Well-being of School Leaders
National Survey

Key findings

1. Context

The National Academy for Educational Leadership's (Leadership Academy) <u>Corporate Plan</u> sets out the organisation's commitment to helping create a Welsh education system in which "**the well-being of educational leaders is prioritised and systematically supported**". As part of this commitment, the Leadership Academy is working with partners to develop an All-Wales Strategy for the Well-Being of Educational Leaders.

To inform this work, the Leadership Academy undertook a national survey of school leaders in summer 2020. This report sets out the key findings of the survey.

Further surveys of leaders in other educational sectors, including youth and further education, will follow later in 2020 and in 2021.

2. Survey

The survey[1] was open to school leaders[2] across Wales between 15th May and 5th June 2020.

The survey received 1019 responses. However, the analysis that follows is based on 986 of these responses as 9 entries were deemed to be from leaders not currently working in a school setting while 24 were found to be duplicates.

It should be noted that responses were received during the Covid-19 lockdown period. The important well-being implications of the pandemic were not part of the survey's focus and no question made direct reference to it. However, the possibility that responses were influenced by these exceptional circumstances should not be discounted.

The survey collected a number of characteristics for each respondent for analytical purposes and these are broken down as follows:

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[1] The survey was open to school leaders across Wales between 15th May and 5th June 2020. It consisted of 13 questions focusing on the following areas:
- Background information,
- Leaders' understanding of 'Well-being',
- Factors that impact well-being,
- Improving well-being and
- How the Academy can support

The survey was constructed using MS Forms and trialled by a group of about 50 school leaders in the Llanelli area, before going live across Wales.

[2] For the purposes of the survey, the definition of 'school leader' was restricted to the roles listed in Chart 3, below. The Leadership Academy estimates the total population of school leaders in Wales, using this definition, is approximately 3500.
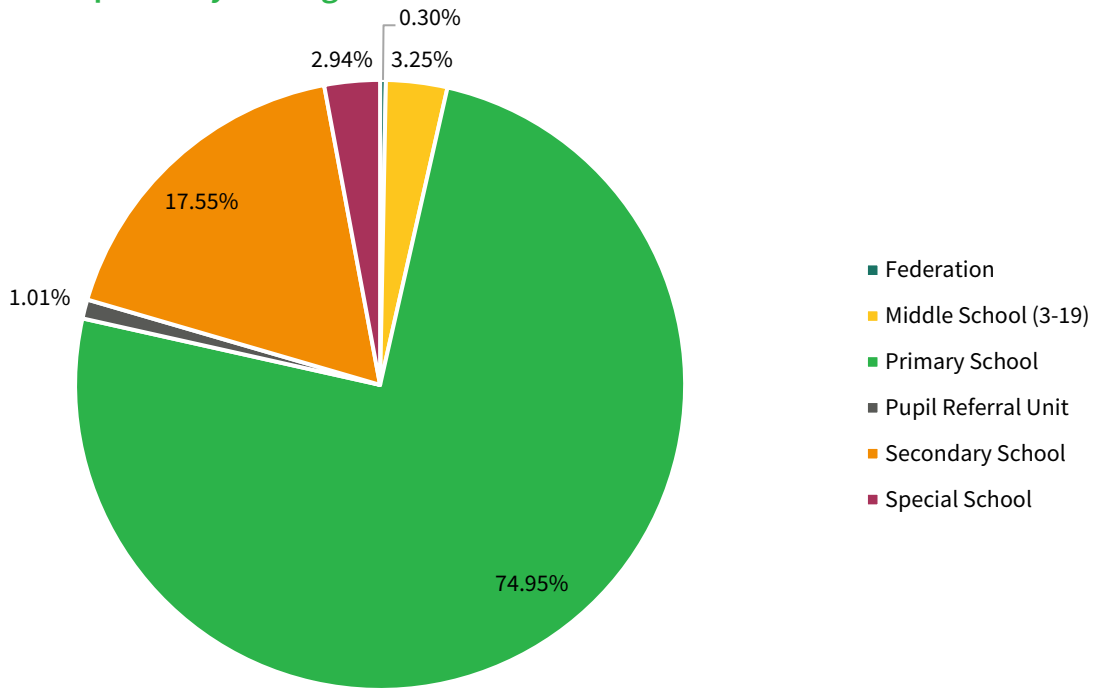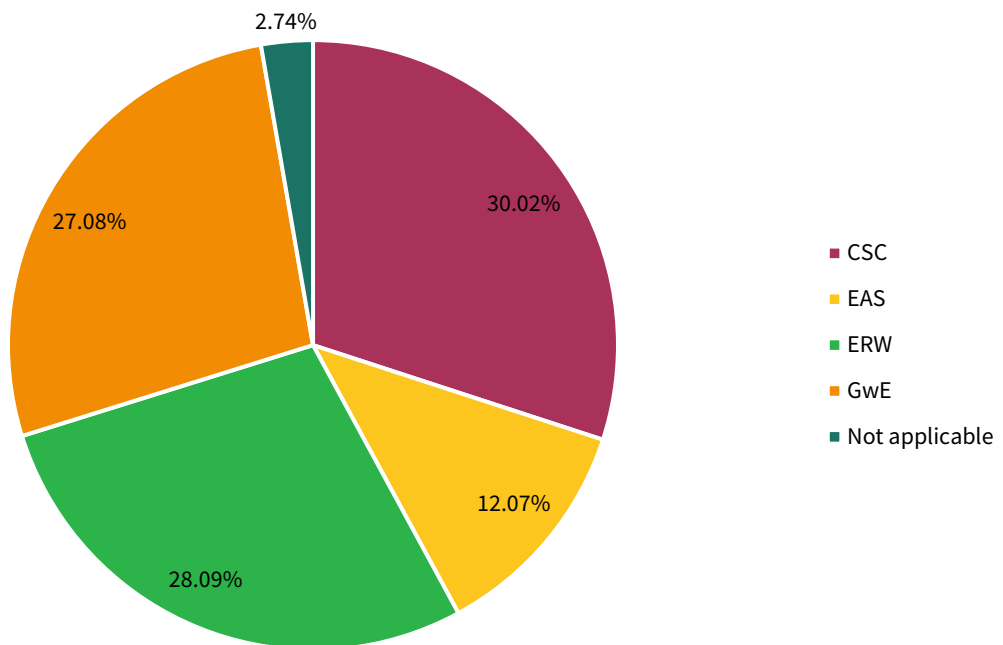
Chart 1: Response by setting

0.30%

3.25%

2.94%

17.55%

1.01%

74.95%

- Federation
- Middle School (3-19)
- Primary School
- Pupil Referral Unit
- Secondary School
- Special School

Chart 2: Response by consortium

2.74%

30.02%

27.08%

12.07%

28.09%

- CSC
- EAS
- ERW
- GwE
- Not applicable

Chart 3: Response by current role

- Acting Headteacher
- ALNCO
- Assistant Headteacher
- Business Manager
- Deputy Headteacher
- Executive Headteacher
- Headteacher
- SLT
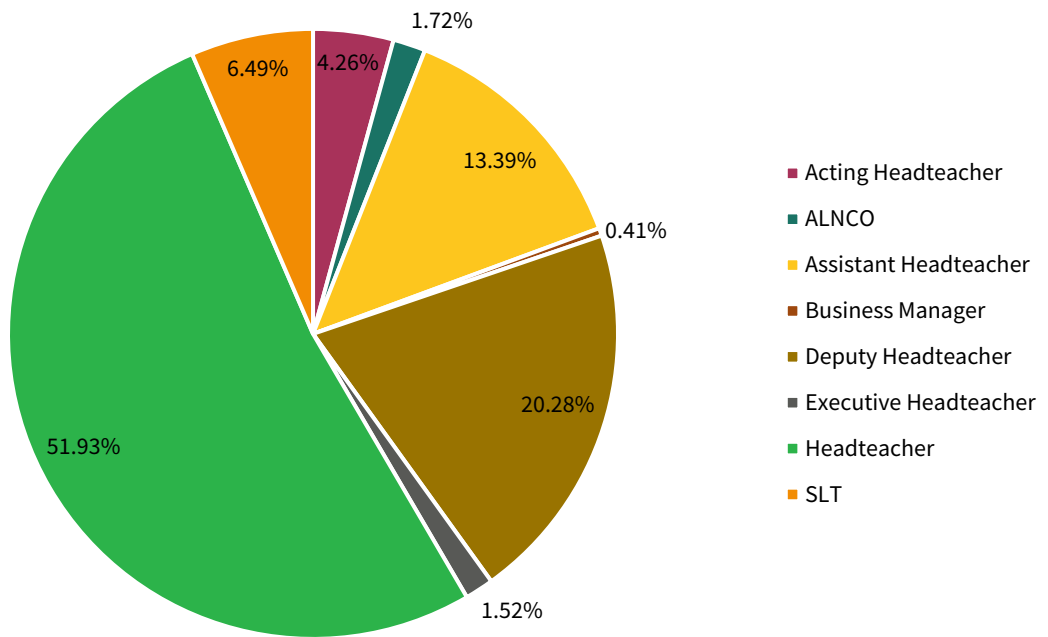
Chart 4: Response by leadership experience

- 2 years or less?
- Between 2 and 5 years?
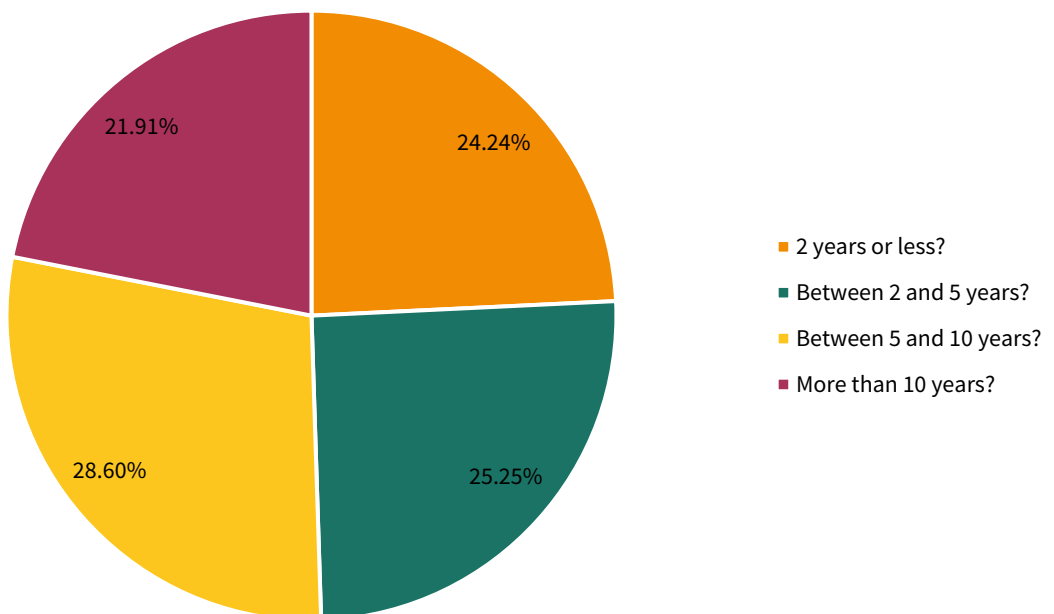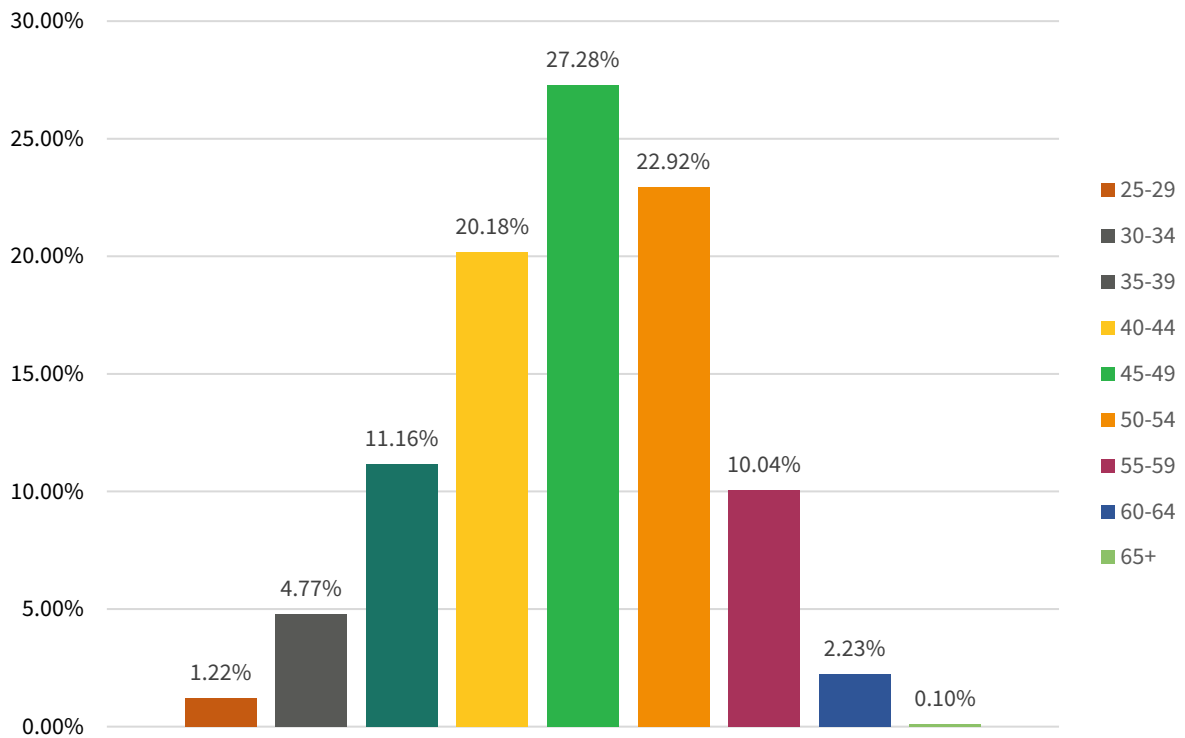- Between 5 and 10 years?
- More than 10 years?
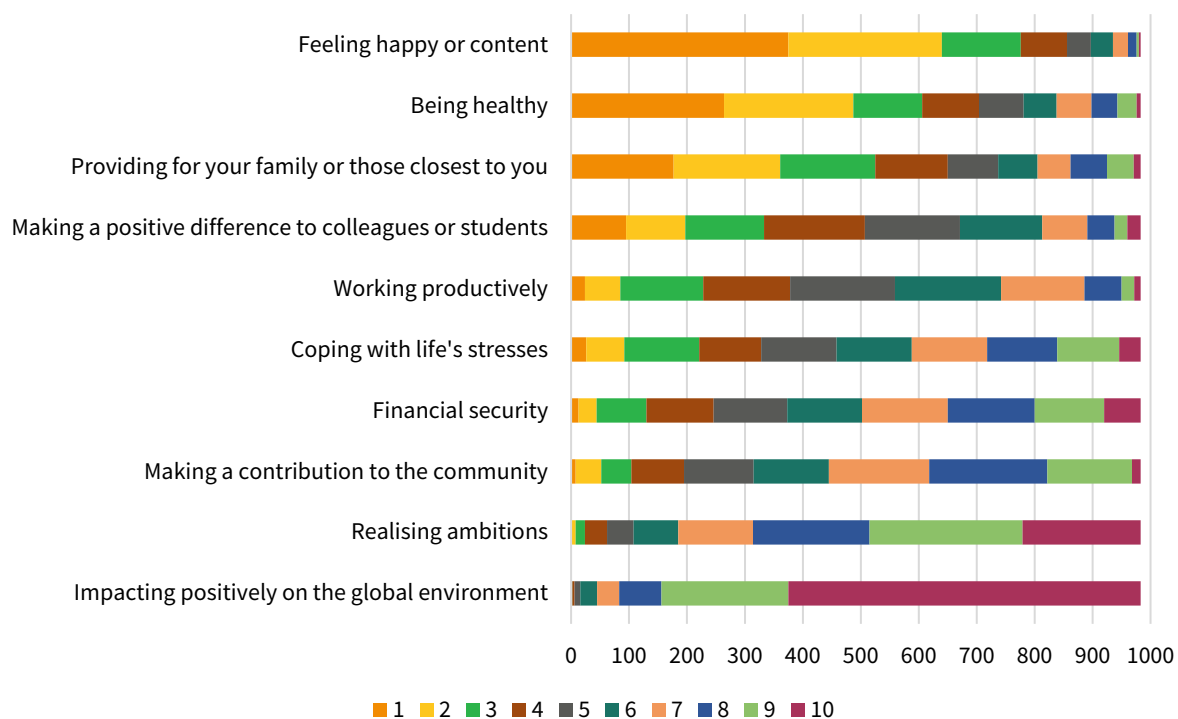
Chart 5: Age profile of respondents

All survey data were analysed to identify variation according to these key characteristics. However, very little variation by geography, age, role or setting was found and certainly none that produced any statistically reliable findings. As a result, analysis by respondent characteristic has been excluded from this summary level report.

3. What does well-being mean to school leaders in Wales?

Respondents were asked to rank ten aspects of their personal and professional well-being, from the most to the least important. The following four aspects were ranked highest:

1. Feeling happy or content
2. Being healthy
3. Providing for your family or those closest to you
4. Making a positive difference to colleagues or students

Chart 6: Aspects of well-being ranked most to least important

Feeling happy or content
Being healthy
Providing for your family or those closest to you
Making a positive difference to colleagues or students
Working productively
Coping with life's stresses
Financial security
Making a contribution to the community
Realising ambitions
Impacting positively on the global environment

Legend: ■1 ■2 ■3 ■4 ■5 ■6 ■7 ■8 ■9 ■10

Respondents were also asked to identify any other aspects of well-being that were important to them. A thematic analysis of these responses identified the following additional aspects of leaders' well-being:
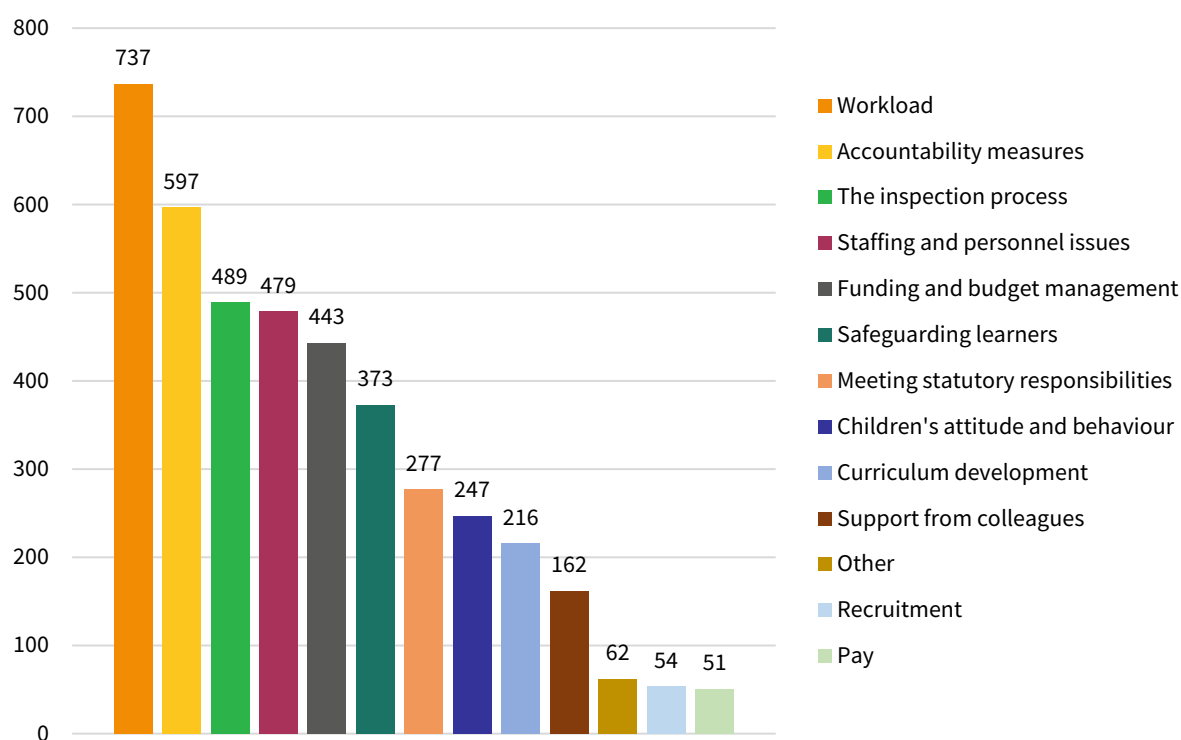
- Achieving work-life balance and having sufficient 'down time' (33% of responses)
- Feeling respected and trusted as a professional (12%)
- Putting others first (12%)

4. What factors affect school leaders' well-being?

Respondents were then asked to reflect on factors affecting their well-being. The most frequently chosen factors, from a list of 14 options, were as follows:

1. Workload (chosen by 75% of respondents)
2. Accountability measures (61%)
3. The inspection process (50%)
4. Staffing and personnel issues (49%)
5. Funding and budget management (45%)

Chart 7: Factors affecting leaders' well-being

Legend:
- Workload
- Accountability measures
- The inspection process
- Staffing and personnel issues
- Funding and budget management
- Safeguarding learners
- Meeting statutory responsibilities
- Children's attitude and behaviour
- Curriculum development
- Support from colleagues
- Other
- Recruitment
- Pay

Values: 737, 597, 489, 479, 443, 373, 277, 247, 216, 162, 62, 54, 51

Respondents were then asked to provide reasons for their choices. From a thematic analysis of the free text responses, the principal ways in which these factors affected respondents' well-being can be identified as:

- Increasing levels of stress and anxiety
- Negatively affecting personal relationships and family life

Workload was chosen by three-quarters of respondents, the largest number by some margin. Furthermore, most respondents who chose 'accountability measures' and the 'inspection process' as affecting their well-being explained their choice in terms of the impact both things had on *workload*.

However, a significant minority of responses identified the disconnect they perceived between process and outcome as the reason for choosing these factors as having a negative effect on their well-being: 17% of those who chose 'accountability measures' explained that they felt such measures did not contribute to better learner outcomes; 28% of those who chose the 'inspection process' explained that they felt inspection did not add value to the school improvement journey.

It is worth noting that 'curriculum development' was not among the most frequently chosen factors affecting leaders' well-being, ranking 9th out of the 13 factors.

5. Current sources of support

Respondents were then asked to consider ways in which their well-being is currently supported. The sources of support chosen most frequently from a list were as follows:

- Support from colleagues (chosen by 75% of respondents)
- Support from a family member (69%)
- Support from a manager/leader in the workplace (35%)

It may be significant that, among the least frequently chosen, were sources of support that could collectively be termed 'external interventions or services', namely:

- Support from local authority / regional education consortium (17%)
- Support from coaching (15%)
- Support from a bespoke counselling service (13%)

This suggests that the great majority of support for well-being currently being accessed by school leaders in Wales, while hugely valuable and a key component of effective support more broadly, is not from professionals with training in coaching, supervision, facilitation counselling, mental health and so on; that is to say – and with very specific reference to well-being – the support that is currently accessed in Wales remains in large part 'non-expert'.

Chart 8: Current sources of well-being support
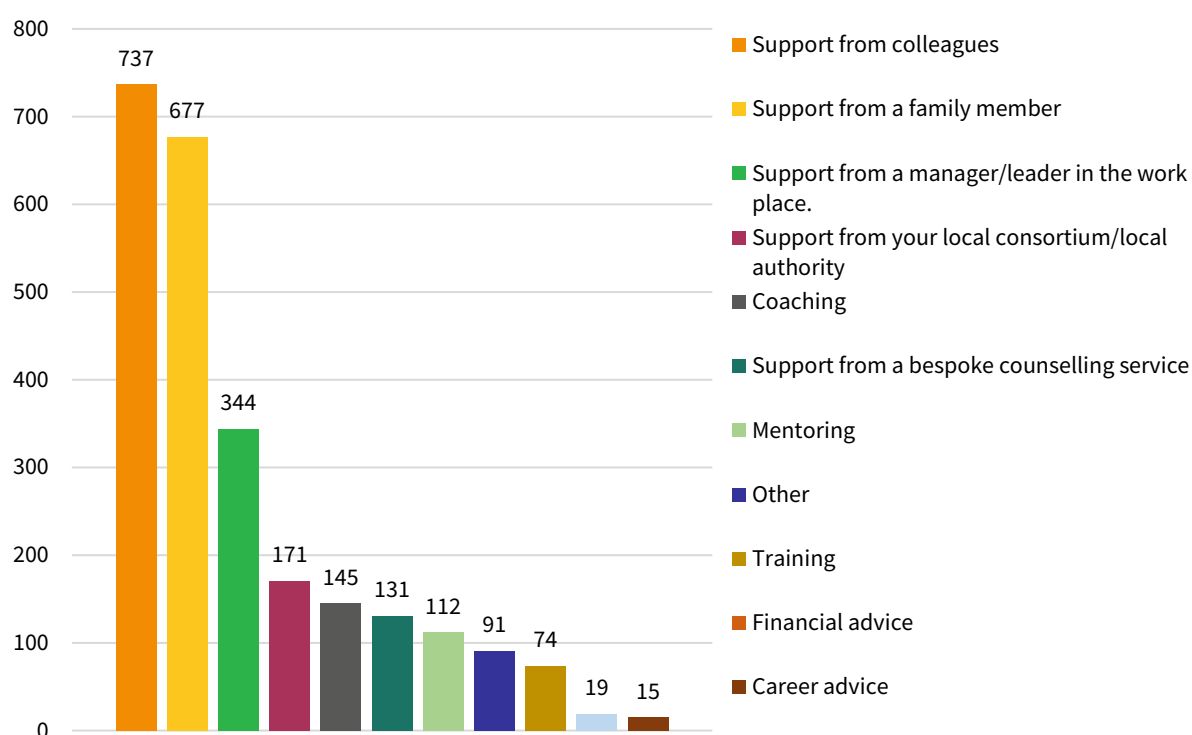
Respondents were then asked to describe the main ways in which sources of support for their well-being were beneficial. The most frequent responses identified in a thematic analysis of the free text responses were that sources of support were valued because they:

- Offered the time and space to process situations and challenges (38%)
- Provided a safe and supportive environment (34%)
- Gave the sense that leaders were understood / provided a source of empathy (29%)

6. What more can be done by the Leadership Academy to support leaders' well-being?

The survey concluded by asking respondents how the Leadership Academy could support school leaders' well-being in Wales. The priority areas that the greatest proportion of respondents felt the leadership Academy can support were:

- Provide (or encourage the provision of) professional development and learning to support leaders' wellbeing
- Provide (or encourage the provision of) mentoring, coaching, counselling or supervision
- Ensure the voice of leaders is heard with regard to their well-being
- Create spaces for leaders to talk about their experiences together
- Advocate for change in areas of policy and practice identified as affecting leaders' well-being, including workload, accountability and inspection

Although this question asked respondents to focus specifically on the role of the Leadership Academy, it is instructive that much of what leaders say they would value as a means of further supporting their well-being are the kinds of external interventions and services that are currently only accessed by a minority of leaders (see 5. Current sources of support, above).

This suggests there is currently an undersupply of such opportunities across Wales (once again, there was no significant geographic variation in responses), or at least a dearth of opportunities that are seen as being *accessible* by leaders, either in terms of their quality, cost, perceived value for money or some other factor or combination of factors. This should be a focus of attention and further research for the Leadership Academy, its middle tier partners and Welsh Government.

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For information on the Leadership Academy's work on the well-being of educational leaders, visit our website or email us post@agaa.cymru