



Department
for Education

n|g|a National
Governance
Association

Recruiting a headteacher

**A guide to the recruitment and selection
of headteachers and other leadership
roles**

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Summary

This publication provides non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education. It replaces 'a guide to recruiting and selecting a new headteacher' published in 2012.

It has been produced jointly with the National Governors' Association (NGA), with support from the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), Freedom and Autonomy for Schools - National Association (FASNA), the Local Government Association (LGA) and a range of other stakeholders. It has been produced to support the recruitment and selection of headteachers in England and should be read in combination with the headteacher recruitment toolkit.

Expiry or review date

This guidance will be reviewed before September 2023.

Terminology

Throughout this guidance, references to:

- *the board* should be taken to mean the body generally responsible for the conduct of a school or group of schools: in maintained schools, this will be the governing body and in an academy trust this will be the board of trustees (committees to whom the board has delegated functions should take account of guidance to *the board*, in so far as the relevant function has been delegated to them)
- *the organisation* means the school or group of schools being governed
- *academy trusts* should be taken to include trusts which are proprietors of academies
- *trustees* means those that sit on the board of an academy trust (who in some trusts are known as directors)
- *MAT* means multi-academy trust
- *academies* means academy schools
- *maintained school* means community, voluntary and foundation schools and community and foundation special schools
- *schools* means maintained schools and academies unless the context requires otherwise
- *Burgundy Book* – the Conditions of Service for School Teachers in England and Wales

Who is this publication for?

This guidance is for:

- the boards of maintained schools and academies in England
- local authorities in England
- school leaders and school staff in maintained schools and academies in England
- those with an interest in the recruitment of leaders in all types of school in England

Main points

- school leadership is extremely influential on the success of a school and it is therefore essential to give thought, care, time and attention to recruitment and selection processes
- recruitment must always be carried out within the context of applicable legislation and laws and it is important that headteachers are appointed only by those that have the power to do so
- schools should have recruitment and selection policies and procedures in place and the recruitment of a headteacher must comply with these
- a diverse workforce benefits everyone and all job applicants must be considered equally and consistently
- a commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of young people should run throughout the whole recruitment and selection process
- the roles of those to be recruited should be carefully defined and consideration should be given to flexible working arrangements, such as job-shares and co-headship in order to be as inclusive as possible
- prepare recruitment documentation, including the application pack, thoroughly to maximise chances of attracting applicants with the right skills, experience and values aligned with those of the school
- conduct a fair and open process to ensure that staff are recruited on the basis of merits, abilities and suitability for the position
- this guide is focussed on recruiting headteachers, and can be used for a wide range of leadership roles as the principles and processes around recruitment will be similar (but the legal aspects of recruiting other roles may be different)

1. Introduction

Recruiting a headteacher is arguably one of the most important tasks a board will undertake. Research suggests that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning, and leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions¹. Analysis also tells us that, “the performance of a school almost never exceeds the quality of its leadership and management”², and more recent evidence suggests that, “the best leaders can transform any school through what they stand for, what they do and how they do it”³. It is therefore essential for boards to have recruitment processes in place that will enable them to attract and recruit the right headteacher for their school.

The point at which a headteacher vacancy arises is a good time for boards to think strategically about the needs and structure of the school, and what skills and qualities they need in a future headteacher. Where the board is governing a group of schools, it will also need to consider the organisation’s structure when deciding which role should be recruited - whether this is a headteacher, executive headteacher, head of school or chief executive officer.

In addition, there remain challenges for particular schools, especially those serving deprived communities, where recruitment may be difficult. Boards must be alert to the circumstances in which they are recruiting and ensure that they are equipped to select a good candidate who will convey the board’s vision for the school and excellent outcomes for the pupils.

Professional recruitment practice is critical to achieving successful recruitment outcomes. Identifying the best headteacher for a school will not always be easy or straightforward, particularly in a competitive environment. It can be challenging to ensure that recruitment is done well. It is often a lengthy process requiring significant resources. Boards therefore need to develop effective recruitment processes which ensure they can be confident in their ability to attract and appoint skilled candidates who are well matched to their school. Boards also need to be well prepared so that recruitment process can be started quickly once a headteacher vacancy occurs, although it is important to allocate sufficient time to ensure the right appointment decision is made for the school.

¹ Leithwood, K, Day, C, Sammons, P, Harris, A and Hopkins, D (2006), *Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership*, NCSL

² Barber. M., Whelan. F., & Clark. M (2008) *Capturing the leadership premium: How the world’s top school systems are building leadership capacity for the future*

³ Matthews, P., Rea, S., Hill, R. & Gu, Q. (2014) *DfE report, Freedom to lead: a study of outstanding primary school leadership*

All schools should have an up to date recruitment policy based on good practice that will help ensure that boards have the best opportunity to recruit the best headteacher for their school.

The recruitment toolkit suggests some basic questions that may be useful for succession planning discussions.

This guide is focussed mainly on recruiting headteachers, but the advice can readily be adapted for use in the appointment of other leadership roles.

2. The law

When schools appoint a headteacher this must be done in accordance with employment law. This section sets out the main legal responsibilities which may vary depending on the type of school, and provides signposting to further guidance on specific relevant legislation.

2.1 Requirement to have a headteacher

The Education Act 2002 requires all maintained schools to have a headteacher, or a person appointed to carry out the functions of a headteacher during an absence of the headteacher or pending the appointment of a headteacher. This means that boards must ensure that a member of staff is appointed to carry out the functions of a headteacher if the outgoing headteacher leaves before a replacement is appointed. This should be an interim arrangement only until a replacement headteacher can be recruited, which should be done as soon as practically possible.

Academies have greater autonomy in determining their leadership structure in accordance with their funding agreement. They also have other freedoms including in respect of the academic curriculum, setting the length of the school day and term, to set teachers' pay and conditions, and to employ teachers without qualified teacher status. Further information on [academy and free school funding agreements](#) and other related documentation is available on GOV.UK.

2.2 Responsibility for appointing a headteacher

2.2.1 Maintained schools

In maintained schools, it is the legal responsibility of the board to select a headteacher. The legal framework regarding the appointment of a headteacher, and the roles and responsibilities of those involved, is stipulated in the requirements of the [School Staffing Regulations](#).

2.2.2 Academies

In academies, the trust's articles of association act as a frame of reference, and Part 4 of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2014, contains standards about the suitability of staff that must be complied with when appointing a headteacher.

In academy trusts, the articles of association will set out who is responsible for the appointment of the principal or MAT CEO. In the Department of Education's [model articles](#), this responsibility lies with the trustees. How appointments are made below MAT

CEO will vary depending on the level of delegation in the academy trust and this should be detailed in the trust's scheme of delegation.

2.3 Equality and diversity

A diverse workforce benefits everyone. This means that if we are to recruit and retain the best possible candidates into leadership positions, we need to recognise and realise the full potential of the leadership talent pool.

It is therefore important to maximise every opportunity to attract the best range of candidates, by ensuring that selection processes are broad and inclusive and based on open and fair criteria.

The subject of unconscious bias is covered in section 3, and more details on how to encourage applications and avoid discrimination in recruitment practice is provided in the recruitment toolkit.

Further information is also available in the [staffing and employment advice for schools](#) and the [equality act 2010 advice for schools](#).

2.3.1 The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful for employers to discriminate directly or indirectly in any of their activities against employees or potential employees on the grounds of the following protected characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- paternity and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

Direct discrimination involves treating someone less favourably because of a protected characteristic than they treat (or would treat) others. In recruitment, this could be through setting criteria which would exclude certain groups from applying. There are specific exceptions in relation to the appointment of headteachers for certain schools designated as having a religious character.

Indirect discrimination involves creating universal rules or arrangements with a workplace that would unfairly disadvantage someone with a protected characteristic without lawful justification for doing so.

Boards or employers of school staff, should not ask health related questions of applicants before a conditional job offer is made, unless the questions are specifically related to an intrinsic function of the work. Employers of school staff or boards may decide to ask health questions after the conditional job offer is made provided these are necessary, relevant and targeted to the specific role. Employers of school staff and boards need to ensure that they are acting lawfully when asking health related questions and should seek advice if they are unsure.

Employers might have a duty to make reasonable adjustments in relation to disability for their employees or potential employees. Such adjustments should alleviate disadvantage in respect of any arrangements or practices and provide necessary auxiliary aids and services. Employers might also be under a duty to consider alterations to physical features of the school where this is reasonable to avoid disadvantage caused by disability.

Pursuant to section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, employers of school staff and boards will be required to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty when recruiting a headteacher. In particular, they are required to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant characteristic and people who do not share it by taking steps to:
 - remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic
 - meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it
 - encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low
- foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it, in particular the need to:
 - tackle prejudice
 - promote understanding

Further information is available in [what equality law means for you as an employer: when you recruit someone to work for you](#).

2.4 Safer recruitment

It is essential that boards adopt recruitment procedures that help deter, reject or identify people who might pose a risk or abuse children. Further information about the

responsibilities placed on schools when carrying out recruitment procedures can be found in the DfE statutory guidance [‘Keeping Children Safe in Education’](#).

2.5 Schools with a religious character

Some schools are designated as having a religious character that may be attached to a particular Christian denomination, such as, Church of England, Methodist or Catholic, or religion, for example, Jewish, Muslim or Sikh.

The [staffing and employment advice for schools](#) contains information relating to the appointment of headteachers in maintained schools with a religious character.

3. Recruitment principles

In order to ensure the open, fair and ultimately successful recruitment of the very best candidate, it is important to establish a set of principles that will outline how the board will conduct its recruitment and selection processes. These principles should be set out in the school's recruitment policy so that they can be followed consistently by all those involved.

All those involved in the recruitment process should adhere to the [7 principles of public life](#) which apply to anyone who holds public office.

3.1 A fair and open process

Schools should have a recruitment and selection policy which outlines a professional and consistent approach to recruitment and selection, adheres to equality and diversity policies and law, employment law and the principle of recruitment of staff on the basis of merit.

It should be clear to all existing and prospective employees how recruitment will be handled, who will be involved in the process, how vacancies are advertised and the selection criteria and scoring methods used to make assessments of candidates.

A rigorous and unbiased recruitment process supported by robust policies and procedures is an essential element of good recruitment. A transparent and ethical recruitment process will give confidence to all candidates. This will increase the prospects of attracting and securing high calibre staff, as well as reducing the risk of recruitment difficulties and in particular, subsequent complaints and grievances.

It is important that those involved in the recruitment process uphold confidentiality throughout the process.

3.2 Unconscious bias

Unconscious bias affects everyone. Our background, personal experiences and cultural environment all influence the way we subconsciously view and evaluate other people. This happens without us realising it, making it difficult to be truly objective. Regardless of how fair-minded we think we are, unconscious bias can have an effect on the decisions we make as well as contribute to inequality in the workplace.

This has clear implications for recruitment and selection processes, where objective judgements about individuals are needed to ensure that the right people are appointed. It is therefore important to establish unbiased recruitment processes that will help to ensure that procedures are as fair and open as possible, such as careful wording of job advertisements by setting criteria that are only necessary for the job. Other examples of

good practice include using a scoring system for objective assessment of applications and skills tests, and standardising interview questions.

It is good practice for all members of the selection panel to receive unconscious bias training before selection begins.

[Further information](#) about unconscious bias is available from the Advisory, Conciliation, and Arbitration Service (ACAS).

3.3 Flexible working arrangements

Flexible working is viewed as a normal expectation in many workplaces.

Expanding the availability of flexible working has the potential to create a wider talent pool for recruitment, bringing new opportunities, especially where there are leadership supply challenges. Flexible working can be a critical element within an overall talent strategy by building capacity and resilience in a schools' leadership team. It can also help to encourage greater diversity in the workforce and enable schools to make the most of the full leadership talent pool.

3.3.1 Flexible recruitment options

Boards should look to be creative in considering a range of flexible working options.

It is important to remain open to appointing job-share headteachers and to make sure that where appropriate, this is made clear in the advertisement and other recruitment materials. Job-sharing helps with shared skill development as part of ongoing professional development and can assist with establishing part-time working arrangements which may otherwise be difficult to achieve. In addition, productivity and creativity can increase and this will help alleviate pressure on individuals.

Boards should also consider ways in which a relatively inexperienced candidate with high potential could be supported with some form of greater flexibility to assist their professional development. Flexible secondments can be a beneficial way of managing interim arrangements for school leadership positions. As an example, an existing headteacher or executive headteacher could be seconded to cover a temporary headteacher vacancy within a group of schools, supporting the current school leadership team on a part-time basis.

Ultimately, boards should build succession planning into their strategic thinking, and flexible working opportunities is one path to consider. For further information, and case studies, please see the guidance on [flexible working in schools](#).

4. Specialist advice and expertise

It is essential that the board has, or is able to access, the skills they need to carry out effective selection processes and follow agreed procedures. They may need advice from the human resources expert or to seek training or other professional support if there are gaps in skills. The [Competency Framework for Governance](#) provides guidance on the skills, knowledge and behaviours required for effective governance, including those in relation to staffing and leadership recruitment and structures. The recruitment toolkit suggests possible sources of advice and expertise and boards should consider how they will ensure that the advice they access is of high quality.

4.1 Education expertise

Boards have autonomy in the appointment of a new headteacher. This makes it all the more important to access the right educational expertise that will provide support in making appointment decisions.

Educational adviser support to the selection panel should include:

- helping the board to think through the specific educational needs of the school, and to consider in the context of a shifting schools landscape
- helping to tailor the job description and person specification to meet the specific educational needs of the school
- shaping the assessment exercises to reflect the educational challenges of the school
- providing the professional experience and ability to judge candidates' relative strengths on leading teaching and leadership, and expertise on their suitability for the headship post

Possible sources of educational advice and expertise are listed in the recruitment toolkit.

4.2 Human resources and recruitment expertise

Boards may wish to appoint an expert in human resources (HR) to provide advice which will help ensure the recruitment process is professionally run. This should include:

- advising on the advert and the application pack so it generates the largest and most appropriate application field
- advising on the use of a recruitment consultancy - the recruitment toolkit provides more information on this option and explains why this might be helpful
- ensuring compliance with recruitment and equalities legislation
- ensuring the process follows best practice in recruitment
- helping to establish appropriate shortlisting criteria, including supporting the process

- helping to determine appropriate assessment exercises and interview questions (led by the boards' knowledge of the school and its challenges) and could include attending interviews
- assisting with relevant paperwork to support the selection process and ensuring this is kept as a safe and secure record
- advising on sensible timescales for the recruitment process

4.3 Remuneration advice

Setting an appropriate salary for the role will help in attracting the right candidate and to reflect the level of challenge in the role being recruited. Schools may consider bringing in specialist expertise to advise them on the right salary range, although the HR expert may also be able to help.

This is an important decision and Boards should consider the long-term affordability of any remuneration package. Boards should also have regard to the guidance in the [Governance Handbook](#) and [Academies Financial Handbook](#) and ensure that their decisions about the levels of executive pay follow an evidence-based process and are reflective of the individual's role and responsibilities.

For maintained schools, the [School Teacher's Pay and Conditions Document](#) (STPCD) provides the statutory framework for teachers' pay. It sets out the available pay ranges for headteachers depending on the size and phase of the school and the flexibility available to boards to exceed those ranges in exceptional circumstances.

Academy trusts have greater flexibility over pay, but many have chosen to adopt the STPCD as their pay structure. An expert can advise the board on local and national benchmarks for similar roles, and can consider a number of factors including:

- the size of the academy and its individual characteristics
- what the academy can afford ensuring any salary range is sustainable over time
- how the proposed salary would relate to the rest of the leadership pay ranges within the academy

Academy trusts are free to set their own salaries for staff, but we would expect this to reflect the size and complexity of the trust, as they must deliver value for money. Any award of performance related bonus must be based on a policy agreed by the board of trustees. The board must ensure that the policy for making such payments includes a robust evidence-based process, reflective of the individual's role and responsibilities, including clear and measurable objectives and an independent approval process. For maintained schools performance related bonuses are prohibited under the STPCD.

The recruitment toolkit provides possible sources of further support.

4.3.1 Pensions

When recruiting to the post of headteacher, it is important to remember the added benefits of being able to offer access to a high quality defined benefit pension scheme. Providing the post wholly or mainly relates to the provision of education to pupils (for example, managing and monitoring pupil progress) then access to the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) is an important part of the remuneration offer which may help in attracting the best candidates. This applies in all schools.

Where access to the TPS is not appropriate, for example, where the board determines the role is not mainly focused on pupils' education, access to the Local Government Pension Scheme may be offered which similarly adds to the attractiveness of the post.

4.4 Administrative expertise

Effective administration is a critical component of a successful recruitment process. This may be provided by the school office or school business manager, or expertise can be bought in from a human resources provider. It should include clear plans for:

- placing the advert in agreed choice of media
- producing the application packs and supporting information
- sending application packs or making them available on line
- handling expressions of interest from potential candidates
- arranging pre visits to the school from interested candidates
- issuing invitations to interview and managing queries
- scheduling the selection process and accommodation
- meeting and greeting candidates on the day
- storing recruitment records at the school

5. Planning and preparation

Planning for recruitment helps to maximise the chances of appointing the right person. It is important to follow the stages outlined in this section and before the vacancy is advertised.

5.1 Vision and strategic direction of school

The recruitment of a new headteacher has always been an important moment and opportunity in the life of a school. In the current educational landscape, it is more important than ever that boards think about how to align the recruitment process with their broader vision and strategy for the school.

Before embarking on the recruitment and selection process, boards should take some time to consider the current situation of their school, their future aspirations, and the leadership they need to enable them to achieve their objectives. Different roles have evolved in recent years and boards should be clear about which role they are recruiting and why.

A checklist of questions that might be asked when considering the strategic direction of the school is provided in the recruitment toolkit.

5.1.5 Diocesan authorities/faith bodies

Boards in schools with a religious character should ensure that any review of their vision is done in line with the expectations of their appropriate faith body/diocesan authority.

Schools with a religious character may be required to consult their diocesan authority/faith body before launching a recruitment process. Some diocesan authorities/faith bodies will have their own employment guidance which schools of religious character will be expected to use. Please see the recruitment toolkit for links to further information.

5.2 Defining the role

It is important for boards to be clear about the role to which they are recruiting, and which specific accountabilities and responsibilities the post holder will have. Where a headteacher will lead a maintained school or single academy, this may be relatively straightforward to establish, but schools that are part of wider MATs and federations require careful consideration of the role of each leader.

There are a number of headship roles including executive headteacher, headteacher or principal, and head of school. Boards must clearly define the accountabilities and responsibilities of the role to which they are recruiting to:

- ensure that accountabilities for leadership decisions are clear for everyone, including the rest of the staff team, and that there are no duplications or confusion
- ensure all leadership responsibilities are clear so that the school or group of schools will be effectively managed
- determine the appropriate salary or salary range for the role
- set clear expectations for the post holder
- support the performance management of the post holder once appointed

The [School Teacher's Pay and Conditions Document](#) sets out the overriding requirements of headteachers, and their central professional responsibilities, and whilst academies may not be bound by this, it provides a useful framework for defining a particular post.

The [National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers](#) are aimed at headteachers, aspiring headteachers and boards and are intended as guidance to underpin best practice, whatever the particular job description of the headteacher. The standards can be used to support the recruitment and appointment of headteachers and assist in shaping role descriptions and person specifications.

The recruitment toolkit provides other points for consideration when determining the accountability and responsibilities of a particular role, which will be underpinned by the needs of the school.

5.3 Identifying the budget for recruitment exercises

As part of its annual budget planning process, the board should have identified a sum of money for the recruitment of any staff during the year. Once a headteacher vacancy has arisen, the board should review the available recruitment budget and allocate a maximum spend for the recruitment exercise. The board should consider any costs associated with buying in expertise, agency fees, costs associated with any recruitment exercises to be undertaken. It may also be worth considering at this stage if the amount allocated will cover any re-advertisement costs if the initial recruitment process is unsuccessful.

5.4 Setting up a selection panel

Where a vacancy for a headteacher is advertised, the board of a maintained school will need to put in place a selection panel to select candidates for interview (and notify the local authority of the names of the candidates), interview applicants and, if the interviews are successful, recommend a candidate for appointment as headteacher to the board. This is also good practice in academies.

5.4.1 Panel size

For maintained schools, the panel must comprise of at least three governors. There is no limit to the number of governors who can sit on the panel, but boards should ensure that the selection panel is not unnecessarily large. It is important to strike a balance between ensuring the panel possesses the range of skills needed and ensuring a candidate does not feel intimidated.

Academies are not subject to the same regulations as maintained schools and, subject to their articles of association, are free to set their own arrangements.

Good practice suggests that schools may want to consider the process to be followed in the event of a complaint or grievance being raised. Any such process should ensure that complaints and grievances can be reviewed impartially by those who were not involved in the original recruitment process.

5.4.2 Panel composition

Membership of the panel should be diverse and inclusive to help ensure an equal and fair recruitment process. In choosing members of the panel, boards should consider factors such as conflict of interest. In maintained schools, panel members may be drawn from the governing board as a whole, with the exception of a governor who is the headteacher, as this is prohibited by regulations. Academies are free to decide their own arrangements, subject to any requirements set out in funding agreements and articles of association.

5.4.3 Training

For maintained schools it is a statutory requirement for at least one member of the selection panel to have completed safer recruitment training.

Whilst not a statutory requirement in academies, this is considered best practice.

Boards should also consider what general recruitment training members of the panel might need.

5.4.4 Local authorities

In community, voluntary-controlled and community special schools, the local authority, as the employer, has the right to attend all proceedings of the selection panel (including interviews) and provide advice. The board will need to consider any advice provided by the local authority.

In voluntary-aided, foundation and foundation special schools, the local authority does not have an automatic right to attend proceedings of the selection panel. The local authority may, however, offer advice to the board, subject to the terms of a written

agreement between the board and the local authority. Any such advice that is given must then be considered by the board.

In all maintained schools the selection panel must notify the local authority of the names of applicants selected for interview. If, within a period of seven days beginning with the date it receives notification, the local authority makes written representations that any applicant is not a suitable person for the post, the selection panel must consider those representations. Where it decides to recommend for appointment any person about whom representations have been made, the selection panel must notify:

- the board and local authority in writing of its reasons (community and voluntary-controlled schools)
- the local authority in writing of its reasons (foundation and voluntary-aided schools)

5.4.5 Record keeping

Given that any recruitment process should be open and fair, it is important to keep records, and as a minimum, panel meetings should be minuted. It is good practice to maintain records of all panel discussions and decisions, shortlisting and interview notes and appointment decisions. It is important to note that any records kept may be relied upon at a future point in the recruitment process, such as an appeal by an unsuccessful candidate.

Recruitment records should not be held beyond the standard retention period unless this would be in the public interest or if there is a clear business reason for doing so. The length of the standard retention period should be agreed based on business need, and schools may want this to reflect the period of time during which a claim arising from the recruitment process may reasonably be brought. Further information can be found in the [Employment Practices Code](#) published by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to help employers comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. The ICO also provides information about the [General Data Protection Regulation](#) (GDPR) due to come into force in May 2018.

5.5 Appointment timeline

In maintained schools, notice periods for headteachers are widely incorporated into employment contracts as set out in the [Burgundy Book](#), and are three months, or four months in the summer term. This means that notice should be submitted by a headteacher as follows:

- 30 April to leave at the end of the summer term
- 30 September to leave at the end of the autumn term
- 31 January to leave at the end of the spring term

Notice periods for academy leaders including MAT CEOs may vary depending on their terms and conditions, although many academies have adopted the same provisions as maintained schools.

Schools should consider building sufficient time into their recruitment processes to take account of the need for successful candidates to serve notice at their current school.

5.6 The application pack

Regardless of the context, boards should consider how to make their school as attractive as possible to potential high quality applicants. Location is the single most important consideration for candidates applying for leadership positions, so it is important to promote other factors that are likely to appeal and be of interest to prospective applicants. Some headship roles are more difficult to fill than others, so boards should be proactive in their approach to marketing their school's headship vacancy.

5.6.1 Information for candidates

Preparing the application pack is an essential element of the process and will be critical in persuading candidates to apply for the post. The pack will present the vision and strategy of the school and will include the application form, a covering letter from the chair of the board or CEO, the job description and person specification and some contextual information about the school.

5.6.2 Job description

A good job description will identify the purpose, main tasks, responsibilities and duties of the role. It will set the context for the role in relation to the whole organisational structure and should reflect the future needs of the school as well as those of the present. It may also be helpful to set out the statutory responsibilities of the role to ensure that lines of accountability are clear.

The job description should cover:

- the primary purpose of the job
- the main responsibilities of the job
- the scope and context of the job

5.6.3 Person specification

The person specification should define the qualifications, experience, skills and personal qualities you are seeking. Informed by the job description, these should be divided into those aspects deemed important for the post and those seen as desirable. It is good practice for the person specification to specify how the attributes listed will be assessed, such as through interview or tests.

While many of the core requirements may be universal, it is important to think carefully about the specific knowledge, skills, attributes and qualities required for the particular headship role being recruited, and to factor in the context of the school.

6. Advertising and promotion

Boards will want to ensure that they have the greatest chance of attracting the best candidates to their vacancy and making a successful appointment. Advertising is an essential tool for doing this as it allows vacancy details to reach a wide range of potential applicants and increases the chances that the right person for the job will apply. Promoting a vacancy is equally important as it allows schools to provide information about the role and the school context that will help ensure only the most suitable candidates who meet the specification will apply.

6.1 School context

The opportunities presented by each headteacher post will differ slightly depending on the unique context of each school, but it is likely that all will offer challenges around:

- making a real and noticeable difference both to individual pupils and the wider school community
- taking on a strategic role in school improvement that affects real change and innovation
- making a measurable difference in meeting the specific challenges faced by the school
- working collaboratively to secure improvements in an exciting, supportive and stimulating workplace

As recruitment becomes ever more challenging, boards may wish to consider how to ensure their vacancy stands out from the crowd. Outstanding schools will not automatically attract a large volume of candidates and selection panels may need to highlight what makes their school unique.

When recruiting headteachers to schools in challenging contexts it is even more important to be explicit about the opportunities offered by the role and to ensure these are clearly reflected in adverts and any other promotional materials. It is essential to maximise the attractiveness of the vacancy and the size of the candidate pool by emphasising the positive aspects of leading a challenging school.

Selection panels may also wish to consider asking for previous experience of working and bringing about positive change in a challenging school as part of the person specification. This should be listed as desirable, rather than essential, to avoid limiting the field of potential applicants. Candidates may then be asked to demonstrate further evidence of this experience should they progress beyond the sifting stage of the recruitment process.

6.2 When to advertise

In order to secure stability for the school, the vacancy should be advertised as soon as practicable and should:

- bear in mind any pending changes such as academy conversion or merger which may affect the school's leadership arrangements
- allow adequate time to prepare - reviewing the role, preparing the job description and person specification, identifying the selection panel (if not already established) and determining the selection process
- bear in mind the resignation deadlines for serving headteachers (three to four months) and other teachers (two to three months) and plan timescales accordingly

6.3 Where to advertise

Under the [School Staffing Regulations](#), boards of maintained schools must advertise headteacher vacancies in such a manner as it considers appropriate, unless it has good reason not to. This does not always mean advertising nationally, although this is often a good way of maximising the field of potential candidates to attract and secure the best possible candidates. For small schools in particular, national advertising can often be outside the reach of budgets, although the increasing availability of online advertising services in the schools sector may help to keep costs to a minimum. Sometimes, schools may achieve best value by going directly to a recruitment agency. Further information about using a recruitment agency can be found in the recruitment toolkit.

Academies have greater freedoms in how they recruit and should refer to the terms of their funding agreement or the academy trust's Articles of Association for further details.

6.4 Exceptions to advertising

In some limited cases, it is possible for schools to appoint a headteacher without advertising the vacant post but only if the board can demonstrate there is a good reason not to do so. Such exceptions may arise where there is a pressing need to appoint a headteacher quickly on occasions when the appropriate notice period is not, or cannot be, observed (for example, following ill health or if there is a long standing vacancy which has not been filled via the usual recruitment method).

7. The selection process

The purpose of shortlisting is to reduce the applications received to only those applicants that meet the person specification and should be interviewed. It is an important step in the process and it is worth taking time and effort to ensure ideal candidates are not inadvertently missed.

7.1 Shortlisting

The purpose of shortlisting is to identify from the applications received only those applicants that panels wish to interview. Careful scrutiny of all applications is an important element of the safer recruitment process and is essential to ensure that quality candidates are not missed, and to avoid wasting time with applicants who do not meet the essential criteria.

Members of the selection panel should review all of the applications received independently and score them in accordance with the specified criteria. The panel should then come together to review their respective scores and then to use these to reach a consensus on which candidates to interview. Further help with the steps to take in shortlisting, examples of scoring systems and a sample shortlisting grid can be found in the recruitment toolkit.

It is important to remember that all paperwork related to shortlisting is confidential to those governors involved in the process.

7.2 References

With all appointments schools should, prior to appointment, take up references from the applicant's current or former employer. This includes following up with the author of the reference if there is anything that requires clarification and/or appears to be contradictory or incomplete. As part of the appointment process for headteachers, the board should ask previous employers for details on whether the individual has been subject to capability procedures in the previous two years. Where an applicant for a teaching post at a school is currently employed at a maintained school, the board of that maintained schools must, upon the request of the board or proprietor of the school to which the applicant is applying, respond in writing to confirm whether or not that person has been the subject of capability procedures within that period. If the applicant has been the subject of capability procedures during such period, the board of the maintained school must provide details of the concerns which gave rise to this, along with the duration of the proceedings and their outcome.

Although these arrangements do not apply to academies established prior to April 2013, they are a requirement of new funding agreements from this date. Academies can ask for

relevant information about a leader's capability, their suitability to work with children and their disciplinary record, as part of the appointment processes.

The [Governance Handbook](#) advises that boards should source references, directly from the applicant's current or former employer for all shortlisted candidates, including internal ones, before interview, so that any issues of concern that may be raised can be explored further with the referee, and taken up with the candidate at interview.

Boards should not rely on open "to whom it may concern" references.

7.3 Selection activities

As part of the planning process, the panel should determine what skills, qualities, attributes and abilities it wishes to test and decide which activities will best test these qualities.

In MATs, a common approach may be taken across the trust in order to ensure consistency of recruitment and selection. In such cases the panel should comply with the requirements of the trust's recruitment policy and procedures documentation.

Testing candidates in a variety of ways means that selection panels will be able to form a complete view of each candidate and be able to judge levels of skill and competency relevant to the essential and desirable criteria set out in the person specification.

The following are all options:

- presentations to the selection panel
- leading an assembly
- leading a discussion with pupils
- teaching a lesson
- observing a lesson and providing feedback to the teacher
- role play exercise
- in tray exercise
- financial or budgeting task
- psychometric testing
- personality profiling
- learning walks
- group exercises with all other candidates
- case studies

Whichever method is chosen, it should be clear which part these tasks play in the overall decision making process. For example, as part of a fair and transparent process it should be clear whether a learning walk is simply an opportunity for candidates to see around the school and meet some staff and pupils, or if it will form part of the final decision making assessment.

7.4 The interview

Interviews are one of the most important steps in the recruitment process. They are a primary tool to assist the selection panel in selecting the right person for the job by helping them confirm whether or not a candidate is likely to succeed in their school as well as in the role.

7.4.1 Interview questions

Core questions for the interview should be planned in advance. Additional follow up or supplementary questions can be asked to expand upon the information provided in the application form or to explore a candidate's response in greater depth.

Questions should be designed to test whether the candidates meet the requirements set out in the person specification and could cover knowledge of the role, pedagogy, requirements of the job, communications, financial and people management, teamwork and relationships. The types of questions that might be used and some example questions are provided in the recruitment toolkit.

Members of the panel should consider in advance what positive indicators they are looking for in response to questions and can then score the responses based on the responses given.

7.4.2 How to select for a job-share

It is recommended that candidates wishing to apply on a job-sharing basis should ideally have identified a job-share partner in advance, but it is not necessary to do so.

To assist with the recruitment process, the selection panel may suggest in its advertisement or application pack that candidates seeking a job-share post should find a partner before applying, so they can apply together. This allows both job-share candidates to agree logistics in advance, such as how to split working hours and manage the handover process. They can then explain this during the interview. Applications from candidates who have not identified a job-share partner should always be properly considered. Some local authorities run job-share registers listing those who are interested in moving to a job-share post to which boards may refer potential candidates.

The local authority or MAT may also have a job-share policy, which panels can refer to for further guidance. This might set out how job-sharing can be introduced, how to manage the application, recruitment and selection processes, and how to manage elements of the remuneration package.

During the interview, the selection panel should get a sense of how job-share partners work together. It may be helpful to consider inviting job-share partners to give a joint presentation as well as an individual interview. Panels may also wish to ask some

interview questions jointly, for example, about leadership styles, to judge how the job-share partners' skills and experiences might complement each other.

7.5 Making a decision to appoint

In reaching a decision, the selection panel should consider the evidence they have from the application forms, interviews and tests. They should also consider any structured feedback received from staff, pupils or other governors involved in other elements of the process, such as a pupil panel, which related directly to the criteria being tested.

Each member of the panel should independently score each candidate against each question asked and the panel should aim to reach a consensus on the best candidate based on the evidence before them.

7.6 Unable to appoint

An appointment should not be made if none of the candidates are considered suitable. While this would be disappointing, it is preferable to not appoint anyone at all than to make the wrong appointment.

If the recruitment process is unsuccessful, boards will need to ensure that any interim arrangements needed to cover the headteacher post are in place. An evaluation of the recruitment process may be helpful in determining the options for securing a suitable candidate from any subsequent recruitment activity.

7.7 Board ratification

In accordance with regulations for maintained schools, the board will need to approve the decision of the selection panel. This may be done during a meeting of the board where the selection panel identifies the preferred candidate and the panel's reasons for selecting them. This is followed by an endorsement vote of the board.

8. Appointment action

Once the board has ratified the decision of the selection panel, an offer of conditional appointment should be made, subject to required checks. Arrangements should also be made to notify unsuccessful applicants of the outcome of their application.

The appointment is normally made by the employer. In the case of a community, voluntary-controlled or community special school, this will be the local authority. In the case of a foundation, voluntary-aided or foundation special school, the board will be the employer. For academies, the employer will be the academy trust.

8.1 Pre-appointment checks

When appointing new staff, schools must carry out pre-appointment checks. These checks are set out in [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) and more general advice on headteacher appointments can be found in the [DfE Staffing and Employment Advice](#) published in February 2017.

8.2 Job offer and contract

The successful candidate should be contacted by telephone, usually by the chair of the board or MAT CEO.

A verbal, conditional offer of employment should be made, which is subject to receiving satisfactory results from necessary pre-appointment checks, and then followed up in writing.

Once the pre-appointment checks are completed, the results considered and the candidate judged to be suitable, the offer can be confirmed.

8.3 Notifying unsuccessful candidates

All recruitment processes should, as a matter of good practice, offer constructive feedback to unsuccessful candidates, and this is especially important for internal candidates. In providing such feedback, it is usual to rely on the records created during the interview process. Outputs from scoring systems which rank candidate's responses and which support the selection panel's selection of one candidate over another are also a useful source of feedback information. Since interview questions should always relate to the person specification, there should be clear evidential support for the recruitment decisions made. Feedback is usually given by the educational adviser, chair of the board or the MAT CEO.

9. Post recruitment action

The recruitment process does not end with the appointment decision. Having dedicated time and effort to achieving a fair and successful recruitment process, boards will now want to consider what arrangements they should put in place to support the headteacher when they take up their appointment.

9.1 Publication of the headteacher's name

The [Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#) require an academy to provide the name of the headteacher to parents and carers of pupils and prospective pupils and on request to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate. The information must also be made available on the school premises during the day.

9.2 Communications

News of the appointment should not be communicated widely until the successful candidate has accepted the position. It is prudent to wait until confirmation in writing has been received from the candidate and all pre-appointment checks have been satisfied.

An announcement should include a simple declaration stating that an appointment has been made. This can then be followed by further communications detailing the new headteacher's name and brief biographical details.

9.3 Induction and continued professional development

It is important that a structured induction programme is in place to ensure that the new headteacher settles into their role.

The chair of the board has a significant role to establish a good working relationship with the new headteacher and where possible, establish a timely and formal handover from the outgoing post holder. A structured, well organised induction will make the new headteacher feel welcome, supported and confident to take on their new role. The chair will also arrange for the appraisal cycle and review meetings with the new appointee to be scheduled so that a framework for support is established at the outset, including mentoring and coaching support options if appropriate.

10. Evaluation

Following an appointment, it is good practice to spend time assessing the effectiveness of the recruitment process to establish what went well and any changes that could be made to improve future recruitment processes.

The evaluation might include considering:

- if the method of recruitment attracted a good pool of applicants
- the results of the equality monitoring of all those who applied for the vacancy and a comparison to those shortlisted
- what proportion of applicants interviewed were unappointable and whether this is an acceptable level
- if there were any questions that produced consistently poor responses from candidates
- if assessment tasks adequately tested skills and attributes in the way intended
- if there were any difficulties in take up of the job offer



Department
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