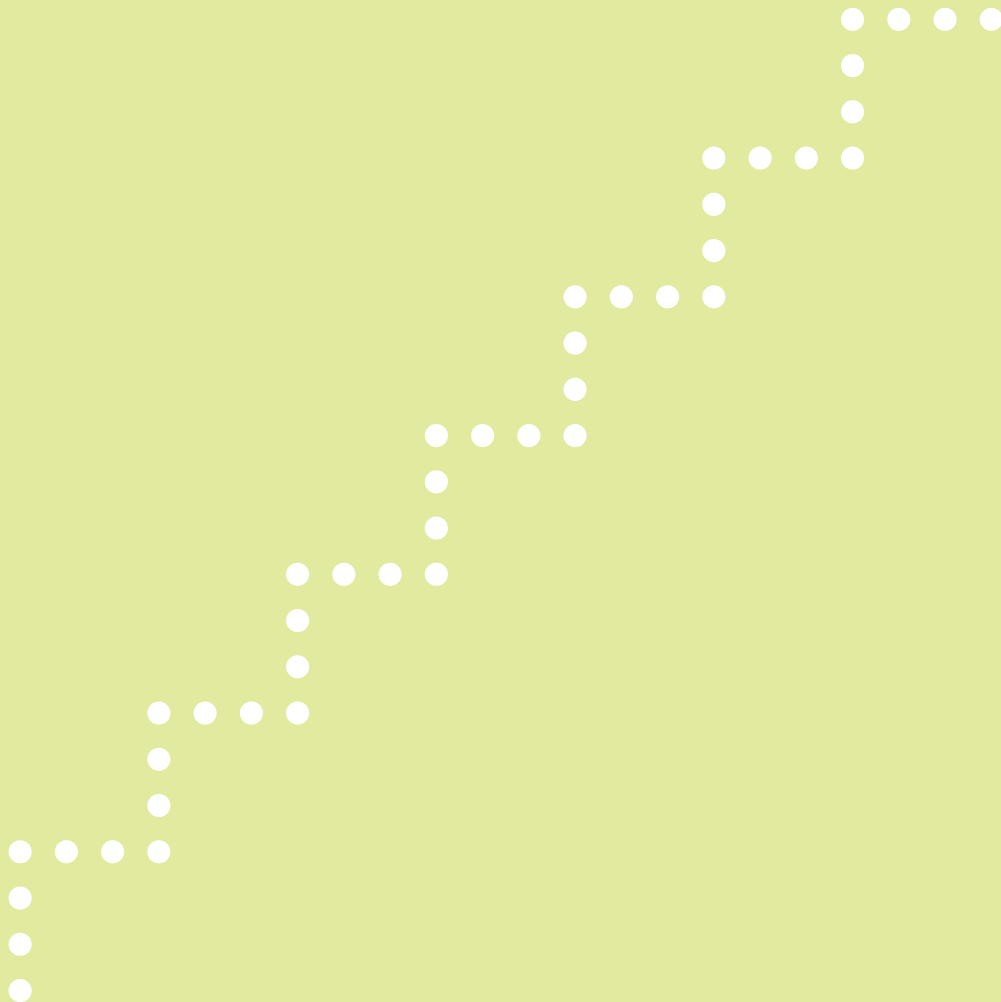


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∴ Recruiting headteachers and senior leaders



Full guidance

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Background and scope

This guidance is intended to help governors and others make the best decision when seeking a new headteacher and other senior leaders for their school. It also helps governors to think about recruitment processes as part of longer term planning to ensure that your school always has the best leadership for its long-term needs.

It has been produced following extensive research into recruitment and appointment in schools, conducted over more than two years (this can be downloaded from NCSL's website www.ncsl.org.uk/recruitingleaders). In doing so, it explores the main issues that should be taken into account during this process.

Practical tools have also been developed to support governors in this and can also be accessed from NCSL's website. Further information on these is provided on page 77 of this document.

This work was completed on behalf of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) by a consortium led by the Hay Group that included the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), the Eastern Leadership Centre and the University of Cambridge. A number of other stakeholders also provided considerable support in this work, including:

- Association of Professionals in Education and Children's Trusts (Aspect)
- Association of School and College Leaders
- Confederation of Children's Services Managers (Confed)
- Department for Education and Skills
- Education Data Surveys
- National Governors Association
- National Co-ordinators of Governor Services
- Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA)

The research that underpins this guidance included:

- a review of advice produced by local authorities and others on the recruitment and appointment of headteachers
- surveys of headteachers and chairs of governors in all schools that had recruited a new headteacher during the three-year period prior to this study
- detailed case studies in 10 of these recruiting schools
- interviews with 15 local authorities and with a range of other key stakeholders
- a review of literature on the issue of recruitment and appointment of headteachers, published in England and overseas
- comparison of approaches to recruitment and appointment in a number of other sectors

As this guidance draws upon broader good practice in recruitment in schools, much of what is recommended is equally applicable in appointing senior leaders more broadly in schools. We therefore encourage headteachers and governors to draw upon it when appointing leaders in their schools more generally.

Introduction

The responsibility of recruiting a headteacher is one that governors will feel keenly, but the chances are that many will be selecting a headteacher for the first time. Some members of the governing body may have limited experience in recruitment and selection of teaching staff; others might have experience in other sectors that may or may not be relevant to a school situation. Even if you have been involved before in recruiting a headteacher, the school will have changed since you last performed the task and so have the demands placed on headteachers and schools. When approaching an event as important as this, it can be difficult to know the extent of what you don't know.

This guidance has been developed as a result of research into headteacher recruitment and selection, carried out on behalf of the National College for School Leadership. We have talked to school governors, headteachers, local authority advisers, consultants and organisations involved in the recruitment of headteachers and other senior leaders, and discovered what helps and hinders successful appointments. While our main focus is upon the appointment of headteachers, we describe a range of good practice which is applicable to the appointment of other senior leaders in schools.

This guidance takes a practical look at good practice and the pitfalls to avoid at each stage of the recruitment and selection process. The process is complex and some aspects of it are covered by employment legislation and local policies. This is not intended as a comprehensive guide to all aspects of the recruitment and selection of headteachers, but it does highlight important factors that you will need to take into account to ensure that the process is efficient, effective and fair.

You should consider this guidance in conjunction with detailed advice and support provided by most local authorities. Support is also offered by governors' associations and the Association of School and College Leaders [www.ascl.org.uk]. You should also refer to the DfES school staffing [England] regulations 2003 [available at www.governornet.co.uk].

You must also ensure that your recruitment is safe. DfES has issued guidance on this entitled *Safeguarding Children: Safer recruitment and selection in education settings* (ref DfES/1568/2005 at www.teachernet.gov.uk). Updated and consolidated guidance, entitled *Child Protection: Safer recruitment and vetting in the Education Service* is due to be launched late in 2006 and will also be available from www.teachernet.gov.uk. A draft of this is available from www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations

Recruitment decisions fall naturally into seven stages. We have divided this guide accordingly, to help you focus on the most relevant information. We have discovered in our research that schools which follow each stage of the process – rather than diving straight in to, say, the advert – tend to be more successful in recruiting a headteacher who fits their school well. In particular, time spent on defining the sort of leadership you need is crucial.

The stages in the recruitment and selection process are:

- Preparation
- Definition of need
- Attraction
- Selection
- Appointment
- Induction
- Evaluation

You may find it helpful to skim read every stage before you embark on the recruitment and selection process and then look in detail at the relevant section as you undertake each stage in the process. You can refer back to the principles section for an overview.

Key things to consider in recruiting headteachers and senior leaders

Before you start

This document contains detailed guidance to help you make the best decision when seeking a new headteacher. You can also apply this advice when appointing other senior leaders in schools.

In later sections there are tools, checklists and recommendations. There is a detailed exploration of best practice, the decisions to be made and the processes to use. In this section, we draw out the key principles to guide your decision.

If you only read one part of this document, read these guidelines.

They embody best practice based on extensive research and experience. A governing body has a duty to consider these principles when recruiting a head.

This guidance also contains a challenge to you.

The quality of leadership is one of the most important factors under our control in determining the success of a school. Therefore, the decision before you is among the most important you can take. There is no such thing as a perfect headteacher or leader. Every school is different: what suits another school will not necessarily suit yours; what served your school well in the past may not serve it well for the future.

We encourage you, therefore, to take this opportunity to think deeply about the challenges facing your school; about your aspirations and hopes for the future; about the changes in your community and in the education system as a whole. Use this to create a demanding but realistic description of the headteacher you are looking for and to assess candidates rigorously against this description.

Of all the steps and choices before you, this deserves the most time and attention.

The education system is changing in many ways: schools' relationships with their communities; the expectations of their staff, parents and pupils; even our definitions of learning and achievement. We can't predict every shift, but recruiting a new head is an exciting opportunity to position your school to take advantage of the changes.

Recruitment within the broader context of succession planning

There is now much evidence that the most successful organisations plan for long-term leadership development and succession: they don't wait until the chief executive is leaving to plan for a replacement and, even more important, they invest in growing their own talent pool, by creating leadership opportunities and providing systematic development and training.

There are many good reasons for governing bodies to take a similar approach, so that the appointment of a headteacher, itself a critical function, is part of a systematic approach to securing the future leadership of the school. This approach becomes even more important when there is a shortage of candidates for leadership positions, which can be the case now. If your school is in London or an area of high housing cost or deprivation, is small or in the Catholic sector, this shortage of leadership candidates could well be familiar to you already.

There are several factors behind this.

Demographics

The first one is purely demographic. Many countries are currently facing a retirement bulge as the baby-boomer generation reaches retirement age. Between 45 and 50 per cent of heads and deputies are over 50. At the same time, there has been a decline in the number of teachers in their late thirties to mid-forties, suggesting that a shortage in leaders is likely to occur in the near future. While the longer term is rosier, this shortage is forecast to be at its worst between 2009 and 2011. To address this shortfall, it is estimated that the number of school leaders will need to increase by 15-20 per cent by 2009.

Perceptions of headship

At the same time, it seems that fewer prospective heads and leaders are currently attracted to the role. Research has found that only 43 per cent of deputies are interested in becoming a headteacher, while just 28 per cent of teachers express a desire to reach the top job. Few would dispute that the role of headteacher today is a demanding one, and for many prospective candidates, the perceived pressures of the role are one reason for their reluctance to apply for headship. However, heads themselves generally have an entirely different perspective of the role, and, notwithstanding the heavy burdens, research has found that 9 out of 10 consider their job to be rewarding. Clearly, then, there seems to be a mismatch between the perceptions of potential heads and those of individuals in the job.

Reducing the “apprenticeship”

There are other factors that compound the problem, and a number of them are things that governors can do something about. For example, the “standard” apprenticeship lasts 20 years and comprises 15 years in the classroom and 5 years as a deputy. This could be partly due to traditional expectations and to the fact that schools as a whole have not traditionally had a connected, systemic approach to identifying and developing potential leaders. Given that there are now many mature entrants to teaching who have valuable experience from other fields, it seems sensible to both change our expectations of how long an apprenticeship is necessary and also seek ways of supporting accelerated career development.¹

A number of strategies are important in addressing these challenges.

A system-wide issue

This shortage is not a problem which can be addressed by government – or any single agency – acting alone. It is a system-wide challenge, and NCSL, heads, governors, schools, local authorities, diocesan bodies, professional associations, DfES and other national agencies all have a part to play in addressing it. It is something in which governing bodies have a particular interest and a potentially important role to play.

Appointing headteachers more efficiently

The first and most immediate implication for governing bodies centres on improving the efficiency with which individuals are appointed to headship, and it is anticipated that this guidance will help to support this. At the same time, governors need to reconsider their perceptions of how their head should work and, indeed, whether or not more innovative approaches to headship may be more appropriate to their needs. There are now a number of successful examples of different models: for example, some schools have joined federations with one headteacher who has overall responsibility for two or three schools; others have appointed headteachers with far more diverse experience than the traditional apprenticeship²; and there are now a growing number of schools successfully led by a “co-headship”, where two people share the role. The some schools, co-headship model illustrates one potential way of enabling talented leaders to share the role of headteacher in instances where, for one reason or another, they might not want to shoulder the burden alone. Further research on the experiences of schools that have adopted this approach is available from: <http://www.ncsl.org.uk/modelsofheadship>

¹ National programmes such as Fast Track aim to support accelerated leadership development (see www.ncsl.org.uk/fasttrack), and local groups of schools are increasingly working together to provide local programmes.

² Three Fast Track participants, for example, have now become headteachers, each of whom has far fewer years’ teaching experience than the traditional model.

Creating a pool of leaders for the future

Equally important, though, is the need to create a pool of good-quality school leaders for the future. Central to this is providing opportunities for potential leaders to develop their leadership skills, for instance through secondments, deputising, visits and other professional development. Governing bodies should be active in looking at the opportunities they are creating within their schools and in collaboration with other schools. Further information on approaches and strategies used to develop future leaders is outlined in ‘Meeting the challenge – growing tomorrow’s leaders’, available at: <http://www.ncsl.org.uk/publications>

Retaining talented leaders

Finally, you will want to consider the issue of retention. There are ways in which governing bodies are working with their current headteachers to provide experiences which keep them invigorated in their post and, at the same time, provide opportunities for growing the other leadership talent in the school. One way is to support heads in taking on part-time responsibilities beyond the school; these might include becoming a School Improvement Partner (SIP), supporting another school in difficulties, or becoming a tutor on a leadership development programme such as NPQH. All of these activities can bring multiple benefits: stimulus and challenge for the head, new insights for the school, support for the wider system, and opportunities for other members of the school’s leadership team to take on “acting” responsibilities.

Further information on the issues relating to succession planning can be obtained from NCSL’s website: www.ncsl.org.uk/growingtomorrowleaders

The main stages in recruiting a headteacher or senior leader

The study found that the process of recruiting and appointing staff can be broken down into seven discrete stages. These are summarised in Figure 1. Evidence shows that schools which follow each stage of the process in turn and with a thorough approach – rather than diving straight in to, say, producing an advert – tend to be more successful in recruiting a headteacher who fits their school well. In particular, time spent on defining the sort of leadership you need is crucial.

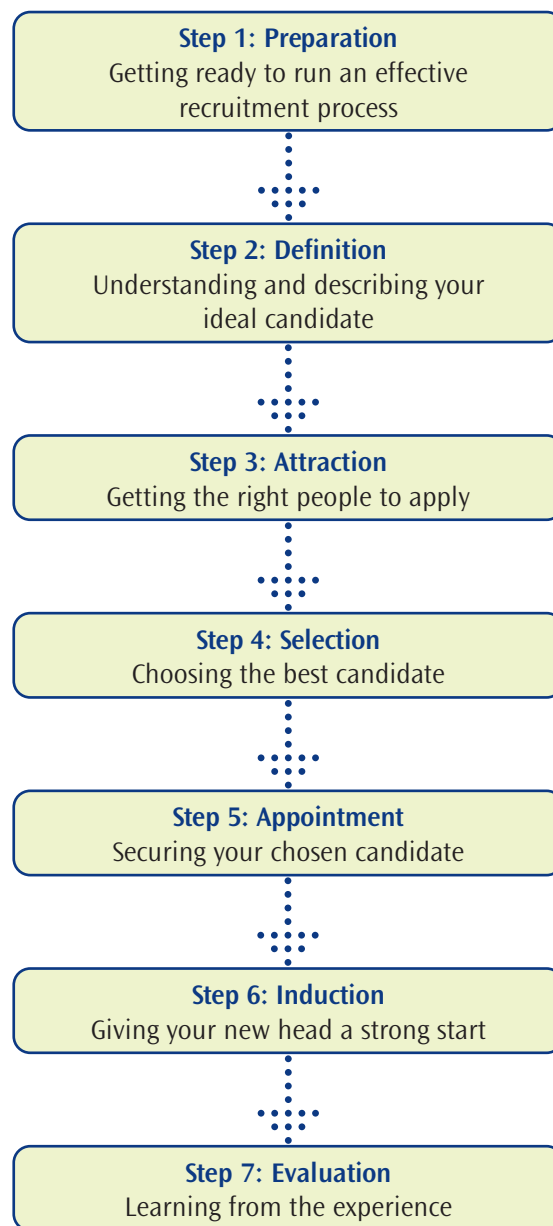


Figure 1 Overview of the stages of the recruitment process

Addressing each of these phases rigorously will help to provide:

- clear insight into the sort of leadership your school needs
- a good pool of appropriate candidates
- a fair, efficient and engaging process
- enhanced reputation for your school
- the right candidate for your school's unique needs at this time
- a strong start for the appointee
- a clear understanding of how the process you used can be improved
- improved standards and higher morale for governors, applicants and staff

Things to consider

Overarching ideals:

Recruiting a new headteacher is among the most important decisions a governing body can make and should be approached with deliberation.

Governing bodies should have a long-term plan in place for headteacher succession, keeping the current head involved and identifying possible internal recruits.

Don't make assumptions about the sort of headteacher you need now based upon what worked in your school in the past or what is seen to work in other schools.

Assess your leadership needs in the light of your goals, your environment and the capabilities of the current leadership team.

There are many new types and models of headship that may suit your school's needs or widen the pool of potential applicants – seek advice on the opportunities available from your local authority or diocese. Further information is also available from NCSL's website www.ncsl.org.uk/modelsofheadship

Define your leadership needs in terms of what you expect your head to know and to do and how you expect them to behave, convert these into selection criteria and rate candidates objectively against them throughout the process.

Set realistic expectations and a manageable number of selection criteria.

Preparation:

- Have a succession plan in place, and stay informed about your current head's career plans.
 - Don't rush into advertising without proper preparation.
- Be careful how you work with the outgoing headteacher and about the expectations you raise in staff about their involvement in the process.
- Obtain the guidance on Safeguarding Children: Safer Recruitment and Selection in Education Settings from DfES/1568/2005 and ensure that at least one member of your panel has been trained.
 - Keep your paperwork.
 - Ensure that you are fully informed about and, if necessary, receive training in equal opportunities policy.
 - Seek advice from your local authority, diocese or other adviser.
 - Create a selection panel of 3-7 members, with experience, interest, objectivity and the ability to commit to the full process.
- Be realistic about what you can expect from a headteacher, but do not appoint if you have not seen the right person.
- Prepare a contingency plan in case you cannot appoint before the post falls vacant.

Definition:

- No recruitment process can succeed without a clear and relevant definition of the role and the qualities you are looking for.
- What has worked well for you in the past may not work as well in the future; what works well for other schools may not work in yours.
- Gather a wide range of evidence about the school's needs and seek objective advice and challenge. Pay attention to the SEF.
- Test the logic of the connections between the school's needs and the attributes you are looking for by ensuring the attributes are individually necessary and collectively sufficient.
 - Be realistic.
- Consider the current leadership team in the school and how their own skills and abilities could complement the headteacher's. What is well covered and where are the gaps?
- Write a job description that is based on the available templates but shaped to be unique to your school.

- Write a person specification that describes the essential, desirable and threshold attributes required. Base your selection criteria on these attributes.
- Limit your essential criteria to a manageable number (6-10) that will really make a difference.
- Consider not only skills and knowledge, but behaviours, attributes, characteristics, values and motivation.

Attraction:

- Don't rush to advertise – invest in preparing your process and defining your needs first.
- Seek to impress as well as to be impressed. Efficiency and courtesy are the most important attributes at this stage.
 - Be honest, but optimistic – some of the best headteachers are attracted by the chance to make a real difference in a school which needs their talents.
- Help candidates to “self-select” by giving accurate information. There is no great value in hiding your selection criteria.
- Invest in a coherent and complete application pack, but don't overload candidates with irrelevant information.
- Include an application form which tests for your threshold criteria and gathers basic information like contact details and career history.
- School visits are a useful part of the self-selection process, but ensure that they are well planned and that all participants in the school are briefed on their role.

Selection:

- Shortlist no more than six candidates for interview, based on your threshold criteria and whichever essential criteria can be discerned from the application form.
- Keep a record of all decisions made and the rationale behind them.
- Request references after shortlisting, keep them focused on factual verification, and use them to confirm rather than influence your appointment decision.

- If you have the time and budget to run a formal assessment centre, do so.
 - Don't try to intimidate candidates – it is not predictive of their behaviour in post.
- Remain polite and engaged, but don't be afraid to push for the level of response you require, or to probe further to get the evidence you need.
- You must conduct a formal interview (with a senior LA representative present unless you are a VA or foundation school or academy).
- Prepare an assessment grid for each exercise used (which cross-matches criteria and candidates) and require observers to complete it on the spot.
 - Ensure that all questions and exercises are related to one or more pre-agreed selection criteria.
- Prepare panel members to ask good questions – open-ended, focused, not leading, and without excessive preamble.
- Reserve judgement until all candidates have completed all exercises.
- Don't seek consensus too early when reaching your decision – ensure that all candidates are considered and all panel members have spoken.

Appointment:

- Be realistic about what you can expect from a headteacher, but do not appoint if you have not seen the right person.
- Inform the successful candidate first – they may say no and you may wish to offer it to the next in line (assuming that candidate also met your criteria).
 - Although verbal acceptances are binding in law they are difficult to enforce. Ensure that contracts are drawn up and issued swiftly to enable the candidate to tender their resignation.
- Unsuccessful candidates should be treated with respect. You may wish to offer feedback, but anything you say could be used in an appeal. Take particular care to offer development feedback to unsuccessful internal candidates.
 - Successful candidates need feedback too – any development areas could form part of their professional development or performance management plan.

Induction:

- A well-planned induction is a critical part of a successful recruitment process and will enable the new head to get up to speed as quickly as possible.
- The local authority will be a good source of advice on induction.
- For first-time headteachers, the national Early Headship Provision provides funds and opportunities (www.ncsl.org.uk/ehp).
- Make as much use as possible of data generated by the interview process to begin the head's performance management and professional development.
- The chair of governors should devote some time to facilitating their new head's entry into formal and informal local networks.
- Where possible, arrange for a mentor from among the experienced local heads – but be aware that your head will have preferences and expectations of their own. Discuss it first.
- Make an audit of useful information and keep the new head informed and involved in any substantive decisions that occur between appointment and taking up post.

Evaluation:

- If you need to re-advertise the post, take some time to evaluate your previous process and decide if anything needs changing.
- Seek objective external advice before re-advertising. Speak to candidates who decided not to apply after receiving an application pack or who dropped out during the process.
- If the recruitment process was successful, also evaluate what went well and what could be improved. Store the learning safely to inform the next senior appointment.

Some frequently asked questions

Preparation

Who is responsible for recruiting and selecting a headteacher?

See page 21-22

Where can I get support and advice?

See page 26-27

What is the impact of equal opportunities and anti-discrimination legislation?

See page 26

What is the right role for the current head to play in recruiting their successor?

See page 22-23

How can I ensure that our recruitment processes are safe and protect children?

See page 25

Definition

What should I look for in a new headteacher?

See page 36-37

How do I write a job description?

See pages 39-41

How do I write a person specification?

See pages 39-41

What account should I take of NPQH?

See page 38

What information should I take into account when deciding what we want?

See page 33-36

Attraction

How do I create a good advert?

See page 45-46

What should I put in an application pack?

See page 46-47

Selection

How many people should I invite to interview?

See page 55

What are the best techniques to use for selection?

See page 55-65 and tool 8

Should staff get involved in the recruitment process?

See pages 20 and 24

How do I conduct an interview?

See page 54 and 60-62

Appointment

Who should be involved in making the decision?

See page 28

What is the protocol for making the offer?

See page 67

What happens if I can't appoint?

See pages 29 and 70-71

Induction

How can I give our new head the best possible start?

See page 68-70

Consideration of each stage

Preparation

Getting ready to run an effective recruitment process

Things to consider:

Have a succession plan in place, and stay informed about your current head's career plans.

Don't rush into advertising without proper preparation.

Be careful how you work with the outgoing headteacher and about the expectations you raise in staff about their involvement in the process.

Obtain the guidance on Safeguarding Children: Safer Recruitment and Selection in Education Settings from DfES/1568/2005 and ensure that at least one member of your panel has been trained.

Keep your paperwork.

Ensure that you are fully informed and, if necessary, receive training in equal opportunities policy.

Seek advice from your local authority, diocese or other adviser.

Create a selection panel of 3-7 members, with experience, interest, objectivity and the ability to commit to the full process.

Be realistic about what you can expect from a headteacher, but do not appoint if you have not seen the right person.

Prepare a contingency plan in case you cannot appoint before the post falls vacant.

If you have been given advance notice of the head's intention to resign, you will have already given some thought to the process. However, for many governing bodies, planning begins when the chair of governors receives a resignation letter. You must immediately inform the local authority of the vacancy, and the diocese (if yours is a church school).

You will naturally be anxious to get planning underway as soon as possible. The number of applicants for headship posts is often lower than it used to be and some schools, particularly primary schools, find that they need to advertise twice or more in order to have a suitable field of applicants to interview. **However, in their anxiety to place an advertisement and hold an initial meeting, many schools leave out vital elements of preparation.**

In an ideal world, planning for your next headteacher begins long before the current head's resignation. This is not always possible, and unforeseen events can intervene, but **the most effective schools have a long-term succession plan**. This may involve identifying potential successors internally, considering and building the strengths and capabilities of the wider senior team, tactical secondments, or building connections with local schools with promising leaders. It will involve constant review of the school's circumstances and changing needs. Effective long-term planning should also feature training for governors in the skills and expertise required by the recruitment and appointment process.

By the end of the preparation stage you will:

- be clear about roles and responsibilities, and who to involve
- be clear about how you will incorporate guidance on safeguarding children and young people into your recruitment and selection process
- know what records you need to keep
- have identified the support and training available to you
- be clear about the steps in the process and timescales
- know who should be on your appointment panel
- have begun to think about the school's budget and the salary you can afford to pay
- know what you will do if you cannot appoint before the post falls vacant
- know what documents it would be helpful to consult

What are the roles and responsibilities of those involved?

In voluntary-aided and foundation schools and academies, the governing body is the employer. In other schools the local authority is the employer but the governing body carries out most employment responsibilities for the school's staff. Where the local authority is the employer, it has advisory rights. Where the governing body is the employer it can choose to give advisory rights to the local authority or to the diocese. Because the local authority knows the school and is experienced in making headship appointments, its advice can be invaluable.

You need to be clear about which category your school falls into and what the rights of the local authority are, and to make an early decision about how and when to involve them. This is particularly important where the local authority has the right to give advice, as you want to be sure that the Director's representative is available for key meetings and dates.

Some aspects of support may be included under a service-level agreement, others you may need to pay for. If your local authority does not offer comprehensive support for headteacher appointments, or if you would prefer support from somewhere else, you may want to consider buying in a consultant if the school budget allows this.

The decision on whom to appoint to headship rests with the governing body, following a recommendation from the appointment panel. Where the local authority is the employer, the governing body should seek the agreement of the local authority to appoint its chosen candidate. Very occasionally the governors will wish to appoint a person to whom the authority has objected. In such instances the reasons for this decision will need to be stated in writing.

From 2005, the New Relationship with Schools initiated the gradual introduction of a School Improvement Partner (SIP) for every school. The School Improvement Partner is the school's "critical friend" and acts as the conduit between central government, the local authority and the school, helping set targets and priorities and identifying support needed. The School Improvement Partner also advises governors on the headteacher's performance management, providing the functions currently performed by the external adviser. Where this relationship has already developed and the School Improvement Partner knows the school well, he or she will be an obvious person to help the school in the appointment process. The degree to which the local authority involves School Improvement Partners in headship appointments will be a matter for local choice and local authority policy.

Many governing bodies, aware of the impact of their decision on staff, pupils and parents, want to involve as many people as possible in some way. Where the governing body is used to relying on the support of the current headteacher, they may wish to seek his or her advice.

It is important that you clarify how others will be involved at an early stage, to avoid later misunderstandings. There are a number of important issues to consider here.

The outgoing headteacher

Headteachers have a critical role to play in the identification and development of leadership talent within the school as part of ongoing succession planning. However, it is not generally seen as good practice for the outgoing headteacher to be heavily involved in recruiting their successor, although there is nothing in law to prevent them from being so.

Pitfalls:

- Your current headteacher may have done an excellent job, but you may not be doing the school a service if you look for their exact replica.
- Schools change, as do their staff, and the skills and experience of the current head may not be the ones needed to take the school into the future.
- You should resist any desire on the part of the outgoing headteacher to dictate your view of what the school needs next or of the information received from candidates.

Good practice:

- Hold a frank discussion with the outgoing headteacher about the role you expect him or her to play, and be aware of sensitivities.
- Hold an exit interview with the headteacher and explore his or her views on the challenges now faced by the school, or other information which may be helpful. Take this into account when forming your views on what the school needs next.
- Consult the headteacher and enlist his or her support for the practical arrangements for the selection process, and keep him or her informed of progress.

In one school the outgoing headteacher held unofficial discussions with candidates when they visited the school. His negative views prompted two potential candidates to withdraw their applications.

“By keeping the current headteacher informed about the process, we gave them confidence that their legacy would endure, without them being involved in the final decision.” Chair of Governors

The staff

The staff will be keenly interested in their next headteacher and will have views on the leadership qualities they see as important. You may also want their co-operation for the selection events if, for example, you plan for candidates to meet them or to hold an assembly. Further guidance on this is provided in the Selection section of this guidance.

Pitfalls:

- Only the appointment panel see all the information about, and performance of, candidates, so be careful not to place too much emphasis on opinions formed by people during one meeting with candidates.
- While you may wish to seek the views of staff, and take them into account, **it is unwise to raise expectations about their influence over the process.**
- Some schools arrange for staff to meet candidates, either formally or informally. You will need to decide in advance how you will deal with feedback from such occasions and when to take it into account. This is particularly important in the case of internal candidates, or candidates already known to members of staff. You may choose to inform staff that, although they are not involved in the assessment of candidates, they are invited to make observations to the chair of governors.

One group of staff put the appointment panel under considerable pressure by lobbying for an internal candidate. Most of the panel were aware that this was inappropriate, but some panel members were influenced by the staff views.

Good practice:

- Share the selection criteria with staff and ask for feedback that relates to the criteria.
- Ensure that staff are kept informed about the process and timescales.

Another governing body restricted staff feedback during the interview days to the following question: “Were there any candidates you would not feel happy working with, and why?”

Other members of the governing body

The considerations that apply to staff also apply to members of the governing body who are not on the appointment panel. While you should involve the whole governing body in the initial stages of the process, once they have delegated responsibility for selecting a candidate to the appointment panel, their input into the process should be restricted to giving feedback, directly to the chair, on their impressions of the candidates gained. Governors who are not on the appointment panel but who wish to have a role in the process could be offered a post on the appeal panel, in case an appeal should arise.

The chair of governors

The chair often takes a leading role in organising the recruitment and selection process and may chair the appointment panel. However, they should ensure that the whole governing body makes a contribution to the preparation stage and should respect the corporate nature of decision-making throughout the process. If the chair meets with external advisers to familiarise themselves with the requirements, they should keep a note of the conversation, and share it with the governing body.

Safeguarding children

You must obtain the guidance issued by the DfES entitled Safeguarding Children: Safer Recruitment and Selection in Education Settings, DfES/1568/2005.

This guidance sets out the recruitment and selection procedures that should be followed at each stage of the process to deter, reject or identify people who might abuse children, or are otherwise unsuited to work with them. You have a responsibility to incorporate these recommendations into your process, and the checklist included in the guidance will help you do this. **At least one member of the appointment panel must have received online training in safer recruitment**, available from:

www.ncsl.org.uk/saferrecruitment

Updated and consolidated recruitment and vetting guidance is due to be launched by DfES in late 2006. The draft version of this guidance is available at www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations.

Record-keeping

You are legally obliged to keep all paperwork for at least six months after an appointment has been made (some local authorities recommend keeping records for a year).

Paperwork, applications and discussions are confidential to the governing body and **no one should commit to paper comments that cannot be made public** if, for example, there is an appeal against your decision by an unsuccessful candidate. Some local authorities advise chairs not to allow documentation to go home with governors, but to remain on school premises at all times to ensure confidentiality. You should also keep a sample copy of all documentation.

What support and training are available?

It is vital that you obtain appropriate advice and training prior to the appointment process. A significant element of this training will relate to a full understanding of the implementation of an **equal opportunities policy**.

Fairness is a critical part of an effective recruitment process. A fair process will not only start a relationship with the new headteacher in a positive way, but will help avoid appeals, and even litigation, from candidates who feel that they have been unfairly treated.

Discrimination is prohibited by law on the grounds of age, gender, race and disability. Recent directives from the EU also prohibit discrimination on the grounds of religion and sexual orientation.

There are a number of other reasons to obtain external advice from the outset of recruitment:

- You are close to the school and outgoing headteacher and this may affect your objectivity about where the school needs to go next.
- You may be clear about your strategic plans for the school, but anxious about the responsibility of making a professional appointment.
- There may be differences of opinion on the governing body.
- You may lack expertise in recruitment and selection for this type of post.

External advice and guidance can provide you with:

- objectivity about the school's strengths and weaknesses
- reassurance that you are complying with legislation and policy
- up-to-date information on the changing role of the head and demands on schools
- experience of what works and what doesn't
- facilitation skills to support effective decision-making
- a professional assessment of the experience and skills of candidates

Many local authorities have comprehensive guidance for governors on the recruitment of headteachers, and staff with considerable experience in making headship appointments. As a first step contact your local authority, via your link adviser or inspector, to find out what support they offer. Alternative support may be available from the diocese, headteacher associations or private companies.

If no one on the governing body has had recent training on recruitment and selection, consider what training is needed and what is on offer. In many appointments an element of training is built into the planning meetings. Will this be enough for your appointment panel? In addition, training may provide you with the opportunity to update your understanding of the changing role of the headteacher. Be sure to consider the individual needs of different governors on the panel: some may not feel as confident as others that they can contribute to this process.

“Not all governors are aware of the full complexity of the head’s role.”
Governor

Tool 1 offers a checklist that highlights some of the knowledge and skills needed to ensure that your process is efficient, effective and fair. It will help you decide in which areas you need support and how much. This tool (and others) is available at www.ncsl.org.uk/recruitingleaders.

Using recruitment agencies

Some supply teaching recruitment agencies also offer assistance to governing bodies in the recruitment of headteachers. Building on experience of recruiting executives in the private sector, such agencies develop a list of experienced and aspiring headteachers who are looking for jobs. An agency would work with the governing body to develop a person specification and then seek suitable applicants for the post. The fee for such a service is often a considerable percentage of the headteacher's salary. You may, however, be in a strong position to negotiate with agencies keen to build market share.

Not all providers in this new market offer the same level of quality or attention to your individual needs. A risk involves agencies presenting whatever candidates are on their books regardless of merit or fit. As with all external advice, personal referrals from people you trust are the best protection.

What are the stages in the process and the time lines?

Tool 2 contains a typical process and time line. It shows a number of important steps to take in a very short time. The minimum amount of time required is nine weeks. However, trying to fit all the tasks that need to be done in this timescale could reduce the quality of your decision-making.

Our research suggests that time invested in the early stages of the process is time well spent. If you have been given plenty of notice of the headteacher's intention to leave or retire, start preparation straight away and use the extra time between hearing of the vacancy and the initial meeting of the governing body to spend more time planning.

The first major task is to hold an initial meeting of the governing body. If you plan to draw upon external support it is helpful if they can attend this first meeting.

Who should be on our appointment panel?

People should be chosen for the appointment panel to ensure:

- experience of making headship appointments
- experience of recruitment and selection in other relevant fields
- a gender balance
- a representative cross-section of governors
- ability to be present at all stages of the process
- full understanding of issues related to fairness and discrimination
- they will make a good impression on candidates

Continuity throughout the process is essential, but the time commitment is considerable and this may pose a problem for some. Don't choose members of the panel on the sole basis of who can give the time. If you cannot form a suitable panel, co-opt someone with the expertise you need – someone from the community or an experienced local headteacher. Be firm about rejecting anyone who may be biased or confrontational in his or her approach. Be sure to note in governor minutes the decision to delegate responsibility for the selection of the new headteacher to the panel.

You should have a least three people on the panel, and seven is usually considered the maximum advisable number. An odd number avoids the need for a casting vote. If the panel is too large, decision-making is unwieldy, especially when it may also include your external supporter and the senior local authority representative for the final interviews.

What information do we need in order to determine salary?

The governing body determines the headteacher's salary, within the parameters of the national pay scales and recommended range for the size of school.

- Will you offer a spot salary or quote a range in your advertisement?
- Where on the range would you expect someone to start and how will you decide?
- Up to what level are you prepared to go if a candidate wants to negotiate his or her starting point?

Most of these decisions will depend on what the school can afford within the recommended range for your school on the leadership pay spine. **There are exceptional circumstances in which you can pay above the recommended range.** Guidance can be found in *School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document* (DfES). Before the initial meeting, you should discuss the budget situation with the bursar or school finance officer and the Finance Committee.

“[Candidates] saw the Ofsted report and thought the school was too tough. The salary needed to reflect that. It’s down to the governors to make this decision, based on the budget.” Chair of Governors

What if we cannot appoint before the post falls vacant?

This is a situation for which you need to be prepared. There are agreed resignation dates for headteachers, and if you receive the minimum amount of notice you will be unlikely to appoint an existing head in time for them to give notice by their resignation date. Deputy and assistant headteachers are required to give less notice. Standard resignation dates are included in Tool 2.

If you do not attract a suitable field of applicants, or you interview and decide not to appoint, you will need to consider the following options:

- go back to the original applications and draw up another shortlist; or, more likely,
- re-advertise

Your local authority may have strategies for supporting schools that cannot fill posts immediately. If you think the post may be hard to fill or you have experienced problems recruiting in the past, talk to your local authority about the support they can give before you need it. This will provide you with the reassurance you need to avoid making an inappropriate appointment out of desperation.

If you cannot appoint immediately, you will need to decide who will lead the school in the meantime. Your options include:

- inviting a member of staff, normally a deputy head, to be acting head for a term (This is good professional development for someone with right level of experience.)
- asking the local authority for help in identifying an experienced deputy from another school to be acting head for a term
- asking the local authority for help in identifying a headteacher who can be seconded to your school for a term
- approaching recruitment agencies or education consultants who may be able to provide an interim manager

Although we recommend realism in what you can expect of a headteacher, never make an appointment out of desperation or choose the best of a weak group. If you have not seen the right candidate, start again.

What documents should we consult?

You will find it helpful to assemble the following:

- Paper No. 50: Selecting Heads and Deputy Heads, NAGM 2003, now part of the National Governors Association (covers the legal requirements)
- A Guide to the Law for School Governors, Department for Education and Skills, 2005 (Chapter 9)
- School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document, Department for Education and Skills, Ref: 0343 2004
- National Standards for Headteachers, Department for Education and Skills, Ref: 0083 2004
- Safeguarding Children: Safer Recruitment and Selection in Education Settings, DfES/1568/2005, obtainable from www.teachernet.gov.uk/childprotection. Updated and consolidated recruitment and vetting guidance is due to be launched by DfES in late 2006. The draft version of this guidance is available at www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations.
- Your local authority's guidance on recruitment and selection of headteachers
- Recruitment and selection: a practical guide for school governors, Jane Phillips, Adamson Publishing Ltd (2005)

Definition

Understanding and describing your ideal candidate

Things to consider

No recruitment process can succeed without a clear and relevant definition of the role and the qualities you are looking for.

What has worked well for you in the past may not work as well in the future; what works well for other schools may not work in yours.

Gather a wide range of evidence about the school's needs and seek objective advice and challenge. Pay attention to the SEF.

Test the logic of the connections between the school's needs and the attributes you are looking for by ensuring the attributes are individually necessary and collectively sufficient.

Be realistic.

Consider the current leadership team in the school and how their own skills and abilities could complement the headteacher's. What is well-covered and where are the gaps?

Write a job description that is based on the available templates but shaped to be unique to your school.

Write a person specification that describes the essential, desirable and threshold attributes required. Base your selection criteria on these attributes.

Limit your essential criteria to a manageable number (6-10) that will really make a difference.

Consider not only skills and knowledge, but behaviours, attributes, characteristics, values and motivation.

At this stage you will define the needs of the school, the job to be done and the person needed to do it.

It is an important phase in the recruitment and selection process but is often rushed in the anxiety to place an advertisement as soon as possible. Getting the definition right will provide you with the foundation for a successful appointment. It doesn't matter, for example, how probing your questions or insightful your judgement, if you are looking for the wrong sort of leader for your school. What you define at this stage will form the basis for:

- the advertisement
- the information you supply to candidates
- criteria for shortlisting
- choice of selection techniques and questioning
- recording the candidates' performance at interview against criteria
- making your final decision

By the end of the definition stage you will:

- have a clear idea about the current and future needs of the school
- have analysed the skills and experience already in the leadership team
- have defined the skills and experience you are seeking in a new headteacher
- have written a job description and a person specification
- have considered the relevance of more radical and creative solutions to the role of headteacher

The current and future needs of the school

From September 2005 schools are strongly advised (but not legally required) to complete and keep up to date the Ofsted *Self-evaluation Form* (SEF), and the governing body should play an active role in contributing to it. This form will be used by inspectors but it is also a valuable management tool for the school's own use.

Reviewing the Self-evaluation Form provides an opportunity to identify:

- the characteristics of learners at your school
- the school's aims and special features
- issues that act as aids or barriers to raising performance
- your priorities for improvement
- the views of learners, parents or carers, and other stakeholders
- how well learners achieve
- the quality of learners' personal development and well-being
- the quality of provision (teaching and learning, curriculum and support for pupils)
- leadership and management
- effectiveness and efficiency

Each of these could affect the experience, knowledge or characteristics required of the ideal headteacher for your school.

Having an up to date Self-evaluation Form and school improvement plan will provide you with a sound evidence base to inform your consideration of the needs of the school. It will also alert you to the views of staff, learners, parents and others.

There are other sources of information to take into account. What are the priorities in the school improvement plan? What is the local authority's assessment of the school, based upon the school's own monitoring processes? What does the school's data on performance and assessment tell you about priorities for raising achievement? What have governing body visits to the school told you about teaching and learning? What is the current and future financial position of the school?

You also need to look to the future. What ambitions does the school have? What initiatives in education will have an impact on the way the school will develop? What needs to be done in the future to continue to modernise the school workforce, to work with other agencies to implement Every Child Matters, to provide additional services to the community as an extended school? Is there any likelihood of federation or greater collaboration with other schools?

One way of capturing this thinking is to answer the following questions:

- What are our most important aspirations for the future?
- What are the most important changes going on around us?
- How might these changes make our aspirations more or less likely?
- What, therefore, are the critical things we have to get right as a school?

Pitfalls:

- Having the answers and the evidence to back up your judgements on this wide range of issues takes time. The first pitfall is to rush this part of the process.
- Don't assume that you know all there is to know about the school. Many governing bodies do, but there are also schools where the governing body has been reliant on the headteacher to filter this information to them. Do you have all the evidence you need to identify the current and future needs of the school?

One governing body had not been kept fully informed about the financial position of the school. The new headteacher identified a considerable deficit in the budget, which had to be rectified by making difficult decisions in his first term in post.

Good practice:

- Take time to manage this stage in the process.
- Form working parties to look at various aspects of the school, now and for the future.
- Consult with staff, pupils, parents or carers and other stakeholders – what do they see as strengths and weaknesses? How would they like to see the school develop in the future?
- Research the national agenda for the future of schools and assess its impact on your school.
- Look at data about the achievement and progress of your pupils.
- Ask your local authority adviser or inspector or school improvement partner to share their perceptions of the needs of the school.

One governing body produced a short questionnaire for staff, asking them what they were looking for in their new leader.

The skills and experience of the leadership team

Teamwork and distributed leadership are increasingly replacing the notion that all schools need a heroic or charismatic headteacher. **Your new headteacher will not be working in isolation. What skills and experience already exist in the leadership team?** What are the current strengths and what are the gaps? What roles do they play and what are the relationships between them?

If you make an assessment of these in consultation with the senior leadership team, you can identify the skills, experience and characteristics needed in the new headteacher to complement them. Teams work best when they contain a balance of characteristics and roles.

Thinking about the leadership team can help you set realistic expectations for any single individual within the team, including the head. You may, on the other hand, identify weaknesses in the current team that imply skills or attributes that are “must-haves” in the new head. Finally, there is the hard-to-define element of team style or culture. What sort of individual would fit into the current team? And do you want them to fit in, or to shake things up and challenge assumptions?

Pitfalls:

- Don't make the assumption that a headteacher has to be skilled and experienced in all aspects of headship. Few of your candidates will be excellent at every aspect of the role.
- If you are not clear about the characteristics of the existing team and how they work together, you may miss the opportunity to bring in some essential new ingredient for strengthening the team and enabling it to achieve more.

Good practice:

- Find out more about your leadership team profile, for example their experience, roles, characteristics, relationships and aspirations. How do they think they work as a team? What characteristics in a new head do they see as important for improving their effectiveness as a team? You could add questions such as these to a questionnaire for staff.

The skills and experience required of the new headteacher

Your analysis of the current and future needs of the school and the current team will generate a number of criteria that you will be able to build into your job description and person specification. What else needs to be taken into account? There are a number of factors about the context of the school and the community it serves that will have an impact on the type of person needed to lead it into its next phase of development.

Will any of the following present a challenge to a new leader? What is missing from this list in the context of your school? Which of these are long-term priorities?

- budget
- staff turnover
- remodelling the school workforce
- rising or falling rolls
- underachievement
- the make-up of the community
- complacency
- a major initiative (eg building work, specialist status, the establishment of extended services)

What sort of background and experience will be needed to lead your school? Will you want to specify the phase and type of school from which the candidate comes? Are you seeking someone with experience in the same context or someone whose background will provide new perspectives?

It is important to go beyond collecting and analysing evidence to draw conclusions about the sort of leadership required in response. Given the evidence, what should your head know, be committed to and be able to do?

Many discussions fall down on the logic of this process – they list aspirations, they list attributes, but are the two connected? You need to be sure that the attributes, characteristics and qualities you list are:

- **individually necessary** – if you removed this attribute from the list would your aspirations be significantly less likely?
- **collectively sufficient** – if your headteacher possessed all these attributes would you be confident about success? What's missing?
- **realistic** – have you over-specified? If you toned down or moderated your demands, would success still be likely?

Tool 4 provides a rigorous process for discussing these issues collectively.

Pitfalls:

- If a school is successful it often wants to continue with the same style of leadership that has served it well in the past. Assessing how your school needs to develop in the future will enable you to judge whether the same or different skills will be needed.
- There is a danger in looking backward rather than forward when defining your leadership needs.
- Generating too many criteria can make it difficult to make a rounded judgement.

Good practice:

- Ask the chair of governors to hold an exit interview with the current headteacher to identify the challenges presented by the school.
- Make a list of the key facts or challenges of the school, and decide which of these will be priorities for the new head in the short, medium and long term. Which of these are most important to the success of the school?
- Read the National Standards for Headteachers to refresh your understanding of the complexity of the job. Which aspects are particularly important for your school?

NPQH

From April 2004, all first-time headteachers need to hold the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) or be working towards it. Serving or returning headteachers are not required to have NPQH. From April 2009, all first-time headteachers must already have been awarded NPQH before taking up post.

You should take care when wording the person specification to ensure that the requirement to hold NPQH or be working towards it is mentioned in the context of first-time headteachers. You will need to check your understanding of the mandatory requirement for NPQH.

NPQH is a “threshold” qualification, and signals readiness for headship. This does not mean that everyone with NPQH will be a suitable headteacher for your school, but it does mean that basic knowledge, aptitudes and skills have been tested.

NPQH now contains a final skills assessment with written feedback. Some candidates may be able to make this available to the recruiting school – it may be worth enquiring, but bear in mind that only recent graduates of the programmes will have this.

QTS

It is not mandatory that a headteacher holds **Qualified Teacher Status**, although in practice it may be more difficult for them to obtain other necessary qualifications or sufficient school experience without that status.

Nevertheless, some schools may find it advantageous to consider applications from people who are not qualified teachers, and there is support for this idea from some professional associations. As always, it depends on the needs of the school. If the school is offering extended services, or if the role is head of a federation, for example, might not other skills, derived from a different background, be more useful?

It is also important to take into consideration the wider leadership team. If the headteacher or principal is not a qualified teacher, who will direct, monitor and develop the curriculum and teaching strategies in the school? There will need to be a role or roles with specific accountabilities, and role holders with the requisite skills.

Whatever the support around them, the headteacher will need to be able to take accountability for the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the school, demonstrate a passion and conviction for the importance of learning in society, maintain a rapport with young people, and sustain the respect of qualified teachers. QTS is neither a necessary nor sufficient guarantee of these attributes, but you will need to consider how your selection process could unearth and test them.

Job description and person specification

If you have spent time defining needs, you will be well placed to put together a job description and person specification that is tightly focused on the job to be done and the person needed to do it for your school.

The **job description** lists the accountabilities and tasks to be carried out in the role. There are many styles of job description, and an internet search under “job description headteacher” will lead you to examples. Your local authority or consultant will have others. You will also find the legal definition of the role of the headteacher in the School Teachers Pay and Conditions document. Many governing bodies save time by starting with an example and customising it, but make sure any example you start with has been recently updated. You will send the job description to applicants and to referees, so it needs to closely reflect the job to be done in your school. There is more guidance on writing job descriptions in Tool 5.

The **person specification** details the knowledge, skills, experience, abilities and personal qualities you are seeking in your ideal candidate. It should be informed by the job description.

The criteria for the person specification can be grouped in a number of ways. Headings might include:

- qualifications, experience, professional knowledge, professional skills
- philosophy, commitment and personal qualities

Alternatively, after detailing the necessary qualifications and experience, you may group your criteria using the headings in the National Standards for Headteachers: Shaping the Future, Leading Learning and Teaching, Developing Self and Working with Others, Leading and Managing the Organisation, Securing Accountability and Strengthening Community through Collaboration and Partnership.

Your work on the school’s current and future needs (see earlier) will be the starting point for selecting criteria for the person specification.

Two warnings:

- You cannot change the criteria after the process has started.
- If you have too many selection criteria you will find it difficult to assess them all and judge the relative merits of candidates.

It is difficult to make a decision on more than seven or eight criteria. In addition, you may find that two candidates both meet 60 per cent of your essential criteria, but they are not the same 60 per cent. Which are the more important?

Think about which criteria are essential and try to narrow them down to 6-10 critical things your new headteacher must be able to demonstrate.

This will help you check that the members of your appointment panel have a genuinely shared understanding of what you’re looking for. It will also help you choose between two or more good candidates at the end of the process.

Experience suggests that many panels find it difficult to limit the number of selection criteria to use: it often feels like there is just one more attribute that must be added to the list. A number of questions may help you reach a sensible limit:

- Is this essential, or nice to have?
- Will this really make a difference in the role?
- Can this attribute be developed later on, or compensated for by other members of the senior team?

It may be helpful to distinguish between **threshold criteria** that any candidate must have to even get in the door, but which won't distinguish the outstanding candidate, and those which differentiate outstanding performers. Threshold criteria can be tested for during the sift of applications. They will vary from the school to school, but might include, for example, possession of NPQH or suitable previous leadership experience.

We suggest, therefore, that you arrange your criteria into three categories, limiting the number of essentials to between 6 and 10:

- **E** for criteria that are “essential”
- **D** for “desirable” (if two candidates were equal, these might be the deciding factors)
- **T** for “threshold”, the more basic attributes they need to get selected for interview in the first place

Tool 3 shows how the person specification might be set out. If you choose to work from the basis of a template person specification, you will need to critically examine the criteria to ensure that they closely reflect the needs of your school and its context.

You will use this person specification to sift applicants for the interview shortlist, so when writing your criteria it is a good idea to also identify when and how you will gather evidence that your candidates meet your requirements. **You should identify at least two opportunities to assess each criterion**, to give candidates a fair opportunity to demonstrate competence.

Pitfalls:

- If your criteria are too generic and not sufficiently related to your school, they will not assist potential applicants in identifying whether they fit the bill, and you will find it harder to assess whether a candidate is right for your school.
- If you are not clear how you will gather evidence, you may not structure your sifting and interview process to test all the criteria.
- If you are aware that you have a good internal candidate, you may unconsciously tailor the person specification to that person. This could preclude you from being open-minded and spotting the potential in other candidates.
- Recent legislation on age discrimination makes it illegal to specify job requirements in terms of age or length of experience. Don't phrase the job description in this way.

Good practice:

- Build the job description and person specification from a rigorous definition of need.
- Help candidates decide whether to apply by making your criteria as explicit as possible. Selection is a two-way process, and self-selection is helpful to you.
- Ensure you know how you will test candidates against each of the criteria.
- Avoid making too many of your criteria essential. Between 6 and 10 is good practice.
- Flag up your essential criteria in your advertisement and test as many of them as possible in the application form and cover letter.

Creative solutions

It may be appropriate to consider whether your current model for the headteacher role is the right one to take the school forward. This is particularly true if you are experiencing or expect to experience difficulties in recruitment, or if you feel that your plans for the school require a radical change in leadership.

You may, for example, consider federation, where the school develops a more or less formal relationship with another school or group of schools. In this situation, your headteacher role could be an “executive principal” with responsibility over several institutions (which may attract a more high-profile candidate) or may report to another executive principal. In the latter case, in certain formal federations with shared governance you may not need a headteacher at all, and the deputy headteacher could be the top job in the school. In either situation the exact accountabilities will vary – and changes to these accountabilities may make the post more attractive or more focused on what your school needs. As noted earlier, these sorts of relationships can also be a vital succession planning tool to bring on promising leaders who are not yet completely ready for headship.

If you are exploring the possibilities of full-service extended provision, bringing together a range of different services and agencies on a single site, it may be that you are looking more for a chief executive or operational management role than the traditional headteacher role. As in the earlier discussion about QTS, however, you need to be sure that teaching and learning are still covered at a senior level within the school. The point is, it need not be the top job which has the deep expertise in this area.

You may also consider a model of co-leadership, where two or more roles divide the responsibilities of headteacher. This may make the task seem more manageable, encourage more candidates or enable one of the job-holders to focus time on a particular challenge the school must solve. Similarly, demands for flexible roles, to balance family commitments and work, are also encouraging some schools to consider job-sharing for the most senior role.

Research into the experiences of other schools who adopted these approaches can be obtained from: www.ncsl.org.uk/models/headship

In all these examples, the most important thing is to consider your plans and aspirations for the leadership team as a whole and how they can be distributed across different roles at the top, rather than vested in a single person. The success of these arrangements are heavily dependent upon clearly defined leadership roles. However they can also make the post of headship more attractive and manageable for potential candidates and also open up opportunities to a more diverse range of candidates.

In some of the options described above, you may generate interest from candidates from non-traditional backgrounds – with leadership experience in other children’s services organisations, from across the broader public sector or even from the private sector. Would these candidates have the skills and abilities required to take your school forward? Would they bring a different vision and drive? If the answers are “potentially yes”, then you may also want to consider widening the range of media in which you advertise the role. Seek advice from your local authority as you develop your thinking.

What documents should we consult?

- Governing the school of the future, Department for Education and Skills, Ref: DfES/0786/2004
www.publications.teachernet.gov.uk
- School Self-evaluation Form
www.ofsted.gov.uk/schools/sef.cfm
- National Standards for Headteachers, Department for Education and Skills, Ref: DfES/0083/2004
www.publications.teachernet.gov.uk
- Guidance on the mandatory requirement to hold the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), Department for Education and Skills, Ref: DfES/0087/2004
www.governet.gov.uk
- School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document, Ref: 0343 2004
www.publications.teachernet.gov.uk
- School Performance and Assessment Data (PANDA)
- Notes of visit by your local authority link adviser/inspector
- Last Ofsted report
- School improvement plan
- School self-evaluation

Attraction

Getting the right people to apply

Things to consider

Don't rush to advertise – invest in preparing your process and defining your needs first.

Seek to impress as well as to be impressed. Efficiency and courtesy are the most important attributes at this stage.

Be honest, but optimistic – some of the best headteachers are attracted by the chance to make a real difference in a school which needs their talents.

Help candidates to “self-select” by giving accurate information. There is no great value in hiding your selection criteria.

Invest in a coherent and complete application pack, but don't overload candidates with irrelevant information.

Include an application form which tests for your threshold criteria and gathers basic information like contact details and career history.

School visits are a useful part of the self-selection process, but ensure that they are well planned and that all participants in the school are briefed on their role.

The attraction stage focuses on creating and communicating information about the school and position that will attract the right candidates to apply and provide you with a large enough field to ensure a real choice.

At the end of the attraction stage you will have:

- drafted and placed an advertisement
- decided on the contents of the application pack
- planned how you will organise visits to the school
- decided what additional information you will make available to candidates

Communication in recruitment is a two-way process. The quality of the material you assemble for candidates, the way in which you communicate with them by letter, who they deal with on the telephone or face-to-face, all need to make a good impression. You want to know what they offer you and they want to know what you offer them. Put yourselves in the candidate's position and consider what they need to know in order to decide whether to apply.

Making an application is a time-consuming process. Candidates may be deterred if they are not given enough information to craft their application, but they could also be deterred by too much information!

You also need to consider how you want to portray your school. **If you are a school with challenges, it pays to be honest about this. Some candidates are looking for a challenge and a school in which they can make a difference.** What they want to hear from the governing body is optimism and a commitment to support the head. On the other hand, if you are a successful school replacing a high-profile headteacher, avoid creating the impression that this will be a hard act to follow. Even successful schools need to keep moving forward.

The advertisement

All headship posts must be advertised nationally, and the majority of advertisements are placed in the Times Educational Supplement (TES). In the case of church schools, the diocese will advise on which other papers to use. Advertising is costly and you need to weigh up carefully whether there is any advantage in using the local press. Most local authorities have vacancy bulletins or web pages, and it is worth ensuring that yours is included, as **many candidates apply within their own authorities**. In some circumstances, you might want to consider the use of a recruitment agency.

Teachers generally know the geographical area they want to apply to, so using the local authority logo in your advert will help them pick out your school as they scan the pages.

The advertisement should include the following factual information:

- school name and location
- number on roll
- job title
- salary
- start date
- how to obtain further information and an application form
- the closing date for applications and the dates of interviews

Other information included in the advert should communicate your most vital messages: the key characteristics of the school, your essential criteria, and what you will offer them. Church schools should indicate the religious commitment expected of candidates.

Showing that you welcome visits to the school is attractive to many candidates. If you do welcome them, indicate in the advertisement whom they should contact. Some candidates prefer to visit before putting in an application. Further guidance on organising visits by prospective candidates is included later in this section.

Good practice:

- Look in the TES at other adverts. Which ones catch your eye and why? Which seem to sell the school positively? Look for ideas on style and content, but ensure that you are describing your school as accurately as possible in the space available.
- Avoid clichés if at all possible. Everyone wants an “enthusiastic” headteacher. (One good test for clichés: reverse the meaning of the statement – could you ever imagine someone advertising for that? If not, then your original statement may be trite.)
- Test the wording for the advertisement on the staff. They will tell you if they think it captures their school in the best possible way.

“One advert said the school was in lovely surroundings, but they failed to mention that the school building itself was dreadful!” Candidate

The application pack

The application pack serves two purposes. It tells the applicants how to apply, and it also tells them more about the school than you can fit in an advertisement. This is your opportunity to sell the school.

Alternative formats may be needed for applicants with particular disabilities.

How to apply

A covering letter from the chair should be welcoming. Thank them for their interest in the post. Give them clear instructions about filling in the application form, where to return it and by when. Your local authority may have a standard form and an equal opportunities monitoring form.

Decide in advance if you want a curriculum vitae (CV) in addition to an application form: if you do not specify, you will get some applications with and some without. This will mean that you do not have comparable information about applicants when you are shortlisting. For this reason, **we recommend not using CVs, and saying so clearly.**

Invite candidates to view your latest Ofsted report on www.ofsted.gov.uk rather than including a copy in each pack. Repeat any invitation to visit and give details of whom to contact. Repeat the information in the advert about key dates.

The chair's letter should also say what you want the applicants to address in their covering letter. You should ask them to address your criteria so that you can use the information in the shortlisting process. However, if your request is general – “Please indicate how you meet the person specification” – you may get long-winded replies. **It is better to ask them to address two or three specific issues related to your context and criteria and specify the length of the response you expect.**

Here are some examples:

- What are your reasons for applying?
- Describe why you consider your ability, aptitude and experience suit you for this post, supplying evidence which supports your case.
- Choose an area of major success in your current school for which you had responsibility. Explain what you did and why you did it and what impact your actions had on staff and pupils. Quantify your impact where possible.
- Describe how you would take [an inner city secondary school / a rural primary school / a school with exceptional SATs results] forward over the next five years.
- How do you motivate staff to set challenging targets for themselves and their pupils and how do you maintain that motivation?

You will also need an application form. Ensure that this asks questions about all the basic logistical information you need to communicate with candidates and about any threshold criteria you have identified. Don't duplicate any questions you have posed for the candidate's covering letter and don't make it too long. A basic test is: will we actually make use of this information? **In all likelihood, your local authority will have an approved application form which you should consider using or adapting.**

Always remind the candidates to back up any assertions or claims with clear evidence and supporting facts.

Information about the school

The application pack should inform candidates about:

- thos, aims and current priorities
- the nature of the pupil intake
- current organisation of classes and rationale
- staffing (teaching and support staff)
- finance and governing body
- location, building and grounds

- parental partnerships, community links and links with other schools
- map and plan of the school
- Ofsted summary and performance results
- information about working in the area provided by the local authority
- job description and person specification

Pitfalls:

- Sending a loose assortment of poorly organised documents from different sources will not create a good impression.
- Using information that was produced for a different audience may not meet the needs of prospective candidates. Does the information really describe the major factors and trends that will affect their leadership and management of the school?

Good practice:

- Some of this information may already be found in the school improvement plan, the school brochure or school profile. If you wish to include the brochure or profile themselves, it is best to send originals rather than photocopies.
- If necessary, re-write standard information with the needs of candidates in mind.
- If you have the time and the resources, it is better to have information from different sources collated into a new document with an attractive cover.
- There may be other information that you wish to hold back and only give to shortlisted candidates. It is good practice to let applicants know what additional information will be available if they are called for interview.
- When you have finished the pack, take a critical look at it. Is it honest enough? Does the prospect of leading the school sound attractive? Have you indicated what support the governing body will provide?
- Ensure the information from your local authority highlights the benefits of working in the authority and, in particular, what induction, support and networking is available for first-time headteachers or those new to the area.
- If you have a website or are able to use the local authority's website, consider making the application pack and application form available online. It is not unreasonable to expect headteachers to have the IT skills required to access information this way, and it may save your money and their time.

School visits

Candidates make visits to schools so that they can decide whether or not to apply, or to gain information about the school to prepare them for interviews. You need to make a number of decisions in advance of such visits:

Is the visit part of the selection process? For reasons of equal opportunity, it is recommended that this is not the case. If the answer is no, then impressions of candidates should not be passed on or taken into account by the appointment panel. If yes, this needs to be clearly stated, and all applicants should be required to visit the school. You will then need to decide in advance how comments are passed on to the chair of governors. They should be related to selection criteria and should be factual. For example “The candidate did not speak to any pupils, although there were opportunities to do so” will tell you something about the candidate’s relationships with pupils. You will need to make candidates aware they are being assessed and ensure that candidates who are unable to visit because of distance and other commitments are not penalised.

What access will you give candidates to pupils, staff and governors?

Candidates naturally wish to see the school in action. Will they be able to visit classrooms, and have you consulted staff about this? They may want to speak to key staff, such as the deputy. How will this person be briefed?

Who will show candidates round? It is often the current head, but there may be circumstances where this is not the best option, in which case a governor might be able to carry out this role. As candidates should be treated in the same way and given the same opportunities, the same person should show round all those who visit.

What additional information will be made available if requested?

Candidates have been known to ask for further details on the budget or pupil attainment data. You may be using some of this information in a task at interview. How will you respond?

One school recognised that it should have planned the visits at the outset. Two governors were approached to show candidates round, which resulted in an inconsistent experience.

Pitfalls:

- not telling your staff in advance about the visits and their role
- the school not looking at its best
- candidates not made to feel welcome or expected

Good practice:

- Plan for visits well in advance and ensure that everyone involved understands the protocols.

Selection

Choosing the best candidate

Things to consider

Shortlist no more than six candidates for interview, based on your threshold criteria and whichever essential criteria can be discerned from the application form.

Keep a record of all decisions made and the rationale behind them.

Request references after shortlisting, keep them focused on factual verification and use them to confirm rather than influence your appointment decision.

If you have the time and budget to run a formal assessment centre, do so.

Don't try to intimidate candidates – it is not predictive of their behaviour in post.

Remain polite and engaged, but don't be afraid to push for the level of response you require, or to probe further to get the evidence you need.

You must conduct a formal interview (with a senior LA representative present unless you are a VA or foundation school or academy).

Prepare an assessment grid for each exercise used (which cross-matches criteria and candidates) and require observers to complete it on the spot.

Ensure that all questions and exercises are related to one or more pre-agreed selection criteria.

Prepare panel members to ask good questions – open-ended, focused, not leading, and without excessive preamble.

Reserve judgement until all candidates have completed all exercises.

Don't seek consensus too early when reaching your decision – ensure that all candidates are considered and all panel members have spoken.

Having attracted your candidates, the next stage is selection. **Applicants must be judged objectively against their ability to do the job specified.** It is against the law to advantage one candidate over another because of, for example, his or her gender, age, race or ethnic or national origin.

The selection stage is sub-divided into two parts, shortlisting (choosing who to interview) and interviewing (choosing who to appoint).

1. Shortlisting

At the end of the shortlisting stage you will have:

- decided how to conduct the shortlisting meeting
- drawn up a grid for assessing candidates' application forms and supporting letters
- decided what training is needed for shortlisting
- drawn up a shortlist
- requested references
- decided whether to seek any other information about candidates

Shortlisting is the process of deciding which applicants meet your person specification and will be called for interview. It is also often known as the “sift”. Many governors do not find this an easy process. It involves interpreting the information on the application form and the accompanying letter and scoring it against the person specification. External support from an education specialist is invaluable here. As with all other parts of the selection process it must be done systematically, transparently and fairly.

You will need a scoring sheet or grid for this process to ensure you take into account all relevant criteria and record your judgements. An example grid is included as Tool 6. Once the candidates have been scored, you should total the scores and identify how many candidates meet your threshold criteria.

The appointment panel should have received the applications and had the opportunity to read them in advance of the sift meeting. If you have discussed the process you will use and the panel are confident, you could also ask them to score all the applications before coming to the meeting. This is a good way of ensuring that everyone's views are taken into account.

However, if the panel is less confident the shortlisting meeting could contain an element of training and moderation at the beginning. Tool 5 contains a suggested agenda and process. If the whole panel assesses one application to start with, and then compares scores, you will have the opportunity to discuss how you are interpreting information and to moderate each other's judgements.

Once panel members have individually assessed application forms and supporting letters and scored each candidate using the grid, a discussion can take place in which applications are sorted into A, B and C piles. Candidates who fail to meet the threshold criteria are placed in the C pile and de-selected. Candidates who meet all the threshold criteria are placed in the A or B piles depending on whether they appear to meet all or some of the essential criteria. The B pile is for candidates who appear to meet some of the essential criteria, and most discussion will be around these candidates. These are, in effect, the marginal cases. Decisions to move them across into the A pile will depend on overall numbers and whether new insight is uncovered during the discussion. Once agreement has been reached the decisions can be recorded.

It is important to note that **it is usually difficult to know for sure whether essential criteria are met from an application form**. Threshold criteria, by their nature, tend to be straightforward yes or no decisions, and easily verified. Essential criteria are often less tangible qualities that require interviewing to discover. This is why candidates may be selected for interview without having displayed all essential attributes on their application form. “Essential” means essential to be appointed, not essential to be interviewed.

Record your reasons for not shortlisting so that you can provide feedback should any applicant ask for it when you inform them that they have not been shortlisted. It is good practice to write to inform unsuccessful candidates of the outcome and thank them for their interest.

References

When you have decided on your shortlist, invite them to an interview and then request references. Don't wait until after the interviews.

References should be requested only to confirm factual details in support of applications, since it is difficult to know how much confidence to place in the person who has written the reference and how to interpret any coded messages. A reference request form will typically ask for factual information on: attendance and health record, timekeeping, whether the applicant has been the subject of a disciplinary or capability procedure, reasons for leaving, and whether the referee would re-employ the applicant.

If you wish to have the referee's opinion on the degree to which the applicant meets the person specification, it is best to provide a grid listing the person specification criteria and inviting the referee to grade the applicant as excellent, good, satisfactory or poor against each of the criteria. Many referees will, however, be reluctant to provide anything other than basic facts.

References should be sent for immediately after the shortlisting stage, and reviewed before the interview, so that any issues of concern can be explored further with the referee and taken up with the candidates.

Other information on candidates

You can seek any other available information on candidates. For example, **if you have applications from serving headteachers you will want to know something about the achievements of pupils at their current school** if they have not offered this information in their application. You could use the internet to look for information on performance data on the relevant local authority website. You should also download the latest Ofsted report and look at the section dealing with leadership and management. But do cross-refer to the application form to check that the applicant was in post during the relevant period, ie that the inspectors' comments relate to their leadership of the school. Your local authority adviser or your consultant can assist you in interpreting the information, if necessary. If you are going to gather information on one candidate, make sure you gather it for all.

For candidates who are not currently headteachers, therefore, you might want to include in your reference request a question asking for specific details about their performance in a leadership role in the school. For example: "Please describe a recent improvement objective for which the applicant was responsible and describe their contribution to its success."

Pitfalls:

- Compromising on your selection criteria – this can happen if the field is very small and you are anxious to appoint. **Don't compare candidates to each other or you may just select the best on offer at the time. Compare candidates to your criteria.**
- Being swayed by personal reactions to the application that did not form part of your original person specification. For example, if you wish to reject an application on the basis of handwriting or poor presentation, you need to relate this judgement to a criterion relating to effective communication.
- Sending an open-ended request for a reference that does not clarify the information you are seeking.

Good practice:

- Do not assume that everyone on the appointment panel knows how to interpret application forms and use the person specification. Build training into the meeting and use external advice.
- Record judgements carefully and objectively. In the case of an appeal you may be required to justify your decisions and the process used.
- Keep all paperwork confidential.
- Once applications are no longer needed they should be handed in with any additional notes, and a single copy carefully stored.

If only one or two candidates meet your criteria on paper, you will need to decide whether or not to go ahead with interviews at all. You may be better advised to re-advertise rather than embark on a process that will leave you with a very restricted choice, especially if one or more of the candidates pull out at the last minute or prove unsatisfactory at interview.

2. Interview days

At the end of the interview stage you will have:

- decided on the length of the interview process
- drawn up a programme of selection activities
- designed a recording grid for each activity
- decided who will be involved on the day(s), and how
- considered how to deal with internal candidates
- decided whether to use an assessment centre (further information is provided on these later in this section)
- made practical arrangements for the interviews
- drafted a letter for interviewees
- decided what additional information to send them, if any
- prepared your interview protocols and questions
- agreed when and how you will review candidates and make your decision

Careful planning of the interview stage should ensure that all candidates are treated fairly. The interview should be structured to minimise the effects of subjective impressions, favoured opinions and values of individual panel members. Under the Disability Discrimination Act, however, it will be necessary to consider what adjustments might be necessary for disabled applicants to help them overcome any significant disadvantage caused by their disability.

The interview stage usually takes place over one to three days. Primary schools normally take between one and two days, secondary schools between two and three.

The length of time you allocate to the process will depend on a number of factors:

- the number of candidates to be interviewed
- the number of selection activities you plan
- the number of stakeholders you want to involve in the process
- whether or not you are arranging for your candidates to attend an assessment centre prior to the interviews, or whether an assessment centre may form part of the interview day itself

Number of candidates

Even if you are fortunate and have a reasonable field of applicants, be clear about your criteria and discerning enough to ensure you invite a manageable number for interview. If you interview more than six candidates, your programme may be rushed and you may have difficulty in remembering or distinguishing between individuals. Think very carefully before interviewing only one or two candidates. While a robust process should mean that even a lone candidate can be selected or rejected based on the criteria you have set, the panel may find it difficult to justify not appointing the applicant in these instances.

Selection activities

A formal panel interview is the only compulsory part of the selection process. It is good practice (but not compulsory) to invite a local authority representative to attend this.

Interviews may not always be the most reliable way of predicting a candidate's ability to perform well in the role. Structured interviews based on past behaviour are better predictors of future behaviour rather than those based on hypothetical situations. Schedules for the interview day should usually include a range of other selection activities. Be strict, however, about what each selection activity will tell you about performance against the person specification.

Some skills and abilities will already have been tested by the assessment for NPQH, so you should focus on those that are most critical for your school.

When you are putting together your selection activities it is good practice to include at least two opportunities to test each essential criterion so that you have two sources of evidence for judgements. You will also need to spend time considering what sort of responses you expect – in other words, how will you recognise that a candidate has met the criterion?

You should have a scoring grid designed for each separate selection activity, listing candidates and the criteria against which you will be assessing them. These can be drawn up using your person specification, focusing on the criteria you have not tested at shortlisting. Agree any scoring system in advance. Final decision-making will be subjective and hard to manage if the appointment panel is left to make notes in their own way, and they may find it difficult to recall the evidence. All judgements should relate to the person specification and be backed up by written evidence recorded during the interviews.

When putting together your programme, also consider the needs of the candidates. Ensure that you have thought about their comfort. Do they have somewhere quiet to gather their thoughts? Is there enough time between events but not too much waiting about? **Selection is a two-way process.** There is no merit in making the experience as tough as possible. If the programme is unnecessarily gruelling or poorly organised, so that it does not run to time, candidates will not perform well and may form adverse impressions of the school. Their performance under these conditions may not be a good predictor of their actual ability.

“I felt as though I was on an assault course.” Candidate

You may be aware of the process that was used to appoint the previous headteacher, but you should consider whether it meets your current needs before adopting it without change.

Tool 8 outlines key considerations to take into account when choosing selection events.

Involving stakeholders

Many governing bodies want to involve and consult a wide range of stakeholders (staff, pupils, governors, parents and others) in the selection process in order to gain the views of those who will also work with the new headteacher. However, only the appointment panel has all the information about candidates, and the decision must be the governors’.

If you arrange for candidates to meet groups of stakeholders, be clear about the purpose of such meetings, how they will be conducted and what feedback you are prepared to take into account. If your main purpose is to assess candidates, stakeholder groups will need to be aware of your criteria. If you are providing an opportunity for candidates to find out more about the school community, remember that a long succession of meetings with different groups can be draining for candidates.

Pitfalls:

- Social events are popular mechanisms for letting as many people as possible meet the candidates. They are a good opportunity for candidates to find out more about the school. However, feedback may not be reliable since it is not possible to ensure that similar conversations have been held with all candidates.
- Don’t raise expectations of stakeholders that they will have a veto or overriding influence. If, for example, you are looking for a change of leadership style to motivate complacent staff you may be looking for qualities that are not immediately appreciated by them.

Good practice:

- Be clear about what the appointment panel may learn from meetings with stakeholders that can be assessed objectively. Ensure that there is a clear focus for any discussion with stakeholders, and that they have agreed criteria against which to judge and provide feedback .
- If stakeholders have been invited to give feedback, for example about interactions with candidates during social events, these should be passed to the chair. Any views should be shared with caution with the appointment panel, and only if they relate to the selection criteria.
- If you want staff reactions, you could structure their feedback by asking: “Did you make any observations about any candidate that you think should be shared with the chair? If so, what evidence are your observations based on?”
- Build time into your programme to receive and consider feedback from selection events that have not involved the whole appointment panel.
- Ensure that stakeholders who have formal meetings with candidates are prepared with appropriate questions and that the meetings will result in feedback on specific selection criteria.
- Ensure that candidates know if they are being assessed during social events or in meetings with stakeholders, and what is being assessed.

Internal or known candidates

As you prepare to appoint a new headteacher, you may be aware of an internal candidate for the post, or a candidate known to the outgoing headteacher or members of the governing body. You may feel that an internal candidate would make an ideal replacement for the outgoing headteacher, providing continuity and minimising any risk associated with appointing someone unknown. You may even have had a long-term plan to develop an internal candidate for the post. **All of these are valid and effective strategies for ensuring a smooth succession.**

If you are leaning towards appointing an internal or known candidate you might find it helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

- Does this person fulfil the person specification we designed with the future needs of the school in mind?
- Have we unconsciously tailored the person specification to match the candidate we already know?
- Are we missing the opportunity to bring other experiences and perspectives into the school?

- How can we put aside our feelings for this person and assess them dispassionately against the person specification?
- Are we going for the safe option and possibly closing our minds to the potential of other candidates?

Pitfalls:

- If you have no intention of appointing the candidate, you should deal with their application in the same way as others. If they do not meet the person specification at shortlisting, you should reject them sensitively.
- Don't put someone who shouldn't pass shortlisting through to the interview days, just to give them the experience.

Good practice:

- When interviewing internal candidates care must be taken to safeguard equal opportunities for all candidates.
- Be open with other candidates about the presence of an internal applicant and be seen to be treating them equally.
- All candidates must be asked the same core questions.
- All candidates must be treated in the same way throughout the days of the interviews.
- Any internal candidate must come through the process on the basis of his or her own record and performance at interview.
- Only verifiable facts about such candidates and their performances on the day should be taken into account, not personal anecdote, hearsay or opinion – even from a respected source.
- Your decision must be arrived at transparently and fairly.

“You have to be very careful not to let your personal feelings for an internal candidate interfere.” Panel member

An internal candidate may be the best choice for your school, especially if they are part of a long-term succession plan, but you have a duty to develop robust criteria and to test people fairly. This will provide confidence that you have made the right choice and protect you from challenge.

Assessment centres

Assessment centres are events designed to create an evidence-based profile of your candidates by using multiple different assessment techniques.

Assessment Centres are normally run by specially trained assessors. They are designed to test candidates using work-related tasks, and sometimes involve personality questionnaires and ability tests. Candidates are required to perform tasks that are relevant to the role rather than just talk about them. **They are a more reliable predictor of candidates' strengths and weaknesses than individual selection methods**, including formal interviews, and are frequently used in industry. On the downside, they are intensive on time and resources.

When run by experts they require additional funding, but can provide the appointment panel with a profile for each candidate indicating strengths and areas for development. Governors who are not confident in selection find this a valuable source of support. Your consultant or local authority adviser may be able to provide you with more details.

Tool 8 provides a list of possible selection techniques, some of which could be combined into an assessment centre. By way of example, however, the Future Leaders assessment centre for urban headteachers (run by NCSL, SSAT and ARK) includes the following exercises:

- candidate briefing on the agenda
- observed group discussion on a school improvement problem
- analysis of a case study using materials on the same problem (leading to a presentation)
- video lesson observation and coaching role play
- conflict management role play (observing interactions with pupil, parents and staff)
- formal interview

It requires a whole day, five different rooms, an administrator and four assessors. It copes with up to six candidates at a time.

Practical arrangements for the day

There are a few practical arrangements to decide in advance of interviews.

Does the school have the space to conduct interviews comfortably? Some schools find it better to hold selection events at other venues, although there may be cost implications. If you are doing this, make sure that the entire appointment panel and the candidates are given full details.

“I had to give my presentation in a tiny room, only inches from the knees of the panel. It was crowded and very uncomfortable.” Candidate

“Some governors went to the wrong site and my assembly was delayed by 25 minutes until they arrived.” Candidate

Ensure that your letter to candidates inviting them for interview makes clear:

- whether, and under what conditions, you are prepared to pay their travel or overnight expenses (and details of local hotels)
- where different selection activities will take place if they are not all at the school
- the programme for the day(s) and whether you will be reducing the number of candidates during the day, before the final interview
- the presentation topic (if you are asking candidates to give a presentation and giving them advance warning), and what style of presentation you are expecting, ie whether you are providing equipment for a PowerPoint slide presentation
- when you plan to make your decision and whether you expect candidates to wait on site for your decision. Most schools ask for telephone or mobile numbers, and contact candidates after they have left the school at the end of the day.

Are you going to send shortlisted candidates additional information about the school that was not included in the original application pack? This can be useful if you intend to ask questions on the basis of their interpretation of additional information. For example, you might send full details of the budget to form the basis of a discussion in a panel interview on financial management.

Preparing for the interview

Once the practical details are decided, the major task for the appointment panel is to prepare for the interviews:

- Who will chair interviews or selection activities, state the purpose of the interview and ask the opening and closing questions to set candidates at their ease?
- Who will ask core questions and how will the answers be probed?
- What sort of responses are you hoping to get to different questions and what will constitute a good answer in the light of your school's needs?

As many of your candidates will have experience of interviews, inventive questions are likely to be the most testing. The support of a consultant or local authority adviser is strongly advised here to probe answers and help you identify what your criteria look like in practice.

Does the panel understand how to use the assessment grids and any scoring mechanism?

When are you going to discuss the candidates? Delaying discussion about individuals until all the activities are completed is best because:

- immediate impressions are put on one side until further evidence is gathered and a more rounded view is formed
- the views of one or two members of the panel do not influence others too early in the process

The appointment panel should re-read all the application forms, the job description and the person specification and the shortlisting grid to refresh their memory before the interview.

Questioning

There are techniques to asking effective questions. The quality of your questioning will affect the quality of the candidate's response and its usefulness to you as a predictor of performance. **The golden rule is to only speak for 20 per cent of the time and allow candidates to speak for 80 per cent.**

There are three types of question to avoid:

- **Leading questions:** these give clues to the answer you want, and the candidate will try and fit the answer to your expectations. For example "We have just introduced a new school uniform. What are your views on uniform?" or "Do you agree that..."
- **Multiple questions:** These are two or more questions rolled into one. This can confuse both candidate and panel, both of whom may only focus the last part of the question or the part they find easiest.
- **Hypothetical questions:** These invite the candidate to speculate how they would deal with a hypothetical situation along the lines of "What would you do if..." It is better to ask for examples of how they have actually dealt with similar situations.

The following types of questions serve different purposes:

- **Open questions:** These are useful for starting a topic. They are best related to a specific criterion. For example, “Tell me about a time when you persuaded others to take a particular course of action”, or “Describe a time when you were confronted by a complex situation that you solved”.
- **Probing questions:** Asking the candidate to explain areas you need to investigate further. For example, “What did you do there that was particularly effective?” or “What was your thinking behind doing it that way?” It is best to avoid questions beginning “why”, because this encourages candidates to speculate or justify rather than revealing the motives they held at the time.
- **Closed questions:** These are useful for establishing facts. For example, “How many people did that involve?” or “How long did it take you?”
- **Summarising questions:** These questions are used to sum up what the candidate has said in order to check understanding. For example, “I think you said that... Is that right?”

You should not ask personal questions that are not related to the job, such as age, disability, marital status, children or other dependents, religion (unless yours is a church school), politics, ethnic origins or sexual orientation.

Pitfalls:

- The panel being under-prepared, for example not having read the application forms or knowing who will ask which questions.
- Poor impressions on candidates if a panel is not ready when they enter the room, or if members shuffle papers while they are talking or avoid looking at the them.
- Not keeping to time, failing to ask all the questions and keeping other candidates waiting.
- Making long introductions to questions.
- Avoiding raising concerns about a candidate and then using them as an excuse not to appoint.
- Trying to fit in too many questions and therefore failing to cover the same topics with every candidate.
- Candidates have a right to request any notes made during the interview, so take care in the language used and in any aides-memoire relating to, for example, personal appearance. Brief panel members to this effect.

Good practice

- Try to structure questions in a logical sequence so that you are not asking the candidates to leap from one topic to another. Make links between the questions.
- Show that you are interested in the answer by making eye contact, which is hard if you are trying to write and listen at the same time. Arrange for someone other than the questioner to make comprehensive notes, and make a rapid note of your overall impression when the questioning moves on to someone else.
- Seek advice on what answers to expect so that you can ask supplementary questions if these expectations are not met.
- There is a tendency to remember the first and last candidate you have interviewed. It sometimes helps to write a short note to help you recall individual candidates, such as “person in green dress,” but remember candidates might see the note.
- Don’t be afraid to politely interrupt if you feel that the question has been answered and the candidate has started to wander off the point.
- Always seek concrete evidence of achievements – dates, results, impact, actions. How could you verify the claims?
- Be frank if you have a concern about an answer. Give the candidate the opportunity to clear it up.
- The chair of the interview should help the panel keep to time.

Decision-making

Once the selection activities and the final interview have been held, the chair of the panel should lead the process of examining the evidence gathered on each candidate and collating scores. The discussion should begin by agreement about how it will be conducted.

Take care to structure the discussion so that judgements are based on evidence against the person specification and that each candidate is considered in turn. The chair has a vital role to play here in ensuring that the discussion is thorough, fair and balanced. You may find it helpful to ask your local authority adviser or consultant to sum up at key points in the discussion. This stage in the process should not be rushed, as it will be important that the majority of the panel are in favour of the appointment.

“It was well organised with plenty of time for questioning and discussion. There was a consistent decision-making process with all the evidence pulled together at key decision-making points.” Panel member

“I acted as devil’s advocate so that we discussed all their strengths and weaknesses. We needed to be balanced about the candidates.” Chair

Bias or the opinions of strong personalities on the panel should not get in the way of an objective and balanced discussion, and external, objective advice can be very helpful in ensuring this happens. The views of all should be heard, so think about how you will ensure this happens. One way is for each person to take turns in giving his or her feedback before any discussion commences.

“The fact that you are a lay person doesn’t mean that your opinions count for any less...if you don’t agree with something you should definitely come out and say so.” Panel member

“There was a feeling that the panel made up their minds based on a stereotypical view of a headteacher...male and tall.” Candidate

You should spend time discussing each candidate, even if your initial impression is that one stands out from the rest – it may not be so obvious on closer inspection of the evidence. Once you have made your decision the references should be opened and read. **The final decision is the governors’, but you will need very strong reasons to reject the advice of the local authority representative or external consultant.**

Pitfalls:

- Discussing candidates before all the evidence has been gathered can reduce objectivity during the process. Suspend judgements until the final decision-making discussion.
- It is easy to allow personal prejudice about appearance and stereotypes to get in the way of objective decision-making using criteria. Prejudice may work for or against the candidate. For example you may find an enthusiastic communicator who appeals to you, but who may not have an essential leadership attribute that you have previously decided is essential.

Good practice:

- Give everyone a chance to comment on each candidate before trying to reach a consensus – this avoids the chance that a quiet member of the panel suppresses a doubt because someone has already indicated that their mind is made up.
- Ensure that all comments are based on evidence against the person specification.
- Decide in advance what weighting you are giving to the outcomes of the different activities and exercises.
- Compare the candidates to the criteria, not to each other.
- Take professional advice if assessing candidates' performance on practical activities like taking assembly, teaching or answering technical questions.

It requires courage to get to the end of the interviews and decide that none of the candidates is strong enough to appoint. However, you should not be pressured into appointing if you have significant doubts. An unsafe appointment is costly to the school. You will need to go back to your earlier plans about what to do in these circumstances in order to decide on your course of action.

If you decide to appoint, the appointment panel must meet with the full governing body so that they can hear the key reasons for your choice and ratify the decision.

Appointment

Securing your chosen candidate

Things to consider

Be realistic about what you can expect from a headteacher, but do not appoint if you have not seen the right person.

Inform the successful candidate first – they may say no and you may wish to offer it to the next in line (assuming that candidate also met your criteria).

Although verbal acceptances are binding in law, they are difficult to enforce. Ensure that contracts are drawn up and issued swiftly to enable the candidate to tender their resignation.

Unsuccessful candidates should be treated with respect. You may wish to offer feedback, but anything you say could be used in an appeal.

Take particular care to offer development feedback to unsuccessful internal candidates.

Successful candidates need feedback too – any development areas could form part of their professional development or performance management plan.

Once the governing body has ratified the decision of the appointment panel, you will need to make your offer to your chosen candidate and inform the unsuccessful applicants.

At the end of the appointment stage you will have:

- made an offer of appointment
- given feedback to unsuccessful candidates
- given feedback to the successful candidate
- ensured that a contract has been sent
- informed all other unsuccessful applicants

Candidates should not normally be asked to wait at the school for a decision, which may occur after a lengthy discussion. It is usually the chair of governors who calls the chosen candidate to make a verbal offer. This constitutes a contract in law, conditional on satisfactory checks into staff qualification requirements, health, criminal record, NPQH and any other checks required by the local authority. Ensure you comply with any recommendations concerning checks on child protection issues. A formal contract of employment will follow, drawn up by the school or the local authority, whichever is the employer. As the candidate will be unwise to resign from their current post before receiving the contract, the chair should ensure it is sent as soon as possible.

Once the verbal offer has been accepted, the unsuccessful candidates are contacted. We advise governors to ask the local authority adviser or an external consultant to inform and give feedback to all unsuccessful candidates, as some may choose to appeal against your decision, and anything said by governors will be admissible as evidence. Feedback should only be given (by telephone or in person) on the basis of evidence of performance against the person specification rather than any personal remarks or judgements. Candidates may be upset at hearing they have not been appointed, and a cooling-off period is often advisable before receiving detailed feedback.

An internal candidate who has been unsuccessful will need particularly sensitive handling. If their feedback is not constructive and developmental, their feelings may colour the way in which they work with the new headteacher.

The successful candidate also needs feedback. It should highlight their strengths and the key reasons why they have been appointed on the basis of evidence and the person specification. There should also be a frank discussion about any areas for development which the governing body would like to see as a focus for the future. These could form targets for the headteacher's professional development in the coming year. This is also an opportunity to confirm the expectations of the governing body for the future direction of the school.

If the local authority informs the successful candidate, be sure to follow up with a congratulatory call from the chair of governors shortly afterwards. The chair might also consider what practical information about the locality the candidate might appreciate at this point, if he or she is new to the area. Finally, confirm with the successful applicant when you will inform staff and parents of your decision.

Induction

Giving your new head a strong start

Things to consider

A well-planned induction is a critical part of a successful recruitment process and will enable the new head to get up to speed as quickly as possible.

The local authority will be a good source of advice on induction.

For first time headteachers, the national Early Headship Provision provides funds and opportunities.

Make as much use as possible of data generated by the interview process to begin the head's performance management and professional development.

The chair of governors should devote some time to facilitating their new head's entry into formal and informal local networks.

Where possible, arrange for a mentor from among the experienced local heads – but be aware that your head will have preferences and expectations of their own. Discuss it first.

Make an audit of useful information and keep the new head informed and involved in any substantive decisions that occur between appointment and taking up post.

Successful recruitment processes do not end with the appointment decision. **Governors have a responsibility for the induction of the new headteacher**, and this begins as soon as the appointment has been agreed.

Induction is too often unstructured and left to chance. Your new headteacher will feel supported by the governing body and more confident in taking up the reins if you start planning the induction early. The first step in induction should be to make use of any relevant data gathered during the selection process. You should also investigate and facilitate access to the growing number of formal programmes available nationally and locally for induction – especially if it is your new head's first post.

At the end of the induction stage you will:

- have agreed a programme of induction to the school
- have obtained information about local and national induction provision
- have considered ways of welcoming the new headteacher to the community

You should agree a programme of visits and meetings, and who will do what and when. It is common for the chair to be in regular contact with the new headteacher, but **your appointee might also welcome assistance in organising discussions with staff and the outgoing headteacher.** Useful contacts include members of the senior leadership team, subject leads, the bursar, local authority or diocese contacts, heads of feeder or partner schools, and possibly parents and students.

The chair of governors should seek the co-operation of the outgoing headteacher, bearing in mind that some might feel sensitive about handing over “their” school. If this is the case, some diplomatic negotiation might be required on the part of the chair. The chair might also need to facilitate discussions with the new headteacher’s current school about the time needed to make visits to the new school.

Governors should obtain information about any induction programme offered by the local authority and ensure that any new employee pack provided by the local authority reaches the new headteacher. Some local authorities will organise an early visit from the school’s link adviser or inspector to discuss the school’s strengths and weaknesses once the new headteacher is in post.

Governors should also make sure that any first-time headteacher has the information needed to register for the appropriate development grants and access to the national **Early Headship Provision**. Details of how to apply and register with a local provider are available on www.ncsl.org.uk/ehp

Newly appointed headteachers benefit from having a mentor, usually an experienced headteacher from a similar phase school. Check with your local authority whether they have a mentor scheme. Mentors are also available through the Early Headship Provision.

You will greatly assist your new headteacher’s induction to the local community of schools if you find out in advance about headteacher networks operating locally and arrange for the organiser to contact them. A note to neighbouring and feeder schools announcing the name of the new headteacher and when they will take up post will also help to provide a welcome. Remember that experienced headteachers moving to the area also need to be welcomed into the community.

Good practice:

- Formalise the handover to the new headteacher by organising a change of headship audit. This could take the form of a checklist of key documents and information which the new headteacher should expect to be available and will want to study in advance, including:
 - financial documents
 - general documents
 - policies and procedures
 - minutes of meetings and key reports (and more)
- As a full term will probably elapse before the new headteacher takes up the post, it is good practice, wherever possible, to involve them in major financial and staffing decision which will affect them once in post. They should also be invited to attend any governor meetings that take place during the interim period.

Evaluation

Learning from the experience

Things to consider

If you need to re-advertise the post, take some time to evaluate your previous process and decide if anything needs changing.

Seek objective external advice before re-advertising. Speak to candidates who decided not to apply after receiving an application pack or who dropped out during the process.

If the recruitment process was successful, also evaluate what went well and what could be improved. Store the learning safely to inform the next senior appointment.

At the end of the interview days, you will either have made an appointment or decided that you need to re-advertise the post. In either event, you should consider taking the time to evaluate the process. This serves two purposes. If you need to re-advertise, an evaluation will identify any aspects of the process you need to change or improve. If you have made a successful appointment, a record of your experience will be valuable for colleagues recruiting in the future.

If you have experienced difficulties recruiting, obtaining objective external advice before re-advertising could also prevent you from repeating costly mistakes.

Re-advertising

A meeting of the governing body will provide you with the opportunity to reflect on the process you are about to repeat. You might find it helpful to obtain information from candidates who requested the application pack but did not complete an application.

One school considered writing to candidates who had requested an application pack to ask them why they had decided not to apply.

A simple letter or telephone call might probe for:

- why they decided not to make an application
- whether their decision was related to the salary or information about the school
- whether there was information missing which affected their decision
- any other comments which you might find helpful

If you have kept accurate records from the start of the process, you will have the contact details of those who requested information.

One school carried out the recruitment process three times in succession without considering the possibility of changing any aspects of the process. Would re-wording of the advertisement or a change to the content and style of the application pack or the salary offered have made a difference?

You might also discover the reasons why any candidates who were selected for interview decided not to attend the interview days or dropped out during the day. It may simply be that they had already been appointed to another post, but other reasons they offer might help you to improve your recruitment strategy.

This sort of information will help you decide what, if anything, could be changed or improved in order to attract another field of candidates and conduct successful interviews.

Although some schools have problems attracting a sufficient field of candidates (in which case the earlier section on attraction will be helpful) others report that the issue is not quantity but quality. If quality is the issue, you may want to reflect on whether your expectations are realistic (without compromising your principles) and whether you are opening up the field to candidates from the widest possible range of backgrounds. You may not always be able to hold out for someone with previous headship experience, for example, nor may it be necessary for them in order to do an outstanding job.

This may also be an opportunity to reconsider the role itself. There are many alternative models of headship which are becoming popular: co-leadership, executive principalship, hard and soft federations. Some of these options also create the opportunity for promising internal candidates who are not quite ready for headship to take on greater responsibility.

Informing future headteacher recruitment and selection

Individual governors make headship appointments infrequently, so learning from an experience that has been such an investment of time and thought should not be lost.

You should be storing the following information on each candidate (successful and unsuccessful) for at least six months:

- original application forms and references
- a file copy of the complete application pack
- a file copy of the job description and person specification
- all grids and notes used by the panel in reaching their decision
- reasons for not shortlisting or appointing

It is also advisable to keep:

- a copy of the advertisement
- copies of the programme
- lists of questions asked
- any other documents used in the process

You should also make a note of:

- numbers of requests for the application pack
- numbers of completed applications received
- the number of candidates shortlisted
- the number of candidates taken through to final interview

All additional copies of personal information about candidates should be destroyed.

In addition to retaining and passing on this sort of information you should also find some time at the next meeting of the governing body to record:

- **What went well** – which aspects of the process were successful and why?
- **Even better if...** – what would you do differently next time?

Your new headteacher will be a valuable source of information about the experience and whether it could be improved for attracting other members of staff to the school.

When a future governing body comes to recruit and select a new headteacher, the learning you gained during the process will provide them with a sound starting point for their deliberations. Given that it will, hopefully, be some time before the governing body needs to repeat the exercise, careful filing and indexing of the evaluation information will be important.

Tool 9 contains a framework to assist you with evaluating your recruitment processes.

Glossary of terms

Advisory rights

The local authority (or diocese in the case of church schools) may have the right to be consulted and to offer advice on your recruitment process and decisions.

Appointment panel

A smaller committee of the main governing body charged with conducting the appointment process, usually three to seven members; decisions must be ratified by the full governor body.

Assessment centre

A selection of different exercises, designed to test selection criteria from multiple points of view; may involve interviews, in-tray exercises, presentations, role play, group exercises, cases studies, psychometrics etc.

Assessment grid

A tool for recording the results of selection exercises, usually a table mapping selection criteria against candidates, with some guidance on scoring.

Bichard report

Examination of recruitment practice in schools in light of Soham tragedy; contains recommendations for safer recruitment of staff working with children.

Children's Act

Legislation mandating the collaboration of front-line services dealing with children along five key outcomes – keeping healthy, staying safe, achievement and enjoyment, economic well-being and contribution to society.

Competency

Any characteristic or attribute which differentiates levels of performance in a specific role.

Data protection

A single copy of each document involved in the recruitment process must be stored, and candidates may be able to request access to them.

Desirable criteria

Qualities or attributes of the headteacher which may contribute to successful performance but which are not essential.

Equal opportunities

The recruitment process must use objective criteria related to the role itself and not discriminate against candidates on the grounds of gender, race, age or religious beliefs.

Essential criteria

The small number of qualities or attributes which are necessary for a headteacher to succeed.

Induction

The process of embedding a new recruit into an organisation and familiarising them with process; there are national programmes available to support headteachers.

Job description

A list of the major accountabilities and responsibilities required of a role; may also include performance criteria.

National standards

A description of the generic accountabilities and qualities expected of headteachers.

NCSL

National College for School Leadership – the government agency concerned with the development and performance of headteachers.

NPQH

National Professional Qualification for Headship – a mandatory qualification for aspiring headteachers providing threshold skills and knowledge.

PANDA

Performance and Assessment Data – a compilation of key statistics about achievement and context within a school.

Performance management

The process by which objectives are set for a headteacher and development needs identified.

Person specification

A listing of the skills, knowledge, experience, behaviours, characteristics, values and attitudes required to perform in a role.

Professional associations

The two main headteachers unions also offer support and development for headteachers – NAHT and ASCL.

Psychometrics

Written aptitude and personality tests designed to predict aspects of performance on the job or likely personality traits.

References

Factual confirmation of a candidate's career history provided by credible sources.

Remodelling

The transformation of the responsibilities and capabilities of the school workforce to suit modern demands.

Resignation deadlines

Custom dictates that headteachers hand their resignations in before set dates within each term.

SEF

Self Evaluation Form – a process of gathering evidence to evaluate and improve the key processes and practices of the school.

Sift

The process of shortlisting applicants to attend interviews.

SIP

School Improvement Partner – a key adviser to the school.

Stakeholder

Any person or group who may have an interest in a headteacher's appointment.

Succession plan

A process and document which identifies likely future leadership needs (at every level of the school) and prepares internal candidates to meet them.

TES

Times Educational Supplement – national trade newspaper where the vast majority of headship vacancies are advertised.

Threshold criteria

Any quality or attribute which all candidates need in order to even be considered for interview.

Further materials and references

As already noted, NCSL has developed materials designed to support those involved in the recruitment and appointment process. Examples of these include checklists and sample forms that are intended to help you to make the most of the opportunity your recruitment presents. These materials are available on NCSL's website (www.ncsl.org.uk/recruitingleaders) for you to download and adapt for your own use. Further materials will be developed and added to the website over time. Those initially available include:

Preparation

- 1: What support do we need?
- 2: Timeline for headship appointment

Selection

- 6: Example shortlisting grid
- 7: Agenda for shortlisting meeting
- 8: Selection activities

Definition

- 3: Person specification
- 4: Defining your needs
- 5: Writing a job description

Evaluation

- 9: Evaluation framework

The following publications may also be helpful:

DfES, *Governing the school of the future*, London, DfES, ref DfES/0786/2004 at www.publications.teachernet.gov.uk

Ofsted, *School self-evaluation form (SEF)* at www.ofsted.gov.uk/schools/sef.cfm

HM Government, *School Staffing Regulations (England) 2003 Statutory Instrument No 1963*, Norwich, TSO www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031963.htm

HM Government, *School Staffing Regulations (England) (Amendment) 2003 Statutory Instrument No 2725*, Norwich, TSO www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20032725.htm

DfES, *National Standards for Headteachers*, London, DfES, ref: DfES/0083/2004 www.publications.teachernet.gov.uk

DfES, *Guidance on the mandatory requirement to hold the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH)*, London, DfES, ref DfES/0087/2004 www.governet.gov.uk

School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (updated annually in September) www.teachernet.gov.uk

NCSL, *New Models of Headship*, Nottingham, NCSL www.ncsl.org.uk/modelsofheadship

NCSL also offers a range of programmes to support the development of leaders and headteachers. These include Early Headship Provision, which is aimed at supporting first-time headteachers. Further information on all NCSL programmes can be obtained at www.ncsl.org.uk/programmes.

Copies of this guidance can be downloaded from www.ncsl.org.uk/recruitingleaders
Printed copies of the summary, priced £7.50, can be ordered online from NCSL at www.ncsl.org.uk/publications or via telephone from the National Governors' Association, on 0121 643 5787 (credit card payment is accepted).

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