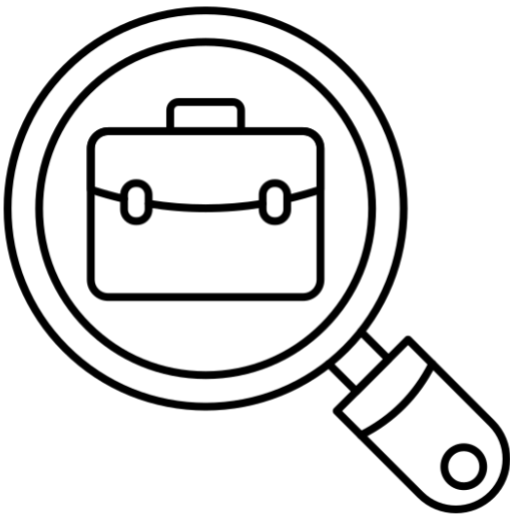


To what extent are provinces freezing HOD and Deputy Principal posts to cope with budgetary pressures?

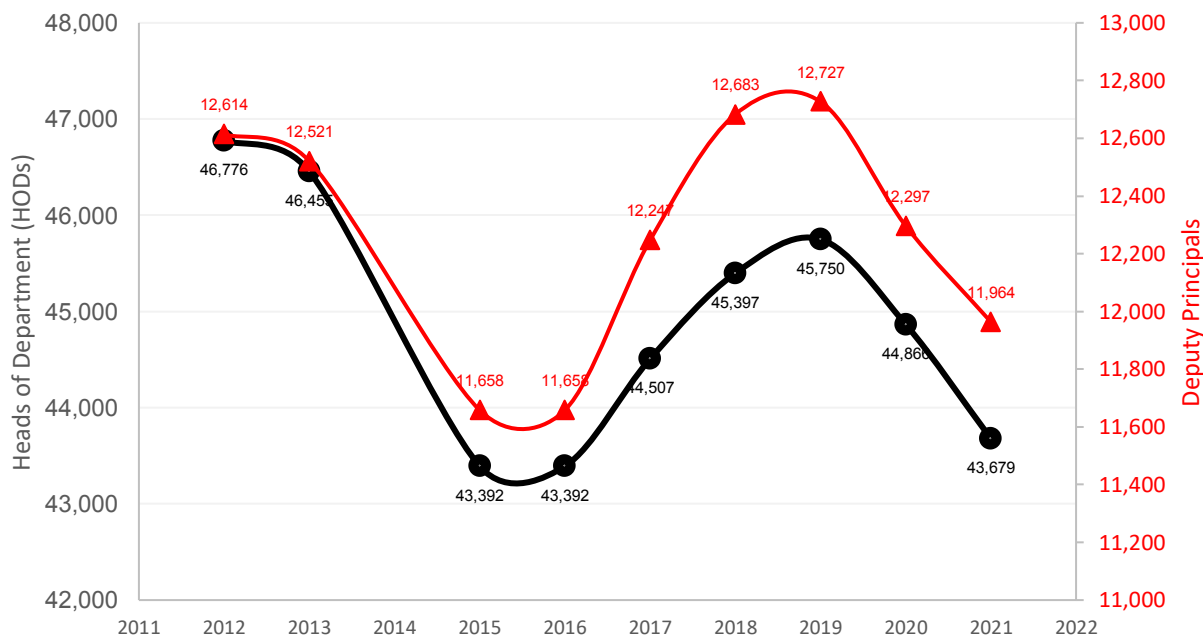
Nic Spaul & Poppie Ntaka (10 November 2022)



Using PERSAL to measure hiring freezes over time: Using the DBE’s salary database (PERSAL) allows for the analysis of changes in the number of people employed at different levels (i.e. teacher, Head of Department (HOD), Deputy Principal etc.). Figure 1 shows that there was a decline in the number of heads of department (HODs) and deputy principals employed between 2012 to 2015 and that these numbers then rose to their previous level by 2019 only to fall again from 2019 to 2021. In the 2020 Medium Term Budget Statement, Finance Minister Tito Mboweni announced a public sector wage freeze for three years as the Treasury sought to tackle public debt and increase spending elsewhere. It is remarkable to see how the number of middle management posts corresponds to overall austerity measures in provincial education budgets. The data suggests that provinces have been instituting hiring freezes for middle-management posts. Between 2019 and 2021 there was a decline of 2,071 HOD’s and 763 Deputy Principals (Figure 1). Note that some smaller schools are not big enough to qualify for a Deputy Principal position hence the large differences between Deputy Principals and HODs.

Hiring freezes of management posts ‘save’ provinces money because senior educator posts are more expensive than regular teaching posts. The average 2019 total average annual salary packages for teachers was R449,868 compared to HODs (R577,224) and Deputy Principals (R687,156). The difference between these last two figures (and depending on the experience of the incumbent HOD) would be the saving from not appointing an HOD or Deputy Principal. See Note 4 for the breakdown of salary and benefits by seniority.

Figure 1: Number of heads of department (black) and Deputy Principals (red) in PERSAL

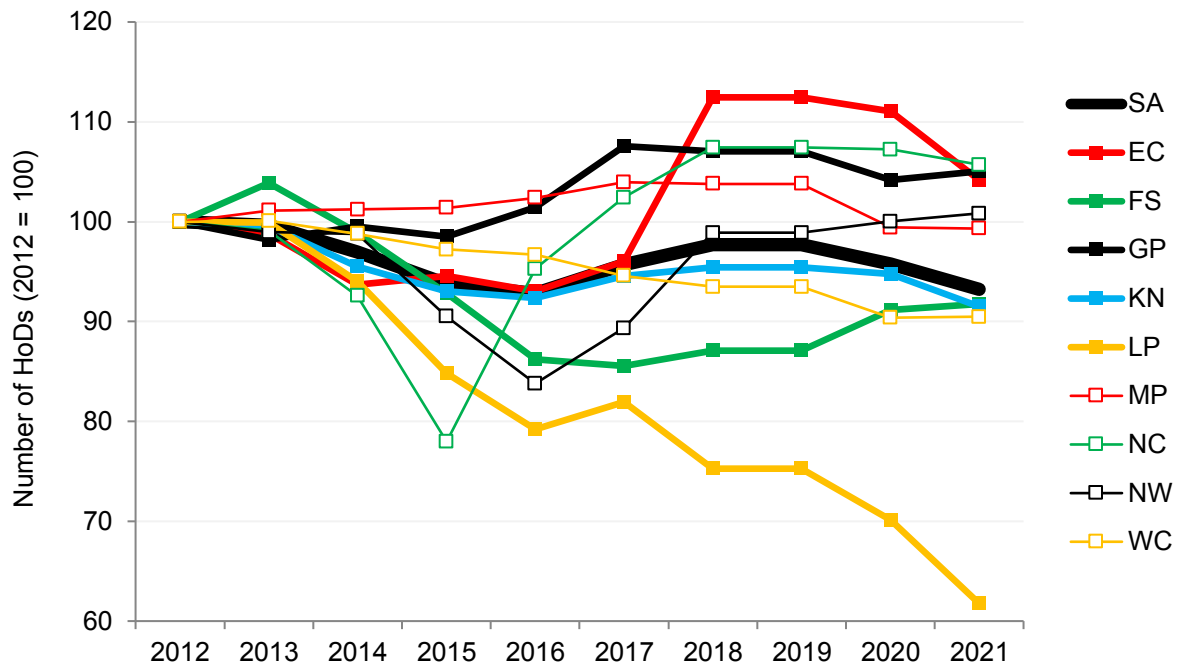


Source: Department of Basic Education (2022).

Large inter-provincial variation in middle-management freezes, with extreme declines in Limpopo

Figure 2 shows how this national trend looks in selected provinces, and reveals that most provinces employ fewer HODs in 2021 compared to 2012, but this is especially pronounced in Limpopo which has seen a continuous decline since 2012. Limpopo had only 60% as many HODs in 2021 compared to 2012. The figure also presents evidence that KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and North West took steps towards rectifying these losses post-2016, with the number of HoDs almost recovering to 2012 levels by 2018. One limitation of Figure 2 is that it does not take into account overall enrolment and number of schools per province and whether this is growing (or shrinking) over time. This likely underestimates the problem in a province such as Gauteng.

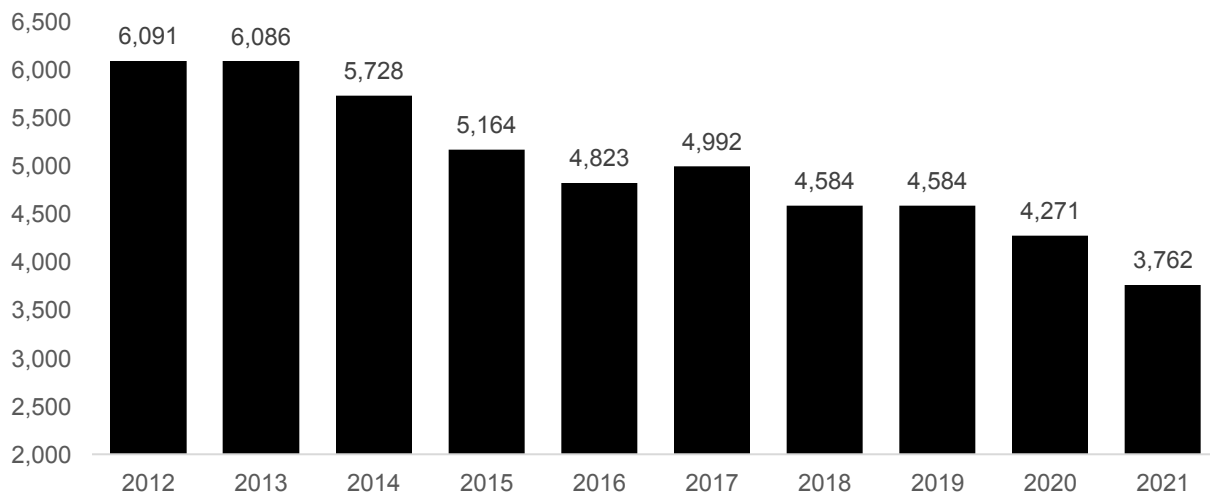
Figure 2: Number of Heads of Department (HODs) by province relative to 2012 (baseline = 100 in 2012)



Source: Department of Basic Education (2022).

Limpopo employed 2,300 fewer HODs in 2021 than it did in 2012: Figure 3 below shows that in 2012 Limpopo employed 6,091 HODs but this had declined to 3,762 by 2021, a decline of 2,329 HODs. Although there were 298 fewer schools in Limpopo in 2021 compared to 2012 according to DBE’s School Realities (3935 schools in 2012 compared to 3675 schools in 2021) this would account for at most about 460 fewer HOD posts in 2021 relative to 2012, not 2,329. Clearly Limpopo is freezing HOD posts to cope with budgetary pressures.

Figure 3: Number of Heads of Department (HODs) in Limpopo (PERSAL)



Source: Department of Basic Education (2022).

Why do provinces institute hiring freezes for middle-management posts? To cope with budgetary pressures, provincial education departments (PEDs) cut down on expenditure by freezing middle-management posts or by appointing individuals in acting roles ^{[1], [2], [4], [5]}. This is because middle-management posts are more expensive than teacher posts, as discussed above. Additionally, PEDs are aware that the system will most likely continue functioning if the delays in appointments are occurring in middle-management posts, whereas the system would break down if there were no principals or teachers.

Undermining teacher career incentives and school curriculum support: When HOD and Deputy Principal posts are frozen, this blocks one of the only paths of significant career and pay progression for most teachers, undermining the incentive system within a school ^[5]. For example, the average pay of a teacher increases by 20% when they are promoted to a HOD position ^[2]. Although freezing HOD and Deputy Principal posts may seem to be an expedient measure to reduce spending, these posts are meant to play important roles for monitoring curriculum coverage, offering support to teachers, managing assessment and teacher professional development etc. Given that men tend to dominate leadership positions in South African schools, it also means that hiring freezes impact negatively on the possible progress that can be made towards the gender transformation of school leadership positions.

Endnotes

[1] Department of Basic Education (2022). *Trends from the Persal data to inform basic education planning*. Unpublished report. Pretoria.

[2] Department of Basic Education. (2017). *Who becomes an HoD?* Published report. Pretoria.

[3] Department of Basic Education (2017). *Personnel spending pressures: Hiring and promotion cuts with enrolment growth*. Pretoria.

[4] Spaul, N., Lilenstein, A., & Carel, D. (2020). The race between teacher wages and the budget: The case of South Africa 2008-2018. Research on Socioeconomic Policy (RESEP). Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.

[5] Wills, G. (2019). *School Leadership and Management: Identifying Linkages with Learning and Structural Inequalities*. In Spaul, N. & Jansen, J. (eds): South African Schooling: The Enigma of Inequality. Springer.