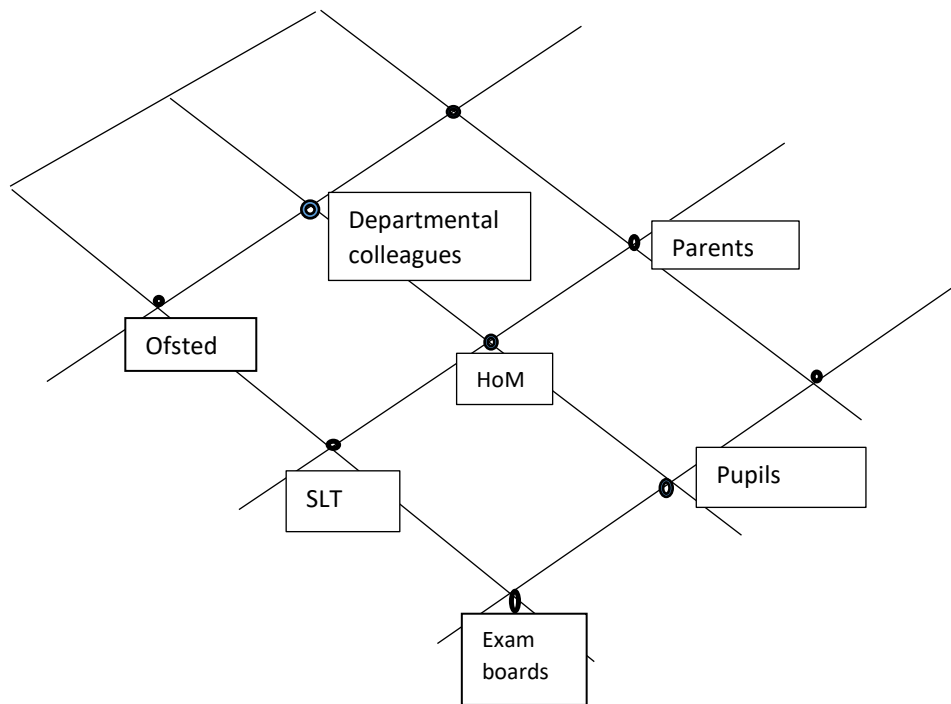


Figure 2: Representation of the “net-like organisation” (Foucault, 2004, p. 98) of power relations

Foucault described several different modes of power, most notably, disciplinary power and biopower. Disciplinary power can be summarised according to its three aspects: hierarchical observation, or surveillance, normalizing judgement and a combination of the two: the examination (Foucault, 1977). Put simply, surveillance involves observing a particular group of people to check they are doing what is expected, normalizing judgement is a way of grading people against a particular measure or set of measures, and the examination provides the evidence for that judgement.

In further clarifying approaches to surveillance, Foucault discusses the concept of the panopticon¹⁶ that originated in prison design. He argues that this aims to ensure “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power”. (Foucault, 1977, p. 201).

¹⁶ The panopticon was devised by John Bentham in the 1900s as a way of ensuring that all prisoners in an institution could be seen by a prison guard, but that they could not see whether the guard was watching them. Its aim was to ensure that prisoners complied with the rules without the need for large number of guards, since the possibility of being seen disobeying was enough of a deterrent.

Connecting this to education, he claimed that, “A relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, is inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching...as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency” (Foucault, 1977, p. 176). I would argue that this surveillance through the panopticon has developed extensively in recent years and is undertaken both in school and at a distance through the use of data produced by a range of examinations including Ofsted inspections and GCSEs. As Ozga (2008) argues, the data is a “resource through which surveillance can be exercised” (p. 264), and this data-based surveillance then enables schools to be compared and ranked using normalizing judgements such as scores in tests or Ofsted gradings. In particular, the ever-present possibility of an Ofsted inspection ensures that “surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its actions” (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). Foucault argued in his earlier work that the three “simple instruments” (Foucault, 1977, p. 170) of surveillance, normalizing judgement and the examination combine to ‘train’ individuals, helping constitute them as subjects, and that the strength of disciplinary power lies in separating, labelling and ranking people so that they understand their position and worth within society.

On the other hand, biopower (Foucault, 1990) focuses on the whole population, and involves the implementation of appropriate interventions to ensure so-called improvements in that population. Foucault’s work on biopower appears to be less developed than that focusing on disciplinary power: Rabinow and Rose (2006) point out that “Foucault promised to flesh out his sweeping generalisations...That promise was not fulfilled...” (p. 196). It is therefore useful to consider others’ interpretations of the term in addition to Foucault’s own initial definitions. The sweeping generalisations referred to by Rabinow and Rose (op. cit) were that in the classical period there was a move from a system of control based on those in power making decisions about the life or death of their subjects to a more developed era in which power was concerned with “taking charge of life, more than the threat of death” (Foucault, 1976, p. 143). The focus had therefore moved to the control of people’s physical lives, and to developing general theories on which decisions about the population could be made. Mills (2003) describes this process:

“knowledge is accumulated, populations are observed and surveyed, procedures for investigation and research about the population as a whole and of the body in particular are refined” (p. 83)

Foucault particularly focused on “propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity” (Foucault, 1976, p. 139), although others have since related his ideas about biopower to other areas.

Rabinow and Rose (2006) refine these ideas, offering three key elements that they argue must be present in biopower: “truth discourses”, “strategies for intervention” and “modes of subjectification” (p. 197). These three mean that, initially, there must be some identification about what is the ideal, then a generalised approach to make this ideal possible and a method of involving individuals in the population in aiming to meet the ideal. For example, in the context of the HoMs, the normative ideal might be that all pupils achieve high grades in GCSE examinations for mathematics. During the period of the National Strategies discussed in Section 2.2.3, the generalised approach was evident in the materials produced to support leadership development, and the mode of subjectification was the national training programmes that HoDs were expected to attend.

Allen (2012) argues that biopower views society as “an organism with natural cycles and processes that must be discovered and then nurtured” (p. 644), whereas disciplinary power “works on the population it subjects without due regard for its pre-existing forces and tendencies” (p. 645). I suggest that this differentiation comes between the first and second elements identified by Rabinow and Rose: the population needs analysing against the “truth discourses” before a suitable intervention can be selected.

Both disciplinary power and biopower are evident in schools in England today, and Ball and Olmedo (2013) summarise their presence in a useful, if simplified formula: biopower is policy; disciplinary power is practice.

2.6.2 Neoliberal Governmentality

In order to better understand the complex power relations experienced by participants in this study, and HoMs' position within the school structure, it is necessary to consider Foucault's later work on power in conjunction with his earlier concepts of disciplinary power and biopower. I now, therefore, discuss the development of the term "neoliberal governmentality" and its connection to and development from the ideas of disciplinary and bio power.

Governmentality or "mentality of government", was described by Foucault in 1978 as a mode of Government in which subjects are taught to govern themselves. Here, Foucault defines "to govern" as, "...to structure the possible field of action of others" (Foucault and Gordon, 2007, p. 341). He states that Government is the "conduct of conducts" (op cit.), meaning that governmentality guides people to make 'appropriate' choices about their lives. The development of this term marks a significant shift from the ideas of sovereign power, in which the public was governed by laws and potential punishment if these laws were not followed. Instead, with governmentality, "tactics" or "technologies" are employed with the intention that people will behave in the desirable way.

Foucault argued further that "power relations have been progressively governmentalized – elaborated, rationalized and centralized in the form of, or under the auspices of, state institutions" (Foucault and Gordon, 2007, p. 345). One such institution is the education system, in which Foucault's "technologies of dominance" include tactics such as performance measures and Ofsted inspections, which steer people in the government's desired direction.

By 1980, however, Foucault became aware that in his focus on technologies of power in the 1970s he had not discussed the possibility that individuals acted or played a part in governing themselves. In his Dartmouth lectures (Foucault, 1993), he defined this as "technologies of the self", which he described as "techniques which permit individuals to effect, by their own means a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct" (p. 203). From this point, Foucault's focus moved to the connection between those "technologies of

the self” and the previously discussed “technologies of domination” (p. 203). He argued that we should “take into account the points where the technologies of domination over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself” (Foucault, 1993, p. 203).

Considering schools again, the technologies of domination already discussed (performance measures and Ofsted inspections), when accepted as appropriate by a HoM, mean that the HoM will, without being made to comply through laws and punishment, ensure that their focus is on meeting those measures and preparing for inspection. At this point, Foucault refined his definition of power, arguing that the complex relations already discussed actually involve a combination of “coercion-technologies and self-technologies” (Foucault, 1993, p. 204). It is evident, however, that whilst people may feel that they are choosing to act in a certain way, these tactics of governmentality mean that “individuals or collective subjects...are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behaviour are available”. (Foucault, 1993, p. 342). This suggests that whilst there may be a greater degree of freedom for individuals than in a period of sovereign power, there is still a limit to the ways in which individuals can act.

Foucault’s theory of governmentality and its extension to self-governing has been developed significantly in the years since his death (see, for example, Ball, 2003, 2013, Gillies 2008, 2013, Mitchell, 2006) and has been used to make sense of neoliberalism, which Mitchell (2006), argues “... has become the dominant paradigm in the EU over the past decade” (p. 393). I now briefly develop a definition of ‘neoliberalism’ in the context of schools before connecting this to governmentality.

Shamir states simply that neoliberalism, “actively exports the logic of the market to other social domains” (Shamir, 2008, p. 6) whilst Gillies (2013) describes neoliberalism as “a belief in the centrality of the market; a desire for reduced Government (spending); privatization of state ownership; reduction in regulation and controls; and a focus on the individual” (p. 76). Working in schools in the neoliberal era therefore involves working in competition with others. As Ball and Olmedo (2013) argue, within education, “neoliberalism requires and enacts a ‘new type of

individual', that is a 'new type of teacher and Head Teacher' formed within the logic of competition" (p. 88). This competition relates to examination results and Ofsted outcomes, both of which are published nationally and both of which are used to make judgements about schools by both Government and parents.

Combining the two terms discussed, I would therefore argue that we are currently working within a "neoliberal governmentality", which Kelly (2001) argues, "...attempts to reconfigure the practices of Government by conceiving the subject as rational, autonomous, choice making and responsible" (p. 29). If this is the case then I must consider the ways in which "techniques" or "tactics" of that governmentality are employed currently within education lead to the possibility of HoMs developing an identity that enables these tactics to succeed. The most obvious tactics are the use of performance measures for which data and statistics about groups of and individual students and teachers are collected, policy documents and the importance placed on the results of Ofsted inspections.

Having discussed Foucault's development of the concept of power, from disciplinary power through biopower and on to neoliberal governmentality, I now move on to consider the relationship between that power and resistance, since Foucault argues that one cannot exist without the other.

2.6.3 Resistance

In this section, I begin by discussing Foucault's approach to resistance, considering in particular his definitions of the concept, the ways in which he argues that resistance manifests itself and possible approaches to its analysis. I then go on to discuss ways in which the concept has been developed and used by scholars in recent years. This helps to give a broad background to the concept of resistance that I refer to in the Analysis chapter.

Foucault's main work developing the concept of resistance comes in his History of Sexuality Volume 1. Here, he argues that power cannot exist without resistance to that power (Foucault, 1990), and in

an interview with Borreil et al. (Foucault and Gordon, 1980) he continues that resistances are “all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised” (Foucault and Gordon, 1980, p. 142). Foucault argues that “there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions” but rather “a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case” (Foucault, 1990, p. 96). In this study I have the opportunity to consider each HoM as a “special case” and to identify the way(s) in which they choose, or choose not to resist in situations where “relations of power are exercised” (op. cit).

Foucault suggests that resistance can take a range of forms. It can be, “spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent...quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial” (1990 p. 94).

He argues that resistances

are distributed in irregular fashion: the points, knots, or focuses of resistance are spread over time and space at varying densities, at times mobilizing groups or individuals in a definitive way, inflaming certain points of the body, certain moments in life, certain types of behaviour.

Foucault, 1990, p. 96

This suggests that there is not a single effective approach to resistance but that the type of resistance depends on the particular situation. Therefore participants in this study are likely to resist in different ways depending upon their contexts. Foucault argues that in order to analyse power relations we should be “taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point” (Foucault and Gordon, 2007, p. 329), and so developing an understanding of the ways in which participants undertake resistance is an essential element of this study.

Having considered Foucault’s definitions of the term “resistance” and the ways in which it can be analysed, I now move on to discuss more recent interpretations of the term. Taking on Foucault’s ideas explicitly, Nealon (2008) argues that resistance “is not a rare attribute of certain heroic subjects, but an essential fact of everyone’s everyday struggles with power” (p. 111). As he points out, “power implies and produces resistance, so the easiest way to get a handle on *power* is to

examine those sites at which *resistance* is or should be most intense” (p. 104). In this study, the HoMs are those sites since they experience such a range of negotiations of power, and it is therefore important to consider their approaches to resistance.

A number of scholars have developed their own ways to analyse resistance, and a particularly helpful approach comes from Lilja and Vinthagen (2014). As discussed, Foucault argues that we should be “taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point” (Foucault and Gordon, 2007, p. 329), and this is the approach they adopt, comparing in particular resistance to disciplinary and biopower. They find that disciplinary power “...is met by forms of resistance that challenge through avoiding, rearticulating discourses and by destabilising the institutional control of behaviour” (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2014, p. 114). This resistance “might then take on practices such as, e.g., foot-dragging, escape, sarcasm, passivity, misunderstandings, disloyalty, slander, avoidance or theft” (p. 114). Whilst theft does not seem relevant in the context of this study, it is fairly straightforward to imagine a single HoM undertaking resistance to forms of disciplinary power in their school in some of the other ways suggested, in particular by dragging their feet on an issue or by apparently misunderstanding an instruction. Whilst this may not have a large impact on the school as a whole, it is likely to give the HoM at least some feeling of control over their work. On the other hand, it is much harder (almost impossible) for an individual to resist biopower, since it is a type of power that acts on a population as a whole. Lilja and Vinthagen suggest that, “Resistance against biopower is then resistance that tries to avoid the managing of population policies and institutions by acting differently, in subcultures, and by cultivating a different set of values, practices and institutions” (p. 121). In a study such as this one, resistance to biopower would involve a number of HoMs or Head Teachers coming together to jointly resist a policy such as a curriculum change or the introduction of the Progress 8 (DfE, 2015) measures by refusing to engage with them.

Whilst Lilya and Vinthagen (2014) have offered an analysis of resistances according to the type of power being resisted, it is also useful to consider research that develops the ideas of approaches to resistance further in order to clarify the ways in which it may be enacted. It is quite challenging to find examples of such research, and Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012), for example, explicitly avoid any in-depth discussion of resistance in their analysis of the way in which schools “do” policy, arguing that resistance is hard to identify or classify. Indeed they question whether resistance takes place “in grand gestures and/or in instances of personal unease?” (p. 149). However, Johansson and Lalander (2012), who argue that despite much research into power, power relations and power structures, “there is often a lack of more developed theories and conceptualizations of resistance” (p. 1078), confront the issue directly in their research into resistance to health interventions, offering a new set of ways to categorise resistance as either “conceptual” or “behavioural” (p. 320). Here a conceptual resistance might result in apparent compliance but for a different reason from the expected reason for compliance. This is also described by Lilja and Vinthagen (2014) as “showing outward compliance while maintaining inner aggression towards the values and norms of discipline” (p. 115). On the other hand, a behavioural resistance involves explicitly refusing to do something. I would argue that whilst a conceptual resistance on its own is likely to have little impact beyond the individual’s own thoughts, it may help a HoM to internally maintain a professional identity that is not subsumed by the identity they are expected to assume. Armstrong and Murphy’s (2011) argument that “resistance may well take complex and flexible forms which extend well beyond the outright rejection of dominant discourses” (p. 317) offers the opportunity to consider more subtle forms of resistance than simply refusing to follow instructions. This is something I make use of in the data analysis.

2.6.4 Concluding comments

This section has involved two elements. Firstly I discussed Foucault’s conceptualisation of power, neoliberal governmentality and resistance, and secondly I considered other scholars’ interpretation

and use of these concepts. This dual approach has helped to clarify the ways in which Foucauldian concepts are relevant to my study and may be used to analyse participants' experiences. Having considered the Foucauldian concepts used in the study, I now move on to discuss two key theories that some scholars have developed directly from Foucault's work: performativity and responsabilisation. After considering the connection between the two, I apply the discussion to an analysis of approaches to school leadership that are likely to impact on the experiences of HoMs.

2.7 Beyond Foucauldian concepts

Having considered the role of the HoM from a policy and a research perspective and having introduced the Foucauldian ideas that offer a lens through which to analyse the role and experiences of HoMs, three connected areas have emerged that have an impact on those experiences: performativity and responsabilisation and their interpretation in the development of Head Teachers. In this section I expand on each of these themes, considering the ways in which they may impact upon HoMs.

2.7.1 Performativity and its impact

Although Foucault developed his concept of power beyond that of disciplinary power, it is evident that disciplinary power is still a very important part of the education system in England. Schools are ranked according to examination outcomes and labelled using Ofsted grades. In recent years, the concept of disciplinary power has been accompanied by other important concepts, such as governmentality (discussed above) and 'performativity'.

'Performativity', in this context, was first used by Lyotard in 1979, when he defined the term as "the optimization of the global relationship between input and output" (Lyotard, 1979, p. 11). Whilst Lyotard was referring to society as a whole, the term can be mapped fairly straightforwardly onto education by interpreting performativity as the aim to improve educational outcomes for pupils by employing the most effective, efficient processes to do so. Within the current educational

discourse, this involves measuring the impact of particular teaching approaches on examination results in order to determine the “best” action to take to raise standards of attainment. Ball (2000) argues that performativity is “a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation...that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change” (p. 1). Since at least 2000, there have been concerns that concentrating on data and performance measures has taken over from educational ideals such as a focus on learning, developing an understanding of challenging areas of knowledge or building an identity based on an understanding of the world around us. Ball pointed out in 2000 that, “We now operate within a baffling array of figures, performance indicators, comparisons and competitions” (Ball, 2000, p. 3), whilst Jeffrey (2002) argued that:

A performativity discourse currently pervades teachers’ work. It is a discourse that relies on teachers and schools instituting self-disciplinary measures to satisfy newly transparent public accountability and it operates alongside a market discourse (p. 531)

By 2013 Keddie went a step further, claiming that,

Measuring and monitoring student, teacher and school performances in relation to externally imposed targets, comparisons and incentives comprise the ‘fabric’ of most schools (Keddie, 2013, p. 764)

Over the last thirty years, the measurement of schools’ performance has been constantly refined, and I would argue that since the late 1990s the two key measurements have been Ofsted reports and grades, and examination results. Therefore, to comply with the discourse and increase performativity at a departmental level, improvements must be made in these two measures: HoMs must perform by ensuring that the pupils within mathematics secure high grades in their subject and make suitable levels of progress between Key Stages 2 and 4 (DfE 2017), and they must increase their department’s performativity by constantly improving on previous years’ results without additional resource. At the same time they must undertake a ‘meta performance’ when visited by

Ofsted by demonstrating explicitly the features of their work that lead to strong results or to the possibility of strong results in the future. As Carol, a Key Stage 1¹⁷ teacher, puts it,

“Teaching requires a ‘showmanship bit’ for my kids in my class because that’s motivating and getting them learning and interested. That’s fine, I accept that part of my role within the classroom but now it’s show business in my relations with inspectors” (Carol, KS1) (Jeffrey, 2002, p. 543)

Not everyone would agree that a culture of performativity is the ‘wrong’ approach in education. In fact, as Ball points out, “There is something very seductive about being ‘properly passionate’ about excellence, about achieving ‘peak performance’” (Ball, 2000, p. 10). The issue comes when we focus on measurement over everything else, when that measurement starts to determine our methods or narrow our educational focus. I now consider some of these possible effects of a performative culture in more depth.

The possible implications of a culture of performativity within schools are wide ranging and in the main are not considered to be positive. I have already mentioned the relentless focus on progress and results, but additionally, Elliott (2001) presents a range of issues including the need to constantly demonstrate the progress that pupils are making and the erosion of trust in the professionals involved in education. McKenzie (2001), Ball (2003) and Locke (2013) all discuss the issue of who decides what should be measured and how it should be done, and focus on the idea that performativity has completely changed the meaning of education; Ball (2003) focuses on the impact of performativity on teacher morale and Locke (2013) on its limiting nature, suggesting that school education risks becoming boring and predictable within a performative culture. Here I expand on these themes and consider their implications for HoMs.

2.7.1.1 Teachers’ views on the nature of education

Many argue that a focus on performance has narrowed the views of those involved about the meaning of education. Ball (2000) goes as far as to say that,

¹⁷ Key Stage 1 is for children aged 5-7 in England.

(some) educational institutions will become whatever it seems necessary to become in order to flourish in the market. The heart of the educational project is gouged out and left empty (p. 10)

whilst Locke (2013) argues that we are

no longer concerned with the pursuit of ideals revolving around emancipatory themes, but...now more concerned with the pursuit of skills that can contribute to the operation of the state in the world market (p. 257).

In a similar vein, Lyotard had previously suggested that a culture of performativity is only possible when education is seen as the transmission of skills and knowledge designed to “supply the system with players capable of acceptably fulfilling their roles at the pragmatic posts required...” (1979, p. 48). Thus it only becomes possible to measure educational performance if education itself is split into measurable chunks. In the case of mathematics, this means, for example, that a pupil is labelled as having performed at a higher level if they are able to add two vectors together than they would be if they were able to add two fractions. These two “skills” are completely unrelated and also not particularly useful in isolation but it is easy to check whether a pupil can perform them. Thus, a teacher’s view of mathematics risks becoming one in which the subject is understood to be a series of skills to be tested rather than an interconnected set of concepts. If this is the HoM’s view then this is likely to have an impact on the approach of the whole department. If it is the view of the Head Teacher then this will impact on the HoM.

2.7.1.2 Teacher anxiety

A culture of performativity and an audit culture can lead to anxiety in teachers, partly because the measures against which they are ranked are determined externally. This is likely to be multiplied for those in positions of leadership such as HoMs. Keddie (2013) argues that,

internalising of an audit logic generates a sociality of anxiety – related to the uncertainty, fragility and investment associated with schools’ compliance with, and positioning within, these particular fields of judgement and mechanisms of surveillance and control (p. 752)

Ball (2003) warns that teachers' souls are in danger within a performative culture, and that the need to meet the latest externally imposed measures means that they lose free will and are not able to act honestly or in a way that they believe in. He argues that,

We become uncertain about the reasons for actions. Are we doing this because it is important, because we believe in it, because it is worthwhile? Or is it being done ultimately because it will be measured or compared? (p. 220)

He points out that, whilst teachers may not directly ask themselves these questions, the fact that they exist as issues means that teachers are at risk of losing their confidence, of feeling anxious and becoming stressed about their work. I would suggest that for a HoM, these anxieties will be heightened, since the HoM must not only ensure that they meet the current targets for their own classes, they are also responsible for ensuring that the rest of their department 'performs' to the same high 'standard', whether they agree with the measures or not.

2.7.1.3 Damage to relationships

There is a risk that a focus on results and performance could prevent HoMs valuing their teams as people: "there is a real possibility that authentic social relations are replaced by judgmental relations wherein persons are valued for their productivity alone" (Ball, 2000, p. 6). For those who are not meeting externally set targets, then, "support" may be offered but there are consequences if their productivity doesn't improve. As mentioned in my introduction, a HoM may find themselves describing their team by their Ofsted rating or their "value added" score rather than whether they are good at engaging the most challenging pupils or have an interesting approach to introducing algebra, for example.

2.7.1.4 "Safe" teaching approaches

Locke (2013) warns that within a culture in which the meaning of "performance" is one-dimensional and focuses on evaluation, the system becomes focused on efficiency and on not wasting a moment, which in turn will mean that teachers and senior leaders are unwilling to take pedagogical risks, thus leading to a much more boring pedagogy within the classroom, and I would add that the issue here

is that the pedagogy focuses more on proving that evaluative measures have been met rather than considering whether children have genuinely made progress or understood a challenging concept.

2.7.1.5 Proving one's performance (fabrication)

Elliott (2001) describes performativity as “the continuous state of activation to match the indicators” (p. 200) and argues that this leads to a sense of urgency within the teaching profession, focused on demonstrating the progress of pupils in order to evidence our effectiveness as teachers. He suggests that this means that there is no time to consider what might be a good approach, but that acting quickly and being seen to act are more important.

Ball (2003) extends this idea, pointing out that the focus on demonstrating that progress has been made means that teachers' attention may actually be drawn away from looking at ways to improve their work, whilst Perryman (2009) adds that “A culture of performativity leads to performances that measure efficiency” (Perryman, 2009, p. 617). Hence the suggestion is that living in a culture of performativity leads us to adapt our practice in order to be able to be measured rather than to improve what we do.

Ball adds that the focus on constant progress means that teachers and school leaders become less honest and more adept at ensuring that the data about their school address the latest performance measures, whether or not things are going well in the classroom. He refers to this idea as “fabrications”: not exactly lies but versions of the truth, which could also be described as resistances, that present the organisation in a favourable light against those measures. In 2000 he asserted that “There is the possibility that commitment, judgement and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression and performance” (Ball, 2000, p. 6), adding later that “Effectivity rather than honesty is most valued in a performative regime” (2003, p. 226).

The possible consequences of a performative culture outlined above are likely to be experienced by HoMs in different ways, and the biggest influence on this will be the interpretation of the performativity agenda by senior leaders in school. I return to this discussion in Section 2.7.3 after first considering the way in which responsabilisation has allowed a performative culture to flourish.

2.7.2 Responsibilisation

Whilst the concept of performativity arises out of disciplinary power, neoliberal governmentality leads us to a discussion of the concept of responsabilisation, or self-responsibilisation. In this section, I begin by defining this term before considering its application within an educational setting, and in particular its relevance to this study.

2.7.2.1 Defining responsabilisation

In his discussion of etho-politics, Rose (1999), hints at the development of the term ‘responsibilisation’ arguing that “etho-politics concerns itself with the self-techniques necessary for responsible self-government” (p. 478). Lemke (2002) develops Rose’s ideas further, describing in Foucauldian terms the idea of “strategic games”, in which one person or set of people is able to “structure the field of possible actions of others” (p. 53). He goes on to suggest that the later Foucauldian interpretation of power means that in this situation, subjects are responsabilised, “forcing them to ‘free’ decision making in fields of action” (p. 53). Therefore a person who is self-responsibilised feels that they are choosing to act in a particular way, but that in fact these choices are being made from a limited range of options. As Shamir (2008) summarises, “while obedience had been the practical master-key of top-down bureaucracies, responsibility is the practical master-key of governance” (p. 4).

Responsibilisation is described by Shamir as “predisposing social actors to assume responsibility for their actions” (2009, p. 7), and by Peters (2017) as, simply, “making responsible” (p. 138). These

two definitions offer slightly different interpretations of the term. In arguing that responsabilisation involves “making responsible”, Peters (2017) suggests that a person is responsabilised by someone else, whereas Shamir’s definition suggests that this process involves making a person inclined to take responsibility for themselves. Taking the example of immunisation, in Peters’ definition, a parent may be made responsible for immunising their child by being told that they must do so, and by offering medical appointments for the relevant injections. On the other hand, taking Shamir’s definition, a parent would view it as their responsibility to find out information about immunisation and would then make their decision about when to go ahead, based on the information they have obtained. A particular view of immunisation might be offered through Government publications that influences the ‘field of actions’ of the parent, but the parent will still view the process as being their responsibility. Whilst this is a fairly subtle difference, I would argue that Shamir’s definition is closer to the Foucauldian interpretation that I shall take in this study. Amsler and Shore (2017) offer a useful clarification of this point:

Subjects become responsabilised when they are internally persuaded that social risks such as illness, unemployment, poverty, and lack of education or job training or career progression are problems whose solutions are the personal responsibility of the individual subject, not something the state is responsible for remedying by creating better conditions or support (p. 125)

It may be that the process of being ‘internally persuaded’ has involved the influence of others around a person, but it is unlikely that a direct ‘handing over’ of responsibility would have taken place.

I have previously discussed the idea of neoliberalism, and it can be argued that we are currently in a period of neoliberal responsabilisation. Keddie (2018), for example, states that,

Responsibilisation as self-governance sits within neoliberal ideals of a shrinking state and the mechanisms of privatisation and deregulation – it embodies the neoliberal emphasis on personal choice and freedom (p. 126)

Shamir suggests that someone who is responsabilised in the neoliberal era has “a moral agency which is congruent with the attributed tendencies of economic-rational actors” (Shamir, 2008, p. 7).

Therefore responsabilisation extends to the idea of individuals within a society making an economic contribution to that society. Drawing all of these ideas together, I would argue that someone who is self-responsibilised in the neoliberal era assumes personal responsibility for their own development and for maintaining their position within whichever market situation they find themselves. McLeod (2017) puts this simply, stating that responsabilised members of a neoliberal society are “relentlessly responsible for their own destinies” (McLeod, 2017, p. 45).

2.7.2.2 Responsibilisation and education

Having defined the term ‘responsibilisation’ or ‘self-responsibilisation’, I now go on to consider its relevance in education, and in particular its relevance to this study. If a responsabilised person is “relentlessly responsible” (McLeod, 2017, p. 45) for what happens to them, then within a performative educational culture they assume responsibility for educational achievement measured through examinations. As Torrance (2017) argues, both students and teachers are responsabilised, “with assessment and examinations providing the quintessential vehicle for individualising and responsabilising success and failure in relation to achievement and social mobility” (p. 83). In this situation, pupils will expect to make the right choices in their education that will lead to good outcomes, for teachers this will involve identifying the best approaches to secure outcomes for their classes and for HoMs, the focus will be on ensuring that their departmental team produces excellent outcomes across all classes.

As discussed earlier in the literature review (Section 2.2.4) the coalition Government claimed, in 2010, that its intention was to reduce state control over education. They argued that “We believe that public services will improve most when professionals feel free to do what they believe is right”, (DfE, 2010, p. 66), suggesting that teachers would be able to exercise choice in how they approached their role. However, the sentence concludes that these same professionals must be “properly accountable for the results” (p. 66) of those choices. The assumption in the paper is that schools will agree that this coupling of autonomy and accountability makes sense and will readily accept the new

wave of accountability measures. Wright (2012) argues, therefore, that the Government rhetoric of 'handing back' control to schools is inaccurate, and that by maintaining the accountability agenda the Government is ensuring "the deepening control of education by the logic of responsabilisation" (p. 291). As Trnka and Trundle (2014) argue, there are "practices of audit and accountability that promote particular kinds of self-surveillance and self-assessment techniques" (p. 139). Keddie (2018) argues that the responsabilised subject "readily takes up the modes of regulation and measurement expected of them" (p. 124), and so the idea of teachers feeling "free to do what they believe is right" (DfE, 2010, p. 66) only really extends to doing what is right to ensure strong performance in examinations.

The concept of neoliberal self-responsibilisation helps to clarify why performativity has been allowed to flourish in education in recent years. If each person "readily takes up the modes of regulation and measurement expected of them" (Keddie, 2018, p. 124) then the Government is able to take the opportunity to develop those modes of regulation without concern for resistance.

I now go on to bring together ideas of performativity and responsabilisation in a discussion of the ways in which they have influenced recent thinking about school leadership.

2.7.3 School Leadership

Having considered two key concepts that arise from Foucault's work on power, I now go on to discuss the way in which performativity and responsabilisation are likely to impact on the work of Head Teachers. Although my focus in this study is on HoMs, the approach of Head Teachers is particularly relevant because of their close relationship with the middle leaders such as the HoMs in their schools. I begin this section by offering a brief overview of the development of the research literature into school leadership before problematising some of the ideas presented in the light of research into performativity and responsabilisation.

Since the 1988 Education Reform Act (DES, 1988), the importance of Head Teachers in transforming young people's education has been emphasised ever more strongly (Storey, 2004, Bush & Glover, 2014). Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2008) argue, for example, that "School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (p. 28), and the current government, in its 2016 White Paper identified as one of its key drivers for "Educational Excellence Everywhere" the need for "Great leaders running our schools and at the heart of our system" (DfE, 2016, p. 40).

Tseng (2015) argues that within this leadership culture, everyone in school "is now encouraged to take a leadership role" (p. 491), and that "Head Teachers are encouraged to see that improving their school is best achieved through distributed forms of work practice within which... 'middle leaders' and 'teacher leaders'...are given the responsibility to implement national reforms and made accountable for learning outcomes" (op cit.). This close connection between school leaders and middle leaders, including HoMs, means that the approach of the school leader will have a significant impact on the experience of the HoM in a school. In this section, then, I consider the likely approaches of school leaders and the influences on those approaches that may affect the HoMs in my study.

Whilst much of the recent literature regarding school leadership focuses on explanations of leadership styles (see for example Bush and Glover, 2014) and on the best leadership approaches to ensure high performing schools (Leithwood et al., 2008), there is also a significant body of work critiquing this approach and arguing that school leadership should be considered as an element of neoliberalism in which leaders' work is

...narrowed to a focus on and responsibility for learning outcomes and measures of school performance, and whose behaviour is dominated by the need to fulfil technical requirements and entrepreneurial duties (Tseng, 2015, p. 484)

I consider both approaches here in order to try to understand what Head Teachers are likely to have learned about leadership, and the issues that may arise from their learning. This will help in the analysis of HoMs' experiences since I did not have direct access to their Head Teachers during this study.

The two main approaches to leadership in schools in the last twenty years have been firstly transformational leadership and secondly a more recent move towards distributed leadership. I begin by clarifying each of these terms, before considering the ways in which, in particular distributed leadership, connects with the earlier discussion of self-responsibilisation within a neoliberal culture of performativity.

Gunter and Rayner (2007) argue that the need for transformational, heroic school leaders arose out of New Labour's desire in the late 1990s to "transform" education (p. 47) through workforce remodelling. They suggest that

remodelling is presented as an optimistic reform with the language of transformational leadership being used in order to signal the serious nature of what is proposed and the dramatic need for this change (p. 48)

Such a task would need to be led by very strong individuals with a clear vision of the future and the capacity to ensure that their colleagues share the vision and are willing to implement it. Gronn (2003) terms this approach to leadership "exceptionalism" (p. 281), suggesting that "leadership that is exceptional is presumed to be manifest behaviourally in individual deeds of heroic proportions", and that "so-called organisational turn-around, revitalisation and performative excellence are attributed causally to the deeds of high-profile, larger-than-life figures" (op cit). The very positive language of this era is certainly enticing, and having experienced working for a transformational leader myself, I would argue that this leadership style is not necessarily entirely a bad thing, particularly for those working in a school in challenging circumstances whose intake is not used to social or academic success. However, having a strong character with a clear vision in charge of a school is not necessarily enough to ensure its transformation, and Storey (2004) suggests that doubts about the ability of one person to secure a new future for a school led to the development of the idea of sharing that leadership amongst a team, or distributed leadership.

In 2003, the NCSL explicitly stated in their training materials for the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH) that "the college believes in 'distributed leadership', where

responsibility for decision-making is accepted throughout the school” (NCSL, 2003). By 2012, almost 60% of all Head Teachers in England had completed the NPQH prior to taking up their post (DfE, 2012) and between 2009 and 2012 the qualification was compulsory for all new Head Teachers. This means that it is likely that the discourse of distributed leadership will be dominant in many schools.

Harris (2010) states that distributed leadership is “the expansion of leadership roles in schools, beyond those in formal leadership or administrative posts” (p. 55), whilst Morrison (2013) suggests that “the focus has moved away from a single dominant individual at the top to a more collective approach to decision-making” (p. 415). The implication with both of these ideas is that anyone within a school organisation has the potential to be involved in the leadership of that school within a distributed framework regardless of their named position. However, in considering nine case studies of leadership in ‘high performing schools’¹⁸ Bush and Glover (2012) noted that, “effective teams distribute leadership among SLT (Senior Leadership Team¹⁹) members, in ways which give them a strong collective overview of teaching and learning, and of pastoral issues” (p. 26). This would suggest that, in these schools, rather than distributing the leadership throughout the staff, there is an increased number of people in a core team leading the school, with the rest of the staff expected to follow. These two very different interpretations of distributed leadership will lead to very different experiences for staff within the schools. In the first case, they are likely to feel able to make decisions about their daily work, and that the decisions they make will contribute to the development of the school in which they work. In the second case, however, there is the possibility that the SLT is viewed as an extension of the Head Teacher, and that their aim is to implement the vision of that head and to ensure that the rest of the staff do the same.

There are some contradictions to consider when considering distributed leadership in practice in schools today. Firstly, there is the issue of responsibility and accountability. The Head Teacher has

¹⁸ Bush and Glover defined a ‘high performing’ school in this context as one with an outstanding Ofsted grade overall, and also an outstanding grade within that for leadership and management.

¹⁹ The SLT of a school usually comprises the Head Teacher, Deputy Head and several Assistant Head Teachers. They are responsible for the smooth running of the school.

overall responsibility for the performance of a school, and so when implementing any form of distributed leadership there will be limits to the possibilities. Torrance (2013) reports a Head Teacher referring to “tensions related to balancing staff autonomy and her [the Head Teacher’s] control (‘you only give people enough rope to hang themselves, and not the school’)” (p. 365), whilst Hall, Gunter and Bragg (2013) report on Mike, a transformational Head Teacher who believes in distributed leadership, and believes that this is the approach he is taking within school. However, from Hall et al.’s observations, it could be argued that “distributed leadership is used instrumentally as a tool for bringing staff ‘on board’ and encouraging them to ‘buy into’ the vision [of Mike]” (p. 186). Once this has happened, those in leadership positions within the school are then able to lead their teams in the direction desired by the Head Teacher.

Secondly, there are those who argue that no one in a school can actually be a leader with their own vision and freedom about how to attain that vision. Gunter and Rayner (2007), for example, argue that “in reality they [Head Teachers] are positioned as middle managers necessary to ensuring that national reforms are delivered on site” (p. 54). This would suggest that it is not possible to implement distributed leadership within a school, since no one within the school is genuinely able to decide on the direction of development. Hall et al. (2013) go further, stating that distributed leadership could be seen as, “a cheap, flimsy intervention compromised by a central contradictory flaw” (p. 180), that schools are expected to meet externally imposed targets and whilst those working in that environment may participate in decision making about ways to meet the targets, they do not have the freedom to ignore them and move in a completely different direction. Gillies (2013) and Niesche (2013) both make the direct link from these arguments to Foucauldian neoliberal governmentality. Gillies (2013) argues that the chief tactic of that governmentality is the use of data, which “are used as a means to affect others’ actions in the pursuit of desired goals” (p. 77), whilst Niesche (2013) argues that leadership itself is another tactic: “governments are deploying leadership as a strategy, a tactic of governmentality in the governing of education at a distance” (p. 144).

This discussion of school leadership suggests that whatever approach a Head Teacher wishes to take, it is likely to be affected by performativity and responsabilisation. A Head Teacher will expect to secure strong results in their school and will therefore expect those in middle leadership roles to take their part in ensuring this happens.

2.7.4 Concluding comments

In this section I have considered an extension of Foucauldian concepts to theories of performativity and responsabilisation and the way in which these ideas are likely to affect school leaders. I concluded that self-responsibilisation in a neoliberal society means assuming responsibility for personal development and for maintaining market position. The market within education is defined by the performative measures put in place by the Government and the ways of publicly reporting outcomes. I discussed two main leadership approaches (transformational leadership and distributed leadership) and argued that distributed leadership is the approach most closely aligned to a self-responsibilised, performative culture, and the one that most Head Teachers are likely to have received training in. However, the research literature suggested that this approach could be considered to be simply another tactic of neoliberal governmentality since it involves finding ways to meet externally-imposed measures rather than genuinely choosing the direction of a school.

2.8 Conclusion

The three aims of this chapter were to place my study in its political context, to critically review literature relevant to the study and to outline the theoretical concepts that underpin the study. In meeting these aims I began to address my three research questions:

1. How do HoMs perceive their role?
2. What experiences of fulfilling their role do HoMs report?
3. What affects HoMs' decisions to remain in or leave their post?

In order to meet the aims of the literature review I began positioning the role of the HoM within its policy context. I then analysed the literature relating to teacher retention in general, bearing in mind that some of this may have limited relevance to a HoM, before considering research into the role of HoM since the 1970s. Having considered a range of factors that are likely to affect those undertaking the role, I drew the ideas considered together by taking a theoretical perspective focused on some key areas of Foucault's work. I then made use of this perspective to outline some more recent theoretical developments that will influence the role of the HoM and their experiences of that role.

Through this review, it became clear that the role of HoM has developed over time from ensuring the smooth running of the department to monitoring the performance of colleagues and dealing with any underperformance. This performance element has led to a closer connection between the HoM and Head Teachers in school, meaning that the approaches of those Head Teachers have a significant impact on the work of the HoM.

The limited amount of research, and certainly the lack of a body of knowledge regarding the HoM makes it hard to generalise about approaches and experiences that are likely to support the retention of those in the role, but some general themes did emerge, including schools taking a

collegiate approach to their work, and maintaining a focus on teaching and learning above data and statistics.

The ideas drawn out here shape the rest of my research, giving me tools with which to develop my research methods as well as a framework with which to begin my analysis. I return to these ideas throughout the rest of the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

Having considered the relevant literature and theory required to frame this study, I now present a discussion of my methodological approach and the way in which that approach led to the selection of methods for the research. As a reminder, my research questions are:

1. How do HoMs perceive their role?
2. What experiences of fulfilling their role do HoMs report?
3. What affects HoMs' decisions to remain in or leave their post?

I begin this chapter by discussing my philosophical position before placing my research within the context of my own positionality. I then share the ethical considerations I made in the planning and execution of the study. I go on to determine my research approach, taking into account its advantages and disadvantages, and the challenges of drawing from more than one approach in a piece of research. I discuss each of the methods I selected to obtain data, and then end the chapter by discussing my approach to data analysis.

3.2 Methodology

Griffiths (2007) suggests that methodology “provides a rationale for the way in which a researcher goes about getting knowledge” (p. 35) whilst Wellington (2015) offers a definition of a more practical nature, arguing that methodology is, “the activity or business of choosing, reflecting upon, evaluating and justifying the methods you use” (p. 33). I undertake this activity by first considering fundamental questions regarding the connection between reality and knowledge before moving on to considering how my beliefs about these fundamentals can be used to guide the research in selecting appropriate research methods.

3.2.1 Ontological position

Developing a clear understanding of one's ontological position is key to ensuring that one's methodological approach and therefore one's choice of methods is sound and can be justified in light of that position. A fundamental consideration before undertaking any research is whether reality exists and can be discovered by those who search for it, or whether realities are constructed by those experiencing them. The most basic idea here is that a positivist (or realist) believes in the former whilst an interpretivist (or constructivist) believes in the latter (see, for example, Creswell, 2007). If there is a single reality then in order to discover it, a researcher is likely to conduct experiments or collect statistical data via surveys in order to test theories or ideas. On the other hand, if we believe that everyone has or experiences their own reality then we are more likely to want to listen to people and hear their views in order to somehow represent their reality in our research.

Pring (2000) is quite disparaging of what he describes as the "false dualism" of the two paradigms that stem from the opposing views of reality espoused by positivists and interpretivists, and more particularly of the methodological approaches of those in the two "camps". He argues that a rejection of the positivist approach should not necessarily imply a complete shift to the side of the constructivists whose methodological approach he argues is entirely qualitative. He refutes the idea that it is only possible to believe that there is an objective reality when not working with humans, pointing out that the very possibility of discussing people's experiences of reality requires some common ground such as the understanding of what makes a human. This therefore implies that there are aspects of a social reality that are not constructed by those experiencing that reality. Pring (2000) claims that,

Far from individually constructing the world, we acquire those constructions which (although socially developed) are possible because of certain features of reality which make them possible. (p. 254)

He argues that “It is not that there are multiple realities” but that “there are different ways in which reality is conceived” (p. 254). Others agree with Pring’s arguments, and they have been taken further by those who adopt a critical realist approach to methodology. Scott (2005, 2014), for example, describes Pring’s ideas as “neo-realism” (p. 633) and argues that critical realism “seeks to bridge the divide” (p. 636) between the extremes of positivism and interpretivism.

Whilst critical realism has its merits and is a useful perspective for some research, I would argue that in this study the HoMs are working within their own socially constructed realities rather than a single objective one that exists outside their own experience, and therefore I need an interpretivist approach. The terms participants use to discuss their realities may be common, but this does not imply that there is just one reality, and the same terms may be used to describe very different experiences. The role of HoM itself has been created by educational leaders and has not always existed. The purposes of the HoM are laid out in job descriptions devised at a school or Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)²⁰ level, and each Head Teacher will have their own views on what is meant by a HoM and may therefore interpret a job description very differently. There is therefore not one single reality that is “The HoM” that can be experienced in different ways by different people and that I, as the researcher, can attempt to discover and describe.

Those undertaking the role of HoM will, however, experience it as their objective reality in many ways. There are aspects of the role that cannot be negotiated, such as the expectation that the HoM will do their best to ensure that young people achieve well in external examinations that will determine their future. There are, however, other aspects of the role that can be negotiated or developed by the individual and it may be that HoMs feel that they have opportunities to shape their reality to some extent. My research has added complexity due to the fact that I consider the same role (the HoM) in a range of secondary school settings, and whilst there may be common

²⁰ A multi-academy trust is a group of schools led by one board of directors and governors. It may be focused in a locality or could be spread out geographically.

elements of the 'realities' my participants experience, these are not identical, which points even more strongly to the idea that perspectives of reality in this instance are socially constructed, and that I am going to find a range of experiences of a range of 'realities'. I therefore place my work firmly in the interpretivist paradigm.

3.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and how that knowledge is acquired (Wellington, 2015). A positivist, who believes that there is a reality to be observed or discovered, would argue that knowledge can be gained through conducting experiments or observations in order to identify 'facts' about that 'reality'. On the other hand, an interpretivist standpoint "imposes on researchers an involvement with their subjects" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2009, p. 7) and involves interpreting their shared experiences. I would argue, however, that, whatever one's ontological position, the aim of the research being undertaken will in part determine the approach to acquiring knowledge and therefore the approach to data collection. For example, if I worked for a crisp manufacturer and wanted to ensure that production was efficient, whilst I may believe that people's experience of salt and vinegar is different according to their own reality, I would analyse data about consumer buying habits and then produce flavours in appropriate quantities. Therefore, whilst I may have an interpretivist view of realities, for that piece of research I would adopt a positivist approach. One's ontological position is therefore only part of the story when it comes to epistemology; the specific nature of the project is also key, and so here I focus my discussion on this particular research project.

In this study, the decision of which epistemological viewpoint is appropriate cannot be separated from the context in which participants work or from the fact that I make use of Foucauldian concepts to aid my analysis. These two sets of ideas conflict significantly and it is important here to consider the way that both interact in this study.

Since the turn of the century a “what works” culture (Blunkett, 2000), has pervaded education, and policy makers tend to look for ‘hard facts’ from positivist research on which to base their advice for schools. This is evident with the development of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (EEF, 2019), a charitable organisation that funds research and research evaluation in education and describes itself as “the government-designated What Works Centre for Education” (EEF, 2019). Here, research is digested for practitioners and presented in a series of “toolkits” measuring the impact of interventions in relation to their cost and the strength of the evidence available. This approach is quite simplistic, and those in schools may find it problematic to apply something deemed to ‘work’ in general to their own individual context or experience.

In contrast to the EEF approach, the Foucauldian notion of ‘knowledge’ is that it is a construction. Gillies (2013) explains that, “Foucault’s concern is with what people say is true, and accept as true in terms of discourse, and not with questions of objective reality or objective truth” (p. 12). This is a much more nuanced concept of knowledge than that taken by the EEF, and brings into question why people believe certain notions to be true, such as the idea discussed in the literature review that monitoring school performance through the use of league tables will improve the educational experience of young people.

Foucault argues that knowledge is produced or constructed through interactions:

Knowledge is simply the outcome of the interplay, the encounter, the junction, the struggle, and the compromise between the instincts. Something is produced because the instincts meet, fight one another, and at the end of their battles finally reach a compromise. That something is knowledge. (Foucault, in Faubion (ed), 1994, p. 8)

Therefore, a Foucauldian view of knowledge in this study is that it is produced by participants as they speak to each other and as they interact with me. As Nietzsche (2011) argues, “To therefore understand knowledge it is imperative to examine power relations” (p. 23). Since this study uses Foucauldian concepts to aid analysis I therefore consider what is said by participants, why they may

speak in particular ways, and try to make sense of the power relations that may produce the knowledge presented.

Howe and Moses (1999) argue that educational research “must seek out and listen carefully to ‘voices’ embedded in their social context to gain a true understanding of what people are saying and why they do what they do” (Howe and Moses, 1999, p. 32). Whilst I am not sure that it is possible to “gain a true understanding”, the knowledge I discuss is in the form of developing descriptions of my understanding or interpretation of the experiences of the HoMs.

I agree with Howe and Moses (1999), who claim that,

Educational researchers, in particular, often hope that the new knowledge they produce will contribute to the improvement of educational practices and policies, as well as better treatment of students (p. 26)

I hope that I will develop new knowledge about the experiences of the HoMs that may impact immediately on their working lives, simply by giving them chance to consider those experiences, and in the longer term, I hope that a deeper understanding of those experiences may go some way to inform future policy or the choices made by Head Teachers.

Having argued that reality, or realities, in the case of my research, are socially constructed and affected by context, I now consider my own position within the research process. I discuss my reasons for choosing this area to research, whether I am independent of my participants or part of their social construction, and how my own experiences are likely to impact on my interpretation of my findings.

3.2.3 Positionality

Punch (1986) argues that, for a qualitative researcher, “his or her social and emotional involvement in the research setting constitutes an important source of data” (p. 14), and that a piece of research is enriched by a discussion of the researcher’s own position. I am not convinced that my involvement in the research constitutes a source of data, since my experiences as a HoM are from

ten years ago, but I do agree that it is important to share my own experiences that have led to my choice of topic and to become aware about the possible influence these may have on my interpretation of participants' contributions.

Relles (2016) argues simply that "positionality is a research method to prevent bias" (p. 313), whilst Lavia and Sikes (2010) argue that it is necessary for a researcher to state their positionality,

not for reasons of self-aggrandisement but simply in order that readers can know 'where we are coming from' and to avoid any impression that we speak from any sort of universally authoritative, God-like plateau. (p. 88)

These two perspectives offer quite contrasting understandings of the term 'positionality'. I am not sure that I completely agree that positionality could be considered a 'method', and understanding one's positionality goes way beyond simply avoiding bias, but on the other hand I do not agree that it is entirely about showing humility, which is implied by Lavia and Sikes (2010). However, Bourke (2014) argues that, "The nature of qualitative research sets the researcher as the data collection instrument" (p. 2), adding that "the researcher's beliefs, political stance, cultural background (gender, race, class, socioeconomic status, educational background) are important variables that may affect the research process" (p. 2). Therefore, in order to be able to undertake this research, it is necessary for me to first consider my own background and its potential impact on the study.

Here, rather than indulging in any 'self-aggrandisement' (Lavia and Sikes, op cit), I present some key areas of my own working life and my current position that have impacted on my approach to this piece of research, from the initial planning phase and particularly into the data collection and interpretation. The most obvious place to start is the fact that the role I am researching is one that I have undertaken myself, and that I therefore have well-formed views on. I spent five years as a HoM between 2004 and 2009, and in many ways they were some of the happiest years of my career. I felt that what I was doing was valuable, I never felt the need to question why I was doing it, I had freedom to develop the role as I felt was appropriate, and support was available if things became challenging. Towards the end of the five years I felt that things were beginning to change: data

analysis was starting to take over from common sense and professional judgement as the main way in which plans for future developments were made. I still felt, however, that we were all humans engaged in a human process and that with strength we were able to find our way within the system, whether we agreed with all aspects of it or not. However, I have elected not to be a HoM any more, or at least for the time being. This was not because I disliked the role or because I stopped believing in its importance. I was promoted beyond the role into the SLT of the school, which was a place where I felt much less at home and during discussions about potential new buildings, adaptations to uniforms and tweaks to behavioural policies I found myself disengaged and wishing I was still involved closely with mathematics education rather than the practicalities of running a school. New opportunities outside of school emerged, and I elected to change direction in order to have a greater impact on mathematics teaching and learning.

I still feel, though, that the role of HoM is key within a school, and that the pressure of taking on the role is immense. I am aware of the complexities of the position and therefore, when working with my participants it was from a position of admiration that they were undertaking such a challenging role, prepared to put in huge amounts of time and cope with pressure from senior leadership, other teachers, pupils and parents. I feel that it is important to hear their voices beyond reporting on examination results and pupil progress. Therefore my approach needed to be one in which I worked, as far as possible, in partnership with my participants.

Since leaving my post as HoM, I have been fortunate in having the opportunity to experience, to some extent, the culture and practices of a broad range of schools, and it has become clear to me that the role of HoM is likely to be experienced very differently depending on the context in which a person works. In addition to this, whilst I had only been working in teacher education for five years at the start of this project, meaning that the first people who were students on the ITE course I lead had only been teaching for four years, many of them had already gone on to take leadership roles within school mathematics departments. Whilst I was not necessarily surprised by this, since

recruitment is such a challenge in mathematics leadership, and they had been very successful in their training, I wondered how teachers with such little experience would cope with such a pressurised role at this early stage in their careers and whether they would remain in post. Having undertaken the role of HoM myself, then, I could use my experience to my advantage in planning my approach whilst also ensuring that I was critically reflective about my own preconceived ideas and working hard not to allow these to impact on my work.

Bourke (2014) states that, “The identities of both researcher and participants have the potential to impact the research process” (p. 1), and therefore it was not just important to consider my own position in relation to the research, but also to be aware of participants’ perception of my identity and those of each other. This could have had a significant impact on participants’ engagement with the project and their abilities to be honest in sharing their ideas. Within the region, there is now a fairly large number of mathematics teachers and some HoMs whom I led through their initial teacher education, and who are likely to view me in some ways as a figure of authority or even, possibly, wisdom. There are other HoMs with whom I worked when I was in the same role, attending HoM meetings and training, and whom I have maintained some contact with whilst working in teacher education. There are others with whom I have no connection whatsoever, but they and the other participants may have an image of the type of person who works in a university and the knowledge or opinions they are likely to have. Therefore, within any meeting between myself and participants there was likely to be a potentially challenging set of power relations in which I was viewed as a peer by some, as an authority figure by others and as a stranger by the final group. My main approach to dealing with this possible issue was to work hard to build relationships with all participants on an individual basis as well as in the group, and to try hard not to refer to previous encounters when in the focus groups. I am not someone who wishes to feel powerful, and I felt that it was particularly important for me to respect the work and ideas of all my participants, but particularly those whom I had trained, since they may be most likely to feel that what they said should fit with the philosophy they thought I held.

3.2.4 Concluding comments

In this section I have outlined my ontological and epistemological position with regard to this study and considered how my positionality affects my approach to data collection. Before going on to discuss that data collection, I outline the ethical considerations I made during the project.

3.3 Ethical considerations

Having outlined my methodological approach, I now go on to discuss the ethical considerations I made at each stage of the research process. Pring (2001) argues that there are two key elements to adopting an ethical approach to educational research that cannot be separated from one another. In the first instance, there should be a set of ethical principles on which one's research is planned, and secondly, and possibly with a greater impact on what actually happens during the research process, the "virtues" (p. 407) of the researcher themselves need to be considered. Therefore, from the outset, I needed to ensure that I considered the ethical implications of both my choice of project and the execution of that project, and the impact my own approach may have on its success. Undertaking the rigorous ethical review at The University of Sheffield (University of Sheffield, 2014) (See Appendix 1 for evidence of ethical approval) helped me to ensure that I had considered the ethical element of the project in some depth from the start, although I found it necessary to keep ethics at the forefront of my mind throughout the project. In this section, I begin by considering the ethical issues inherent in my choice of topic. I then look in detail at the implementation of the project.

I was aware that the topic I was interested in was potentially sensitive, particularly in an educational culture where, as Pring (2001) puts it, "few schools provide the forum in which teachers might question the educational priorities so often determined by pressures from outside the school" (p. 420). I was interested in the experiences of those currently undertaking the role of the HoM, but I was not merely interested in understanding how it is for them: having undertaken the role myself I was already aware of many of the challenges they may face, and the potential conflicts of interest

they may experience within their daily work. I wanted to allow the HoMs to take the opportunity to question their work and their experiences, being aware that this could make them feel less secure and settled within their jobs. However, as the challenges of both recruitment and retention of HoMs are so acute I felt that the research was necessary, and that I could use Pring's ideas about the virtues of the researcher to ensure that I researched in an ethical way throughout the project.

At the start of the empirical aspect of the research, it was important to ensure I had considered the "non-negotiables" of ethical research. Wellington (2015) offers a straightforward list of eight rules for this purpose, which concur with Pring's (2001) "principles" and which proved a useful starting point. These focus on ensuring that all participants know what they are agreeing to, are happy to be involved and that their time is not wasted as well as making sure that participants are treated with respect and, as far as possible, cannot be identified outside of the research at any stage in the process. Finally Wellington (2015) makes it clear that no one should be deliberately disadvantaged by a piece of research, for example by withholding something potentially beneficial by incorporating a control group.

However simple the first consideration, that of 'informed consent', sounds, in practice this is a contested issue that in research of an interpretive nature is challenging to achieve, since some of the possible consequences of taking part cannot be predicted. Howe and Moses (1999) point out that

Interpretive research is open-ended insofar as the questions and persons to which interviewing and participant observation may lead can only be roughly determined at the outset (p. 40)

In this study, when I had selected the initial participants I could not predict who would become the most involved in the research. It was therefore impossible for me to give full information to my participants from the outset. In order to deal with this challenge, in creating a Participant Information Document (Appendix 2), I gave the basic outline of the project with anticipated developments. I asked participants to agree to taking part in two focus groups, but beyond that made it clear that they could choose how to participate in the research and would not be

disadvantaged if their only contribution was in the focus groups. In addition, and separate from the issue of open-endedness, I elected to share my research questions with participants, but not to comment in the initial stages on my understanding of Foucauldian concepts of power, resistance and governmentality since that could mean that they became aware of issues they had not considered within their working lives up to the point of the research. I wanted to find out whether the issues I had read of were evident in participants' experiences and approaches and I therefore instead asked questions that may draw out these concepts rather than pointing them out from the start.

In order to act on the rest of Wellington's guidelines, and to meet the requirements of the University of Sheffield Ethical Review process, I assured all participants that I would use pseudonyms in any write-up in order to maintain anonymity, I ensured that all participation was voluntary and made it clear that participants were free to withdraw from the research at any time without giving any reasons.

Wellington's "Eight rules" were helpful during the planning phase of my research, but I found that as the project developed there were issues not covered, particularly as I got to know some of my participants well. Howe and Moses (1999) argue that

interpretive research is more ethically uncharted, and thus more ethically hazardous, than experimental and quasi-experimental research. Once begun, it requires more vigilant ethical reflection and monitoring for that. (p. 40)

Throughout the study, therefore, I found myself facing ethical dilemmas about which decisions needed to be made, often on the spot, partly because of a second ethical challenge identified by Howe and Moses (1999), that of intimacy. They argue that "Interpretive (qualitative) research is intimate insofar as it reduces the distance between researchers and participants" (p. 40). This was the case with my work: I came to know some of my participants very well, and, particularly with the audio diaries that were part of the research design, I felt that they were sharing thoughts and ideas with me that they may not have done had they bumped into me in school. Even the simple act of listening to an audio diary entry in my own home felt much more intimate than I could have

anticipated, and I quickly realised that I needed to be very careful about when and where I listened to those entries.

An additional challenge was that, whilst I was not strictly an insider researcher (Wellington, 2015), many of my participants worked in schools where I support trainee teachers, and I found myself learning of incidents and issues concerning staff in those schools, knowing exactly to whom the participants were referring. I therefore faced a dilemma even as the interviews and focus groups were taking place: should I remind my participants that I may know some of their colleagues, or should I allow them to tell me stories and simply ensure that I did not respond to those parts or consider them when visiting schools? I felt concerned that if I reminded participants of my knowledge it would restrict what they felt they could discuss and I would potentially harm the data I was collecting, and so I decided to choose the second option of treating the stories as part of the research process and trying to disconnect them from my knowledge of particular schools.

In undertaking a piece of research in which interaction between participants was also important, I found that some of the ethical considerations I had made were challenging to implement, and in fact their implementation was out of my control. I decided that during focus groups I would ensure that all participants agreed that what was said in the room stayed in the room, which they all happily did, but there was actually no way of policing this, and I had to trust my participants that they would behave ethically.

In this section I have discussed the quite complex ethical issues encountered during this research study, At times these were more complex than I had expected, and a key learning point was that the ethical approval is an essential but small piece of the ethical picture. I now go on to discuss my research approach.

3.4 Research Approach

Having outlined my ontological and epistemological position in relation to this study and the ethical considerations necessary throughout, I now go on to discuss the research approach that followed from this position. In order to gain as full an understanding as possible of the construction of the role of the HoM and the experiences of those undertaking it I needed to approach my research from a number of angles. This included listening to those who were currently in the role and those who had undertaken the role in the past, as well as considering relevant policy relating to the role. This range of views on a subject suggested that a case study approach was the most appropriate, with the case being “the HoM in non-fee-paying secondary schools in England”.

Many social science texts divide approaches to research into neatly separated areas, suggesting that the researcher should choose an approach and stick with it. Creswell (2007), for example, claims that his readers will be “choosing among five approaches” (title page): narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic or case study research. As I planned my own research, I became increasingly uneasy with such a straightforward delineation. Whilst I felt happy that my overall plan amounted to a case study, within that case study I was going to be listening to stories told by teachers, and I could therefore not ignore the possibility of incorporating narrative enquiry into my work. Law (2004) talks of “mess in social science research” (title page), claiming that adopting a blinkered approach to research risks missing the complexities of the area being researched. I agree and felt that following Creswell’s approach would limit my study, potentially removing the voices of my participants and I therefore included elements of narrative enquiry where this was appropriate.

3.4.1 Case study

The term “case study” has been given a range of definitions over the last 30 years (see for example, Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Bassegy, 1999; Yin, 2014), but throughout these definitions some key features emerge:

A case study

- Considers a single entity or unit
- Builds up a detailed picture of that entity or unit using a range of research methods
- Investigates the entity within its contemporary real-life context
- Does not attempt to control that which is being investigated

(based on ideas from Bassey, 1999, Yin, 2014 and Wellington, 2015)

Yin (2014) argues that “the distinctive need for case study research arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena” (p. 4), which aptly describes my own situation. I want to understand the complex role of the HoM and the perspectives of those experiencing that role.

Flyvbjerg (2006) contends that there is a range of cases that can be chosen for a study, and that the choice depends on the focus of the study. An *extreme case* (p. 14; author’s italics) would be “well-suited for getting a point across in an especially dramatic way” (p. 14), whilst a *critical case* would have “strategic importance in relation to the general problem” (op cit). Thirdly, a *paradigmatic case* would be a case that can “highlight more general characteristics of the societies in question” (p. 16). Flyvbjerg comments that these cases are not mutually exclusive, and in my own research whilst my case, that of the HoM fits most closely with the paradigmatic case, it also contains elements of being a critical case. Here, the ‘strategic importance’ is that within a school environment, HoMs are likely to experience complex relations of power and the implications of a performative culture more than classroom teachers or those in the SLT. Therefore, their experiences are a good place to start in understanding those relations and implications.

A number of criticisms are directed at the use of case study as a research approach. Whilst many of these have been discussed at length in recent years, I consider them here to ensure that I do not find myself guilty of the most common mistakes and that I fully understand the possibilities of the case study. Flyvbjerg (2006) summarises the criticisms of case study research as issues of “theory, reliability and validity” (p. 4) and then goes on to forcefully refute these criticisms. I would argue

that the first of these is a philosophical argument that relates to the overall approach to research, whilst the second two are of a more practical nature relating to the research methods and analysis.

Flyvbjerg's argument relating to theory is that many people view facts and figures that are independent of context as "more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge" (p. 3). However, Flyvbjerg argues that "predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs" (p. 7) and therefore that we would be attempting the impossible if we focused on formulating theory over development of knowledge of cases in context. Yin (2014) argues that theoretical generalization is possible in a case study, but adds, in a similar vein to Flyvbjerg that, "your goal will be to expand and generalize theories...and not to extrapolate probabilities" (p. 21).

Flyvbjerg's second key argument regarding theory is that it is only through knowing a large number of cases in depth that we can make sense of any theory and become expert in a particular area. This argument is true even outside of the study of humans; for example in mathematics, someone who knows and can state Pythagoras' theorem, and perhaps even prove it, is not someone who is expert in the theorem: they need to know when and how to use it and the most efficient way of going about it, which only becomes possible through using the theory in particular cases.

Flyvbjerg's discussion regarding concerns about reliability and validity of case study research is not necessarily particular to this approach; the concerns relate more generally to qualitative research, and there is significant debate about whether it is appropriate to use these measures in qualitative research. Noble and Smith (2015) define validity as the "integrity and application of the methods undertaken and the precision in which the findings accurately reflect the data", and go on to argue that "reliability describes consistency within the employed analytical procedures" (p. 34). However, these measures are more appropriate for quantitative data, and so in this study I choose to focus instead on 'credibility' (Tracy, 2010). Hammarberg, Kirkman and de Lacey (2016) argue that, "A qualitative study is credible when its results, presented with adequate descriptions of context, are

recognizable to people who share the experience” (p. 500) , and this was one of my aims in the study.

Flyvbjerg (2006) points out that many worry that a case study risks losing credibility if it is used to confirm a researcher’s already-formed beliefs about a particular situation, but he comments that many researchers “report that their preconceived views, assumptions, concepts, and hypotheses were wrong and that the case material has compelled them to revise their hypotheses on essential points” (p. 19). Throughout the research process I have remained aware of the possibility of my own bias or of allowing my own ideas to influence my approach, and later in the chapter I deal with this potential issue when considering the data analysis process.

Consideration of Flyvbjerg’s arguments in the context of this study reassures me that the case study is the appropriate choice, and my intention is that the study of a particular context will contribute to the growing literature analysing practical situations with a Foucauldian lens.

3.4.2 Narrative inquiry

My research aim is to understand the construction of the role of the HoM and how those undertaking the role understand and experience it. This involves considering the “official” information about the role, such as policy documents, but in order to understand the experiences of current and past HoMs it is necessary to listen to their stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define narrative inquiry as

a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus (p. 20)

This resonates strongly with my aims: as far as possible I wanted to understand the experiences of my participants within their own context, and I wanted the research process to feel collaborative between me and the participants, and potentially between the participants themselves as far as possible within the constraints of time and busyness.

Having researched narrative inquiry previously (Black, 2014), I was aware of the potential benefits and challenges of the approach: it can offer a source of rich data that uncovers the voices of the participants and can have a positive impact on those participants, but it can be challenging to analyse such rich data, and for those not involved in the project it can be hard to assess the trustworthiness of the analysis presented. Additionally, Caduri (2013) argues that “narrative researchers fail to make a connection between personal and practical knowledge, i.e. between the teacher’s life story and his [sic] teaching practice” (p. 38), and this is a limitation of my study. In listening to my participants’ stories I have had chance to learn what they believe and how they think they act in the role of HoM. However, in another study I may consider the use of observation to connect the “personal and practical” knowledge, as suggested by Caduri (2013). However, the stories are important for this study as they help build an understanding of how HoMs report their role and the ways in which they experience it.

3.4.3 Participatory research

During the planning phase it became evident that it was necessary to consider whether a participatory approach (Werdelin, 1982, Cornwall and Jewkes, 2010 and Hansen, Ramstead, Richer, Smith and Stratton, 2001) was appropriate. Participatory research is defined by Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) as “a process of sequential reflection and action, carried out with and by local people rather than on them” (p. 1667). Other definitions vary slightly, but all I have considered contain some common elements, including the point that, as Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) argue, “the key difference between participatory and other research methodologies lies in the location of power” (p. 1667-1668). In order to shift the power so that it is shared between all involved, the researcher should ensure equal involvement of all participants in setting the research agenda, the collection and analysis of data and the presentation and dissemination of results (Hansen et al., 2001). However, these same researchers point out that it is hard to conduct truly participatory research, and that many pieces of work purporting to be participatory are in fact “pseudo-participatory” (p.

317), particularly when the initial topic is not jointly decided or when one person defines the direction of the research.

One aim of participatory research is “to help teachers find their voices as change agents and creators of knowledge” (Evans, 1999, p. 129), and this is something that I wanted to do: HoMs’ voices can be lost in a busy school environment focused on examination success, and I suspected from the start that they were unlikely to have had chance to share their thoughts with one another beyond the latest strategies in their departments. However, there are challenges in adopting a truly participatory approach, and as Lau and Stille (2014) point out, “the optimistic, emancipatory nature of participatory research has been questioned, particularly concerning claims of equitable and democratic research relationships” (p. 157). The key issues are around the challenges of ensuring genuine equity (Evans, 1999, Lau and Stille, 2014) and whether that is, in fact, a desirable aim, since participants begin the research process with a range of different skills, different reasons for being involved and different levels of commitment. For example, if one HoM was simply choosing to be involved so that they had chance to meet with other HoMs outside of school, then they would be unlikely to want to be involved in shaping the research, whereas if another HoM had an interest in the research process and was considering undertaking some research themselves, they may be keen to help direct the process.

Despite these challenges, it was clear that my work needed a participatory element. First, this study focuses in part on power relations (Foucault, 1977) experienced by HoMs and it was therefore essential that in choosing my approach to research, I considered the possible consequences of the power relations between myself and my participants, as well as between the participants themselves as these may have had a significant impact on their involvement and the results I obtained. If, for example, two HoMs worked at significantly contrasting schools, it would be very easy for the HoM from the more academically successful school to feel that their opinions were more important than those of the HoM from the less successful school, and therefore to dominate a

focus group. With a more traditional case study approach, I would be likely to see myself as the research expert, observing my participants and finding out about their work, reporting my findings without necessarily involving them in the actual research process. Regardless of the topic I had chosen, this would not be an approach that would suit me or that I would believe to be the most likely to be effective, and particularly in a piece of research considering power relations this would be entirely inappropriate.

Second, in choosing my research topic I was aware and concerned that the people I planned to work with were some of the busiest, most pressurised staff in schools, and my biggest concern was with ensuring that I undertook a project that felt useful and worthwhile so that they did not feel they were wasting valuable time. Therefore I needed the active involvement of participants to prevent this happening. However, setting up a truly participatory piece of research would mean taking a large amount of time at the initial stages, agreeing the focus and ensuring that everyone understood the approach, and time was not something I or the participants had to spare. Additionally, I had already selected the research topic, and I am presenting my findings as part submission for a Doctoral degree, and so some of the key elements of choice in participatory research were missing from the start. I therefore elected to set some fixed parts of the data collection and adopt a flexible approach beyond that. I selected a range of possible activities from which my participants could choose and add to, as well as offering chance for participants to offer suggestions for topics to be discussed at the focus groups. I felt that this level of flexibility had the potential to develop healthy power relations between myself and participants without making them feel that their involvement was too onerous. My awareness of a participatory approach therefore influenced my research design but did not direct it.

3.4.4 Concluding comments

In this section I have outlined the considerations made in developing my approach to undertaking this study. I have determined that this study essentially constitutes a paradigmatic case study that

incorporates elements of narrative inquiry. I have elected to seek the involvement of participants in directing the research, but have confirmed that this makes the study only semi-participatory since they have not chosen the research topic and they were not involved at the initial planning stages. I now move on to discuss the research methods employed during the data collection, giving reasons for the choices made, and sharing experiences of undertaking these methods.

3.5 Methods

Having determined that my research approach is the paradigmatic case study with elements of narrative enquiry and participatory research, the next step was to identify the research methods that were most appropriate to build up a picture of the role of the HoM and of the experiences of those undertaking the role. Wellington (2015) stresses the importance of using a range of research methods in a case study, suggesting that observation, interview, use of documentation and “a wide range of other techniques” (p. 171) will build a picture of the case being studied, and these suggestions allow flexibility for the researcher. I have already considered documentation relating to the role of HoM in the literature review (Section 2.3) and so the rest of the data collection needed to involve the voices of those undertaking the role.

I began data collection by sending a short questionnaire to as many mathematics teachers in the region as possible (Appendix 3). This led to the identification of my participants as well as giving me an initial understanding of some of the positive aspects and challenges they experience in their jobs. Having an interest in whether the experiences of the HoMs in the study were different at different stages in their lives or careers, I sought three different groups of participants: those with less than 5 years’ teaching experience prior to taking on the role; those with more than 5 years’ experience, and those who had moved on from the role. The 5-year cut off here was selected because, in a 5 year period a teacher is likely to have had the chance to develop their classroom skills to a reasonably high level and to have had full responsibility for examination classes. It could be argued that,

following this period, they will be ready to take on additional responsibilities, although, as evidenced in this study, many are promoted earlier than this.

Following the initial survey I chose to select from a range of methods to build a fuller picture of the experiences of participants. I decided to conduct focus groups, interview individuals and to ask my participants to undertake audio diaries. With such a range of methods, it was important to be clear about the order in which the research would be undertaken and the reasons for that order. I chose to start and finish the data collection with focus groups, with the audio diaries and 1-1 interviews taking place between the two. The focus groups were needed to launch and close the project, whilst the other methods were placed between those two events in order to expand on ideas discussed in the first focus group and to narrow down the discussion points for the final one. In the next section I consider each of the methods used in turn, in the order in which they were undertaken, offering reasons for my choices and comments on the planning and implementation of the methods.

3.5.1 Initial survey

I elected to use an initial survey prior to the focus groups for two main reasons: firstly, this was an efficient way to obtain participants whilst avoiding bias by adopting a convenience sampling technique to obtain participants, and secondly, being aware that HoMs are very busy people, I wanted to ensure that anything discussed at the focus groups was relevant and important to them.

In designing the questionnaire I wanted to ensure that it was short enough that busy teachers would be happy to complete it but that it offered me more information than simply the names and contact details of potential participants. I needed some simple factual information and also opinions, and so I elected to use both open and closed questions, some with multiple choice answers and others with space for free text (Cohen et al., 2009).

The first four questions (see Appendix 3 for details) were to determine suitability for inclusion in the research, whilst the next two were to give me an idea on an individual basis of the challenges and rewards for people teaching mathematics. Question seven helped me to ensure that I was able to tailor the focus groups to currently relevant topics, and question eight ensured that I had contact information for potential participants. I distributed the survey link via as many routes as possible, including sending the link to the local Maths Hub²¹, to colleagues at another local Higher Education Institution with links to different schools from me and to school-based colleagues who mentor student teachers and who would be happy to share the link within their departments. The response rate was pleasing: in a period of two months I received 66 responses, of which 32 said they were interested in being involved further in the research, and the potential participants were divided fairly evenly between those who had become HoMs early in their careers, those who had done so after more than five years of teaching, and those who had been HoMs but elected to leave the role. This meant I had suitable numbers for my planned focus groups.

The participants who took part following the survey were:

²¹ "Each Maths Hub is a partnership, led locally by an outstanding school or college. The lead school identifies strategic partners, who help plan and evaluate the hub's work, and operational partners, who help carry out the hub's work". (NCETM 2016)

Group 1: HoMs who took on the role after more than 5 years of teaching

Name	Background	Intentions at the time of the study	School information	Elements engaged with		
				Focus groups	Audio diary	1-1 interview
Rory	HoM for the last 8 years. Taught for a number of years prior to that.	Planning to remain in current role.	11-18; "good" at last Ofsted.	✓✓	✓	✓
Mags	1 st year in this HoM role but has been teaching for over 20 years and was HoM early in her career.	Planning to remain in current role.	11-18; "outstanding" at last Ofsted.	✓✓	✓	✓
Max	Been HoM for 5 years. 15 years' teaching experience.	Planning to remain in current role.	11-18; "good" at last Ofsted.	✓✓		
Claire	Recently took on HoM role. Been teaching 10 yrs.	Not known	11-16; "requires improvement" at last Ofsted.	✓		

Table 2: Group 1 participants

Group 2: HoMs who took on the role within their first 5 years of teaching

Name	Background	Intentions at the time of the study	School information	Elements engaged with		
				Focus groups	Audio diary	1-1 interview
Elizabeth	Been HoM for 18 months; been teaching for less than 5 years.	Uncertain about plans.	11-16; "RI" at last inspection	✓	✓	✓
Edward	Been HoM for 2 years; been teaching for 6.	Considering options in other schools, focusing on 11-18 provision.	11-16; "good" at last Ofsted	✓✓	✓	✓
William	Been HoM for 18 months; been teaching for 5 years.	Considering other roles in education.	11-16. Put in Special Measures during research project.	✓✓		✓
Felix	Been HoM for 3 years; been teaching for 6 years; currently AHT.	Planning to remain in post in the short-term but considering other options.	11-18; "good" at last Ofsted	✓✓		✓
Marcus	Been HoM for 3 years; been teaching for 7 years.	Planning to remain in post.	11-16; "good" at last Ofsted	✓✓		
Miles	Been HoM for 5 years.	Looking for promotion within school.	11-16; "good" at last Ofsted.	✓		
Ralph	Moved on to AHT ²² role in London after first FG	Moved on to AHT role in London after first FG	11-18; "good" at last Ofsted.	✓		

Table 3: Group 2 participants

²² Assistant Head Teacher. This is a role on a school's SLT

Group 3: Those who have chosen to leave the role in state-maintained schools.

All three took part in a single 1-1 interview.

Name	HoM experience	Position after leaving HoM role
Callum	HoM for 3 years prior to moving into school leadership.	Currently teaching maths in a free school
Ricky	HoM in two schools for 5 years before leaving to work in the private sector.	Currently HoM in private school.
Sally	HoM for one year before taking time out from teaching.	Currently working part time in a secondary school.

Table 4: Group 3 participants

My biggest fear throughout the early stages of the project was loss of participants, and so my main focus between the initial survey and the focus groups was on maintaining good relationships with my participants. This involved treading a fine line between keeping in touch with them and pestering them. I therefore sent a quick email (Appendix 4) as soon as they had expressed an interest in the project explaining that I would be in touch as soon as I had formulated my groups, followed by a second, more detailed email (Appendix 5) outlining the project and asking participants to choose suitable dates for the initial focus group from options identified by me. Once the date was finalised I contacted all participants to confirm this, and I then sent two emails during the week of the focus groups to remind participants of the details. At every stage, I sent personalised emails to each individual and began each one with a comment personal to the participant so that they felt as though I was talking to them one-to-one. The effort paid off, and for the key focus groups everyone who was invited attended.

3.5.2 Focus groups

In order to ensure that my participants felt that they were joining a significant project, I decided that their first interaction should be as part of a group of similarly minded people. I felt that a 'launch' of the research was necessary and would be likely to retain more participants than if the entire project was undertaken on a 1-1 basis.

Additionally, and more importantly, I felt that HoMs would benefit from talking to others in a similar position outside of their usual work-based networks, and they would be more likely to feel that the research had had an impact on them as practitioners if they had this chance than if they were simply responding to my questions. This may also mean that there was potential for participants to compare their experiences and for significant differences or similarities to emerge and be discussed, rather than me finding these differences and similarities when interviewing individuals and being unable to do anything with them apart from report them.

I therefore decided to start the research by setting up focus groups. Cohen et al. (2009) explain that these are a form of group interview, where “the reliance is on the interaction within the group who discuss a topic supplied by the researcher, yielding a collective rather than an individual view” (p. 376). Gibbs (1997) points out that “the key characteristic which distinguishes focus groups is the insight and data produced by the interaction between participants” (online, line 16), and Wilson (1997) also comments that this offers an additional angle to the focus group that is not considered in group interviews, “which do not explicitly include participant interaction as an integral part of the research process” (p. 211). This interaction was key to my work, both for me and for the participants: there was the chance for participants to develop more well thought-out arguments, rather than expressing the first idea that came into their heads, which would potentially lead to me obtaining higher quality data; they were able to compare their experiences; I could consider the relationships between the participants who were all “officially” on the same level, and finally participants had the chance to learn from one another.

Gibbs also mentions that focus groups can be “a forum for change” (op cit, paragraph 4 line 10). This was not something that I had necessarily initially envisaged happening with my groups, since the idea was to build a fuller picture of the role of the HoM rather than to initiate change. However, following the first set of focus groups one participant managed to secure a permanent contract in school using evidence uncovered during the focus group that working conditions were far more

secure for other members of the group than for her, and another pair of participants set up some joint school observations following a discussion about the potential of using mixed attainment teaching in Key Stage three. For me this was an unexpected positive outcome of setting up the focus groups.

Gibbs suggests that focus groups “can be used at the preliminary or exploratory stages of a study” (1997, paragraph 3, line 1), that “they can be used either as a method in their own right or as a complement to other methods” (op cit, line 2) and finally that they can be used at the end of a project to assess its impact. I elected to set up focus groups for the start and end of my data collection, and as is already clear they were part of a suite of research methods designed to build a picture of the HoMs’ experiences and perspectives. This was because focus groups would not be enough on their own: they were likely to raise questions that needed following up on an individual basis, and they risked developing group ideas that not everyone agreed with (Wilson, 1997).

The key elements in the process of planning the focus groups were selecting the participants, organising the logistics, devising appropriate questions, moderating the groups and following up after the groups. I spent a great deal of time in the planning process to ensure that I made the best possible use of my participants’ time: I was aware that there would be no second chances, and that if things did not go well I would be unable to quickly ask my participants to return for a second try.

I have already discussed the selection of participants and the main logistical considerations, and so here I focus on the development of the questions and group moderation.

3.5.2.1 Question development

As I wanted to be able to focus, not only on the answers to my questions but also on the interactions between participants, it became evident that a small number of questions made sense for the focus groups, since this would allow the discussions to flow without being punctuated by my demands for

information. I decided to begin the focus group by sharing some of the basic findings from the survey, focusing particularly on the groups in front of me. I then identified five areas on which to focus:

- Introductions
- Participants' views on mathematics education
- Participants' aims as HoMs
- How those aims fit with their school's approach
- How they were approaching the new GCSE.

The first topic was partly to help participants to get to know each other, but also key in finding out what they felt it was important to share about themselves and their schools that they felt would give the group a quick idea of the context within which they were working. The middle section of the questions was developed in part through reconsidering the themes drawn out of the literature, and particularly the ideas about the possible consequences of a performative culture in schools. I wanted to know whether the participants had deep-seated beliefs and whether these focused on developing an understanding of mathematics or on passing examinations and progressing to the next level. In considering their own approach to being a HoM, I wanted to look in more depth at participants' own experiences in school: where the pressures lay, how much freedom they felt they had, and what had an effect on their daily work. The final topic, regarding the new GCSE²³ was designed to ensure that participants felt that they were given a chance to discuss something that was currently important to them: all participants had mentioned this as a concern in the initial survey.

3.5.2.2 Moderation

Eliot and Associates (2005) suggest that "ideally, the focus group is conducted by a team consisting of a moderator and assistant moderator" (p. 7), with the moderator focusing on asking the questions and the assistant looking after the technical side, such as recording the group. However, this was

²³ This was introduced in 2014, with the first examination in June 2016, and so was a key topic of conversation for the HoMs.

not possible for me, and so rather than having an assistant, I practised both roles prior to the first focus group. I considered a number of possible issues in the running of the focus group: domination of one or more participants, other participants becoming quiet and not contributing, moving too far from the planned topics, spending too long on one part at the expense of another, people talking over each other, people not feeling comfortable to go against the prevailing beliefs of the group (Wilson, 1997). However, by creating ground rules (Eliot and Associates, 2005) and prompts to redirect the discussion if necessary, I combated these potential issues. Having set up two recording devices, meaning that I could be confident that at least one of them would work and I would have time afterwards to review the conversations in depth, I knew that as the focus group took place I could concentrate on the relations within the group, and could draw in the quieter members and sensitively deal with some of the more vocal participants. In practice, the focus groups were surprisingly straightforward to manage. Participants seemed happy to go with the ground rules, and they were in the main very considerate of one another. There were very few quiet members of the groups, and everyone was happy to share their ideas.

3.5.3 Follow-up methods

At the focus groups I offered two suggestions of possible follow-up activities that I would use to build a fuller picture of the perspectives and experiences of my participants in their roles as HoMs: 1-1 interviews and audio diaries. As I had intended to take a participatory approach at this point, the plan was to suggest some obvious possibilities and also to take ideas from the group about other ways to keep in touch. However, in the event, participants seemed happy to select from the two options I had provided and no one offered any additional suggestions. This may be because of the time constraints: by the time I was asking for suggestions, it was almost 6pm on a Friday evening, which is not an ideal time for new, innovative ideas. I now discuss each of these methods in turn, considering the reasons for their use and the experience of undertaking these methods in the project.

3.5.3.1 Audio diaries

I knew that I wanted to develop an understanding of the everyday lived experiences of the HoMs whilst they were undertaking their role. The focus groups were a good way to start to build that understanding, but they would not be able to provide a picture of the on-the-job, day-to-day experiences of the participants. I considered the possibility of observing HoMs in their daily working lives, but this approach was not practical for me as I work full time leaving limited opportunity for me to take full days to undertake such observations. There were also potential pitfalls to this approach, such as making my participants feel watched or judged, and the possible reactions of others within their departments.

I therefore ruled out direct observation of practice and looked to more innovative approaches to obtaining appropriate data, realising that some kind of diary may well prove useful. Worth (2009) argues that

The use of diaries in social research can contribute personal, participant-controlled data, adding both complexity and detail about a person's experiences to research that is sometimes difficult to achieve with interviews (p. 2)

This idea fitted closely with the participatory approach to which I aspired: here was an area over which my participants could have ultimate control. A fairly recent development as a research method is the use of audio diaries (Buchanan, 1991, Hislop, Arber, Meadows and Venn, 2005, Worth, 2009, Williamson, Leeming, Little and Johnson, 2012, Gibson, Mistry, Smith, Yoshida, Abbott, Lindsay and Hamdani, 2013, Crozier & Cassell, 2016) in which participants record oral diary entries rather than creating a written diary, and this immediately struck me as the ideal option for my participants who might be too busy to find time to sit and write diary entries. Gibson et al. (2013) use the term "solicited narrative diaries" to describe "reflections that participants are asked to create for a research study" (p. 386), whilst Buchanan (1991) describes an audio diary as a "tape-recorded narrative account[s]...generated according to a structured brief" (p. 125). I combine these

two descriptions and my own interpretation to define the audio diary in the case of my research as 'a collection of recorded reflections over a period of time based on a set of pre-determined topics'.

There are a number of benefits of the use of audio diaries over a paper-based approach. Hislop et al. (2005), for example, in their sleep study, commented that audio diary entries from participants were much more detailed than those who chose to complete written diaries, who favoured bullet points and commented little on thoughts and feelings. Crozier and Cassell (2015) commented that audio diaries are easier to undertake than written diaries, meaning that more people are likely to engage with them, leading to a larger data set, and that audio diaries often result in less structured but deeper reflections than from other forms of diary (p. 399). They add that an audio diary does not offer the chance for editing and reviewing (or that participants are not likely to undertake this process), which means that the researcher has "access to the unfiltered accounts" (p. 400), which is less likely to happen with a written diary. I would add that the audio diary may feel more "casual" than its written counterpart, and so people may be more willing to be honest and open when they cannot see in front of them the comments that they have made. All of these potential benefits raised ethical issues for me as the researcher: if participants were willingly sharing their thoughts and feelings with me on a recording that I could listen to whenever I wished, I needed to be careful about my approach to the use of this information. I therefore elected to transcribe each recording as soon as I received it and then deleted the recording once transcription was complete.

There were challenges to consider prior to launching the audio diaries. Most important was the consideration of the level of structure to apply to the guidance. I had chosen this method partly because of the freedom it would offer my participants, and because it would allow them to participate more actively in the research design. However, those who had had success with this method had offered at least a minimal amount of structure in order to ensure that participants were confident to take part. Crozier and Cassell (2016), for example, commented that a prompt sheet was a useful tool to provide a basic structure and starting point to ensure that participants felt able to

engage, whilst Worth (2009) gave very specific ideas to her teenage participants for their diary entries, beginning with sentence starters such as “You know you’re an adult when...” (p. 5). Monrouxe (2009), on the other hand, chose to say to participants, “Please tell us a story about something that has happened to you since the last time you left a message and how it has affected the way you think about yourself now and your future role as a doctor” (p. 85). I felt that this was probably too broad for my participants, but that I did not need to go as far as providing sentence starters for them. I therefore chose a middle ground that made use of narrative inquiry techniques. Drake (2006) argues that “The narrative methodology is designed to uncover teachers’ descriptions of their beliefs and knowledge in the context of experience” (p. 583) and so I offered suggestions for times in their working life when a diary entry might be appropriate. The aim was to elicit stories told by the participants about key aspects of their working life that might draw out their beliefs about mathematics education and how those fit with their daily experiences as they described them. Appendix 6 gives full details of the information provided to participants. The aim was to ensure the possibility of participant control of the diaries whilst giving participants enough structure to be able to engage, and also ensuring that some of the key areas I was interested in were covered.

Many of the other issues faced by those using audio diaries were around practical challenges relating to the use and return of equipment (Worth, 2009), but fortunately technology has moved on so fast that these were not issues for me: everyone in my sample owned a smart phone, and everyone could easily access a voice recorder that had a facility to email the recording directly to me. I made sure that participants practised this at the focus group so that the technology would not hinder them. An additional benefit of the technology was that participants were able to send me diary entries the moment they completed them, rather than hanging on to a device over a period of months and then sending a completed diary at the end. This meant that the research felt ‘alive’ throughout the data collection period, and it was very easy for me to send personalised encouragement to my participants.

A surprising finding when I launched the audio diaries was the overriding enthusiasm for the idea from the group of more experienced HoMs, and the much less positive response from the less experienced. I had begun the project fearing that no one would want to participate in creating an audio diary, but my first experience was with the experienced HoMs, who immediately took out their phones and started testing recordings, emailing them to me and showing no embarrassment or concern. That evening I received my first 'proper' entries from two HoMs, and I felt confident that I had selected an approach that suited my participants. However, the next week I launched the idea in the same way with my less experienced group and had a completely different response. One said he would feel stupid talking into his phone, and he would only participate if I gave him a Dictaphone, whilst another said there was no way he would be getting involved, and there was much laughter about the whole idea. However, despite the contrasting responses, two participants from each group engaged with the use of audio diaries. Each took their own approach, summarised in the table on the next page:

Pseudonym	Years' teaching experience	Years as HoM	Number of audio diary entries	Style
Mags	>20	<1	7	On the Job: recorded audio diary entries during the school day, on the way to meetings, on the way home. Very brief entries focused on activities undertaken.
Rory	15	8	5	Evening Reflections: thought about possible audio diary entries during his working day, then made quite long recordings in the evenings, describing situations and analysing their meaning for him as HoM.
Elizabeth	6	1.5	2	In Transit: made two audio recordings, both on the car journey home from work.
Edward	5	1	4	Ofsted Support All entries were before, during and after an Ofsted inspection.

Table 5: Approaches to the use of Audio Diaries

During the process, I came across some interesting questions that I had not considered prior to setting up the audio diaries, key of which was whether or not to respond to the diary entries. I received entries one at a time, and I felt that some kind of response was needed to encourage the participant to continue, but I wasn't sure that offering feedback or advice was appropriate when someone had simply shared their thoughts with me. I therefore elected to respond with fairly short emails to maintain participants' engagement (see Appendix 7 for examples).

Between June and October 2016, I received a total of eighteen diary entries from the four participants, and these became a vital set of data in understanding the daily experiences and perspectives of the HoMs.

3.5.3.2 One-to-one interviews

I used one-to-one interviews with two sets of participants: as part of a series of research methods with the current HoMs who had been involved in the focus groups and as a one-off, standalone method with the former HoMs. Whilst there were some differences in approach with the two groups, most of the initial considerations were very similar and so I discuss these together in this section.

Everyone was very keen to be involved in follow-up activities at the end of the first focus group, but it was the four who engaged with the audio diaries that became the group I followed more closely. I found that listening to the audio diaries raised questions that it would be hard to answer without speaking individually to the HoMs, and I also felt that these participants had put in a great deal of effort, which in a way needed to be rewarded by my interest in their views. I therefore elected to interview each of them individually during the time when they were still creating the audio diaries and prior to the second focus group. I felt that this was a suitable way of restricting the amount of data I had to deal with, and still had potential to provide me with richer data than just the two focus groups. However, later in the project, two additional participants (Felix and William, both Group 2) requested individual interviews, and I added these two to the four already undertaken in order to broaden the data set.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) describe an interview as “a purposeful conversation...that is directed by one in order to get information from the other” (p. 96), which aptly sums up my aim. They argue that the interview can be used at any point within the research process, and that its position will usually guide its structure. Therefore, at the start of a qualitative project an interview is likely to be fairly free-flowing and unstructured to allow themes and issues to emerge, whilst later in the project the interview may be used to follow up on areas drawn out through other methods. In this study I chose to use a survey as well as my own literature search to identify key areas for discussion, then the focus groups to consider these and any others brought by participants. With the current HoMs,

the audio diaries then allowed for individual foci to emerge, and so by the time I arrived at the stage of the individual interviews I felt that I knew my participants and their priorities fairly well. However, despite this individual knowledge, and the range of themes that had emerged from the audio diaries in particular, I also wanted to ensure that I addressed some common themes within the interviews, partly to aid analysis but also to avoid the issue of becoming focused on a particular theme that happened to emerge on the day of the interview, but that may not have seemed important on another day. I also wanted to avoid the issue identified by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) of controlling the content of the interview too tightly and as a result not allowing the participants to tell their stories or share their experiences effectively. I therefore planned for a semi-structured interview in which I had questions planned to stimulate the discussion, but that also allowed freedom in response. I also planned to allow space to discuss both the focus group and issues that had come out in my participants' audio diaries.

For the former HoMs, in contrast to the current HoMs, the individual interview was the prime source of information about their experiences and beliefs following the initial survey, because they were not involved in the audio diaries or focus groups. However, this interview was also part of the larger piece of research and so I did not need the interview to be completely open-ended. All Group 3 participants had completed the initial survey so I had some idea about their own views on mathematics education and the challenges they faced in their work. Additionally, it transpired that I had in fact worked with all of the participants in some capacity within the last few years and so I was not starting with strangers and I knew the basic career backgrounds of all three. In this case, then, I took a similarly semi-structured approach to the interview that I had with Groups 1 and 2, using some questions from the focus groups to guide the interview (See Appendix 8 for interview questions).

In all, I undertook 9 interviews: six of current HoMs and three of former HoMs. Listening to the recordings I realise that my approach developed as the interviews went on: in the first two, I tended

to ask the pre-planned questions and try not to intervene in the answers, but from then on I realised that this was holding the interviews back and that I could risk adding my own thoughts or interpretations in order to help the interviews to flow better without worrying that I was taking over, 'leading' the participant or influencing the data.

3.5.4 Pilot studies

Having considered each research method in some detail, in order to ensure the success of data collection I also undertook a number of pilots. Wellington (2015) argues that piloting is useful for "eliminating ambiguous, confusing or insensitive questions" (p. 145) when preparing for interviews, and I would argue that it also helps to ensure that the researcher is confident with the practicalities of the method undertaken. With such a range of methods, this was very important in this study.

In the case of the initial survey, I needed to check first that the survey link worked and that participants were able to respond without any issues. It was simple to check these basics by asking a colleague to trial the survey, before then sharing it with a friend who was currently a HoM but who lived out of the research area and would not be taking part in the project. Both trials were successful and no changes were made to the survey.

For the interviews and focus groups, I set up a pilot focus group with a small number of my PGCE students in order to determine the most effective way to record the session and tested the questions I planned to ask on an ex-colleague who was also a HoM. The pilot focus group helped me realise that I needed additional time at the start of any group in order that I could set up recording equipment without wasting participants' time, and that I needed to employ two recording methods in order to avoid complete data loss. These practical issues related equally to 1-1 interviews.

Trialling the focus group questions introduced a dilemma: the question relating to the purpose of mathematics education led to a long pause, and my ex-colleague warned me that this was a very

challenging question that might put participants off. However, I was surprised that a HoM didn't have a quick answer to this question, and wanted to check others' reactions and so I retained the question early in the focus group. For the 1-1 interviews, I did not undertake a pilot of the questions; these were developed as a result of the focus groups, and at this stage I felt that I knew the participants well enough to adapt the questions appropriately without trialling them.

Piloting the audio diaries was more challenging. I tested the practicalities of using mobile phone based recording equipment and ensured that it was straightforward to receive the recordings and listen to them, but the free nature of this method meant that I had to wait and see the approaches that participants took. As mentioned above, participants' approaches varied hugely but I regard this as being due to the nature of the method rather than limited piloting.

3.6 Approach to data analysis

Having discussed my methodological approach and the methods I chose to collect data, I now go on to explain the approach to data analysis chosen for this project, before going on to consider the ways in which I ensured that this process enabled a high quality analysis.

3.6.1 Analysing a case study

Yin (2014) argues that the case study researcher has two options in beginning their analysis: they could start from "theoretical propositions" (p. 136) that were identified at the start of the research process or analyse the data "from the 'ground up'" (op cit), by repeatedly considering the data and trying to notice patterns to explore further. Whilst Yin (2014) argues that these two approaches are complete opposites, in this project that was not the case. I had identified in the literature review some likely areas that would affect the experiences of HoMs, and so at the analysis stage these themes helped to give some structure to the process. However, I was also aware that I could limit the analysis by allowing myself to be entirely led by pre-identified themes, and so I consciously chose to look beyond those areas for additional patterns.

The initial challenge in analysing the case study data was the broad range obtained from a number of sources and at different stages in the research. Through the course of the research I had collected three separate sets of data obtained from four different methods:

- Responses to the online survey
- Recordings of focus groups and 1-1 interviews
- Audio diary recordings

As mentioned, the online survey was set up to identify potential participants in the study and to elicit relevant topics for discussion at the focus groups. Therefore, this data was analysed prior to those focus groups and in the analysis chapter I refer only briefly to this analysis to summarise the answers to questions 5, 6 and 7:

- What are the (up to 3) best bits about your job?
- what are the (up to 3) biggest challenges you face in your job?
- When “talking shop” in your department what are the most common topics of conversation?

I now explain the approaches taken to the analysis of the rest of the data.

3.6.2 Thematic analysis of HoMs’ experiences

For the bulk of the data analysis focusing on the experiences of HoMs I adopted a thematic approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006 and 2013), whilst also taking caution from Bazeley (2009) that qualitative data analysis is “more than identifying themes” (Bazeley, 2009, p. 6).

The process of arriving at the thematic analysis involved four elements: transcription, coding, theme identification and theme testing. I discuss each of these in turn below.

3.6.2.1 Transcription

Although an arduous task I chose to transcribe most of the recorded data myself (see Appendix 9 for a sample), employing a transcription service for three of the 1-1 interviews when time was very tight. I elected to transcribe all the spoken words in each recording, including pauses, hesitations

and repetitions, in order that when I re-read the transcriptions I could hear the voices of the participants in my head. Initially I had considered making use of the NVivo facility to annotate the recording itself and to code the data directly from there without the need for transcription, but I found it challenging to repeatedly listen to the same conversations and felt that the transcriptions gave me greater flexibility in my approach to analysis and coding. Undertaking the process of transcription also gave me the opportunity to get to know the data in more depth and helped with the start of the analysis process.

3.6.2.2 Use of Nvivo to code the data

There are many who argue that the use of software in the process of analysing qualitative data is risky. For example, Crowley, Harre and Tagg (2002) point out that it is possible that the researcher may find themselves being led by the software package rather than choosing their own route through analysis, and that the quality of the data may be damaged by reducing text to codes and numbers. Initially I shared some of these concerns but was drawn to NVivo because it allowed me to store all data in one place and return to it easily without the risk of misplacing pieces of paper or other documents. I discovered by using NVivo that many of the concerns about the use of such a package seem to exist due to a lack of understanding of the way in which the package works, and, as Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2011) argue, NVivo is intended to assist with analysis and not to do it for the user. In my experience, it is hard to be “led by the software” because it is designed in such a way that the user must constantly make decisions about how to use it. I felt more able to maintain the richness of my data by using NVivo than if I had used a paper-based approach to data management, and so I persevered in learning how to use it to my advantage despite the time implications of doing so.

I used NVivo at the early stages of analysis in two ways. Firstly, I undertook basic coding of all data, a process that Richards (2013) calls “topic coding” (p. 100), and secondly I adopted “analytic coding” (p. 102), often in parallel with the topic coding. In order to complete the topic coding I set up

'nodes' such as "training for the job" or "new GCSE" as I read through the data, and assigned the relevant text to the node created. I did this without direct reference to the themes identified in the literature review although I was of course aware of these as I worked. Taking the codes from the data in this way meant that I was able to reduce possible bias in my analysis and allow surprising findings to emerge rather than simply confirming my prior beliefs. For example, whilst I was aware of the pressure of external examinations, I was surprised at the amount of time participants spent discussing examination tactics in preference to pedagogical approaches. The initial coding process took many, many hours, and I did at times find myself concerned that I was not progressing. As Johnston (2006) argues, an "incessant desire to code every part of a document without taking time to think and reflect upon data can lead to an overly descriptive prosaic project" (p. 383), and this was something I wanted to avoid. I therefore tried, throughout the topic coding period, to also consider "analytical coding" (Richards, 2013, p. 102), which Richards describes as "coding that comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning" (op cit.). At this point, Richards' advice to undertake a simple two-step process was invaluable. She suggests that the researcher should try to notice when something in the data is interesting, and then stop to consider *why* that is so. For example, when I read this statement from a participant: "I try and take a lot of weight and a lot of brunt from SLT and from my line manager so that they can get on with doing their job as best as they can" (Edward, 1-1 interview, July 2016), I was fascinated that part of his role involved protecting his team from senior leaders, since it might be assumed that staff did not need this type of protection if the whole team was working well together. I gave this the analytic code of "buffering" and set up a node which was then populated by comments from other HoMs with similar experiences.

I therefore finished the coding process with a mixture of nodes that simply described the data and nodes that attempted some reflection beyond what was said (See Appendix 10 for evidence of this coding). Whilst this left me with a challenge for the next stage in the analysis process, I do not think that this issue is confined to those researchers using a software package such as NVivo, and one of

the challenges of the early stages of analysis is knowing when to remain close to the data and when to take a step back and try to work out what it means.

3.6.2.3 The return to manual methods to identify and test themes

Richards (2002) argued that with the development of NVivo, “a project need no longer be separated into the bits you do on the computer (e.g. coding the interviews) and the rest (your notes, results, reports, and conclusions)” (p. 211). However, whilst there is a huge range of tools within NVivo to help with the “stepping back” part of data analysis, I found that many of these were more cumbersome than helpful, and so I did not exclusively use NVivo for the whole analysis process, and once I began to draw out themes from the coding I had undertaken, I did this using manual, paper-based methods in combination with NVivo.

Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) comment that “an account of themes ‘emerging’ or being ‘discovered’ is a passive account of the process of analysis, and it denies the active role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes...” (2006, p. 80). This helped to guide me in this stage of the process, reminding me that it was my own interpretation that was important. However, there was also an element of themes ‘emerging’ through the grouping of particular nodes into broader themes such as “leadership” or “teaching and learning”, a process that allowed at least some objectivity: stronger nodes were drawn out at this stage. Again, this helped to discourage me from identifying pre-conceived themes and allowed me to be led by the data. I then broke these themes down by printing out the relevant data connected to the themes, re-reading the data and thus checking the appropriateness of the themes identified. Nvivo’s basic tools allowed me to consider the strongest themes simply by checking the number of times a particular theme was mentioned across the data set, and the printed documents meant that I could maintain the richness of the data by continually re-reading participants’ comments.

3.6.3 Quality of data and analysis

As discussed in Section 3.4.1, it was important that I ensure the credibility of this study, from design through to conclusion. Making use of Tracy's (2010) eight "'big tent" criteria' (p. 837) helped to ensure the integrity of the research project as a whole, and for data collection and analysis I focused in particular on Tracy's broad definition of the term "credibility" (p. 842), which she argues "refers to the trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings" (p. 842). Tracy goes on to argue that a "credible" piece of qualitative research is marked by "thick description", "crystallization", "multivocality" and "member reflections" (pp. 843-844), the first three of which were important in my own work.

"Thick description" was achieved by ensuring that reference to participants' experiences was contextually situated, and that I "showed" those experiences rather than "telling" (p. 843) by making use of direct quotes from participants. Tracy warns that the researcher should spend enough time in the field to develop "tacit knowledge" (p. 843) of the situation, but as a former HoM I did not feel this was a concern, and participants tended to speak to me as someone who knew the educational jargon of their role. My own understanding of the context therefore enabled a thick description of the experiences without having to spend protracted time in the field.

Rather than triangulating the data (Cohen et al., 2009, p. 141) I instead elected to employ a process of "crystallization" (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). I was not trying to confirm the truth of participants' stories by checking them in different contexts; rather my intention was to "open up a more complex, in-depth, but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue" (p. 844) by discussing issues in different situations, such as in the focus groups or in a 1-1 interview. One example of this process was that I read the transcripts of the first focus groups prior to running the 1-1 interviews, giving me a chance to query any points that had been raised, and for those who completed the audio diaries I took the same opportunity. In both cases this allowed me to ensure that I had understood a point correctly, or to ask a participant to expand on the views they had shared.

I elected not to undertake member checking or member reflections during the analysis process (Braun and Clarke, 2013, Tracy, 2010), for a mixture of practical and philosophical reasons. Firstly, as mentioned throughout the project, the participants in the study are busy people and it was challenging enough to bring them together for focus groups, without expecting them to read 15000 words of analysis and offer their thoughts. Secondly, I was concerned that, as with the rest of the project, it was likely that some participants would become more involved in this process than others, leading to some having a stronger influence over this part of the research. Finally, as Braun and Clarke (2013) comment, “member checking typically assumes that participants are the ultimate authority on, and have complete insight into, their experiences” (p. 285), which is not necessarily the case, and since this is an interpretive piece of research, the process of returning to the participants would simply lead to another stage of interpretation: I am not aiming to arrive at “the truth” about the experiences of HoMs, but to interpret what they say about those experiences. Instead, I chose to develop a 1-page summary of my findings to share with participants once the project was complete, mostly so that they did not feel that I had abandoned them once I had taken what I needed from them.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the methodological approach taken in this study, and the reasons for selecting an interpretive approach. I explained the way in which I have drawn together ideas from case study, narrative and participatory research in order to find an approach that is suitable to answer my research questions. I have then discussed the blend of methods employed to collect the relevant data, clarifying the compulsory and optional elements of the project. I then explained the quite complex ethical considerations involved throughout the study before going on to outline my approach to data analysis. In Chapter 4 I now go on to share that analysis.

Chapter 4: Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this research project is to understand the role of the HoM in a sample of secondary schools in England, identifying and exploring possible reasons why HoMs choose to remain in the role, and factors that affect their decisions to move on. In the previous chapter I outlined my methodological approach, the research methods used to collect data and discussed my approach to data analysis. I explained that my dominant approach was thematic analysis, undertaken using a combination of NVivo tools and paper-based methods. In this chapter I present the data analysis in order to address my first two research questions, in the context of the literature review.

The research questions that focus the analysis are:

1. How do HoMs perceive their role?
2. What experiences of fulfilling their role do HoMs report?

The third research question (What affects HoMs' decisions to remain in or leave the role?) forms the basis of the subsequent discussion chapter since, in order to address this question it is necessary to interpret the analysis relating to questions one and two.

This chapter is divided into two main sections, each designed to address one of the research questions. In the first section I analyse the role of the HoM. Before considering how the HoMs themselves perceive their role I consider how it is defined externally (by Government and Head Teachers). I then go on to analyse the HoMs' reported experiences of their role. In this second section I break down the analysis into two key themes that came out of data analysis:

responsibilisation/surveillance and resistance. I then conclude the chapter. During the analysis I make use of data collected through the focus groups, the one-to-one interviews and the audio diaries. Throughout this chapter I refer to participants in relation to their group, defined in Chapter 3 (p. 95-6). As a reminder, these are: Group 1 – those who took on the role of HoM after more than 5

years of teaching; Group 2 – those who took on the role of HoM within their first 5 years of teaching and Group 3 – those who left the role of HoM prior to the study.

4.2 The Role of the HoM

In the literature review I defined the term “role” as “the sum total of the cultural pattern associated with a particular status” (Linton, 1936, p. 113). I argued that the term encompassed both the beliefs and attitudes of those involved in the definition of a role and the tasks involved in undertaking it.

Therefore, in this analysis I consider both elements: first I discuss the external influences that affect the construction of the role, and second I consider the way in which the HoMs in the study define it, before considering the tasks they undertake that constitute the role.

4.2.1 External construction of the role

As Jenkins (2008) argues, the way in which a role is enacted depends on “the individual occupants, contextual constraints and possibilities and the demands of significant others” (p. 164). During data collection and initial analysis it became evident that those “contextual constraints” and “demands of significant others” had a significant impact on the construction of the role of the HoM, and participants dealt with three external influences:

1. they were expected to ensure that their departments meet externally-imposed performance targets
2. they led the implementation of new national policy and
3. they must be perpetually ready for a possible Ofsted inspection.

At this point in the analysis, a Foucauldian lens is particularly useful. The three “influences” named here could be more effectively described as technologies of government (Gillies, 2013), influencing both the discourses within which the role of the HoM is situated and in turn HoMs’ own interpretation of their role and construction of themselves as subjects. Because the three technologies were so evident in all participants’ discussions throughout the data collection, I begin by considering the ways in which these technologies help to influence the construction of their role.

4.2.1.1 External Performance Measures

The first technology influencing the construction of the role of the HoM is the expectation that they will ensure their department addresses externally imposed performance measures and demonstrate the way in which they are working to do so. As argued in the literature review, disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977) in the form of grading and ranking schools through the use of performance measures is a key technology of neoliberal governmentality. In the case of the HoM, participants' responses indicated that this technology was contextualised within their schools, and senior leaders viewed the HoMs' role as being to ensure excellent mathematics outcomes for students in external examinations in order to perform well against the national measures. The HoMs in the study were situated in an annual cycle in which they spent the year focusing on trying to ensure that pupils performed well in GCSE examinations. Results are released in August, when members of SLT, parents, staff and Ofsted react to those results and thereafter the HoM works to improve on those results in the following academic year and to deal with any consequences of disappointing results that lead to the loss of the school's position within the 'market'.

The tactic of measuring performance was operationalised in participants' schools through a range of monitoring regimes designed to keep the HoMs alert to whether they and their teams were on track to meet targets. Some of these were national schemes whilst others were developed by Head Teachers for the specific school context. On a broad level, HoMs were expected to undertake Performance Management (PM) of their teams (DfEE, 2000) and in the study all but one of the 11 participants who were currently HoMs confirmed that this was an expectation for them. The process, which was similar for all participants, involved the HoM setting three performance targets with each mathematics teacher in their department in September or October, reviewing these mid-year and then conducting a final review following the publication of examination results, during the next target setting period in September/October. Arguably, this example demonstrates the presence of performative techniques alongside disciplinary ones, where disciplinary power tends to impose externally defined norms, whilst a performative regime recruits subjects into setting their own targets, and doing so repetitively in an endless cycle of performance improvement. As

mentioned in the literature review, “A culture of performativity leads to performances that measure efficiency” (Perryman, 2009, p. 617), and this was evident in the setting and monitoring of these PM targets. Head Teachers dictated two of the three targets for every teacher in their school, focusing on key school priorities and examination results, and teachers selected their third target provided that it focused on the examination grades of their GCSE classes. Staff were then expected to plan actions in order to meet those targets, and the focus in review meetings thereafter was initially on whether the targets had been met, and if not on whether actions had been taken to try to meet those targets. This focus in the nationally-defined PM cycle on setting up plans in order to maximise pupil examination results gives little room for the HoM to decide for themselves what they feel is important and makes explicit the tactic of focusing on performance.

Discussion with and between participants made it clear, however, that the official PM cycle is a minor part of the monitoring and surveillance role of the HoM, and performativity, including this cycle, is at the centre of their work. Foucault argues that “it is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection” (1977, p. 187), and this process of subjectification through surveillance was evident to varying degrees for all participants and helped to define their role. Head Teachers in participant schools had adopted their own tactics to help them keep a closer eye on likely performance, and a large element of the HoMs’ role involved monitoring the performance of their departmental team using these tactics. HoMs were then expected to present their monitoring of pupil progress in individual classes to their Head Teacher and make plans to improve performance. For example, Elizabeth (Group 2), and each member of her department met with their Head Teacher on a weekly basis in the months leading up to GCSE examinations, to talk through the progress of their Year 11 classes and to explain what they planned to do where pupils’ progress suggested that they might not achieve their target grades. This monitoring and action planning was much more responsive to current circumstances than the ‘official’ PM cycle, and was expected in addition to the annual target setting and review process.

The expectations described above take up a significant amount of time and therefore define a large part of the HoM role. However, they are not the only externally imposed expectations: at the time of the study, a national policy change occurred, and analysis of the impact of this helps to give some insight into the way in which the role of the HoM is constructed when national developments are imposed. I now go on to consider this national policy change.

4.2.1.2 New national policy

The second way in which the HoM role is constructed through technologies of governmentality is by the presumed necessity to respond quickly and effectively to changes in national policy. This became evident during the study when a new National Curriculum in mathematics (DfE, 2014) was introduced. All participants were grappling with ways to deal with the curriculum change, which meant incorporating new, more challenging content, selecting appropriate examination boards and choosing tiers of GCSE entry²⁴ for pupils and supporting their departmental staff in implementing the necessary changes.

Savage (2012) argues that those working in schools are “both *subjects of policy* and...*active agents* in mediating and enacting policy meanings and practices” (p. 88), and this combination of subjectification and agency was evident throughout the conversations about the new curriculum and defined some elements of the HoMs’ selves. Participants speculated about what the examinations might look like, what the grade boundaries²⁵ might be and what other schools might be doing to manage the situation. Rory began by commenting that “I still don’t know whether it’s going to be a big change or a little change” (Rory, Focus Group(FG) 1, November 2016), and Mags commented that, “I think it’s not knowing the difficulty of the stuff that’s come down...you have no concept really of how hard any question’s gonna be on the trig [trigonometry]...” (Mags, FG4, November 2016). Here participants were ready to be “active agents” but were unable to undertake this

²⁴ Pupils can be entered for GCSE mathematics at Foundation or Higher Tier, and the entry choice will affect their future. If a pupil is entered for the Foundation Tier, the highest grade they can achieve is a 5, which is not enough to go onto further study in mathematics, for example.

²⁵ The mark required to achieve a particular grade.

process effectively due to the lack of information provided at the time of the policy changes and their lack of input into those changes.

When asked about the new GCSE in the focus groups, participants talked for a short time about the mathematical content itself, but invariably the conversation moved to discussion around the most effective ways to maximise the chances of pupils performing well in the new examinations. This is perhaps not surprising since the policy change did not happen in isolation, and working within a performative culture, as I argued in the literature review, can lead to an apparent change in teachers' views on the nature of education. As Ball (2000) argued, "some educational institutions will become whatever it seems necessary to become in order to flourish in the market" (p. 10), and it appears that this need to flourish was at the forefront of participants' minds and formed a key element of the definition of their role when implementing policy.

The less experienced participants had a particularly strong focus on examination tactics. They appeared to be employing the "technologies of the self" (Foucault, 1993, p. 203), discussed in the literature review, having been "internally persuaded" (Amsler and Shore, 2017, p. 125) that their role is to improve pupil performance; they were therefore self-responsibilised. William (Group 2), for example, focused almost entirely on maintaining his 'market' position, and talked extensively of the trial examinations he had undertaken with his Year 11 classes to identify the best approach to selecting examination boards for the mathematics department in his school:

We did the AQA²⁶ mock exam and the Edexcel²⁷ mock exam, and our students got over 10% better on the AQA ones, and we...I did them within a week of one another...there was no extra teaching in between....and nationally...cos they both [AQA and Edexcel] did a very large national trial...nationally students did 5% better on AQA than Edexcel. So we're doing AQA cos I was like, "we've got a 5% jump on anyone else!" (William, 1-1 interview April 2017)

²⁶ Assessment and Qualifications Alliance: an examination board that sets GCSE and A level examinations in England.

²⁷ A second examination board, in competition with AQA.

William views his role as being to select the examination board that is likely to yield the best examination outcomes for pupils rather than the one that offers, for example, the most interesting mathematical content. This can be viewed as a direct result of working within a performative culture: as Keddie (2013) argues, this focus on outcomes “comprises the ‘fabric’ of most schools” (p. 764).

The introduction of the new GCSE was closely entwined with the surveillance role of the HoM discussed in the previous section, and a significant amount of participants’ time was spent trying to work out ways to monitor pupils’ progress and the impact of individual teachers within the new curriculum and assessment. This was challenging when everything had changed so suddenly and old resources were no longer usable. Rory, for example, in his 1-1 interview commented that, “kind-of rolling it through into Y11 feels like, how do we assess it when we have no...all these kind-of useful tools like past papers and grade boundaries and...” (Rory 1-1 interview, August 2016). As a HoM he had set up systems and resources that helped him to monitor the progress of his pupils, and he now found himself in a situation where these resources were no longer applicable and he had nothing yet with which to replace them. Therefore part of his role was defined as finding ways to replace these resources in order to continue monitoring pupil progress.

Whilst all participants were expected to introduce the new GCSE at the same time in their schools, the ways in which this expectation defined their role varied according to their own interpretations of what was required, and participants were enacting the new policy in very different ways. In implementing the new GCSE curriculum, Felix (Group 2) had attempted to minimise the impact of the changes:

What we are doing with the new GCSE is we are delivering the old syllabus on the old scheme of work 100% but we’ve got certain key periods – we’ve got 6 weeks built into the school year, where they’re just hitting off²⁸ new spec content. (Felix, FG5, November 2016)

²⁸ By “hitting off new spec content” Felix means teaching the topics that have been introduced in the new GCSE specification that were not in the old one.

In contrast, Mags (Group 1) had taken the introduction of the new GCSE as an opportunity to develop the curriculum from Key Stage 3 (KS3)²⁹ upwards in a way she had already intended. She was now able to focus on problem solving and was leading departmental meetings focused entirely on teachers reflecting on their teaching approaches. The timing of the introduction of the new curriculum happened to help Mags to ensure even the most reluctant members of the department became involved: “you’ve got to actually force it [problem-solving approaches]– you *need* to do this activity, this...you know, actually writing it into the curriculum” (Mags, FG1, June 2016).

These discussions suggest that a large part of the HoM’s role is determined by the necessity to quickly absorb information about curriculum and examination policy change and then to plan accordingly. As Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) argue, “The school [or in this case the department] here is represented as a cipher of Government policy, policy that comes from outside...which ‘overrides’ local particularities or priorities or principles...” (p. 93) and there is very little opportunity to consider whether the changes to the curriculum are appropriate for students or fit with the HoM’s and mathematics teachers’ own beliefs about mathematics education, as they need to implement them quickly to maximise their pupils’ chances of success. The technology of biopower (Foucault, 1990), enacted through curriculum policy change, means that the HoMs must implement something neither they nor their colleagues have developed, and they have no choice about doing so if they want to maintain their position in the ‘market place’ of school league tables.

Having considered the way in which the HoM’s role is in part constructed through the need to address the technologies of external performance measures and to implement national policy change, I now go on to consider the third major external influence on the definition of the role: that of the Ofsted inspection regime.

4.2.1.3 Perpetual Ofsted readiness

²⁹ Key Stage 3 is the school stage in England for children aged 11-14, the stage prior to GCSE (KS4)

The third, and probably highest stakes, technology of governmentality contributing to the construction of the role and the subjectification of the HoM is the Ofsted inspection regime. The Ofsted discourse works in combination with the first technology, external performance measures, since Ofsted's starting point is the examination of nationally produced performance data about individual schools and it bases its inspection focus on that data (Ofsted, 2016), as discussed in Chapter 2. Mathematics is a key element of the government's measures applied to schools (DfE, 2017), and the performance of the mathematics department impacts significantly on schools' experience of Ofsted inspection and the outcome. A HoM's involvement in an Ofsted inspection could be either direct or indirect: in the first instance they may be interviewed by an inspector and their teaching may be observed, or in the second, indirect case, they may be in a school that is about to be inspected or has recently been inspected and is now focusing on responding to the points raised in the inspection report.

There were surprisingly few direct references to Ofsted by participants in Group 1 (experienced), and it was mentioned only once across two focus groups. However, two participants in Group 2 (inexperienced) underwent Ofsted inspections during the research project, and it was evident that many of the performative pressures on these HoMs stemmed from their Head Teachers' responses to these inspections or reported inspections of other schools.

Foucault (1977) argues that power relations are in constant tension and always being negotiated, and Wright (2012) states that in developing those power relations, "actors can be both subjected to discourses *and* actively challenging and rearticulating them" (p. 289). However, this is not necessarily the case with Ofsted reports, and comments from participants suggested that the opportunities for HoMs and Head Teachers to be directly "actively challenging and rearticulating" (op cit) Ofsted edicts were limited. As Callum (Group 3), put it, "Ofsted got so belligerent at one point that now everybody seems to think what Ofsted says is the way you do it. So Ofsted are this

kind of...not dictatorship...but it's directed [in] how teaching and learning should be" (Callum, 1-1 interview, August 2016).

Both Elizabeth and William (Group 2) had very challenging experiences of Ofsted inspections, Elizabeth prior to this study and William during the study, and these help to explain Callum's comment. In both cases, it appeared that the Ofsted inspector had chosen their focus before arriving at the school, and the HoMs did not have the opportunity to discuss issues from their own perspectives:

Erm, so we were deemed Requires Improvement³⁰ because of the results. They [the Ofsted inspectors] came in – they wouldn't listen to anything we were saying basically. They just, they came in with it decided. It was awful. He [the lead inspector] refused to speak to me. I was the head of maths, he had an issue with maths, he was a mathematician, he refused to speak to me. They [the school's SLT] made several petitions for him to speak to me and he wouldn't. So as I say, they [the Ofsted inspectors] came in with an agenda. (Elizabeth, 1-1 interview, July 2016)

So, on that first day when they [Ofsted] came in on the Section 8³¹, and that was to confirm that we were still a good school, erm, I was part of a joint meeting – HoM, Head of science, Head of English, and the lead inspector, whose opening line was "your data is inadequate, so you're an inadequate school", so I didn't feel like he was in here to confirm that we were a good school...so I disagreed with them...and by the end I think I talked them round and they agreed with me, so then they would send someone else to try to pull me apart. That's what it felt like. (William, 1-1 interview, April 2017)

There were no opportunities to negotiate regarding outcomes in these cases. The judgements had been made, and the schools had to accept their fate. Foucault (1990) argues that power relations exist where resistance exists, and here the experiences of both William and Elizabeth suggest that the only resistance possible was to attempt to argue with individual inspectors. This appeared to be an unsuccessful strategy and Elizabeth and William reported that this did not affect the outcome of

³⁰ In an Ofsted inspection a school can be rated as "Outstanding", "Good", "Requires Improvement" or "Inadequate". A school rated as "Requires Improvement" will experience additional visits to check that improvements are being made, whilst a school rated as "Inadequate" may be placed into Special Measures and control taken from the Head Teacher.

³¹ A Section 8 is a one-day Ofsted inspection visit for schools previously rated "Good". If the school is deemed to remain "Good", the inspection ends after one day. If there are concerns that the school is no longer Good, or there is the possibility that the school may now be Outstanding, the inspection continues into a second day.

either inspection. Whilst Ofsted offers a complaints process (Ofsted, 2019), this was not mentioned by participants, suggesting that their schools did not complain about their experiences.

The above discussion suggests, then, that the role of the HoM is in part constructed by the need to find ways to demonstrate that their department is continually improving performance prior to an Ofsted inspection rather than arguing with any judgements that are made during that inspection.

This was particularly evident at Felix's (Group 2) school. He explained that after a "dip" in his mathematics examination results of 4%,

we had three mock-Ofsteds³² that year, we had lots of additional pressure, you know, all these work scrutinies³³, we had all these external people bought in... (Felix, 1-1 interview, July 2017)

Here, the fear was that a small dip in results could potentially trigger an inspection, and so the Head Teacher needed to prepare for that possibility so that they could defend their position should Ofsted arrive. Felix's role as HoM was to ensure that the department was ready for the mock inspection and to respond to feedback on it, ready for a 'real' inspection. This could be considered an example of Ball's (2000) 'fabrication' (p. 6), where, whatever the pupil outcomes the school needed to present itself in a favourable light to inspectors. It is likely that this approach is motivated, at least in part, by the Head Teacher's fear of the consequences of failing an inspection, which could ultimately lead to the Head Teacher being asked to leave their post.

Experiences of the Ofsted regime described here by participants are evidence of the likely impact of the panopticon discussed in section 2.6.1. Foucault argued that the panopticon ensured that power relations were:

Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so (Foucault, 1977, p. 201).

³² A school sets up its own 'practice' inspection, often paying an ex-inspector, to identify key areas that are likely to be issues should a 'real' inspection take place.

³³ A process in which members of the school's leadership team (or external assessors) inspect pupils' books in order to assess the teaching and/or learning that has taken place.

In the case of Ofsted, published resources such as the Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2016) and publicly available reports ensure visibility, whilst participants' experiences in this study suggest that Ofsted inspections are experienced as an unpredictable process over which schools have little or no control, and that schools need to assume that they are constantly being "looked at" and that an inspection may be imminent.

As with the previous two technologies of government: performance measures and policy change, the role of the HoM is in large part constructed by the required responses to the Ofsted regime, and the amount of time that this takes up means that opportunities for participants to construct their own roles or develop alternative senses of self are limited.

The three discourses discussed above (examination performance, Government policy change and Ofsted readiness) have a strong influence on the HoM's role and go some way to constructing that role, helping to begin to answer the research question, "How do HoMs perceive their role?".

However, discussion of these three external discourses offers only a partial picture of the way in which the role is constructed, and the HoMs themselves take a part in this construction, interpreting their role in part through their own beliefs and values. As argued in the literature review, "any status [role] can be *done* in a variety of ways, depending on the individual occupant(s), contextual constraints and possibilities and the demands of significant others" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 164). Up to this point I have considered the ways in which "contextual constraints and possibilities" (op cit.) have gone some way to construct the role, and I now go on to analyse the ways in which the HoMs construct their role.

4.2.2 Internal construction of the role

Whilst the performative demands of the three technologies discussed in the previous section did in some ways construct the role of the HoM, it was clear from listening to participants that their own perception of the role went beyond explicitly responding to those demands and broadened it significantly. In the literature review I argued that the performance of a role involves both attitudes

and behaviour, and here I consider each of these in turn. I begin by analysing the aims of the HoMs in order to understand their attitudes towards their role. I then go on to consider their behaviour or “what the occupant of the status does when acting in that status” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 163) by discussing the activities they undertake in the role. In order to undertake this analysis I use data collected in the focus groups, audio diaries and the initial survey.

4.2.2.1 Aims of the HoMs

I asked participants in Focus Groups 1 and 2, “what is your aim as a HoM?” in order to better understand their attitude towards the role. As discussed in the literature review, the most recent policy documentation about the role of the subject leader in schools states that their aim should be, “to demonstrate that you can deliver successful and sustainable school improvement in your own school setting” (NCTL, 2014). However, this was not the explicit response I received from either group. Group 1 (experienced HoMs) focused on supporting their teams and providing the structures within which they could work effectively, with brief mentions of ensuring examination results were strong. Mags, for example, repeatedly stated that “if I can get to the end of the year and the team are happy, I think I’ll have...you know...and the results are good” (Mags, FG1, June 2016), whilst Rory said he was “supporting my brilliant team to do brilliant things” (Rory, FG1, June 2016). Both of these responses could be viewed in two ways: it may simply be that the HoMs are keen to ensure members of their department are happy at work, or it could be that they expect that happy colleagues are likely to perform better against the externally imposed measures. I did not discuss with Rory what he meant by “brilliant things”, but this may refer to producing excellent examination results. Therefore, Group 1’s aims may well be in line with the NCTL’s focus on school improvement despite being expressed differently.

The newer HoMs, in Group 2, focused on their subject and pupil experiences rather than the people in their team. William, for example, stated that, “My biggest priority in my school is to change the perception of maths within the school cos it’s very negative” (William, FG2, June 2016). Marcus

wanted to achieve “a more kind-of...for the pupils...a more aspirational...environment” (Marcus, FG2, June 2016), whilst Miles argued that “I constantly believe that our subject is a great one and we should be doing everything we can to make kids enjoy it” (Miles, FG2, June 2016). Again, these aims might be the result of a desire to share their passion for mathematics or as another element of a ‘performativity package’ focused on securing strong examination results in order to maintain market position.

In their 1-1 interviews, I asked Group 3 participants a slightly different question since they had already left their role (What do you think the role of the HoM should be?), and their responses were a combination of those offered by Groups 1 and 2. Sally commented that “A HoM should be there to focus on teaching and learning. I think it should be inspiring your staff” (1-1 interview, August 2016), whilst Ricky offered a more fully developed idea involving three elements: directing resources to the right pupils, supporting the well-being of the team and developing approaches to teaching.

All of the above comments suggest that, whilst participants in all groups had assumed responsibility for ensuring their department performed well against external measures, they maintained ideals that had the potential to go beyond these, whether focusing on the wellbeing of their staff teams or sharing a passion for their subject. The only person who explicitly stated that he had a focus on results above all else was Felix, who commented that “it’s about making sure the students have got the very best chances when they leave school”.

4.2.2.2 HoMs’ enactment of the role

Having considered the aims of the HoMs in the study, I now go on to analyse the ways in which the HoMs enact their role including and beyond an explicit focus on meeting the externally imposed expectations already discussed. During this analysis, the comment that “much will be situationally sensitive” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 164) is relevant, and the activities expected of HoMs and that HoMs expected of themselves varied considerably across schools. In this section, I use evidence from the four audio diaries completed by participants and responses to the initial survey. In analysing these

two sets of data thematically, four additional elements of the HoM role became evident, and I discuss these after sharing a single audio diary entry from Mags (Group 1).

Mags' (Group 1) audio diary entry, recorded as she walked home from work, gives an indication of the high workload and competing priorities in a typical day for a HoM and of the range of ways in which she acted in a self-responsibilised way. Her focus appeared to be on taking a relaxed approach to ensuring strong performance from her team whilst meeting the demands of her Head

Teacher:

...we've had a 2.5 hour departmental twilight³⁴, looking at the new KS3 curriculum that we're going to be doing, with much more of an emphasis on problem solving, so we've had quite a lot of fun solving problems and doing a bit of research, so that's been good, and last half hour I got the department in pairs, in 4-minute intervals to erm answer the 10 SEF1³⁵ questions that I need answers to, so I've got to fill in a SEF1 – it's the first time I've done that – so – it just means that the department is fully engaged in it, so that was really good....big thing of today is er one of the department got herself into trouble with the head, erm, about tracking, erm...got herself into trouble, basically, cos she's part time and she'd got two lots of Year 8 exams to mark plus tracking to do all by 9 o'clock Monday morning when she finishes at half past 3 today and doesn't come back until 10:15 on Monday. Unfortunately, she went about it the wrong way, mouthed off and then upset leadership. So I've had to deal with that – lots of tears, and...and in the end she'd actually done all the work, but she just opens her mouth and says the wrong thing and comes across in the wrong way, so I sort of had to give her a bit of a, you know, talking to, cos that's, you know, think before you speak, Dorothy. Erm, so that's the excitement of today, also got my lovely letter out to Y10, making sure that they are all going to bring their calculators and rulers to the maths exam next week cos we are NOT going to lend them. (Mags, audio diary entry 29 June 2016)

In this entry, Mags talks of one day at work, when in addition to her own teaching load she has undertaken tasks involving surveillance (Foucault, 1993) of her team, fabrication (Ball, 2000) through ensuring that members of her team present themselves favourably to SLT, mediating national policy and directives from the Head Teacher alongside some basic administrative work. Mags' tone did not suggest that this was an unusual day, nor that this was a particularly high workload; she was simply

³⁴ A training session immediately following the school day, in this case based in subject departments.

³⁵ School Evaluation Form part 1. This is a form completed by the Head Teacher evaluating the performance of their school. In this case, responsibility for the form has been shared with the HoM (and this is likely to be the same for other leaders of subject departments in the school).

talking me through the activities she had undertaken, and she clearly viewed each of these elements as part of her role as a HoM.

The activities discussed in Mags' entry are not unique to her: using evidence from all four audio diaries, together with responses from 21 HoMs to the initial survey I was able to draw together four elements of the HoM role beyond the need to respond directly to the three technologies of government. These elements were identified through thematic analysis:

Element	Example or explanation	Participant(s) audio diary entries	Number of survey responses
Teaching own classes	HoMs taught approximately 16-20 hours per week.	Mags, Elizabeth, Rory, Edward	11 (best bits)
Organisation	Setting of pupils ³⁶ ; ordering new textbooks; sending letters to parents; setting up intervention classes; deciding on examination entries; coordinating visitors to the department	Mags, Elizabeth, Rory, Edward	2 (best bits)
Pedagogical development	Developing new schemes of work; attending external meetings; leading team meetings focusing on teaching and learning.	Mags, Elizabeth	7 (best bits)
Managing departmental staff	Dealing with issues between staff and SLT; supporting staff at challenging times; helping team prepare for Ofsted; maintaining a team spirit.	Mags, Elizabeth, Rory, Edward,	20 (best bits) 16 (challenges)

Table 6: Elements of the HoM role beyond explicitly addressing performance measures

Many of the activities outlined above could be considered as part of the 'performativity package' already mentioned. All of the activities involved in 'organisation' could be viewed as maximising pupils' chances of performing well in examinations, for example, and 'managing departmental staff' is likely to help ensure that members of the team also perform effectively. Therefore, whilst the activities identified above may expand the role of the HoM they are also part of its constitution in

³⁶ Putting them into groups according to prior attainment in mathematics tests.

relation to self-governance in a performative culture. In many ways these categories concur with those discussed in the literature review and with the NPQML guidelines (DfE, 2014), although one area not mentioned by participants was that of liaison beyond their own departments for example with other HoDs in school or with local primary schools (“Working in partnership”, NCTL, 2014). This may simply be oversight, or it may be that it was not an element of their work that was a high priority or of particular concern at the time of the project. A significant teaching load was the one element missing from almost all research into the role of the middle leader, but this was discussed extensively by participants in this study. For most participants, teaching took up more than half of their timetabled activity during the week, and it therefore should not be ignored as an element of the role of the HoM.

4.2.3 Concluding comments

In this section I have considered the ways in which the role of the HoM is constituted, both externally and by HoMs undertaking the role. It is clear that the role is significantly influenced by the three major technologies of neoliberal governmentality (external performance measures, new national policy and perpetual Ofsted readiness) and by the need for the mathematics department to maintain or improve its position in the ‘market’. Analysis of the day-to-day activities undertaken by the HoMs in the study helped to clarify the focus on performance and went some way to begin to consider the ways in which participants constructed their own roles in order to meet the externally imposed measures.

4.3 The experiences of HoMs

In the previous section I analysed the ways in which the role of the HoM is perceived by both those undertaking it and by those involved in other ways, such as Government and Head Teachers. I now consider the ways in which participants experienced their role on a daily basis and the ways in which their experiences were affected, not only by those external and internal to the school but also by the

HoMs themselves. In doing so I aim to answer my second research question: What experiences of fulfilling their role do HoMs report?

During thematic analysis, two broad themes impacting on the experiences of the HoMs became evident: first, responsabilisation/surveillance and second, resistance. All of these are themes that were discussed in the literature review, although the combined experience of responsabilisation and surveillance is new here. The first theme focuses on the experiences that are strongly influenced by participants' Head Teachers, whilst the second considers HoMs' responses that also made up their experiences. In this section, data collected in the focus groups, 1-1 interviews and audio diaries helps to provide a rich analysis. All of the HoMs' experiences were affected by the context in which they were working and their own background and I therefore briefly consider this before discussing the two key themes.

4.3.1 Context

Braun, Ball, Maguire and Hoskins (2011), in their discussion of policy enactments, argue that we must "take context seriously" (p. 585) when considering how different schools respond to policy directives, and this comment was also relevant when considering the experiences of HoMs in the study. Some significant context-specific issues affected those experiences, and I briefly consider these prior to broader discussions about those experiences in order to inform the different ways in which participants experienced their role as HoM. In my discussion of teacher retention and attrition in the literature review I commented that Towers and Maguire (2017) had identified three key areas affecting attrition: "personal, professional and situational factors" (p. 946), and the two main contextual factors that were discussed by participants during data collection fit within the "professional" and "situational". These were: the challenges of departmental staffing (a situational factor) and the HoMs' own teaching experience prior to taking on their role (a professional factor). I now discuss departmental staffing and HoMs' prior experience before moving on to the main part of the analysis.

4.3.1.1 Departmental staffing

Issues of team stability, in terms of both staff attendance and turnover, and the capability and experience of departmental staff had a significant impact on the experiences of the HoMs in the study, and some participants found themselves in a situation where simply having a full staff team in the mathematics department was an achievement. Edward, for example, commented that, “so this year...being fully staffed is [like] phenomenal” (1-1 interview, 4 July 2016), following a number of years where this had not been the case. However, although many participants had a fully staffed departmental team, a number of participants in both Groups 1 and 2 discussed the issue of staff absence. Marcus was the envy of FG2 when he announced that “...I think we’ve only had 2 days of absence in 18 months, and that makes your life so much easier”, with Edward responding incredulously, “...by magic?!!!”. Max (Group 1), in contrast, stated that,

the staff absence is having an impact on the department...I’m picking up a couple of extra classes and er, yeah, a couple of other people are as well, and it just is a bit draining when it’s not feeling quite like the team’s working... (Max, FG1, June 2016)

whilst Sally (Group 3), whose difficulties had been exacerbated by a change in school leadership, found herself reorganising her whole department due to high levels of staff absence: “...reallocating classes, putting classes together, it was a nightmare. It was a nightmare” (Sally, 1-1 interview August 2016).

I will not speculate here about why some departments struggled with absence more than others and whether the HoMs could have had a greater impact on ensuring their teams were complete, but it is important to note that the performative demands, both emotionally and practically, on those dealing with absence or lack of staff were likely to be significantly increased.

4.3.1.2 The HoM’s prior experience

The second contextual factor affecting the HoMs’ experiences was their own career up to the point of taking on the role. Group 2 (less experienced) participants experienced additional stress not felt

so keenly by Group 1 (more experienced), the former having taught for less than five years prior to taking on the role of HoM. At times the Group 2 (less experienced) participants felt pulled in too many directions, struggling to find a way to manage their priorities, and as a result their teaching suffered. Edward commented, for example, that:

I'd really like some...knock-out Y11 results...I've always had alright results from my Y11s, because I end up taking on loads of things, and then it just...but I don't know how to...I don't know how to not take on loads of things (Edward, 1-1 interview, 4 July 2016)

and Elizabeth expressed similar concerns "...his [the Head Teacher's] worry with me is me being spoilt because I've got everything else to do that I can't continue to grow and be an outstanding teacher" (1-1 interview, 6 July 2016). The more experienced HoMs, in Group 1, were also aware that they were compromising between developing their own teaching and supporting the departmental team, but they seemed to feel more at ease with this than Group 2. Rory commented that "it's not really about teaching and learning yourself any more is it?", feeling that his role had moved on to "facilitating, supporting and that team building..." (FG1, June 2016), but he appeared secure in his own teaching and did not feel that this was a problem.

These two contextual challenges: the stability and capability of the departmental team and the prior experience of the HoM are likely to have had a significant impact on the experiences of the participants in the study. As discussed in Section 4.2, the HoM role is constructed in large part by three tactics of neoliberal governmentality: performance against externally imposed measures, response to national policy change, and preparation for Ofsted inspections. The pressure on the HoM to perform, and the pressure they put on themselves to do so, will be increased if, in the first case they do not have enough qualified teachers to maintain the performance of the department or in the second, they lack confidence about the likely examination outcomes for their own classes due to their lack of teaching experience.

I now move on to the main part of the analysis of participants' experiences of the role of the HoM, beginning with the ways in which they experienced responsabilisation and surveillance before

discussing HoMs' development of their experiences through varying degrees of resistance.

4.3.2 Responsibilisation/surveillance

Whatever else affected HoMs' experiences, it became apparent during data collection that the most significant influence on those experiences was the approach of their Head Teacher. As discussed in the literature review, Lemke (2001) argues that, within a neoliberal governmentality of self-responsibilisation, "...the consequences of the action are borne by the subject alone, who is also solely responsible for them" (p. 201). In the case of HoMs who are working within a performative culture this means that they assume responsibility for mathematics outcomes in their school. This was exemplified particularly strongly in Edward's audio diary, completed during an Ofsted inspection. He spoke at length about the way in which he would demonstrate to inspectors that he was ensuring strong outcomes, measured through examination performance:

Coming out at the end of this year, we're looking at predicting similar if not slightly higher 5A*-C, but we have spent a lot of time focusing on our 4a³⁷ sort-of students and our 5c students, trying to take them up, so I've been working with that group, aiming towards As, and we're going to get As out of our set 2, which is the first time we've got As out of a set 2. (Edward, audio diary entry 1, July 2016)

Whatever else Edward might find important in educating his pupils, these 'strong outcomes' were evidently top priority, and Edward's discussion focused on a number of interventions he had instigated as HoM to improve examination outcomes in mathematics, demonstrating his assumption of responsibility for those outcomes. However, in listening to participants throughout the data collection period, it became clear that their experiences were not as straightforward as simply assuming responsibility for the mathematics outcomes regardless of what was happening around them. The HoMs are part of a hierarchy in which their self-responsibilisation is significantly affected by their Head Teacher's own self-responsibilisation. Whilst the HoM assumes responsibility for mathematics outcomes, the Head Teacher has responsibility for maintaining their school's market position, which

³⁷ 4a and 5c were the levels secured in national examinations at age 11 until 2016. They were used to predict pupil performance at GCSE.

also includes some responsibility for those same mathematics outcomes. The approach of the Head Teacher quoted in the literature review: “you only give people enough rope to hang themselves, and not the school” (Torrance, 2013, p. 365), was evident in the experiences of some participants. In this next section I consider HoMs’ experiences of self-responsibilisation and surveillance by dividing this broad theme into three interconnected sub-themes identified during thematic analysis: trust, support/interference and recognition/blame.

4.3.2.1 Trust

Whilst I did not explicitly ask participants about trust during data collection, it was discussed a significant number of times, particularly in Focus Group 2 (less experienced HoMs) and the 1-1 interviews, and as a result it emerged as an important theme in my analysis. In the literature review I commented that Elliott (2001) warned of a loss of trust between educational professionals within a performative culture, and it appears that some participants experienced this issue. In this section I understand trust, by considering participants’ use of the word, to mean the assumption from Head Teachers that their HoMs are competent to undertake their role effectively. In this context, ‘undertaking their role effectively’ can be interpreted as ‘securing excellent examination outcomes’.

Ricky (Group 3), who had moved into the private sector, made some general comments about trust, stating that,

The teaching profession is not trusted anymore, the teachers are not trusted and sometimes Head Teachers are trusted, sometimes senior leaders are trusted but not entirely. But most teachers would say that they probably don’t feel trusted in what they’re doing and that people need to check up on them all the time. (Ricky, 1-1 interview, July 2016)

However, not all participants felt the same as Ricky. Group 1 (experienced) generally felt trusted.

Mags stated that “we’re generally – they trust the maths department ‘cos we know – we know what we’re doing”, and Max commented that, when implementing new policy, “If it’s just maths, it’s just

me – just get on with it” (FG 4, November 2016). Mags and Max speculated that the reason for this trust might be connected to the stability and high performance of their schools and departments, and they did not appear too concerned about the possible consequences of a poor set of outcomes. However, this may not be the only reason for their Head Teacher trusting them, and Edward (Group 2 – less experienced), who worked in a school without a history of high performance, had a similar experience and expressed appreciation of the trust his Head Teacher demonstrated in him:

I’m in a school where there’s a lot of freedom from SLT to do my job – there’s accountability and stuff but they trust that me and my line manager are the best people to do that job... (Edward, 1-1 interview, July 2016)

Here, it is evident that a Head Teacher can, even in a school in more challenging circumstances, choose to trust their staff.

It became evident, however, that not all Group 2 (less experienced) participants had the same experience of trust as Edward. Two participants in particular (Elizabeth and Miles) experienced the erosion of trust discussed in the literature review. In Elizabeth’s case this erosion of trust was explicit: she mentioned the word “trust” nine times across a single focus group and a 1-1 interview, and she was clear that her Head Teacher did not trust her or her department to do their jobs effectively. She stated, “We suffer within our school with a lack of trust in maths” and “they don’t trust that I know what I’m doing” (1-1 interview, July 2016). In further discussion, it became evident that there were several possible explanations for this lack of trust: Elizabeth had been in post for just 18 months, and her line manager [a member of SLT but not the Head Teacher], “explained [to her] that the lack of trust is a historical issue due to poor results in maths...” (1-1 interview, July 2016). She contrasted this with the experiences of the English department: “that’s kind-of why English doesn’t get it [lack of trust] cos they’ve got really good results, so they don’t get touched” (Elizabeth, 1-1 interview, July 2016). Here, both Elizabeth and her HT are responsabilised subjects, in that they have both taken up “the modes of regulation and measurement expected of them” (Keddie, 2018, p.

124). However, in this situation, Elizabeth wants to be trusted to meet expectations whilst her Head Teacher feels he cannot risk trusting her in case she does not do so.

Some Group 2 (less experienced) participants had mistaken being left alone by their Head Teacher as representing 'being trusted', and this became evident when mathematics outcomes did not reach the required level. For example, Miles had been left alone in years when outcomes were good, but when departmental results showed a potential decline, the Head Teacher became involved, leaving Miles feeling that:

well – alright – our results weren't good last year, but we're working really hard with these pupils and you have just shown us that you don't trust us to do the job. (Miles, FG2, June 2016)

It was not necessarily true that Miles was trusted in the past, and it may have been the case that his Head Teacher's priorities lay elsewhere whilst outcomes in mathematics were strong. As Keddie (2016) argues, the Head Teachers [or pupils in Keddie's research] are positioned "as self-determining and self-sustaining subjects whose choices are rational expressions of free will, the consequences of which they solely bear and are responsible for" (p. 117). Therefore, at the point when results in mathematics did not meet targets, meaning that the school's overall outcomes would suffer, Miles' Head Teacher assumed responsibility for finding ways to improve outcomes in mathematics in order to prevent this situation happening again. This resonates strongly with Elizabeth's experience. In a similar way, Felix commented that he had not had any concerns about being trusted, but, "I think it is such an outcomes-driven thing, that I know equally if our results...if our outcomes this year are poor, that next year will be horrendous" (Felix, FG2, June 2016).

The above discussion suggests that a responsabilised HoM assumes that their Head Teacher will trust them and that when they are trusted they feel able to make choices and do what they believe is right within the constraints of the performative culture. However, the Head Teacher's own neoliberal self-responsibilisation (Keddie, 2016) means that they do not necessarily feel able to trust their HoM, particularly if there is a lack of evidence of success or if results do not meet expectations.

When a lack of trust becomes evident, this leads to frustration (e.g. Elizabeth) and demoralisation (e.g. Miles).

I now consider the second key theme within this section, that of support/interference. The latter appears to occur as a result of a lack of trust.

4.3.2.2 Support/interference

In this section I begin by discussing some approaches to supporting their HoMs that were employed by Head Teachers before considering the ways in which participants experienced Head Teachers' interference in their work.

If responsabilisation involves people choosing to "assume responsibility for their actions" (Shamir, 2009, p. 7) then it could be argued that in a culture of responsabilisation, support would be neither needed nor expected. For some participants, the approach of their Head Teacher suggested that this was their view. William, for example, complained that in the main his Head Teacher left him on his own to make decisions and plans for the mathematics department. He would clearly like more support and stated that if things went wrong there was only him to blame: "part of the reason that the results were so low last year is completely my fault, cause again I've just been left to do what I wanted" (William, 1-1 interview, April 2017). Similarly, Mags found that, when choosing which textbooks to purchase to support the implementation of the new GCSE, she could not find anyone to discuss this with, and she was expected to make the decision alone. It may have been that, in these cases, the Head Teacher's focus was on other areas of the school that were performing less well than mathematics. However, this approach of leaving people alone to make decisions without discussion is risky: as mentioned in the literature review, "the amount of leadership support was strongly related to organizational commitment" (Hulpia et al., 2009, p.2), suggesting that if HoMs experience a lack of support from their Head Teacher they may be less likely to remain in post.

In contrast, some participants felt well supported by their Head Teachers. They expressed a loyalty to their school by commenting favourably on the support of their leadership team. Four participants

spoke of this explicitly: Rory had "...a massively supportive Senior Leadership Team" (Rory, FG1, June 2016), as did Edward, who commented that "...I think we have a relatively supportful [sic] SLT" (Edward, FG2, June 2016) and Felix, "...well I've got quite a supportive SLT I have to say..." (Felix, FG2, June 2016), whilst Jim commented that "I feel very supported by my school, always have done" (Jim, FG2, June 2016). However, both Jim and Felix followed their comments by adding that this may relate to the fact that their examination results are excellent. Only Rory went on to explain what he meant by 'support': "I think they genuinely do take a collegiate and supportive approach at our place, and they're genuinely interested in helping departments to do their best" (Rory, FG1, June 2016).

Three participants in Group 2 (less experienced) (Felix, Elizabeth and Marcus) commented that one of the best features of the support they received came in the form of a mentor in a position senior to them. Mentoring also arose in the literature regarding teacher retention, with both Borman and Dowling (2008) and Guarino et al. (2006) identifying a lack of mentoring as a strong attrition factor for teachers, particularly for those in the early years of their careers. Felix viewed this support as "training" for the HoM role, commenting in the first focus group that

For me the best part of the training was...having someone to go and speak to without being worried about, you know, looking very insecure – literally about anything whatsoever, I think that's been really useful, like, "what's a...what is a panda report³⁸?" you know, being able to ask that, and then to be able to say "well I've got no idea – let's find out together", to, you know, and incident where a student, you know, maybe had done something really, really terrible in the classroom, so that's been really useful... (Felix, FG2, June 2016)

The support of the mentor helped Felix to learn his role more efficiently and enabled him to understand the technologies of governmentality that defined his role. Felix was therefore able to focus on becoming a so-called "good" HoM (Keddie, 2016) within the neoliberal performative

³⁸ A 'panda report' was a report provided for schools so that they could compare their performance with other schools. It was used by Ofsted when planning their inspections. It was replaced in 2007 by an online version, RAISEonline.

culture, able to self-govern in order to maintain or improve the mathematics department's market position. It could be argued that he is therefore being subjectified, but his interpretation of his experience here is that he is offered the support that he wants.

Beyond being offered a mentor, interventions from Head Teachers were often experienced by HoMs as interference rather than support. The main way in which this interference occurred was through Head Teachers employing surveillance techniques using data about pupil progress. This helped them to spot *potential* underperformance by identifying either pupils who were underperforming or whole classes whose grades were not as high as they should be. They could then deal with these issues in the hope that *actual* performance would be strong. Some of the participants in the study, such as Elizabeth, Felix and Miles, were under high levels of scrutiny about their own work and that of their departments throughout their working lives. Felix had to meet with his Head Teacher once every half term to talk through the progress of all classes in all year groups. Felix described the tricky conversations that could ensue in the meetings if that progress was not satisfactory:

...but when things aren't good enough, when things aren't moving fast enough in the right direction, it can be very awkward conversations, you know, it starts to get personal about colleagues, about, you know from a senior level, you know, picking on individual members of staff, and that may or may not be the case, but it's still very unpleasant, you know... (Felix, 1-1 interview, July 2017)

Felix's experience here, of surveillance in a performative regime focused on improving examination outcomes, is one that Ball (2000) warned of. Potentially useful discussions about support that could be offered, for example, have been replaced with judgemental conversations about the performance of individuals.

Elizabeth and all of the Group 3 participants were subjected to intensive interference through surveillance beyond that experienced by most other participants. Elizabeth had to demonstrate to her Head Teacher that she was monitoring her department's performance and she was required to draw together details of departmental activities that should be leading towards improvements.

Elizabeth expressed disappointment during FG2 that a HoMs' training course she attended had not

taught her “how to do a decent INQTL³⁹ calendar, and maintain it, and balance it”. When met with blank faces from other participants, she explained that this calendar was a mixture of:

...performance management, erm, minutes of staff meetings, minutes of progress discussions⁴⁰, learning walk⁴¹ details, it’s meant to have work scrutiny⁴² details in there but I’m not going to be very good at that this year, book looks⁴³ and stuff. It’s a load of – it’s a paperwork exercise that I’ve not had time to do this year. (Elizabeth, FG2, June 2016)

Elizabeth was very concerned about gaps in some areas:

I’ve done no student voice⁴⁴ this year, which I was meant to as part of my INQTL⁴⁵ and it was written into my appraisal, so I’m on the verge, if I don’t do it in the next few weeks, of failing my appraisal because I haven’t done a student voice because that’s something that needs to go in this folder (Elizabeth, FG2, June 2016)

This evidence collection to assist the Head Teacher’s surveillance was experienced by Elizabeth as significant additional workload, and it appeared to cause her some stress.

This type of interference through constant monitoring was taken to an extreme level by the Head Teachers of the Group 3 participants and became direct instruction that could not be questioned.

Sally, for example, who had become a HoM because, as she said, “If I want maths teaching to be the way I see it, the only way I can do it is by leading a department” (1-1 interview, August 2016), found that her priorities were very different from her new Head Teacher’s. He imposed a range of measures:

Everything had to be evidenced, children had to be tested much, much more, there was much, much more rounds of tracking. You had to have your evidence for your tracking.

³⁹ Elizabeth herself could not remember the full version of this acronym, but it was a year plan of the range of ways in which she would monitor the performance of her department.

⁴⁰ Progress discussions are meetings with the Head Teacher to discuss the progress of Year 11 groups towards meeting their GCSE targets

⁴¹ A ‘learning walk’ is when members of SLT walk around school visiting classrooms to check that pupils are engaged in lessons.

⁴² ‘Work scrutiny’ is where members of SLT or HoMs collect in pupils’ exercise books and check that the work is of the right standard, school policies are being followed and marking is done in line with school policy.

⁴³ ‘Book looks’ are the same as work scrutiny.

⁴⁴ ‘Student Voice’ is meeting with a group of pupils to hear their feedback about a particular aspect of their school experience.

⁴⁵ Not a standard term – this acronym was developed in Elizabeth’s school and she herself was not certain about its meaning.

It took me away from the teaching and from leading my department. (Sally, 1-1 interview, August 2016)

This experience of interference from the Head Teacher extended to all aspects of Sally's departmental work. In particular, her Head Teacher undertook "work scrutiny", which involved checking pupil exercise books to ensure teachers' marking followed the school policy. Sally describes a time where her department had lost focus on marking due to other demands:

...before May we'd had our last book scrutiny and then we were focusing on Year 11s as you do completely [at that time of year]. So yes, we were still teaching but our marking went completely out the window because people were doing before school, after school [extra classes to improve pupil performance]... (Sally, 1-1 interview, August 2016)

However, the Head Teacher did not consider the stress the teachers were under, and continued his work scrutiny programme regardless:

So we were working with Year 11s and then we had another book scrutiny believe it or not in July. Yeah. Everybody failed. People were on 3s and 4s⁴⁶. (Sally, 1-1 interview, August 2016)

Whilst Sally knew the impact on morale that sharing these grades would have on her team, she felt she had no choice: "But I then had to feed that back. I didn't agree with what he said but he was like 'Well, look at this list, you can't tick all these things on your list, so so and so is a 3'" (Sally, 1-1 interview, August 2016). Her Head Teacher's intensive surveillance and focus on performance against his own imposed measures was so different from Sally's desire to concentrate on the teaching of mathematics that she found it impossible to remain in post.

Rather than the constant surveillance described above, some participants experienced sudden interference, which tended to occur because of a dip in performance. As discussed in the literature review, Gillies (2013) argues that the use of data to "affect others' actions in the pursuit of desired

⁴⁶ 3=Requires Improvement; 4=Inadequate. These grades are aligned with Ofsted grades.

goals” (p. 77) is a tactic of neoliberal governmentality employed by Head Teachers, and this was the case for many participants. Returning to Miles, he had been left to lead his department over a number of years until the arrival of a poor set of GCSE results. In the subsequent academic year, when undertaking surveillance by analysing mock GCSE examination results, Miles’ Head Teacher became concerned about likely outcomes. At that point, Miles explained:

This year, it feels like they’ve [SLT] done everything they possibly can to, to make sure that...er...it doesn’t happen [poor results] by interfering and getting in the way. For instance, the week before the paper 1 the head sent me an email saying ‘I’ve looked at the recent internal exam results...all those pupils who got a C need to do Foundation’.
(Miles, FG2, June 2016)

Here, the Head Teacher is clearly concerned about his school’s position and the consequences of poor results, since the dominant discourse is one in which a ‘good’ Head Teacher is positioned as one whose pupils achieve strong results in GCSE examinations (Keddie, 2016).

However, such interference led to a very poor experience for Miles. As he explained,

not only are there these massive external pressures, we’ve had a massive amount of internal pressures as well, and it just, it stops you from doing what you want to do, it makes you question whether you’re doing what you really want to do.
(Miles, FG2, June 2016)

Responsibilisation is described by Amsler and Shore (2017) as, “a technology of indirect management” (p. 7). Within the school environment that “indirect management” takes the form of the tactics of neoliberal governmentality (externally imposed performance measures, new national policy and Ofsted inspections) discussed in Section 4.2. This means that the HoM assumes responsibility for mathematics outcomes whilst the Head Teacher does so for the school’s outcomes as a whole. However, an issue arises when these two overlap. In Miles’ case the Head Teacher has undertaken surveillance as part of his own self-responsibilisation, and he has simply given an instruction to Miles in order to protect against disappointing outcomes. It is likely that Miles is also concerned about the risk of poor performance and may have his own ideas about how to improve outcomes, but this is not discussed, possibly due to

the Head Teacher's perceived need to act quickly. This has resulted in Miles experiencing 'internal pressures' alongside the external ones.

This analysis of support and interference goes some way to begin to highlight the conflicts in approach that can occur in a school hierarchy. At times this leads to the HoM being left with big decisions and no one to help make them, whilst at others the expectation to respond to the interference of the Head Teacher has a significantly negative impact on the experiences of the HoMs.

Having considered responsabilisation and surveillance from the perspective of support and interference, I now go on to discuss the third relevant sub-theme, that of recognition and blame, which, it could be argued, is a direct result of a performative culture of self-responsibilisation.

4.3.2.3 Recognition/blame

The first two sub-themes in this section highlighted the ways in which self-responsibilisation can lead to conflict between the approaches of the HT and the HoM and can involve a frustrating and confusing experience for the HoM. The third sub-theme, recognition/blame, identified during thematic analysis, moves onto a discussion of the way in which participants experienced their Head Teachers' responses to their success or otherwise as HoMs. I begin with a brief discussion of the times when some participants received recognition or praise for their work before moving on to consider HoMs' experiences when things did not go as well as hoped.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, since they were working within a performative culture, most recognition for HoMs in the study came when it was deemed that they had secured good departmental outcomes in external examinations. As Keddie (2018) argues, "what constitutes school improvement...rests on the capacity of schools to raise standards on particular performance indicators" (p. 126), and that was, in the main, what was recognised. The discourses that have led to HoMs assuming responsibility for mathematics outcomes and to their Head Teachers agreeing that this is their

responsibility mean that, as Juhila, Raitakari and Hall (2017) argue, the HoMs are “the ones to be thanked or criticised for the successes and failures” (p. 63). If results were strong in mathematics, then there were a number of ways in which the work of the HoMs was recognised in participants’ schools: in some cases this recognition came enthusiastically, whilst in others there was begrudging praise. For example, at Felix’s school the mathematics department was bought a hamper to congratulate them on excellent examination results, whilst Mags’ school offered more subdued praise: “the first few weeks back, everybody sort-of said [sounding surprised], “maths results were really good, weren’t they?!”” (Mags, FG4, November 2016). Whether simple comments or physical rewards, participants appreciated this recognition.

There were few mentions of situations in which recognition was offered for success or contribution outside of examination results. Whilst the Head Teacher in Ricky’s (Group 3) school recognised that Ricky had developed a strong departmental team, the praise seemed rather begrudging and came at the point when Ricky had already resigned from his post: “The one thing I will say about you is that you did create the team and I would like...they seemed a really disparate lot to start with and then you brought them together and they were a real group by the end” (Ricky, 1-1 interview, August 2016). The only example of recognition beyond that for examination outcomes came in William’s school when good practice in the mathematics department, developed through peer observations and discussion, was disseminated across the rest of the school.

In some participants’ schools, including those where recognition was evident, there was a culture of blaming staff when things went wrong. This blame appeared to be centred on examination results. Some participants appeared to feel that a small amount of blame was reasonable, which is perhaps not surprising: a self-responsibilised HoM will assume responsibility for outcomes and they are therefore likely to blame themselves if they view those outcomes as not good enough. However, as Juhila et al. (2017) argue, with responsabilisation, “blame can be targeted at other people or oneself”

(p. 78). Therefore, in the case of a disappointing set of results, a HoM is likely to blame themselves but may also face blame from their Head Teacher.

Ricky, for example, commented that:

So you know if you get a bad set of results you could be in loads of meetings and you'll be told. In a good school where they're supportive, you'll be told that the results aren't good enough and we're really not happy with you and all that sort of stuff. (Ricky, 1-1 interview, August 2016)

Ricky felt that it was reasonable to be held to account as HoM if results were not good enough: he could be described as an "ideal neoliberal subject" who "readily takes up the modes of regulation and measurement expected of them" (Keddie, 2018, p. 125). However, there were limits to his willingness to comply. Ricky experienced an extreme version of blame in one school, and one of the reasons he left his role as HoM there was his Head Teacher's reaction to GCSE examination results:

So anyway we [the school] had a bad set of results, the headteacher stood up and spoke to us and very emotional, she didn't quite cry but she got quite close and talked about the shame that she'd felt going and presenting *our* results that *we'd* got that weren't her fault. And that she'd done everything she could and why hadn't we? And did we really understand what responsibility we had? And sent us to our rooms to write down three things that we were going to commit to do better and differently than last year because we hadn't tried hard enough. (Ricky, 1-1 interview, August 2016)

It appears that the Head Teacher, in her self-responsibilisation, felt the pressure of accountability for performance and needed to offload that pressure onto staff in her school. She was aware of the likely consequences of these poor results, and perhaps therefore unable to allow her staff to reflect on these in a rational way since, in her eyes, they were the cause of her problem. As with Elizabeth's Head Teacher, she seems to view her staff as tools to be used to ensure excellent outcomes. Disappointed that her tools are not working effectively, she blames them and demands that they do better. Perhaps if she was not so fearful of the consequences of underperformance, discussed in the literature review, she might be able to think more about the impact of her approach on her staff team.

HoMs' experiences of recognition/blame within this study demonstrate some of the possible consequences of responsabilisation in a neoliberal governmentality. In this study, these appear to be that recognition is narrowly focused on success in external examinations, and that the person who has taken responsibility for that success will blame themselves or those around them when success is not achieved. In one case, that of Ricky, this blame has led directly to him leaving his post, whilst in others, such as Miles' case, the HoM was demoralised but had not yet decided on a new course of action.

4.3.2.4 Concluding comments

This section of the analysis has helped to clarify the way in which Head Teachers' approaches impact on the experiences of HoMs in the study. I have discussed three themes that reflect these approaches: trust, support/interference and recognition/blame. It is evident through this analysis that both the Head Teachers and the HoMs in the study are self-responsibilised, and that their main focus is on ensuring strong results in external examinations. This can at times lead to a Head Teacher being seen as interfering in the work of their HoM, leading to frustration and feelings of not being trusted. However, whilst participants' experiences were significantly affected by the combination of self-responsibilisation and surveillance discussed in this section, it was evident throughout the study that the HoMs were active participants in the development of their role and their experiences were not simply defined by what happened to them. As Dean (1999) argues, "regimes of government do not determine forms of subjectivity" (p. 32): rather they strongly influence the identity formation of the HoMs. In order to complete the analysis of data relating to the second research question, "What experiences of fulfilling their role do HoMs report?", I therefore now consider the HoMs' approaches to the development of their experiences of the role in the form of resistance.

4.3.3 Resistance

In introducing my theoretical framework I commented that resistance “is not a rare attribute of certain heroic subjects, but an essential fact of everyone’s everyday struggles with power” (Nealon, 2008, p. 111). This was true for participants, and resistance was an important element of their experiences. In fact, forms of resistance were often a way in which HoMs coped with and enacted their role. In the literature review I discussed a range of different approaches to the analysis of resistance, and I return to these as I analyse the experiences of the participants.

Before discussing times and places where HoMs employed resistance, I consider the times when either resistance was not considered or the possibility of resistance was not pursued. This will help to build a broad understanding of the ways in which participants made choices about resistance and the way in which those choices affected their experiences.

4.3.3.1 Compliance

There were many areas of the HoMs’ work where they did not appear to consider resistance. These tended to relate to instances in which biopower was in evidence, such as with responses to the tactics of neoliberal governmentality. As Lilya and Vinthagen (2014) suggest, biopower is “a power that is trying to improve the quality of life of its [a society’s] members” (p. 118), and in the case of schools the argument is made by Government that more challenging examinations alongside accountability measures (DfE, 2010 and 2016) will enable this to happen. Ball and Olmedo (2013) state that “we are burdened with the responsibility to perform, and if we do not, we are in danger of being seen as irresponsible” (p. 88). This may go some way to explain why all HoMs in the study appeared to be, for example, happy to push their teams and the pupils in their school to achieve high grades in external examinations. As evidenced in the earlier discussion of participants’ examination tactics, in this area of their work all participants were self-governing and assumed without question that this was part of their role. Even when the measures changed suddenly, whilst participants may have been frustrated and unsettled, their main concern was with ensuring that

their department was viewed in a favourable light within the new system and not with finding ways to avoid working within that system.

In other areas of their work, participants consciously chose to comply, and viewed this as part of their role. As Sally commented about complying with the surveillance regime in her school:

...that's what you do isn't it? Even though I didn't believe in it at all but I had to pretend I was behind it to get them [the mathematics department] on board because otherwise I would get you know, all the problems with SLT saying what ... anyway. (Sally, 1-1 interview, August 2016)

When it came to monitoring the performance of her team, however, despite the fact that she did not agree with what she was being asked to do, Sally complied with the expectation on her to undertake surveillance to the point of making herself and members of her department ill. Sally's apparent compliance could also perhaps be considered a "conceptual resistance" (Johansson and Lalander, 2012, p. 320) in which she is "showing outward compliance while maintaining inner aggression..." (p. 115). However, to those around her the evidence suggests that she is complying with the surveillance regime.

Rory also viewed compliance as part of his role, describing it as "not minding...being a mouthpiece for whole-school policy that I don't necessarily agree with" (audio diary entry, 7 July 2016).

However, in his case the expectations placed on him by his Head Teacher were much less restrictive than for Sally. He offered one example of being happy to follow the school's marking policy and ensuring that members of his department did the same. Although he felt the policy was rather strict, he commented that, "if the school policy says it goes on a marking sticker...I have to kinda suck that up and go, 'well it has to be on a marking sticker'" (1-1 interview, August 2016).

Whilst there were many occasions when participants consciously chose to comply with instructions, this was not always the case, and I now move on to consider instances where participants chose to resist. In most cases, these resistances were to disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977) enacted by Head Teachers. This approach to resistance mirrors Foucault's (1984) argument that, "people criticize

instances of power that are the closest to them, those which exercise their action on individuals” (p. 330). Whilst in the literature I found a broad range of approaches to analysing resistance, none completely fitted with my data and I therefore developed my own framework for analysis. Johansson and Lalander (2012) argue that we should consider the “degrees and instances of power, of changing hierarchies and a dynamic interaction between power and resistance” (p. 1085), and here I have attempted to do this by ‘grading’ participants’ approaches to resistance. I start with those I consider to be the least resistant and end with those that involve directly challenging the disciplinary power in participants’ schools. I begin with indirect resistance, where the HoMs undertook activities to support and develop their departments outside of the performativity regime. Whilst this is not an obvious form of resistance since the HoMs are not explicitly arguing with their Head Teachers it is in direct opposition to the instructions to “hold others to account for performance” and “clearly spell out the consequences of non-compliance” advocated in the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leaders (NCTL, 2014). I then consider negotiation, followed by quiet resistance and finally consider examples of explicit resistance undertaken by HoMs.

4.3.3.2 Indirect resistance

I have defined “indirect resistance” as an approach that acts counter to the operation of the performative culture, which inherits and adapts elements of Foucault’s disciplinary power. Indirect resistance does not involve participants in explicit argument with policy or directives from Head Teachers. The literature identifies two risks of working in a performative culture that can be associated with this form of resistance: relationships are damaged (Ball, 2000) and approaches to teaching are limited to those considered to be the least risky (Locke, 2013). The HoMs in the study indirectly resisted the performativity discourse in both these cases: firstly, they worked hard to develop positive working relationships with their departmental teams and secondly, they conducted activities focused on pedagogical developments wherever possible. I consider each of these in turn.

4.3.3.2.1 Building strong relationships

Throughout the literature on teacher retention, relationships were a key factor in the choices made by teachers about remaining in their job or leaving (Buchanan et al., 2013, Rhodes et al., 2004). I argued in the literature review that for HoMs this was likely to be a more significant factor than for those new to teaching since they were likely to experience a complex mix of relationships as both members of their department and also leaders of that same department. It was clear in discussions that participants put in a great deal of effort to strengthen relationships within and maintain the morale of their departmental teams. The focus was on developing strong relationships, often despite some of the issues identified in the literature review, including Ball's (2000) argument that one consequence of a culture of performativity is that, "there is a real possibility that authentic social relations are replaced by judgmental relations wherein persons are valued for their productivity alone" (Ball, 2000, p. 6).

Seven participants made explicit reference to ways in which they had focused on building good departmental relationships, which can be grouped as follows:

Theme	Activity	Participant
Team building	Social events such as drinks after work, weekend nights out, cake at meetings.	William, Elizabeth, Mags
Facilitating skill development	Ignoring senior staff who said that some teachers needed removing; spending time developing skills of teachers rather than looking for new ones	Ricky, Max, Felix, Rory
Supporting the team	Dealing with behavioural issues in other teachers' classes; listening to the views of teachers when issues arise; being "like their mum".	Mags, Felix, Rory

Table 7: Approaches taken by HoMs to build strong relationships in their teams

This focus on development of the departmental team came in spite of spending so much time and effort dealing with performativity expectations from the SLT, and in some cases it felt as though the HoM was introducing a human element to their work that, as Ball (2000) suggests, may otherwise have been absent. Here, something that might be assumed to be part of the role of the HoM is being experienced as an indirect resistance to the discourse of performance.

4.3.3.2.2 Pedagogical developments

Responses by HoMs to the initial survey suggested that one of the most enjoyable aspects of their role was having an impact on pedagogy within their departments (7 responses), but during the focus groups and 1-1 interviews it was clear that this was not always something that participants had chance to focus on. Whilst Mags, Rory (Group 1) and William (Group 2) showed a particular interest in this area of their work and appeared to have the freedom to make decisions about pedagogy without interference from others in school, pedagogical development was something that Elizabeth (Group 2) needed to fit around her other responsibilities, and Felix and Edward (Group 2) did not mention this aspect of their work unless it related to examination performance.

In a performative culture in which the least risky teaching approaches tend to be chosen in order to maximise pupil outcomes (Locke, 2013), it is straightforward to argue that anyone adopting an approach different from this is indirectly resisting the discourse. William is the most significant case of this indirect resistance, and in his 1-1 interview he reeled off a list of recent developments in his department, all focused on improving teaching approaches. Elizabeth appeared to feel as passionate about developing pedagogy as William, but she had less freedom to develop this and found herself encouraging her department to attend teaching conferences at the weekend or leading “teaching and learning briefings” before school (Elizabeth, 1-1 interview, July 2016) because it was not possible to make this a focus during the working day due to other pressures.

Two participants employed resistance in order to develop pedagogical approaches by, as Niesche (2013) describes, finding “ways of working in the spaces of freedom of the accountability logic” (p. 155). Mags used the introduction of the new GCSE to help her focus the pedagogical developments in her department into an area about which she already felt passionate, whilst Elizabeth, having identified a problem in the performance of pupils with SEND, secured funding for departmental training in a teaching approach she had already wanted to trial. This approach enabled both Mags and Elizabeth to focus on the pedagogical developments they felt were important whilst also demonstrating to their Head Teachers that they were aimed at addressing the performance measures of the accountability regime.

Whilst the indirect resistances undertaken by the HoMs did appear to help them to take some responsibility for defining their role and influencing their experiences of that role, there was a limit to the possibilities of indirect resistance, and to some extent, HoMs’ actions could be viewed as compliance strategies since they were essentially ways of meeting performative expectations. Therefore in some situations other resistances were needed. I now go on to consider the most moderate of these: negotiation.

4.3.3.3 Negotiation

Where indirect resistance was not possible, in particular when all middle leaders⁴⁷ were expected to introduce and enact a new policy, it became necessary for participants to negotiate with SLT in order to mediate that policy to meet the needs of the department. This process, described by Ball et al. (2012) as “policy translation” (p. 48), involved adapting a school policy to fit departmental needs and obtaining permission to implement the adapted policy.

Marcus, for example, had adapted the school’s marking policy:

we can’t just not mark our books if we’ve been told by the senior leadership that we have to do them X amount of times a half term, but I do feel, and I bet everybody in my department feels, for maths, this is a bit of a waste of time, doing, like in-depth marking, when we do that for tests and we do it for homework...what I’ve now kind-of negotiated is that, as part of that school policy, if we keep tests in a folder with their book, if we keep the marked homeworks with their book, that they now count as part of one of the marks. (Marcus, FG5, November 2016)

Evidently, as Ball et al. (2012) argue, “the spaces of negotiation and contestation of policy are relatively narrowly defined here...” (p. 72) and Marcus is only questioning one small element of the marking policy, not the policy itself. Marcus does not feel that he should be able to dictate how often books are marked by members of his departmental team and is happy to accept that this decision should be made by senior leaders in his school. He has therefore focused on the element that might be open to negotiation: what constitutes marking. However, Marcus is still nervous that his negotiation will be forgotten, and his team will be criticised in the next round of surveillance:

So theoretically we shouldn’t need to mark the books that often, but my worry is that we’ll still be marked down in the work scrutiny, because maybe that negotiation that I’ve had hasn’t been communicated to all the assistant heads, or it might have been and they’ve forgotten (Marcus, FG5, November 2016)

Others had undertaken similar negotiations, and in fact, Rory, who was happy to enforce his school’s marking policy, had agreed some adaptations to that policy prior to introducing it to his team.

⁴⁷ Middle leaders are usually Heads of Department. The term may also include pastoral leads such as Heads of Year.

These policy negotiations do not necessarily have any great impact on the way in which policies are enacted in school: the Head Teacher “sets narrow and well-defined conditions for the enactment of policy” in which “there is little or no space for ‘alternative’ interpretations” (Ball et al., 2012, p. 93), and small tweaks may have little effect. Rather, it could be argued that the HoMs are finding ways to be a “responsible neoliberal subject” (Keddie, 2018, p. 125) that they can live with, perhaps feeling that they have had some choice in the way that they do so.

In some situations, however, negotiation of a policy was not enough for participants, and I now go on to discuss situations in which some HoMs employed quiet resistances.

4.3.3.4 Quiet resistance

On occasions, there was no time to negotiate adaptations to a policy or the HoM disagreed with the policy so strongly that they were not prepared to implement it or to ask members of their department to do so. In many cases, the HoMs therefore went a stage further in their resistance, choosing not to do what they were asked, although they remained quiet about that resistance. I have labelled this approach “quiet resistance” to biopower (Foucault, 1990) in the form of school-wide policies enacted by Head Teachers, and it appeared to have two aims. Firstly, the HoM wanted to minimise the anxiety of their departmental team which tended to be caused by the “pressures on individuals...to make their contribution to the performativity of the unit” (Ball, 2003, p. 224) and secondly, it seemed to help participants to feel that they were choosing approaches that they felt were appropriate rather than simply following orders. This “quiet resistance” closely connects with Moore, George and Halpin’s (2002) concept of “strategic pragmatism”, which involves “a conscious practice of creative – sometimes subversive – response to reform” (p. 186).

The HoMs undertook quiet resistance by acting as a ‘buffer’ between their departmental team and their Head Teacher. Edward commented, for example, that “I just try and let them be good at what they do and take away the stuff that stops them being good at what they do...” (1-1 interview, July 2016), whilst in FG1, Rory talked of “sort-of being a shield from a lot of the rubbish” (FG1, June

2016), and Elizabeth had a similar experience, saying, “I block as much as possible...I do try and shield them from a lot of it” (1-1 interview 6 July 2016). I label this activity as ‘buffering’.

Both William and Miles gave examples of times when they employed quiet resistance. William did not believe that the school’s approach to literacy development had any benefit for pupils:

They have literacy stickers ... these little squares printed in colour that you have to stick on the front of students’ exercise books, and there’s one per half term – and they’re identical and they roll year-on-year, and the first one is “how to use a full stop and a capital letter”, and you have to stick that on the front of the book of every child in school, including my straight A* Y11 top set.... (William, FG 2, June 2016)

William’s resistance to this policy was not overt, but he simply ignored the instruction to use the stickers and encouraged his department to do the same, knowing that he would be the one held responsible for this: “every time we have a work scrutiny or a learning walk, there’s a big cross in that box, and I go, ‘oh yeah – yeah. We’ll get to that one’” (Focus Group 2, June 2016). This is not a particularly “creative” resistance, although it is certainly “subversive” (Moore et al., 2002).

Similarly, Marcus quietly resisted a policy for the high attainers in his school:

They had this push on ‘most able’, and I’d had this class – like this top set class and they were Y11, I’d had them for 5 years – and they wanted me to stick on these ‘most able’ stickers, but not on everybody’s folder, just the ones that were ‘most able’ coming from primary school, and I just refused to do it - I was just like “I’m not doing that – I’m not going round to kids and saying, “you’re most able – you can have a sticker – you’re obviously thick, so you’re not allowed one, and obviously, like, cos you’re thick, you’re not going to get an A”, and I just refused to do it – I’m not doing that! It’s ridiculous! (Marcus, FG5, November 2016)

When asked how his school leadership team reacted to his refusal, Marcus responded, “Nobody noticed! It was more of, like, it was a passive protest!” (FG5) It is interesting to note that these apparently confident HoMs, with very strong views about what is appropriate in their classrooms and their departments, do not feel comfortable about overtly contradicting a school policy. It may be that they feel that it will be more beneficial that their energy is used elsewhere, and in fact, when asked how they selected which parts of their job to prioritise, Group 2 made a number of comments about not wasting their time on “meaningless tasks”. Marcus, for example, argued that

If the head asks, or if my line manager the deputy head asks, I'll do it and it's very rarely pointless – if it's pointless I'll do it myself, [rather than trouble the department with it] – if it's just an Assistant head and I think it's pointless, I'll ignore the email. Never gets back to you. They're just ticking boxes [laughter]. (Marcus, FG5, November 2016)

Here Marcus does not fear the consequences of his quiet resistance: he believes that Assistant Heads in his school are enacting policies that perhaps they, too, do not believe in, and so he knows that quietly ignoring instructions will not be noticed.

Up to a point, the HoMs' experiences of 'buffering' seem to be accepted as a reasonable part of their job, but sometimes a HoM's ability to protect their team was seriously undermined by the expectations of, in particular, the SLT. Sally, for example, wanted to develop her team and to support them to do their jobs effectively, but she felt that she was being held back by those in leadership roles, pointing out that

It was so hard to be that buffer between everything that SLT is raining down on you, things that you know aren't beneficial to the children at all, protecting your staff, encouraging your staff and also listening to your staff you know, who are hanging on by their fingernails (Sally, 1-1 interview, 22 August 2016)

This tension proved too much for her and was a contributing factor to her leaving her post as HoM. Tseng (2015) argues that "Headteachers in England do sometimes negotiate, accommodate, resist and mediate mandated policy..." (p. 489), but it appears from discussions with participants that a significant proportion of their Head Teachers did not do this to a great degree, and the pressure of the mandated policy was passed down to be dealt with by the HoM.

A quiet resistance to biopower may simply be a matter of efficiency rather than a fear of the consequences of overt, more dramatic resistance. However, in many cases this quiet resistance was not enough. I now go on to discuss situations in which participants therefore undertook explicit resistance.

4.3.3.5 Explicit resistance

During data collection I heard very few examples of situations in which the HoM resisted a policy

overtly or where that resistance was successful. Sally had argued with her Head Teacher, but he had refused to take any notice of her views, and when William tried to argue with his school leadership team about the merits of working across subjects to improve the quality of marking, he found that, “I’m the most junior person there, and my voice isn’t heard” (William, 1-1 interview, April 2017). As Lilja and Vinthagen (2014) argue, “The open method of challenge is hard to sustain once discipline is a dominant feature of society and when institutional correction systems are in place for those who do not conform” (p. 114). Therefore, the only way any participants described resisting a strong Head Teacher was by threatening to leave, or by actually doing so when other forms of resistance had not produced the required result. Ricky had been told in no uncertain terms after being absent for one day that if he was away again he would risk losing his job. His response was,

...about a week later I went and asked for a meeting and I told her ‘If you ever talk to me like that again I will leave. And you won’t know about it, I’ll tell you on the very last day and you won’t be able to replace me and I’ll go because I can get a job’. And she was much nicer after that (Ricky, 1-1 interview, August 2016)

In this case, Ricky was in a situation in which the bullying approach of the Head Teacher meant that the only way to resist was for Ricky to have an extreme reaction, using the only leverage he could think of, which was the difficulty the Head Teacher would have in replacing him as a HoM.

All of the Group 3 participants took explicit resistance a stage further and left their posts. Callum and Sally’s reasons for becoming HoMs related to their desire to develop approaches to teaching mathematics, and to have an impact beyond their own classrooms. However, in both cases, when a new Head Teacher changed their school’s focus to be more aligned with the tactics of neoliberal governmentality already described, both Callum and Sally realised that they could not undertake the HoM role as they wished. Both attempted resistance. Callum forcefully stated his view that his focus should be on pedagogy, which he wanted to develop by using current research to develop his department’s practice. However, his deputy head argued, “Who needs experts and research? We know what we’re doing” (Callum, 1-1 interview, August 2016), meaning that Callum’s entire approach was viewed as being wrong and resistance was not possible. As already discussed in

section 4.3.3.1, Sally attempted to outwardly comply whilst quietly resisting. However, both of their attempts at resistance failed to make their jobs workable for them and so their only option was to leave their posts.

It could be argued that leaving a post when other resistance has failed should not be classed in itself as a form of resistance. That might be the case if there were hundreds of other mathematics teachers queueing up to take on the role, but as Ricky warned his Head Teacher, due to the significant shortage of mathematics teachers (DfE, 2017), it is hard to replace a HoM and so I would argue that this is a good example of explicit resistance.

4.3.3.6 Concluding comments

This analysis of the resistances employed by HoMs has helped to clarify that resistance can be enacted in a range of ways, from none at all (or compliance) through to explicit resistance in the form of leaving the HoM post. Some of the resistances employed appear to have a more positive impact on the experiences of HoMs than others, and in particular, negotiation appears to allow the HoM to influence the construction of their role in the most productive way.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed a broad range of data in order to address my first two research questions:

1. How do HoMs perceive their role?
2. What experiences of fulfilling their role do HoMs report?

Responding to question one, I found that the role of HoM is constructed to a significant degree by external influences, in particular three key technologies of neoliberal governmentality (performance measures, new national policy and Ofsted) and by Head Teachers' interpretations of these technologies. However, these influences do not entirely define the role, and the HoMs in the study also had a significant impact on its definition, often taking it beyond the narrow confines of performance within the market.

In addressing research question two, I found that HoMs' experiences are affected most significantly by their Head Teachers' expectations, which to some extent depend on the context of the school and the level of attainment in mathematics. Again, though, HoMs are not passive recipients of experiences, and they influence their experiences through the employment of varying degrees of resistance, from indirect to explicit resistance.

Having addressed research questions 1 and 2 in this chapter, in the discussion chapter I move on to consider the impact of HoMs' experiences on their decision to remain in role or to leave. In doing so, I address my third research question: What affects HoMs' decisions to remain in or leave their post?

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to understand the role of the HoM and the experiences of those undertaking it, in order to offer suggestions to policy makers and Head Teachers about ways of retaining people in the role. The research has been structured around three key questions:

1. How do HoMs perceive their role?
2. What experiences of fulfilling their role do HoMs report?
3. What affects HoMs' decisions to remain in or leave their post?

In Chapter Two, having placed the role in its changing policy context over the last 60 years, I considered the literature regarding retention and attrition of teachers in general and its connection with HoMs. I offered a theoretical background to the study based on Foucault's work on power and resistance within a neoliberal governmentality and extended this to consideration of performativity and responsabilisation in education. Chapter Three outlined my research methodology and the methods employed to collect relevant data before discussing my approach to analysis. In Chapter Four I addressed the first two research questions by analysing HoMs' perceptions of their role in the context of external and internal expectations, and the reported experiences of current and former HoMs.

In this chapter I now go on to address the third research question: What affects HoMs' decisions to remain in or leave their post? The chapter is split into two sections. First, I interpret the findings of the analysis chapter in order to reflect on the way in which the use of the Foucauldian lens has helped develop an understanding of the construction of the role of the HoM, the experiences of HoMs and the way in which these experiences may affect their career decisions. Second, I comment on two additional issues that are likely to affect retention: the HoM's own career plans and attitude to their role, and the likely effectiveness of retention strategies already employed by some participants' Head Teachers. I then go on to conclude the chapter.

5.2 Issues exposed through the Foucauldian lens

In this section I draw together three interconnected themes that help to clarify the reasons that a HoM may choose to remain in post or leave their position. I begin by considering the way in which an understanding of the Foucauldian concept of neoliberal governmentality helped to shed light on the constitution of the role of the HoM, and the effect that has on the experiences of the HoMs in the study. I then discuss the issue of self-responsibilisation within a hierarchy, and finally I consider the challenges with resistance that may lead to someone choosing to leave the role. Only the Group 3 participants (Callum, Ricky and Sally) had left the role of HoM at the time of the study, and they found it challenging to explain their specific reasons for doing so. I therefore combine their experiences with those, mostly in Group 2, who were at the time of the study considering their next career moves. This goes some way to enabling me to interpret the ways in which the experiences of the participant HoMs affect their decisions to remain in or leave their post.

5.2.1 Performative culture leading to limited freedom to construct the role

Analysis of the construction of the role of the HoM in Chapter 4 brought to light that opportunities for the HoMs in this study to construct their own role were limited and tended to involve choosing how to meet a specified target or aim rather than choosing what the aim should be. A Foucauldian lens was helpful in developing an understanding of the way in which we have arrived at this situation and the part that both national policy and the approach of the Head Teacher play in that. In the literature review, I argued that we are currently in a period of neoliberal governmentality in which HoMs are self-governing individuals focused on maintaining their department's position in the 'market'. Foucault argues that it is necessary to consider how this has happened, stating that, "We should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted" (Foucault, 1980, p. 97). This was possible both by considering policy developments in the literature review and by undertaking data analysis.

The policy developments discussed in the literature review suggest that the subjectification of HoMs has happened through the employment of three main technologies of neoliberal governmentality: performance measures, national policy change and Ofsted inspections. These three tactics of governmentality, which have helped to constitute the subject that is the HoM, can be considered as elements of biopower, which is intended as a “positive and constructive” (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2014, p. 119) way of developing an aspect of society for the common good. In this case, the government’s interpretation of “the common good” is that pupils achieve strong educational outcomes, measured through grades in national examinations. It is perhaps unlikely that a Head Teacher or a HoM will argue explicitly with an approach whose stated aim is to improve educational outcomes for young people, particularly when, as discussed in the Literature Review (Section 2.2.4), poor performance against the measures will lead to an Ofsted inspection and the possible removal of the Head Teacher. Therefore, as the measures have been refined over the last 30 years, Head Teachers and HoMs have not necessarily been in a position to argue or even always felt the need to do so.

Whilst the Government stated in 2010, “We believe that public services will improve most when professionals feel free to do what they believe is right, and are properly accountable for the results” (DfE, 2010, p. 66), data analysed in this study suggests that this combination of freedom with accountability is not possible. Participants were only ‘free’ to do what they thought would address the accountability measures in the most effective way. Whilst I did not interview Head Teachers directly, evidence from the experiences of participants suggests that Head Teachers are in the same position as their HoMs, and this is explicitly stated in the 2016 White Paper:

We believe that the fastest and most sustainable way for schools to improve is for Government to trust this country’s most effective education leaders, giving them freedom and power, and holding them to account for unapologetically high standards for every child, measured rigorously and fairly. (DfE, 2016, p. 9)

Therefore, whilst the Government claims to offer “freedom with accountability” (DfE, 2010, p. 66), fear of the consequence of failing to meet targets is likely to have a significant impact on the approach and behaviour of a Head Teacher.

In practice, then, the amount of freedom participants in this study had to decide how to meet the measures imposed by Government depended on the approach of their Head Teacher. This is an exemplification of the neoliberal governmentality defined in the literature review, where the “field of possible actions” (Lemke, 2002, p. 54) is determined by the performance measures, new curriculum and the Ofsted regime. Contrasting the experiences of Mags and Elizabeth clarifies this point. Mags stated simply that, “well there’s this whole-school agenda which is basically, you need to get these results...so they’re generally questioning you and making sure that you’re doing your bit of the bargain” (Mags, FG4, November 2016). Provided that Mags had a plan in place and could explain that to her Head Teacher, she was free to choose her approach. However, as discussed in the analysis chapter, Elizabeth, alongside 18 hours of teaching per week and monitoring the progress of all pupils and the performance of her team, was expected to produce a range of “fabrications” (Ball, 2003) specified by her Head Teacher in case her mathematics department did not meet the “unapologetically high standards” (DfE, 2016, p. 9) imposed by the Government. Therefore, whilst both Elizabeth and Mags were self-governing subjects aiming to meet performance targets, Mags had the freedom to choose how to do so whilst Elizabeth did not. This is likely to be in part due to the differing circumstances of the two schools. Mags’ school had been labelled ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted for ten years at the time of the study, whilst Elizabeth’s school had been downgraded to ‘Requires Improvement’ in the year prior to the study. The pressure on the Head Teacher of Elizabeth’s school to demonstrate improvements would therefore be significantly greater than that on the Head Teacher of Mags’ school.

These issues of freedom and choice have a significant impact on participant HoMs’ desire to remain in post or to leave. However, it is not necessarily a lack of freedom to construct their role that leads directly to the attrition of HoMs. If, as discussed in the literature review, in taking on the role, a HoM “readily takes up the modes of regulation and measurement expected of them” (Keddie, 2018, p. 124) then they will expect to work within fairly narrow constraints and still be able to enjoy their job. However, there are times when, despite this self-governing, issues arise. In the next section of

the discussion I consider the difficulties that occur when the lack of freedom to construct their role develops into clashes between the approach of the HoM and the Head Teacher.

5.2.2 Conflict due to clash of approaches within a hierarchy

The second issue affecting retention of HoMs, identified through a Foucauldian lens, is that of the conflicts that can arise within a hierarchy. In the literature review I argued that a self-responsibilised person acting in a neoliberal governmentality “assumes personal responsibility for their own development and for maintaining their position within whichever market situation they find themselves” (Section 2.7.2.1, p. 62). It was immediately evident during analysis that all HoMs in the study were employing the “self-techniques necessary for self-government” (Rose, 1999, p. 478) within limited “fields of action” (Lemke, 2002, p. 53). These “fields of action” were defined by the necessity to ensure the mathematics department performed well in external examinations. However, the interpretations of “governing the self” (Foucault, 1993, p. 203) identified in the literature review do not necessarily consider the issues that arise within the hierarchical structure of the school. This became evident during the analysis of HoMs’ experiences in relation to their Head Teachers’ approaches undertaken in Chapter 4. Here I therefore take the discussion further to consider two issues that arise when a Head Teacher’s “conduct of conducts” (Foucault and Gordon, 2007, p. 314) clashes with the desired approach of the HoM: conflicting approaches to dealing with the performative agenda and conflicting approaches to relationships. This goes some way to help clarify the reasons that HoMs may choose to remain in or leave their posts.

5.2.2.1 Conflicts in approach to meet performance targets

As discussed above and in section 4.3.3.1, all HoMs in this study were focused on securing strong outcomes in national examinations and accepted this as their role. However, having assumed this responsibility, most also expected some choice in how to go about securing those outcomes, and some freedom to work with their departmental team as they felt appropriate. Conflict arose when this freedom was limited because the HoMs’ ideas about how to meet performative expectations clashed with those of their Head Teacher. In the analysis chapter, the influence of the Head

Teachers was clarified through the identification of three sub-themes relating to participants' experiences of self-responsibilisation and surveillance: trust, support/interference and recognition/blame. Whilst all of these could be described as consequences of working with a self-responsibilised Head Teacher, the issue of conflict in approach was most evident when a HoM experienced a lack of trust from their Head Teacher, evidenced by their interference in the HoM's work. As discussed in the literature review, "lack of decision-making power" (Borman and Dowling, 2008, p. 398) can be an attrition factor for teachers, and in the case of HoMs this may be even more significant if they are unable to self-govern in the way they feel is necessary to fulfil their role.

The issue of a clash of approaches was not evident for all participants, and Group 1 (more experienced) did not appear to experience significant conflict in their roles. This may be because they were more self-assured, having spent longer in the profession, or it may be that they were working in schools where the Head Teachers chose or felt able to trust them. I have already contrasted the experiences of Mags and Elizabeth, arguing that Mags (Group 1) was able to self-govern in acting on the tactics of neoliberal governmentality, whilst Elizabeth (Group 2) experienced significant interference from her Head Teacher. I now expand on this issue. In many cases, the HoMs viewed developing pedagogy (Mags, Callum, Sally, William and Elizabeth in particular) and building strong relationships (Mags, Rory, Felix, William and Elizabeth in particular) as a key element of their role. This may in part have been an indirect way of improving the performance of their team. However, most participants' Head Teachers adopted a more direct approach than the HoM to ensure targets were met. They employed disciplinary power through surveillance (Foucault, 1977) focusing on the use of data to measure the performance of each pupil and each teacher. This meant that they would then be able to deal with any identified underperformance. For Callum, this clash was a contributing factor in him leaving his role:

I realised that I was getting to the point where what I wanted to do in terms of being creative and trying things wasn't matching what the powers that be wanted me to do in terms of pure numbers and results, even though the results were fantastic. (Callum, 1-1 interview, August 2016)

Both Callum and his Head Teacher were self-governing subjects, and both were aiming at the same outcome. However, they disagreed about how to get there, and the Head Teacher's self-governing overlapped with Callum's, meaning that a conflict was inevitable. This issue was also experienced by Sally, whose Head Teacher's focus on data "took me away from the teaching and from leading my department" (Sally, 1-1 interview, August 2016), and as a result she did not wish to remain in post.

5.2.2.2 Conflicts in approach to relationships

In my discussion of teacher retention in the literature review, I argued that "a raft of positive interpersonal relationships" (Rhodes et al., 2004) is a factor in encouraging teachers to remain in post. I went on to identify the issue of damage to relationships as a potential consequence of a performative culture. However, it became evident through analysis that this damage to relationships was also a likely element of self-responsibilisation and that it was causing some participants to question whether the HoM role was for them. This was particularly evident when a Head Teacher's approach to relationships contrasted significantly with the HoM's desired approach.

McLeod (2017) argues that, "Increasing concerns with testing and measurement of effective schools...are part of the context in which consideration of care and relational ethics appear to have dropped off the educational agenda" (p. 48), and this was evident for several participants. Analysis of their experiences suggested that some were working for self-responsibilised Head Teachers who, having assumed responsibility for the school's outcomes, appeared to have begun to view those around them as tools to help them meet their aims rather than as people. This approach often clashed with that of the HoM, who wanted to build strong relationships with their team in order to improve their performance. The recognition/blame theme of the analysis (Section 4.3.2.3) helped to clarify this issue.

In the analysis chapter I discussed an extreme case of the breakdown of relationships, when Ricky's Head Teacher blamed all the staff in the school for poor results and sent them away to decide how

to do better in future. Ricky reported his Head Teacher's sentiment: "She'd done everything she could and why hadn't we? And did we really understand what responsibility we had?" (Ricky, 1-1 interview, August 2016). Here again it was evident that the Head Teacher viewed staff members as tools in her own responsabilisation: they had not functioned effectively and therefore needed dealing with.

More subtle losses of "care and relational ethics" (McLeod, 2017, p. 48) within the Head Teachers' approaches were equally as damaging as the extreme case of Ricky. Felix, for example, felt very uncomfortable about the conversations with his Head Teacher that involved "picking on individual members of staff" when "things aren't moving fast enough in the right direction" (Felix, 1-1 interview, July 2017), whilst for Elizabeth the lack of human consideration was evident through her Head Teacher's expectation that she cope with an excessively high workload. Having been given a huge amount of administrative work to present to the Head Teacher, Elizabeth faced the threat of "failing performance management" (Elizabeth, Focus Group 2, June 2016) if she did not meet the expectations. In all of these cases, it could be argued that the Head Teachers are so intent on meeting performative demands that Ball's (2000) warning that, "the heart of the educational project is gouged out and left empty" (p. 10) has taken place.

However, for the HoMs in the study, relationships were more complicated than simply considering the way in which their Head Teachers interacted with them. For some participants, the loss of "care and relational ethics" (McLeod, 2017, p. 48) extended to the way in which their Head Teacher expected them to deal with their department. Elizabeth wanted to help her team work together, and so she had organised a team night out "as like a team-building thing". However, she was "told by my head that I had to stop being cocktails and shooters⁴⁸" (Elizabeth, 1-1 interview, July 2016). This interaction gives an indication of the Head Teacher's approach and suggests that he feels that this type of activity will detract from performativity in the mathematics department. Similarly,

⁴⁸ This phrase can be interpreted as "stop going out drinking".

Sally's interactions with her Head Teacher, discussed in the analysis chapter, suggested that he treated her as a tool of his self-responsibilisation, tasked with reporting any failings of her team directly back to them so that they could seek to perform more effectively. In practice, this meant very high levels of discomfort for Sally as this reporting of under-performance undermined her approach to developing positive relationships.

The definition of self-responsibilisation I developed in the literature review, in which members of a society are "relentlessly responsible for their own destinies" (McLeod, 2017, p. 45) suggests that responsabilisation can lead to an individualised society, which in turn is likely to mean that any focus on maintaining relationships will be absent. However, I did not find literature that extended this idea to the more complicated, hierarchical, relationship structure in schools, and I therefore needed to extend my understanding of the concept of responsabilisation through analysis of participants' experiences. The evidence discussed here suggests that individualisation has occurred for some Head Teachers, who have become so focused on results that they do not have chance, or choose not to consider the feelings of their staff teams. In contrast, perhaps, many HoMs in the study viewed part of their responsibility as being to care for their teams. Trnka and Trundle (2014) begin to explore this idea, arguing that whilst "neoliberal conceptions of responsibility...foreground the 'autonomous' individual as making his or her own 'choices' about how to act...relations of care...are motivated by one's commitment to the welfare of the other" (p. 142). Perhaps this 'commitment' is felt more intensely by HoMs, working closely with their departments, than by Head Teachers who work at a greater distance.

In both cases of conflict discussed here (conflict in approach to meeting targets and developing relationships) the power relations between the Head Teacher and the HoM mean that some are able to find ways to work in their school environment whilst others find this impossible. I now go on to discuss those power relations and the way in which the resistances the HoMs were able to employ affected their career decisions.

5.2.3 Experiences of resistance

Discussion of the construction of the role of HoM and the conflicts that arise within a neoliberal governmentality gives some idea of the challenges a HoM may face in their role. However, I have argued that neither of these issues necessarily implies that a HoM will leave their position. Taking up the role in the first place, they have already been mathematics teachers and so they are likely to be aware of the expectations that will be placed on them regarding addressing performance measures. Whilst these expectations may prove challenging, they are unlikely to be the sole reason that a HoM leaves their post. Similarly, whilst the clashes described in Section 5.2.2 were challenging to deal with, they tended not to lead directly to someone leaving their post, except in the extreme cases of Sally and Ricky. I now argue that this is because many participants in the study were able to employ resistances in order to make their jobs workable. In this section I discuss the way in which issues arise with the resistances employed by participants, in order to clarify situations in which the likelihood of a HoM leaving their role is high.

During analysis it became evident that an appropriate way to consider the ways in which HoMs influenced their experiences was by extending and further developing an analysis of resistance. Whilst this extension and development has been undertaken by a number of different academics (e.g. Armstrong and Murphy, 2011, Lilja and Vinthagen, 2014), I commented in Section 4.3.3 that I could not find a framework that satisfactorily supported my analysis. Therefore, although I used ideas from others to begin the analysis, it also became necessary to devise my own framework in order to understand the resistances undertaken by participants. In section 4.3.3 I identified the levels of resistance employed by HoMs, from no resistance (or compliance) to explicit resistance, which involved directly refusing to follow instructions and which often led to the HoM leaving their post. In analysing data from Group 2 (less experienced), who were considering their career options and Group 3, who had already left the role, it became evident that a likely reason for a HoM choosing to leave their position was that the resistances they employed did not make their job

workable for them. This could be because the level of resistance required was unsustainable in the longer term or because the resistances did not have the desired effect or were rejected or ignored by those in senior leadership positions. I consider these two problems in turn: firstly, the issue of tensions that arise with indirect and quiet resistance and secondly, where compliance is not felt by the HoM to be an option, but neither negotiation nor indirect or quiet resistance are effective.

5.2.3.1 Tensions in indirect resistance and quiet resistance

In the analysis chapter I defined “indirect resistance” as an approach that acts counter to a Head Teacher’s expected operation of the performative culture. I then identified two indirect resistances undertaken by participants: pedagogical developments and building strong relationships. The fact that participants experienced these as resistances is perhaps surprising, since it might be expected that building strong relationships with colleagues and developing pedagogical approaches might be fundamental and enjoyable parts of the role of a HoM. However, as discussed in the previous sections (5.2.1 and 5.2.2.), in a situation where the role of the HoM is in large part constructed by the discourses of neoliberal governmentality (performance measures, national policy change and Ofsted inspections) and when the Head Teacher has a clear focus on data and monitoring performance, this was not always the case. Here, the HoMs’ interactions with their Head Teachers can be viewed as “sites at which resistance is or should be most intense” (Nealon, 2008, p. 111), which, Nealon argues, should be analysed in order to “get a handle on power” (op cit.). An understanding of the power relations experienced by HoMs then helps to clarify why they may remain in post or not.

As discussed in the previous section, if a HoM had a different idea from their Head Teacher about how to go about improving departmental performance, then in order to put that into practice they employed resistance. This was manageable if the resistances required were minor or if the HoM could find a way to ensure that the resistances had a positive impact on their working lives. For example, despite the challenging personal meetings with his Head Teacher discussed in the analysis,

Felix had managed to develop strong relationships with his department. He commented in Focus Group 2 that, “my biggest priority is my staff, because, regardless of anything else...I actually do believe that staff need to be put at the very, very forefront” (Felix, FG1, June 2016). This focus meant that he had developed strong ties that kept him at the school:

when I did apply for a job earlier in the year, the one thing that was holding me back wasn't necessarily loyalty to the school or to the students, it was a real loyalty to the colleagues actually in the department (Felix, 1-1 interview, July 2017)

The work Felix had put into indirectly resisting his Head Teacher's approach had led to a positive working environment for him, ensuring he remained in post despite being interested in other roles.

On the other hand, as discussed in the analysis, Elizabeth viewed pedagogical developments as her main priority but she needed to fit these into the margins of her already very high workload if she was to meet the expectations of her Head Teacher. This led to her expanding her working week to include attending professional development conferences on Saturdays, for example, which was unlikely to be sustainable in the longer term in addition to the many hours she already worked each week.

I argued in the analysis chapter that 'quiet resistance' involved participants choosing not to follow instructions from their Head Teachers but doing so without announcement. The analysis highlighted that this kind of resistance tended to be in relation to biopower enacted by their Head Teachers through whole-school policy initiatives. Lilja and Vinthagen suggest that,

Resistance against biopower is then resistance that tries to avoid the managing of population policies and institutions by acting differently, in subcultures, and by cultivating a different set of values, practices and institutions (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2014, p. 121)

This was the approach of participants when resisting quietly: by ignoring policy directives from SLT that they felt were not beneficial to their pupils, they were able to take some control over the practices within the mathematics department. However, at times this caused participants unmanageable levels of stress leading them to question whether they should remain in role.

As discussed in the analysis chapter, participants employed 'buffering', or managing the directives and requests from their school's leadership team before deciding what was appropriate to share with their departments and what could be dealt with or ignored by the HoM. This is probably to be expected to some degree for someone in the middle of the school hierarchy, and some participants accepted this and were able to manage the situation. Marcus, for example, had a 'savvy' approach and appeared rather entertained by ignoring some directives from senior leaders that he viewed as 'ticking boxes' (FG5, November 2016). This quiet resistance meant that he could comfortably continue in his role.

In the cases where HoMs left or were considering leaving their posts due to tensions in quiet resistance, this tended to be because expectations from their Head Teachers were so unrealistic or viewed as inappropriate by the HoM that buffering became a negative but unavoidable and time-consuming element of the HoMs' work. As discussed in the literature review, HoMs take a challenging position between being part of a departmental team and being expected to implement directives from leadership (Busher et al., 2007), but for some participants this became an impossible position. When more than one participant (Elizabeth and Edward) used the word "shield" to describe their role in this position rather than, say, "filter", it became clear that their role went beyond simple mediation, and they felt they were taking on excessive additional pressure in order to protect their teams.

Participants appeared to find both indirect resistance and quiet resistance challenging for one of two reasons. For some, it was because the fundamental and most enjoyable aspects of their role were marginalised by their Head Teachers in favour of a focus on surveillance through the use of data to meet externally imposed measures. For others, their own beliefs about what was important were undermined by their Head Teachers' approaches. It could be argued here that the self-responsibilised Head Teachers have missed an opportunity to work together with their HoMs to

come to an agreement about suitable approaches to meet the performative demands on both of them.

5.2.3.2 Leaving the role as a positive act of resistance

In the previous situation, that of tension in indirect or quiet resistance, some participants found that the resistances they employed had a negative impact on their working lives, meaning that they experienced high levels of tension and stress. Whilst they remained in post at the time of the study, this tension and stress was causing them to consider their options. In some cases, however, the tension went a stage further and participants felt that the demands made on them by their Head Teachers were unreasonable or inappropriate. In these cases (those of Sally, Ricky and Callum), the HoMs chose to leave their roles. Foucault argues that resistance can be “spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent...quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial” (Foucault, 1990, p. 94). Of all the resistances undertaken by participants, it is probably only this resistance that can be described as ‘violent’ or even ‘sacrificial’, since it could have a negative impact on the person’s career.

As discussed in the Analysis chapter, all three Group 3 participants (Sally, Ricky and Callum) had experienced a situation in which they were unable to employ resistance that would make their jobs workable. They disagreed strongly with the approach of their Head Teachers and would therefore not consider compliance. Negotiation, indirect resistance and quiet resistance had either not been employed or not had a positive enough impact on their experiences, and these three HoMs therefore found that the only possible resistance left to them was to leave their posts. In all three of these cases, it can be argued that the Head Teachers’ leadership has been “narrowed to a focus on and responsibility for learning outcomes and measures of school performance” (Tseng, 2015, p.484) and since Callum, Sally and Ricky all wanted more from their roles the only way to resist was to leave.

Smith and Ulvik (2017) argue that people do not necessarily leave teaching because it is too stressful or demanding. In the case of the four people they interviewed,

The teaching profession did not meet their expectations, not because it was too demanding or too difficult, but because it did not have space for new ideas, innovations, development and autonomy (p. 929)

These appear to be the reasons that Callum, Sally and Ricky left their roles as HoMs: not because they were not resilient enough to cope with the situations in their schools but because the way things were done did not match their views about how they should be done. Therefore the explicit resistance of leaving the role can be viewed as a positive decision, and one that has the potential to encourage a Head Teacher to consider their approach before trying to appoint a replacement.

5.2.4 Concluding comments

Reflecting on the analysis has highlighted the interconnected nature of the Foucauldian issues that may affect a HoM's decision to remain in post or to leave. For all participants, the role of the HoM is narrowly constructed through the tactics of neoliberal governmentality. However, the HoMs who have left or are considering leaving the role have experienced a limited choice about how to go about addressing performance measures or little or no opportunity to resist and make their role workable. In the cases where the HoM is happy in their role, it appears that the Head Teacher is aware of the limitations imposed by the tactics of neoliberal governmentality and allows the HoM the freedom to act as they wish within the externally imposed constraints. In these cases, the main resistance employed is negotiation, which appears to be experienced positively by the HoM.

Whilst I have considered issues identified through the Foucauldian lens, the discussion of factors that affect HoMs' career decisions is not yet complete. The HoMs in this study were all individuals with very different needs, desires and approaches to their work. It is therefore necessary to go beyond the Foucauldian lens to consider other elements that are likely to have an impact on their decision making. I now go on to discuss two of these that emerged during data analysis.

5.3 Beyond Foucault

The ideas discussed using a Foucauldian lens helped to understand the experiences of the HoMs in the study and therefore to consider some of the reasons they may remain in post or choose to leave. However, two elements emerged during the study that also had an impact on those decisions. Firstly, participants' attitude to the role and reasons for taking it on had an impact on the likelihood of them staying. Secondly, their Head Teachers had, in some cases, tried some explicit retention strategies that had worked in the short term. I discuss each of these in turn.

5.3.1 Career plans and attitude to the role

One of the biggest contrasts between Group 1 (experienced) and Group 2 (less experienced) participants was evident in their discussions about their careers. Whilst this is not something I considered in the analysis chapter, it offers an important contribution to the discussion of reasons HoMs stay or leave, and may warrant further investigation beyond this study. Two elements are important here: firstly, the amount of choice involved in taking on the role of HoM in the first place and secondly the attitude of the HoM towards the role. Whilst these elements did not emerge explicitly in the literature review, they could be considered as elements of the "teacher characteristics" (p. 308) categorised by Mancuso et al. (2010).

Group 1, as well as Marcus from Group 2, had all spent a significant amount of time in mathematics teaching posts prior to choosing their roles as HoMs and had then consciously chosen a HoM role that particularly suited them. Mags, for example, chose to be a HoM in a school that was conveniently located for her and her family and that she knew well having taught there for a number of years. Similarly, the HoM role was one Rory had coveted for a number of years, and he stated that "I took on the role [in this school] because it was the job that I said I'd always apply for if it ever came up" (Rory, audio diary, 10 June 2016). However, it was evident that the Group 2 participants had not made such clear choices as this. Edward, Felix and William (all Group 2), for example, had all been rapidly promoted within the school in which they started their teaching careers, suggesting

that they may have made fewer conscious decisions about their progression to the role of HoM.

This lack of independent career decision making perhaps makes them more likely to choose to move on, which was evident in their persistent discussion about what they might do next.

Similarly, the HoMs' own career plans and attitudes to the role of HoM had a significant impact on their decisions about leaving or remaining in role, and this was particularly the case with Group 2. In these cases, it may be that a Head Teacher can have little impact on the retention of the HoM. Felix, for example, felt that 3-5 years was the optimum length of time to remain as a HoM, arguing that

I think you get to a point then after that time that any change, or certainly I feel that that's the case, any change that I wanted is now done, not that I've run out of ideas, but everything that I've wanted to do, I've done now (1-1 interview, July 2017)

It is likely that Felix, as a successful HoM, measured through strong performance against externally-imposed measures, felt that 3-5 years is long enough to 'prove' that success. He stated that the HoM role is "a really good platform role for aspiring school leaders to go through, because you really do get put under the microscope at every level" (1-1 interview, July 2017). In his case, whatever approach the Head Teacher takes to try to retain him is likely to have a limited impact when he has no intention of remaining in the HoM role for more than a few years.

In other cases, the issue was with the type of school the participant worked in. Edward, for example, commented that

I've not had the chance to do any actual A level⁴⁹ teaching [because his school only caters for pupils aged 11-16], and that's something I've been sad about not being able to do. So I, I don't think I'm looking – I don't think I'm going to be staying here a huge amount of time longer (1-1 interview, July 2016)

Again, the Head Teacher will find it challenging to retain the HoM if they are unable to offer the challenges they require.

⁴⁹ The main post-16 qualification required for entry into university in England and Wales.

Whilst a discussion of “personal factors” (Towers and Maguire, 2017, p. 928) and “teacher characteristics” (Mancuso et al.) were evident, career plans are not a factor that is explicitly discussed in the literature regarding teacher retention. Schaefer et al. (2012) do mention the need to take “teachers’ whole lives in all their complexities into account” (p. 116) when focusing on retention, but this is not necessarily the same as considering someone’s intentions when they take on a role in school. It may be that a Head Teacher needs to take time to understand the career plans of their HoM and to support them in developing those plans.

5.3.2 Head Teacher strategy of rapid promotion

Discussion with the Group 2 (less experienced) participants drew out the fact that some of their Head Teachers had been employing explicit strategies to persuade them to remain in role, and that these strategies had worked in the short term. The main strategy was that of rapid promotion. Here I discuss this strategy and the reasons that it may only work as a short-term measure.

In all but one case, the Group 2 (less experienced) HoMs, who tended to be promoted within the first school they taught in, were working in schools in challenging circumstances where recruitment of good mathematics teachers is not easy. This means that if someone shows potential as a mathematics teacher through success against performance measures the Head Teacher is likely to want to retain them, and the evidence in this study suggests that a common way to do so is through rapid promotion. It was evident that William, Edward and Felix were promoted rapidly after their Head Teachers had recognised their potential to perform well. These three HoMs appeared to gain confidence from the awareness that their school needed them. Early in his career, for example, Edward applied for a small promotion within his department. Whilst he did not get the post,

I apparently did a really, really good interview, which meant that they suddenly realised that they needed to find something for me otherwise they would lose me which was quite nice – it was really flattering to be in that position (Edward, 1-1 interview, July 2016)

Whilst Edward’s school had a fairly measured approach to his development, he also commented that, “I think, from conversations that I’ve had in this school, if I stay around here for too long I will

be senior leadership!” (1-1 interview, July 2016), suggesting that this tactic of promotion to aid retention was likely to continue. William and Felix were in similar situations to Edward. William had been promoted to a position on his school’s SLT after less than four years of teaching, whilst Felix’s Head Teacher’s strategy was to give him more and more responsibility in order to be able to offer him a higher salary and thus entice him to stay. Felix was therefore a Head of Year (HoY)⁵⁰ as well as HoM, adding significantly to his responsibility within school.

There were issues with the ‘rapid promotion’ approach to retention. For example, although Felix was confident in his own ability to perform, he found the amount of work given to him challenging to manage. The sheer quantity of work alongside a lack of direction from the SLT made him question whether promotion to HoY in addition to HoM was the right move for him, and whether all of the extra responsibilities represented a career development or simply more work:

...before Christmas in particular it was a very, very difficult time, and I didn’t feel very supported in school having to stretch myself over all the different responsibilities...erm...and doing a good job in terms of supporting the department as well, and not particularly seeing any career development within school, so enjoying the HoM job, but actually wanting some further career development...(Felix, 1-1 interview, July 2017)

In a similar way, William was aware that he was marketable:

I could, very easily, go and get an Assistant Head Teacher job at a struggling school, because that’s the state of play in education at the moment. That doesn’t mean that’s right for that school to employ me or that the right thing for me to do so I have no idea what I want to do. (William, 1-1 interview, April 2017)

William’s performance against external measures had been strong up to this point, and so schools struggling to recruit and wanting to improve their performativity would be likely to consider him despite his lack of significant experience. However, it is clear from William’s comment that understanding the situation does not help him to plan his career.

⁵⁰ This is a role in which the teacher is responsible for the wellbeing and progress of a particular year group. It involves in part identifying issues and dealing with them and a large part of the job is taken up with responding to problems as they arise.

Whilst the strategy of retention through promotion appeared to be working in the short term, it could be considered a flawed approach: as Felix commented, “I just think there’s an amount of experience, age and just all-round time in education that you need to get to before you can really do a very, very good job at a senior level” (1-1 interview, July 2017).

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have combined the three key Foucauldian concepts of neoliberal governmentality, self-responsibilisation and resistance to discuss the experiences of those undertaking the role of HoM in order to identify reasons they may remain in or leave the role. The use of the Foucauldian frame helped to clarify the situation in which the HoMs are working, and in particular an understanding of neoliberal governmentality explained the narrow construction of their role. However, it was necessary to take the concepts of self-responsibilisation and resistance beyond their definition in the literature review in order to apply them to the situation of HoMs. I applied the concept of self-responsibilisation to a hierarchical situation in order to understand its impact on HoMs, and I refined the analysis of resistance to help clarify the types of resistance that may lead to positive experiences for HoMs.

Towards the end of the chapter I discussed two context-specific issues that I had not analysed in the previous chapter. These offer a potential insight into individual experiences of the role of HoM and warrant further investigation.

In the next chapter I now go on to conclude the thesis, offering a summary of the study, recommendations for policy and practice and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this research project is to understand the role and experiences of HoMs in order to be able to offer suggestions for both policy and practice to improve retention of those in this key position in school.

In the introductory chapter I outlined the reasons for the choice of the study and identified the three research questions needed to focus the study:

1. How do HoMs perceive their role?
2. What experiences of fulfilling their role do HoMs report?
3. What affects HoMs' decisions to remain in or leave their post?

I then undertook a literature review in order to position the study in the context of other work regarding HoMs and teacher retention. I offered a policy background to the role before considering other research into the role of the HoM. I then shared the theoretical background on which the study is based, considering Foucauldian concepts of power, neoliberal governmentality and resistance before extending those concepts to performativity, self-responsibilisation and their application to school leadership. Following the literature review I outlined my methodology and the methods used to obtain the data before considering ways to ensure that the data analysis was reliable and rigorous. In Chapter 4 I presented a thematic analysis of the broad range of data collected through focus groups, 1-1 interviews and audio diaries. The focus here was on addressing the first two research questions. This led into the discussion chapter, in which I addressed the third research question in two ways. Firstly I reflected on the ways in which the use of Foucauldian concepts helped to identify issues that may lead to HoMs leaving their roles, and secondly I considered other elements of the experiences of HoM that may also have had an impact.

In this final chapter I begin by sharing the key findings of the study. I then reflect on the use of the theoretical framework before considering the contribution of the study to the field and its potential implications for policy and practice. I finish by suggesting the limitations of the study before offering suggestions for further research related to this project.

6.2 Key findings

The findings of this study, discussed in chapters four and five, are based on data collected through an online survey with 70 responses, 4 focus groups, 4 sets of audio diary entries and 9 one-to-one interviews. The data was collected between April 2016 and July 2017. I briefly explain the findings before reflecting on the research process.

6.2.1 Research question 1: How do HoMs perceive their role?

Put simply, the HoMs in the study perceived their role as being to ensure pupils in their school achieved strong outcomes in external examinations. The HoM's role is constructed through the need to respond to three tactics of neoliberal governmentality: externally defined performance measures, changes to national policy and the Ofsted inspection regime. To a large extent, how HoMs respond and their freedom to shape their role depends on their Head Teacher's interpretation of the performativity agenda. The role has become almost unrecognisable since its inception when the focus was on ensuring the smooth running of the department by developing timetables, ordering stock and so on, although these practical elements still form part of the role. Through data analysis it became clear that the strength of the current external pressures on both HoMs and their Head Teachers, and the time it takes to act and be seen to act on them means that there is very little room for many HoMs to define their role or set their own priorities.

6.2.2 Research Question 2: What experiences of fulfilling their role do HoMs report?

HoMs reported hugely varied experiences that were affected by a number of factors, most significantly the leadership approach of their Head Teacher. In most cases in this study the HoMs' experiences involve a blend of responsabilisation and surveillance through trust (or lack of it), support or interference and recognition or blame. These elements of their experiences are focused on pupil outcomes and are significantly affected by a school's position in the cycle of Ofsted inspections. A HoM tends to be left by their Head Teacher to self-govern if mathematics outcomes have been strong over time or if there is no threat of an Ofsted inspection, for example. On the other hand, if pupil performance in mathematics is disappointing or if the Head Teacher is concerned about a potential Ofsted inspection, the HoM may experience interference from their Head Teacher through surveillance focused on data relating to pupil performance.

The experiences of the HoMs in the study do not only vary due to the leadership approach of their Head Teachers; contextual factors are also important. The two that affected participants most significantly were their own experience prior to taking on the role of HoM and the stability of the staffing in their department. Participants experienced additional stress if their department was not fully staffed, for example, or if their lack of teaching experience prior to taking on the role meant that they found it challenging to manage their time.

Whilst the leadership approach of the Head Teacher significantly affects the experiences of HoMs, they are also able to affect their own experiences through a range of approaches to resistance. The HoMs in the study employed three types of resistance: quiet resistance that involved ignoring instructions from other leaders in school; indirect resistance through undertaking activities that, whilst they improved the performance of their team, could be viewed as being in opposition to the expected operation of the performative culture and negotiation by agreeing with their Head Teacher adaptations to school policy that were appropriate for the mathematics department. All of these resistances can make the role of HoM workable regardless of the leadership approach of the Head

Teacher. However, if these become too challenging or do not have a positive effect on the HoM they are likely to explicitly resist by resigning from their position.

6.2.3 Research Question 3: What affects HoMs' decisions to remain in or leave their post?

This study aims to focus on the retention of HoMs. However, through conversation with 11 people currently in this role and 3 who have left, it became evident that outlining a straightforward list of retention factors would be challenging. It may be that involving a larger sample would have increased the possibility of doing so, or that may have given greater weight to the argument that retention is complex and connected not only to experiences of the role but also to personal circumstances. However, within this study, HoMs' decisions about remaining in their post or leaving were strongly affected by five main areas. They were likely to remain in post if:

- they made a conscious choice to take on the role in the first place
- they had the freedom to construct some elements of their role without interference
- their approach to the "conduct of conduct" (Foucault and Gordon, 2007, p. 314) did not clash with that of their Head Teacher
- their Head Teacher valued working relationships that were not entirely focused on surveillance
- they were able to employ resistance in the form of negotiation in their daily work.

However, even if a HoM is in a situation where all these elements are in place, they may still choose to leave the role for a range of personal reasons including the need to experience a broader range of schools, or the desire for experience of a completely different role.

Evidence in the study suggests that some Head Teachers have employed strategies specifically focused on retaining their HoM, mostly focused on promotion in order to offer a higher salary, and these have been successful in the short term. However their long-term benefit remains in question.

6.3 Reflection on the challenges of engaging with theory

Having shared an overview of my findings, I now go on to reflect on the process of undertaking this research, focusing on one key area: the challenges of making effective use of a theoretical framework. For me, this was the biggest challenge of the study, and one that has helped to move my thinking on the most.

When I joined the EdD programme in 2013, I attended a talk about Foucault and school leadership. I imagined that, as I had such a keen interest in leadership, I would find this fascinating and would learn a great deal. Unfortunately I left the talk completely baffled and spent the rest of the first study weekend feeling rather inadequate. I had no prior knowledge of Foucault's ideas, and my frustration at not understanding the talk meant that part of me wanted to reject what Foucault had to say completely and part of me wanted to rise to the challenge of trying to understand those ideas.

From the start of this study, it was evident that the ideas presented in that initial talk were highly relevant to HoMs. Participants were engaged in complex and challenging power relations that had a significant impact on their work. Therefore I dealt with my initial misgivings about the complexity of Foucauldian studies in order to do my own study justice. However, it took time to develop the confidence to do so: a number of researchers argue that others do not employ Foucault's ideas effectively (see, for example, Allen and Goddard, 2014). In order to deal with this potential issue, I combined direct reading of Foucault's work with a consideration of a range of interpretations of his ideas across a mixture of disciplines. This was a time-consuming process, and my understanding and application of Foucault's ideas continued developing right to the end of the study, and will, I hope, go on doing so beyond this study.

A criticism aimed at some Foucauldian studies is that they identify and describe issues or problems but do not necessarily offer a way forward. Gillies (2013), for example, comments that some argue that, "Foucauldian studies seem to see discipline and surveillance everywhere and, once that has been highlighted, have little else to offer" (p. 112). This was a concern of mine as I conducted my

analysis. It was, as Gillies comments, straightforward to identify disciplinary power and surveillance and criticise the situation in which HoMs are working, but harder to use Foucauldian ideas to find ways to deal with this. Allen and Goddard (2014) suggest that those using Foucault's ideas do so far too gently, and that we should be finding ways to fight rather than simply to explain and discuss challenging situations. I would therefore argue that it is possible to use a Foucauldian lens to help understand the pressures and challenges faced by HoMs whilst then offering pragmatic ways to improve the retention of HoMs. I have therefore taken Gillies' argument that use of a Foucauldian analysis "opens up the discourse for new solutions and responses to be constructed" (Gillies, 2013, p. 24) and in this chapter I suggest some of those solutions and responses. This is therefore not strictly a Foucauldian study but one that employs analytic techniques using a Foucauldian lens.

6.4 Contribution to the field

Petre and Rugg (2010) explain that, in doctoral research, "Making a 'significant contribution' means 'adding to knowledge' or 'contributing to the discourse' (p. 14). In this section, then, I outline how this study has made a contribution in both of these ways. I divide my contribution into two areas: firstly its contribution to the body of work using Foucauldian concepts to analyse specific contexts, and secondly the contribution my study makes to research into teacher retention and the role of the HoM.

6.4.1 Theoretical contribution

Whilst I have not developed a new theory through this study, I would argue that I have, in two ways, undertaken a "re-contextualisation of an existing theory" (Petre and Rugg, 2010, p. 14). Whilst both Niesche (2011) and Gillies (2013) have considered in some depth the application of Foucauldian concepts to school leadership, I have not found any studies that place these ideas in the context of middle leaders in school, or specifically HoMs. Doing so helped me to re-contextualise the concepts in two ways. Firstly, I considered the concept of neoliberal governmentality within a school hierarchy, uncovering some of the issues that arise when contrasting approaches to the "conduct of

conduct” (Foucault and Gordon, 2007, p. 314) cause conflict. Secondly, I have taken a new approach to the analysis of resistance, having not found a framework that worked for the data I collected. Whilst others (Lilya and Vinthagen, 2014, for example) have applied an analysis to a consideration of the type of power being resisted, as recommended by Foucault (Foucault and Gordon, 2007, p. 329), my approach in identifying levels of resistance is not something I have seen developed in other studies. Breaking down the types of resistance into these different levels helped me develop an understanding of the ways in which resistance affects the experiences of HoMs. This then enabled me to specify which elements of resistance are the most problematic for those HoMs and which might be most effective in ensuring a positive working environment.

6.4.2 Contribution to the body of knowledge

In the literature review, I considered three separate bodies of research, focusing firstly on teacher retention in general, secondly on the role of the HoM and finally on research into the perspectives of HoMs and HoDs. Research into teacher retention found that factors relating to the individual or the setting in which they worked had a significant impact on retention (e.g. Mancuso et al., 2010, Smith and Ulvik, 2017, Towers and Maguire, 2017). However, much of the research into teacher retention focused on those in the early stages of a teacher’s career, and I did not find any studies that considered retention of those in middle leadership positions. Two key issues in the literature identified as leading to teacher attrition were excessive workload and poor pupil behaviour (Rhodes et al., 2004, Barmby, 2006). However, these findings were not borne out in my study. None of the participants referred to pupil behaviour as an issue in their work, although workload was mentioned indirectly a number of times. I hinted in section 2.3 that there may be “more to workload than simply the quantity of work expected” and this was evident in particular in Elizabeth’s experiences. She was very happy to work extremely hard but found it difficult to fit in meeting the expectations of her Head Teacher that she did not necessarily feel would have a positive impact on her team or her pupils. Perhaps here, it was not the quantity of work but the focus of that work that was the issue.

This study suggests that general research into teacher retention does not necessarily apply to those who have taken on leadership roles, and there is more work to be done focusing on exactly what is meant by 'teacher workload'.

Research into the role of the HoM was limited and focused on the complex mix of responsibilities a HoM is likely to have (e.g. Harris et al., 1995, Weller, 2001, Aubrey-Hopkins and James, 2002) and the broad range of influences on the construction of the role (e.g. Turner and Bolam, 1998, Fitzgerald and Gunter, 2006). These influences were confirmed in my study, although it became clear that the focus had shifted over time to a point where performativity is at the heart of the role.

In considering research into the perspectives of HoMs, it was evident that this was an under-researched area, and my search needed to be broadened to consider HoDs in general. Through this search I was able to identify some likely influences on a HoM's desire to stay in the role, including teamwork, training, coaching or mentoring and being involved in decision making (e.g. Rhodes and Brundrett, 2008, Thorpe and Bennett-Powell, 2014). However, none of the studies I considered here had retention as their main focus.

This study has drawn together these three separate areas of research, making a significant contribution to the body of knowledge regarding teacher retention and also that focusing on the role and experiences of HoMs.

6.5 Recommendations for policy and practice

Having considered the contribution this study makes to theory and the body of knowledge I now go on to make some recommendations for both policy and practice, based on my findings. As discussed in section 6.3, some would argue that it is not possible or appropriate when undertaking a Foucauldian study to make recommendations, and that the purpose is simply to question that which is assumed. However, this is not strictly a Foucauldian study: rather it makes use of some Foucauldian concepts to help understand a specific situation. Doing so "makes the status quo

untenable and forces people to consider alternative approaches” (Gillies, 2013, p. 23) and here I offer suggestions about those possible alternatives. I do so for two groups: first for policy makers at national level and second for Head Teachers.

6.5.1 Recommendations for Policy

In this study I have expressed a desire to offer realistic suggestions for policy and practice, and I now offer one specific starting point for current policy makers, and one more aspirational recommendation for potential future policy makers. Evidence discussed in this study suggests that the most negative impact on Head Teachers, that is then passed on to HoMs, is the dire consequences of failure to meet government-dictated performance targets. In the current system, if a school is deemed to be ‘inadequate’ and requiring ‘special measures’ it will be forcibly academised and the Head Teacher is likely to lose their job. This means that a Head Teacher’s focus is likely to be on finding ways to avoid failure rather than considering the best approach to leading their school.

Evidence for this desire to avoid failure was identified throughout the Analysis chapter.

It is useful here to share the sentiment of William, who experienced a failed Ofsted inspection during the study:

...this hammering that the school’s just got from Ofsted, and both deputy heads it’s their first deputy headship, the Head Teacher, it’s his first headship. I know they’ve been the SLT of this school for about 4-5 years now, but they’ve never done it before, so what could happen, and we don’t know yet is, once we get sponsored [by an Academy⁵¹] they could all get fired straight away, and that could really possibly end some of their careers. If we just ignore the personal impact of that which is obviously massive, the fact that there’s no real mechanism...from the Government, where there should be a Head Teacher coach that comes in and helps and just develops the team you’ve got... (William, 1-1 interview, April 2017)

The main recommendation I therefore make for policy makers is that they adopt a more supportive approach when a school is deemed to be ‘Inadequate’. This could be, for example, by offering a six-

⁵¹ An Academy is a school that receives funding directly from the Government rather than through the Local Authority. Academies have more freedom than state-maintained schools and they do not charge pupils to attend.

month support package to enable those currently working in the school to make improvements. Whilst the development of policy through the last five years does not suggest that there is any appetite for a complete overhaul of the inspection regime, I would argue that any opposition party should consider starting from scratch when deciding policy for school improvement, considering two key elements. Firstly, there is the question of whether making judgements on the performance of a school and particularly its Head Teacher is a productive way to ensure school improvement or whether it mostly leads to game playing and anxiety. Secondly there should be a reconsideration of the meaning of 'strong outcomes' for a young person at the age of 16. At present this is almost entirely focused on examination performance, but it could be significantly broadened.

6.5.2 Recommendations for practice

In the previous section I argued that the Government should focus on making the consequences of failing an Ofsted inspection more productive and helpful for schools, and in particular for Head Teachers. This recommendation leads into ideas that can be implemented at a school level by Head Teachers in order to offer HoMs a healthier working environment. As discussed in Chapter 4, many HoMs in the study were finding "ways of working in the spaces of freedom of the accountability logic" (Niesche, 2013, p. 155) and this is something that some Head Teachers may be able to help with. Indeed, the evidence in this study suggests that there are Head Teachers who are already having a positive impact on the experiences of their HoMs. These recommendations would enable others to begin to make changes in their practice.

Recommendation 1: Head Teachers should critique Government policy

As discussed in the literature review, the performative regime means that Head Teachers "are positioned as middle managers necessary to ensuring that national reforms are delivered on site" (Gunter and Rayner, 2007, p. 54). This may mean that it is challenging for a Head Teacher to make independent choices about how to run their school, which in turn may prevent the HoM making independent decisions about the best way to lead their department. However, it is possible for a

Head Teacher to be aware of their position within the performative regime, and this awareness can be used to avoid becoming caught up in searching for ways to meet the latest performance targets without question. As argued in the Analysis and Discussion chapters, the HoM acts as a 'buffer' between their department and the leadership of the Head Teacher and, for some, the unreasonable expectations of the Head Teacher make this an impossible task for the HoM. In these cases, the Head Teacher needs to take that same 'buffering' role with Government policy. A Head Teacher needs to be willing to critique Government policy and consider where there are opportunities for them to adapt that policy to suit their context if necessary.

Recommendation 2: Head Teachers may need to reconsider their relationship with the HoM

As discussed in Chapter 5, it is easy, and perhaps understandable, for a Head Teacher to view their HoM as a tool in their self-responsibilisation, to be used to secure strong pupil performances in mathematics. A Head Teacher is under pressure to ensure that their school maintains a strong position in the 'market', and, as discussed, the consequences of failure to do so are likely to be the loss of their job. However, if a Head Teacher treats the HoM as a tool in their self-responsibilisation, consciously or subconsciously, then they form a limited understanding of the strengths and ideas that the HoM brings to their role and the support they may need. This was evident in the analysis chapter. It therefore makes sense for a Head Teacher to consider their relationship with their HoM. Rather than checking on their performance and stepping in if it dips, the Head Teacher could be more prepared to form a strong, trusting relationship with the HoM offering support and development where required.

6.6 Limitations of the study

This study has made significant progress towards understanding the role of the HoM and the experiences of those in the role, which has led to the possibility of identifying ways in which to retain HoMs. However, there are some elements that could have been done differently and others that were not possible within a study of this scale. I consider five of these here.

First, and most obviously, this study took place with a limited number of participants in a specific area of the country. I cannot say with any certainty that, had I undertaken the study in the South West of England, for example, HoMs' experiences would mirror those of the participants in the study. Therefore I need to take care not to over-generalise my findings. However, as Flyvbjerg (2006) argues, and as I discussed in Chapter 3, it is only through studying a number of specific cases that we can make sense of theory and this study therefore contributes to a greater understanding of the role and experiences of HoMs by focusing on specific people in one locality.

Second, I spoke solely to HoMs and not those who were influencing their role in some way. I did not include Head Teachers in the project, for example, or other members of the mathematics departments. Whilst this meant it was possible to understand the experiences of the HoMs without also considering the intentions of those influencing them, it meant that at times I needed to interpret those intentions from the HoMs' comments. It might have been beneficial, for example, to talk to Head Teachers about the approaches they were already taking to aid retention that the HoMs may not have been aware of.

Third, once the research questions had been set and participants identified I felt that the most appropriate grouping was into the amount of teaching experience participants had prior to taking on the role. During discussions and analysis it became evident that the more experienced HoMs (Group 1) seemed to be working in schools with a history of success against national performance measures whilst those with less experience (Group 2) were often in the schools in more challenging circumstances or with less established patterns of success. As the connection between school context and retention was not the focus of my study, I did not have suitable data to pursue this line of inquiry. However I suspect that it was significant and this is a focus I would take if I started this study again.

A fourth limitation relates to the Group 3 participants. All three in this group had left the role of HoM because of issues with the role or their negative experiences of it in a particular school. There

are, however, those who have left the role of HoM because they have been promoted, and I did not consider those people in this study. I did have contact in the initial survey from someone who had moved into a promoted post, and I may have been able to offer a more balanced view had I considered her experiences rather than focusing on three quite negative ones. This is something I would consider were I undertaking a larger-scale project.

Finally, whilst I obtained a huge amount of data during the study, I had actually planned for a broader set. Almost all of the data collection involved listening to HoMs' reported experiences, and I did not see the HoMs in action in their daily work. The closest I came to this was through the use of audio diaries, which in some cases were recorded during the working day. Whilst the approach I took did help me to answer my research questions, it limits any claim I may make to have "investigated the entity within its contemporary real-life context" as discussed in Chapter 3. If I was undertaking a larger-scale project my findings might be strengthened if I spent more time in the field with the participants.

6.7 Suggestions for further research

This study has highlighted the fact that the retention of HoMs is an under-researched area that has the potential to offer ideas about teacher retention in general, and about those in middle leadership positions in particular. Here I offer four suggestions for future research that will help to build a fuller picture of this key area.

First, this research has highlighted the challenges that HoMs face in their daily work and the pressures they experience in their middle position in the neoliberal structure. As mentioned in the discussion of the project's limitations, however, it has not involved speaking to anyone other than the HoMs themselves. Therefore future research would benefit from talking to anyone with whom a HoM interacts, in particular Head Teachers and those in the departmental team.

Second, whilst it is possible to speculate that the findings of this study may be applicable to departmental leaders of subjects other than mathematics, it would be helpful to undertake a similar study with, for example, Heads of English, in order to identify where experiences are similar and where they differ.

Third, it emerged during this study that the less experienced HoMs tended to be working in the more challenging schools, but by the time this was evident it was too late to act on this realisation. A useful follow-up study would involve considering whether this is a common phenomenon and if so what can be done about it.

Finally, whilst I have speculated in this study about the likely impact a HoM might have on retention of teachers of mathematics, this has not yet been studied. A useful research project would be to consider the impact that a HoM and others in middle leadership roles can have on teacher retention so that this impact can be used to best effect.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Approval letter



Downloaded: 13/10/2019
Approved: 19/02/2016

Bryony Black
Registration number: 130235897
School of Education
Programme: Doctor of Education: Educational Studies

Dear Bryony

PROJECT TITLE: Who would be a head of mathematics?
APPLICATION: Reference Number 006919

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 19/02/2016 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 006919 (form submission date: 04/01/2016); (expected project end date: 01/08/2017).
- Participant information sheet 1013888 version 3 (04/01/2016).
- Participant consent form 1013887 version 2 (21/12/2015).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

David Hyatt
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure>
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.6710661/file/GRIPPpolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

Appendix 2: Participant Information Document

Project title: An investigation into the role of the Head of Mathematics

Project lead: Bryony Black, The University of Sheffield

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether to take part it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please feel free to ask me about anything that is not clear, or if you would like further information.

What is the project's purpose?

The aim of the project is to understand more clearly the role of the head of mathematics and the perspectives of those who take on the role in secondary schools in northern England. The purpose of this is to identify some of the factors that lead to the successful recruitment and in particular the retention of heads of department in order to offer suggestions about how to deal with the current recruitment and retention issues for this role.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you volunteered via an online survey to take part, and your profile fits one of the key groups I plan to work with: you are either currently a head of mathematics in a secondary state school in England or you have been a head of mathematics but have chosen not to continue in the role.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you choose to take part you will be asked to attend two focus groups: one in June/July 2016 and the other in October/November 2016. These focus groups will be arranged at a venue as local to you as possible, and light refreshments will be offered. They will take place after school and will last up to an hour and a half. Within each focus group there will be up to 6 participants, all of whom will be in a similar position to you in their career.

Once you have taken part in the initial focus group you will have the opportunity to be involved further aspects of the research if you wish. This may involve keeping an audio diary of key events in your work, allowing me to attend one of your departmental meetings, undertaking a one-to-one interview with you or taking part in online communication with other members of the group. Not all participants are expected to take on this opportunity. It will be discussed at the end of the first focus group.

What do I have to do?

The main requirement is that you take an active role in the discussions that take place at the focus groups. You will also be asked to offer basic information about yourself, your current role and your perspectives about that role.

You will have the opportunity to offer additional suggestions about discussion topics for the focus groups prior to each one. This is to ensure that you find the time you put in to attending is valuable for you in your current role.

You will be able to help direct any future participation you may wish to be involved in following the initial focus group.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There is no intention to disadvantage you in any way if you take part in the research project. However, it may lead you to reflect on and question your current role in school, and at times this could be unsettling.

There will be a commitment of time if you choose to take part, which could mean that on the days of the focus groups you have less time for your day-to-day work. It is hoped that the benefits of taking part will compensate for this.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will give you the chance to talk to others in a similar position to you in local schools, and that this will give you chance to share good practice with one another and make suggestions for policy and practice reform which may be disseminated more widely.

The project will also allow you to take the time to reflect on your own role in school.

What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?

If the research stops earlier than expected I will contact you to let you know. This should not have a detrimental impact on you or your work.

What if something goes wrong?

If you feel unhappy about any aspect of the project, you should in the first instance contact the researcher (Bryony Black, b.black@sheffield.ac.uk, 0114 222 8150). I will work hard to resolve the situation. If, however, you feel that further assistance is needed you should contact my supervisor (Chris Winter, c.winter@sheffield.ac.uk, 0114 222 8142). Chris will follow university procedures in dealing with your complaint.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that I collect about you and your school during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Neither you or your school will be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

The focus groups and any subsequent interviews will be audio recorded and transcripts will be made. Pseudonyms will be used at the transcript stage. These transcripts will be used to analyse my findings. Anonymised quotations may be taken from the recordings in order to illustrate points in the final write-up of my research.

Once the research is complete the audio recordings will be destroyed.

If you choose to take part in the creation of an audio diary you will be asked to email your recordings to me. These will then be treated in the same way as the focus group recordings. You will be free to deal with your own copy however you choose to.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of the research will be reported in my thesis to be submitted to The University of Sheffield in part completion of my Doctor of Education (EdD). Parts of the research may be presented at student-led conferences during the course of my studies, at educational research conferences or in educational research publications. I may use aspects of the research in my teaching on the PGDE or the Masters in Applied Professional Studies in Education (MA APSE). Your name, the name of your school, its location and any identifying features will remain confidential.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is organised by Bryony Black with the support of Christine Winter. It is not a funded project.

Who has ethically reviewed the research?

This project has been ethically approved via the School of Education's ethics review procedure. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University

Who can I contact for further information?

Please contact my EdD supervisor, Dr Christine Winter, c.winter@sheffield.ac.uk, 0114 222 8142.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this information. If you are happy to participate in the research you will be asked to sign a consent form. You will then be issued with a copy of this information sheet and the consent form for your own records.

Appendix 3: Initial survey

Have you ever been a head of mathematics in a state school in England? *

- Yes - I am currently a head of mathematics (GO TO QUESTION 3)
- Yes - I used to be but I am no longer a head of mathematics
- No - but I would like to be one day
- No - and I do not plan to be a head of mathematics
- Other...

What is your current role?

Please answer this question if you are NOT currently a head of mathematics in a state school in England

- Mathematics teacher on the main pay spine
- Mathematics teacher with some departmental responsibility
- Mathematics teacher with some pastoral responsibility
- SLE
- Other...

How long have you been teaching? *

(please count the number of years you have completed)

- I am an NQT
- 1-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-14 years
- 15-19 years
- 20-24 years
- 25 years or more

How long have you been in your current role? *

(please count the number of years you have completed)

- This is my first year in post
- 1-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-14 years
- 15-19 years
- 20-24 years
- 25 years or more

What are the (up to 3) best bits about your job? *

Long answer text

What are the (up to 3) biggest challenges you face in your job? *

Long answer text

When "talking shop" in your department, what are the most common topics of conversation? *

Please choose as many as apply, and feel free to add extra topics at the end

- The new GCSE
- Mastery
- Individual pupil issues
- Data management
- Ofsted and QA
- Setting and set changes
- Approaches to teaching a topic/concept
- Resource sharing
- Marking
- Other...

Are you interested in being involved in further research about the role of the head of mathematics?

You do not have to be currently in this role. If you are interested please add your email address, your full name and the name of your current school in the box below.. I will contact you shortly to follow this up.

Long answer text

Appendix 4: Initial email response to participants (early career)

Dear XXX

Thank you very much for completing the survey I sent out and for being willing to take part in my research. Apologies for the delay in getting back to you: I wanted to give as many people as possible plenty of chance to respond.

My aim is to make the research project useful for you as well as me, and so you will have input at every stage and will be able to decide what kind of activities you would like to be involved in. **The only commitment I would ask for from the outset is that you agree to attend two “focus groups” – one in June and a follow-up in early November.**

So – the initial plan is to get together a group of 5 people who have become heads of department pretty early in their careers (in the first five years) to discuss your experiences in the role. We will use some of the topics you mentioned in the survey to kick off the discussion and you will have plenty of chance to share ideas with others in a similar position.

I would like to meet in June, and could do one of Friday 10th, Monday 13th or Friday 17th. I propose that we plan for a meeting of two hours after school on one of those days (4-6pm). Obviously I will provide homemade cake (requests welcome) and some drinks. I am happy to host the meeting at the university but if you think that’s not very convenient let me know and I’ll think again!

So – please could you email me back just to let me know you’re still happy to be involved, and also:

1. Which of the dates you could make
2. Whether the university is a suitable location for you?

I will then get back to you with final details.

Thanks again, and I look forward to working with you on this.

Bryony

Appendix 5: Follow-up email to participants

Hi all,

I just wanted to say thank you so much for taking part in the focus group on Friday - I really appreciate you giving up time at the start of the weekend. I panicked after you left that some of you might just have gone over the 2-hour parking fee - if I owe you money let me know!

I hope you enjoyed it - I certainly enjoyed hearing about your experiences (which couldn't really have been more varied!) and about your thoughts on education.

If anyone has time for a 1-1 interview or would like me to pop to a departmental meeting before the summer, just let me know a good time.

I look forward to receiving your first voice recordings.

Thanks again, and have a good week!

Bryony

Appendix 6: Information sheet for audio diaries

Audio diaries – information for participants

An audio diary is just a voice recording you make when thinking about an aspect of your work. It doesn't need to be planned and it doesn't matter about pauses or changing your mind halfway through what you think.

Please record a diary entry whenever you feel like it (preferably about once a week on average). You might like to use the list of suggestions below to focus your recordings, although you are, of course, welcome to record at any time.

I might expect an entry to last anything up to 5 minutes, but longer entries are fine.

Please start with a quick trial telling me about yourself.

Try to include:

- your name
- position
- school
- when you took on the role of Head of Maths there
- what made you decide to take on the role
- whether you plan to stay in the role
- any other background you would like to share.

Please send that to me as soon as possible.

After that, you might consider the following topics:

1. Reflecting on the GCSE or A level exams this year: were they hard? What you expected? How did the pupils react?
2. Planning and/or reflecting on a departmental meeting. What did you include? Why? How did the meeting go? Why?
3. After a really good day/event/conversation.
4. After a really tough day/incident/conversation.
5. When the GCSE or A level results come out in the summer.
6. When something happens that makes you question your approach.
- 7.

It doesn't matter how many entries you make – if you just do one and then decide it's not for you, that's fine. If you love doing it then feel free to send me as many entries as you like!

Once you have emailed me the entry and I have confirmed that I have received it, you are welcome to either keep the entry or destroy it. I will transcribe your entry and will destroy all recordings at the end of the project.

Please email everything to b.black@sheffield.ac.uk

Thank you!

Appendix 7: Email responses to participants in audio diaries

To Rory:

Thanks Rory - this is great! Real nightmare about that mechanics paper though - let me know whether the exam board gets back to you.

Bryony (13 June 2016)

To Mags:

Mags,

Thanks for these diary entries - I love the quick updates!

It sounds like a real baptism of fire this year, with lots of strong personalities to work with!! I suspect you're doing a fantastic job of drawing everyone together, though - it sounds like you really care about the team dynamics.

That twilight sounds great, too - it's not often you get to actually do some maths!

Keep them coming (when you get time!).

Bryony (2 July 2016)

Appendix 8: Interview questions

Current HoMs:

1. How did you feel after the focus group?
2. Talk me through your career path up to today – what decisions did you make at each stage? Did you reject alternative paths?
3. What initiatives are you planning for next year? Why? Who chose them? How?
4. Do you have to undertake Performance Management? How does it work in your school?
5. Do you have any “weak links” in your team? If so, how do you deal with them?
6. What type of HoM are you? How would your department describe you?
7. How much do you worry in your job? What do you worry about? Do you take risks in your role?

Previous HoMs:

1. Talk me through your career path up to today – what decisions did you make at each stage? Did you reject alternative paths?
2. What are your views on mathematics education? What is important, and how should it be enacted in the classroom?
3. How well do your views fit with your current school situation? What about when you were HoM?
4. What do you think the role of HoM should be?
5. Why did you choose to take on the role of HoM? Why did you choose to leave?
6. What’s next for you?

Appendix 9: Sample transcript

Extract from Focus Group 2, June 2016:

BB: OK – so – em – has anyone had any training to be a head of maths? Have you had any training while you've been doing the job, or before you did it?

[murmurs of agreement]

Elizabeth: Yeah – I did it before – cos it was always in the progression plan for me to step up , but my former Head of Department was meant to go up to assistant head, but that didn't happen – he just bugged off, erm, so I went in a bit quicker than expected, I went over to, erm, the school paid me to do it to start with but then I got an Enthuse award for it – I went to the STEM centre at York, and I did the New and Aspiring Leaders of Maths [lots of agreement]

BB: Who's done that, then, you've done it, Marcus?

Marcus: No – I've just seen it.

BB: Oh right – you've done it Edward, and Jim.

Elizabeth: Which was good. It, it taught me lots of different things. There was other things it didn't teach me, like how to juggle everything, erm, but there were things in there that, I wouldn't have known how to do otherwise, like an awful lot on data analysis, like RAISE for example, which is something nobody really teaches you, or nobody taught me how to do in school – they just assumed I could do it. Erm, there were things I don't think it did teach me, like how to do a decent INQTL calendar, and maintain it, and balance it.

Felix: A what, sorry?

William: I think it's – you mean monitoring and evaluation thing, right?

Elizabeth: Yeah.

BB: I was just smiling – oh yeah – INQTL, right...

Elizabeth: I think most people just call it NQTL - we call it INQTL – I don't know why.

Felix: MLP...

William: We call it MEA...

[lots of laughter].

BB: I hope we're all talking about the same thing!

Further noisy discussion of the different names used!

Elizabeth: It's something like Intermediary Monitoring of Quality of Teaching and Learning or something like that.

BB: So – what is it – like performance management and stuff like that?

Elizabeth: Performance management, erm, minutes of staff meetings, minutes of progress discussions, learning walk details, it's meant to have work scrutiny details in there but I'm not going

to be very good at that this year, book looks and stuff. It's a load of – it's a paperwork exercise that I've not had time to do this year.

BB: Does everybody have to do that?

General no.

Marcus: I have to do minutes of meetings but like..

William: I don't have...no one's told me I have to do anything, I just...since day 1 even as a teacher in my department it was like "yeah do whatever you want". It's amazing the stuff I've got away with in the last few years...

Appendix 10: Sample coding

Nodes			
Name	Sources	References	
Being led	13	93	
Blame	1	5	
Changes in leadership	1	1	
Compliance	4	6	
Cut throat approach	2	6	
External pressure on SLT	1	1	
Interference from SLT	6	22	
Lack of direction from above	2	9	
Lack of emotional support	1	2	
Lack of understanding of role from SLT	0	0	
Mentoring support	1	2	
Recognition	2	2	
Stability	1	1	
Sticking up for self	2	2	
Structured line management	1	6	
Support from SLT	6	14	
Trust or lack of	7	14	
Beliefs about leadership	1	2	
Distributed leadership	6	6	
Leading	16	90	
Savviness	3	4	
Transformational leadership	2	2	