

Tools and Checklists: Headteacher Recruitment Toolkit



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Introduction

In December 2017, the Department of Education published the non-statutory guidance “[Recruiting a headteacher](#)”: A guide to the recruitment and selection of headteachers and other leadership roles.

This publication was produced jointly by the DfE and NGA, with support from the Association of School College Leaders (ASCL), the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), Freedom and Autonomy of Schools – National Association (FASNA), the Local Government Association (LGA) and a range of other stakeholders.

This Toolkit, which was developed in parallel, is being published by NGA and should be read alongside the DfE guidance.

A: Equality and Diversity

This section should be read in conjunction with **Section 2.3** of the DfE guidance.

A diverse workforce benefits everyone and the following checklist is designed to help boards encourage applications and avoid discrimination in recruitment practice:

DO:

- Ensure that all those involved in recruitment activities have received equality and diversity guidance as part of recruitment and selection training; and also consider “unconscious bias” training
- Involve more than one person in every stage of the selection process
- Set up a diverse panel that has the skills to be able to make judgements against the person specification and job description
- Advertise as widely as necessary to attract a diverse range of candidates using a range of media (see **Section G** of this Toolkit and **Section 6.3** of the DfE guidance)
- Ensure that assessment criteria are relevant, necessary and objective, focussed on skills, competencies, attributes, attitudes and knowledge
- Only ask for information relevant to the selection criteria and process
- Treat all candidates equitably
- Use a range of selection methods to ensure candidate competencies and qualities are fully explored and tested
- Ask candidates the same core set of interview questions, which can be supplemented by questions based on their application and interview responses
- Make reasonable adjustments throughout the process for candidates with particular needs
- Record and retain evidence of decisions.

DON'T:



- Use discriminatory terminology e.g. headmaster
- Use irrelevant, selective or discriminatory questioning e.g. asking about childcare arrangements
- Allow personal views or preconceptions (unconscious bias) to interfere with sound decision making
- Make assumptions based on what you read, hear or see at any stage of the process (this includes the pre-application visits by the candidate to the school).

Further information is available at: [staffing and employment advice for schools](#) and at [equality act 2010 advice for schools](#)

B: Specialist advice and expertise

Section 4 of the DfE guidance considers the various types of expertise a governing body will need to support a good recruitment process. There is an increasing array of providers that could carry out such support and the governing board will need to consider what options it has and the accompanying value for money offered. Options might include, but are not limited to:

- Local authorities: some local authorities may still provide free support but most are moving towards charging for this support and some no longer provide the service.
- Diocesan boards of education: as with local authorities, they may provide either free or charged support.
- Central HR support teams in academy chains and larger federations: support is usually provided free to schools within the chain or federation but some are beginning to charge for services to schools outside the chain.
- Freelance consultants: these are individuals offering HR, recruitment or educational advice to support schools.
- Support from other schools: increasingly schools are working together and CEO's or Executive Heads in MAT's or federations, or Head teachers in other schools, may all have valuable experiences that may be helpful in the recruitment process
- Commercial recruitment agencies: these are usually either large recruitment agencies that have diversified to have an education arm, or bespoke agencies solely dealing with appointing educational leaders.
- Companies providing services to schools: some legal and accountancy services are now offering a broader range of services to schools which may include recruitment services.
- Headhunting firms: for high-value roles there are firms that will seek out and engage talent for specific posts.
- Professional associations: some associations are beginning to offer a wider portfolio of bespoke services to schools which may include recruitment support.

Governing boards should always work on the principle that the buyer alone is responsible for checking the quality and suitability of a service before a purchase is made. When engaging professional support, reputation is a helpful indicator, but it is important that this is backed up by requesting references. It is prudent to get more than one quote for whatever professional support is being sought, and, indeed, the school's finance policy may require this.



C: Vision and strategic direction of the school

Well thought out planning and preparation for recruitment helps to maximise the chances of a successful appointment and this element of the process is considered in **Section 5** of the DfE guidance. **Section 5.1** emphasises the importance of taking stock of the school's vision and strategic direction and in doing so, the following checklist suggests some useful questions the board might like to consider:

Strategic Direction of the School Checklist

Useful questions to ask might include:

- If your school is currently a maintained school or a standalone academy, are you considering joining or forming a multi-academy trust? If so, how might that affect the type of leader you need?
- If your school is already part of a MAT or federation, might that create opportunities to think differently about who leads it? For example, does every school in the MAT or federation have its own head teacher, or do some have heads of school plus executive heads that oversee two or more schools?
- If your school is part of a MAT or federation, who leads the recruitment process? Is it the local governing body, MAT trustees, the executive headteacher or CEO – or a combination of all of these? Do you have a shared sense of what you need?
- How difficult have other schools in your area, or other similar schools, found it to recruit head teachers recently? Might you need to think about alternative models of leadership if you are unable to recruit a suitable candidate?
- What are your school's strengths, and what are its areas for development? How might you use this opportunity to bolster your strengths and address your weaknesses?
- What are the most important things your school will need to do over the next few years? What type of leader, or leadership structure, will best enable you to do this?
- What is your current and projected financial situation? Is this an opportunity to reduce costs? How might you do that? What might be the implications?

D: Schools with a religious character

Section 5.1.5 of the DfE guidance references the need for schools with a religious character to work with their diocesan/faith body.

Documentation relating to selecting and appointing staff can be found at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools>

<http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/>



E: Defining the role

This section should be read in conjunction with **Section 5.2** of the DfE guidance.

It is critical that the board is clear about the role it is recruiting to, and the specific accountabilities and responsibilities the post holder will have. In addition to the information provided in the guide, boards might want to consider:

- What does the organisational structure surrounding the role and/or the scheme of delegation for a MAT or federation look like?
- Will the role be graded on a head teacher or deputy head pay range for the school? If the latter then the head of school, for example, is not in fact a head and this needs to be clearly set out to applicants.
- Whose name will go on any Ofsted report as the accountable leader? It should be clearly set out who the accountable officer and lead for teacher and learning will be.
- Who will be the key “head” contact for the DfE?
- Statutory responsibilities that can only be carried out by the post holder.

The needs of the school will underpin consideration of all these points and will ultimately define the responsibilities and level of accountability of role.

F: Job Description

This section should be read in conjunction with **Section 5.6.2** of the DfE guidance.

There is no set format for a job description but it should cover the primary purpose of the role, its scope, context and main responsibilities. The following template offers a guide to what a job description might be expected to cover:

Job Description Template

Job Description	
Job Purpose	One or two sentences to summarise the role.
Principal accountabilities	Key tasks for which the post holder is personally responsible - begin with active verbs e.g. manage, create, deliver, drive, establish.
Dimensions and Context	Size and breadth of the role, including organisational structure, relationships within and outside the school, school performance.
Standards and Competencies	Style and methodology – use descriptive language e.g. hold to account, rigorous, model, inspire.

G: Person Specification



This section should be read in conjunction with **Section 5.6.3** of the DfE guidance.

There is no set format for a person specification but criteria should be clearly separated into what is essential and what is desirable and it is a good idea to indicate how these requirements will be tested so that this is clear and transparent to all applicants.

The following template offers guidance on what a person specification might look like:

Person Specification Template

Assessment Method Key:

A	Application form
I	Interview
T	Test
P	Presentation

	Criteria – Essential/Desirable	Assessment Method
Qualifications	Be clear why you consider particular qualifications to be necessary. Can equivalent knowledge and skills be obtained through experience? Head teachers are not required to have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)	A/I/T/P (delete as appropriate)
Experience	Years' of experience is not a measure of competence, only of time served. It is the nature and quality of the experience that is important – what skills and knowledge it has given the candidate. Be clear why the experience you are asking for is required. For example ask for 'experience in successfully managing a large team' (which can be done in a range of roles) rather than 'minimum three years in Deputy Headship role' (which may not have involved line management)	
Professional knowledge	For example: curriculum, theory and best practice, school systems, government policy/political environment, context (religious/social dimensions), safeguarding, special needs.	
Professional skills	For example: teaching, people management, resources management, strategic planning and effective communication.	



Philosophy and commitment	This is about the vision, ethos and culture of your establishment.	
Personal qualities	<p>This is about how people work – their behaviours, style and approach. Think carefully and objectively about what’s important and remember you will want to be able to test these qualities during your selection process.</p> <p>For example: Do you need a directional or collegiate leader? If your school is in challenging circumstances in which case a consistent, solid and firm approach may be more important than creative flare and innovation.</p> <p>Using sentences rather than listing words can help to clarify why the qualities are important.</p> <p>For example: ‘Inspire and influence others to believe in the importance of education’.</p> <p>‘Demonstrate optimistic personal behaviours and attitudes to build positive relationships.’</p>	
Schools with a religious character	It should be explicit if the post is to be filled by an individual practising a specific faith or if preference will be given to candidates of a specific faith.	

In determining the essential and desirable criteria upon which to measure the personal qualities being sought, boards might find it helpful to consider the following:

- [The 7 principles of public life](#) (the Nolan principles)
- [The National Standards of excellence for headteachers](#)

H: Considering a Recruitment Agency

This section should be read in conjunction with **Section 6.3** of the DfE guidance.

Boards may consider employing the services of recruitment consultants for a number of reasons. Recruitment is a time consuming and resource intensive process and some boards do not have the expertise or confidence to be able to carry out a recruitment exercise effectively. The services offered by recruitment agencies allow at least part of the recruitment process to be handled by the experts who will attempt to match candidates to the board’s exact specification.

In other cases, the specificity of the role being sought, or the shortage of local candidates may mean that an agency is much better placed to find suitable candidates than can be found through even a national advertisement.



The fee for this service is usually only chargeable if suitable candidates are provided; however, boards should assess the benefits of using an agency against the full costs of contracting with one before making a decision to take this approach.

Finding the right agency is important. Ideally, there will be a choice between generalist agencies that can offer a larger number of candidates, or smaller niche agencies that attract more specialist candidates.

Once boards have researched and contracted with an agency they will need to ensure that the agency is properly briefed on the board's expectations and requirements, such as a comprehensive person specification and setting out the selection criteria in terms of what is essential and desirable. Ensuring that the agency is properly briefed avoids the time and resources needed to deal with unsuitable candidates.

Providing feedback to the agency on every candidate provided, relating this back to how well they met the criteria, particularly where the quality of applicants has been poor, will help the agency in identifying better quality candidates that meet the specification more closely. The agency should be advised when the vacancy has been filled, regardless of whether the individual appointed was one of their candidates or not.

Checklist for using a recruitment agency	
1	What will the cost be? When is the fee chargeable? What does the fee cover? How does this compare with other agencies?
2	Where will they advertise the post? Do you have any say in this and will you need to contribute to the cost?
3	Does the agency have evidence of providing candidates who have been successful in securing similar roles in the recent past?
4	If recruiting to a school of religious character, what experience do they have of doing this?
5	Are they able to provide references from previously satisfied customers/schools/MAT's?
6	Do they have capacity to carry out this recruitment?
7	Who within the agency will be handling the vacancy and what is their level of expertise?
8	How many hours will they spend working on this vacancy? When and how will they communicate progress?
9	What do they expect from you? What is your role? How will your wishes be taken into account?
10	What happens if there is a failure to appoint?

I: Shortlisting



Section 7 of the DfE guidance looks at the selection process itself, with **Section 7.1** outlining the purpose of shortlisting.

Shortlisting is a very important part of the recruitment process. Although it can be time consuming, full and careful attention at this stage will save time later. The following step by step guide will help to ensure only those candidates who best meet all the essential criteria are interviewed:

Step by step guide to shortlisting	
Step 1	Using the person specification list all the requirements of the job on to a short-listing grid and split these requirement into those you consider “essential” and those you consider “desirable”.
Step 2	Design a scoring system that will allow you to differentiate between how candidates meet your essential and desirable criteria. The scoring system does not need to be complicated and the following are examples of systems commonly used: Numerical: 4 = exceeds criteria; 3= meets criteria well; 2 = meets criteria; 1= barely meets criteria; 0 = fails to meet criteria Met/Unmet: Met+ = exceeds criteria; Met = meets criteria; partly met = partly meets criteria; Unmet = fails to meet criteria You can adjust these systems to suit your needs by adding or reducing the number of ratings, or changing descriptors. Any thresholds to be applied should be determined in advance of the shortlisting activity - thresholds such as the failure to meet essential criteria in one or more areas means automatic elimination.
Step 3	Go through the application forms and score each candidate against each separate criterion on a shortlisting grid (example given below). Each member of the panel should do this separately.
Step 4	Once scoring is complete, the panel should come together to compare results. Looking at the essential criteria first, the panel should discard any applicants that fail to meet any threshold set.
Step 5	Remaining candidates can then be prioritised according to highest score first and if there are still a large number of applications the scoring of the desirable criteria can be considered.
Step 6	You will have now arrived at your shortlist of candidates to interview.

Step 3 above refers to a shortlisting grid and an example of what this might look like is given below:

Shortlisting Grid Template



Shortlisting Criteria	Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Candidate 3	Candidate 4
Essential Criteria				
<i>Essential criteria a</i>	4	0	3	2
<i>Essential criteria b</i>	3	2	0	1
<i>Essential criteria c</i>				
Desirable Criteria				
<i>Desirable criteria a</i>	4	3	1	0
<i>Desirable criteria b</i>				
Total Score	11	5		
Shortlist/Longlist?	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
Interview?	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
Panel Member.....Date.....				

A similar grid can be used to score interview questions (see below).

J: Interview Questions

This section should be read in conjunction with **Section 7.4.1** of the DfE guidance.

The panel will have agreed in advance the questions to be asked and what responses and evidence will be sought for each answer. It will be important for panel members to take notes of the answers given in order that these can be reviewed when scoring the answers later, and the shortlisting grid example shown above, can be adapted for this purpose.



How questions are phrased and the types of questions used will increase the chances of getting the information needed from candidates. Some types of questions that can be useful are:

Open: e.g. Tell me about a time when you....; How did you go about..?

Extending: e.g. Tell me more about how...

Clarifying: e.g. Can you just explain a bit more about....

Hypothetical: e.g. What would you do if...

Example Questions:

- What strategies would you use to support a member of staff whose performance is not reaching an acceptable level?
- What does effective leadership look like to you?
- How would you go about achieving successful parental engagement and why do you think it is important?
- Tell me about an initiative you have developed through school that was successful
- What are the characteristics on an effective school?
- What values do you think you can bring to the role of head teacher?
- How would you monitor the standards throughout the curriculum?
- What do you think the teaching staff and the senior leadership team are looking for from a headteacher?
- How would you like to see the school tackle the problem of pupil disadvantage and the attainment gap?
- What do you see as the key educational challenges in this role?
- Describe to me the ideal relationship between the head teacher and the governing board

It is vitally important to ensure that the whole recruitment process is fair and avoids discrimination and the questions you ask at interview are no exception to this. Gov.UK gives some useful advice on questions that cannot be asked at interview:

<https://www.gov.uk/employer-preventing-discrimination/recruitment>