



TOMORROW'S
LEADERS
TODAY

Recruiting headteachers and senior leaders

Seven steps to success



National College for
School Leadership

Inspiring leaders;
improving children's lives

Recruiting headteachers and senior leaders is part of a suite of materials produced by NCSL to support the development of school leaders. Other titles in the series include:

Leadership succession: an overview

Turning Heads - a guide to marketing your school for prospective headteacher applicants

Career Moves - practical guidance to support aspirant heads succeed in the headship application process

Greenhouse schools - practitioner research reports into developing leaders

What's good about leading schools in challenging circumstances

All publications are free to download from www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday, together with further information on succession planning.

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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 their school always has the best leadership for its long-term needs.

It summarises more detailed guidance 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 is intended to provide a broad overview of the main issues that should be taken into account during this process. A more detailed consideration of these themes is provided in the full guidance document, available from NCSL's website.

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 31 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.

Before you start

Evidence shows that the quality of leadership is the single most important factor *under our control* in determining the success of a school. Therefore, the decision relating to the appointment of the headteacher is the most important one you can make. There is no such thing as a perfect headteacher or school leader. Every school is different: what suits one school will not necessarily suit another; what suited your school in the past may not suit 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.

The responsibility for recruiting a headteacher is one that you will feel keenly, but the chances are that many governors will be selecting a headteacher for the first time. Some members of the governing body may have limited experience in the recruitment and selection of teaching staff; others may 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 a task as important as this, it can be difficult to know the extent of what you don't know.

While neither this document nor the full guidance paper is intended as a comprehensive guide to *all* aspects of the recruitment and selection of headteachers and other senior leaders, each highlights to different degrees the 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's School Staffing (England) Regulations 2003, available at www.governornet.co.uk

In particular, you must ensure that your recruitment process is open and fair. The guidance contained on "GovernorNet" provides a briefing about your responsibilities. In addition, you may find useful information from the Commission for Equality and Human Rights at www.cehr.org.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* was launched late in 2006 and is available from www.teachernet.gov.uk.



Rising to the recruitment challenge

In 2005/06, over 2,600 primary and secondary schools advertised for a new headteacher. Around a quarter of secondary schools and a third of primary schools failed to make an appointment at their first attempt.

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.

Nationally, there are several factors which are affecting the flow of good candidates for headship.

Demographics

The first one is purely demographic. Many countries are currently facing a retirement bulge as the baby boomer generation reaches retirement age. Half of heads and deputies are aged over 50. At the same time, there has been a decline in the number of teachers in their late 30s to mid-40s, suggesting that a shortage in leaders is likely to occur in the near future. Whilst the longer term is rosier, this shortage is forecast to be at its worst between 2009 and 2011. To address this shortfall, it's estimated that the number of school leaders will need to increase by 15 to 20 per cent by 2009.

Of course, as a governing body, there is nothing you can do to change this. However, if your headteacher is due to retire in the next four years then it would be wise to start planning early for their replacement.

Perceptions of headship

Few would dispute that the role of a headteacher today is a demanding one and for many prospective candidates, the perceived pressures of the role is 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. There therefore seems to be a mismatch between the perceptions of potential heads and those of individuals in the job.

As a governing body, you can help ease candidates' worries about moving to headship. A visible commitment to ensure that your incoming headteacher will receive the personal and professional support they need could help persuade potential candidates to apply.

Reducing the apprenticeship time

Currently, the standard “apprenticeship” lasts 20 years, comprising 15 years in the classroom and five years as a deputy. Given that there are now many mature entrants to teaching, who have valuable experience from other fields, it seems sensible both to change our expectations of how long an apprenticeship is necessary and also seek ways of supporting accelerated career development, such as the “Fast Track” scheme (www.ncsl.org.uk/fasttrack). Three participants from that programme, for example, have now become headteachers, each of whom has far fewer years’ teaching experience than the traditional model.

By keeping an open mind about candidates’ experience and backgrounds, you may open the door to a wider range of talented applicants.

Rising to the challenge

Although the national shortage of candidates for headship is not something that a governing body – or any single organisation acting alone – can solve, there are strategies governors can employ to meet the challenge.

Retention is easier than recruitment

Often it is not possible to control the timing of the departure of a serving headteacher and the need to recruit a new one. However, with some forward planning, it is possible to influence events.

There are ways in which governing bodies are working with their current headteachers to provide experiences that keep them invigorated in their post and committed to their school for longer. At the same time, they are providing opportunities for growing other leadership talent in the school as potential successors.

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 other schools as a consultant leader, or becoming a tutor on a leadership development programme such as NCSLs National Professional Qualification for Headship (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.

For heads nearing the end of their career, changes to pension arrangements now include a “phased retirement” option which allow them to access pension benefits whilst still working in a reduced capacity. This can help keep experienced heads in the school system for longer and smooth the process of succession planning.

Appointing headteachers more efficiently

At the same time, governors can consider 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 several examples of different successful models; for example, some schools have joined federations with one headteacher who has overall responsibility for two or three schools.

For some schools, co-headship illustrates one potential way of enabling talented leaders to share the role of headteacher, in instances where for one reason or another they may not want to shoulder the burden alone. In such instances where two people share the headship role, it is vital that governing bodies draw up clear lines of accountability to reflect this approach.

Further research on the experiences of schools that have adopted these approaches are available from the NCSL website at www.ncsl.org.uk/modelsofheadship.

Working together

Overall, the challenge is to create a pool of good-quality school leaders for the future. This means providing opportunities for potential leaders to develop their leadership skills throughout the school system, 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 www.ncsl.org.uk/publications.

Recruiting and appointing: key themes and guidelines

The research underpinning this document identified a number of key themes and guidelines which should underpin the whole process of appointing a headteacher or senior leader. Keep these in mind as you work through the seven stages of the recruitment process described in the following pages.

Things to consider

Step 1

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

Step 2

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

Step 3

Don't base your expectations of the sort of headteacher you need solely on what worked in your school in the past or what is seen to work in other schools

Step 4

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

Step 5

There are many new approaches to and models of headship, which 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

Step 6

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

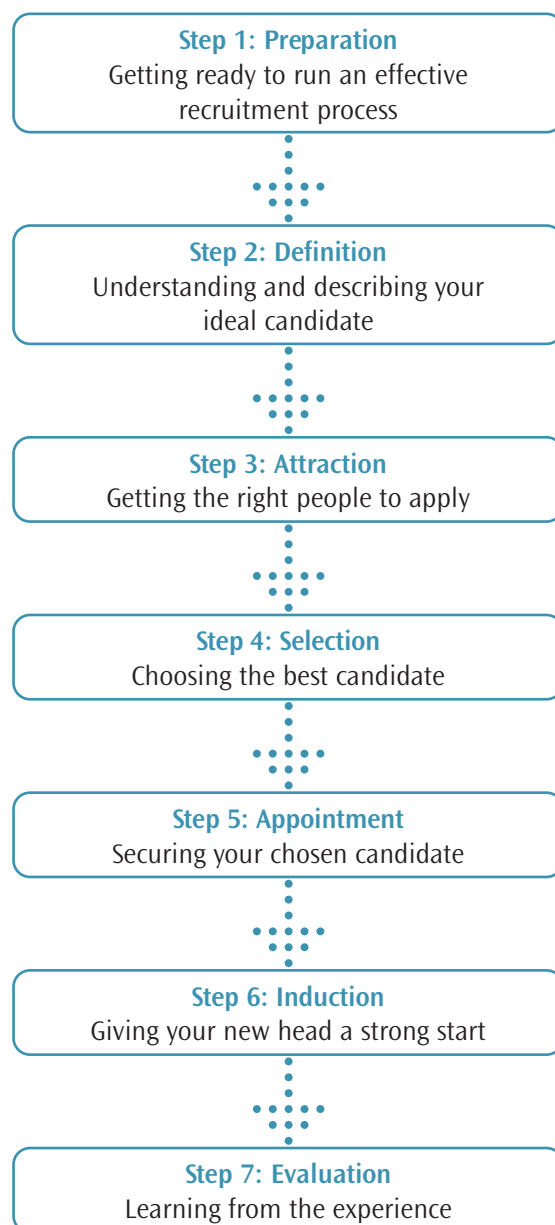
Step 7

Set realistic expectations and a manageable number of criteria for selecting candidates

Understanding the recruitment process

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 that follow each stage of the process in turn and with a thorough approach – rather than diving straight into, 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

Step 1: Preparation

Introduction

If you have been given advance notice of the head's intention to resign or retire, you will have already given some thought to the process. However, for some 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 under way as soon as possible. The number of applicants for headship posts is often lower than it used to be and some 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 senior team, secondments, or building connections with local schools with promising leaders. Part of this will include looking to increase the diversity of leaders' backgrounds more broadly. It should also include training to build the skills and expertise of governors in the recruitment and appointment process. It will involve constant review of the school's circumstances and changing needs.

Key things to consider

1. Have a succession plan in place, and stay informed about your current head's career plans.
2. Don't rush into advertising without proper preparation.
3. Be careful how you use the outgoing headteacher and about the expectations you raise in staff.
4. Obtain the DfES guidance Safeguarding Children: Safer Recruitment and Selection in Education Settings (ref DfES/1568/2005 at www.teachernet.gov.uk) and ensure that at least one member of your panel has been trained in safer recruitment.
5. Keep your paperwork.
6. Ensure that you are trained and informed in equal opportunities policy.
7. Seek advice from your local authority, diocese or other adviser.
8. Create a selection panel of three to seven members, with experience, interest, objectivity and the ability to commit to the entire process.
9. Be realistic about what you can expect from a headteacher, but do not appoint if you have not seen the right person.
10. Prepare a contingency plan in case you cannot appoint before the post falls vacant.

Frequently asked questions

Who is responsible for recruiting a headteacher?

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. In most instances the local authority or diocese will have or be assigned advisory rights.

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 local authority has objected. In such instances, the reasons for this decision will need to be stated in writing and may be subject to challenge.

Where can I get support and advice?

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 can offer. Alternative support may be available from the diocese and headteacher associations. Some recruitment consultancies have also developed approaches to assist governing bodies in the recruitment of headteachers. However, the fee for such services may be considerable and not all providers in this new market offer the same level of quality or attention to your individual needs. As with all external advice, personal referrals from people you trust are the best protection.

What is the correct role for the existing head to play in recruiting their successor?

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.

Checklist

At the end of the preparation stage you should:

- ✓ 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
- ✓ 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

Step 2: Definition

Introduction

The definition stage involves the process of clarifying 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 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 candidate for your school. What you define at this stage will form the basis for:

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

Key things to consider

1. No recruitment process can be successful without a clear and relevant definition of the role and the qualities you are looking for.
2. 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.
3. Gather a wide range of sources of evidence about the school's needs and seek objective advice and challenge. Pay attention to the self-evaluation form (SEF).
4. 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.
5. Be realistic.
6. Consider the current leadership team in the school and how the skills and abilities of its members could complement those of the headteacher. What is well covered and where are the gaps?

7. Write a job description that is based on templates but unique to your school.
8. Write a person specification that describes the essential, desirable and threshold attributes required. Base your selection criteria on these attributes.
9. Limit your essential criteria to a manageable number (6–10) that will really make a difference.
10. Consider not only skills and knowledge, but behaviours, attributes, characteristics, values and motivation.

Frequently asked questions

What should I look for in a 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. You should also take into account a number of factors about the context of the school and the community it serves, which will have an impact on the type of person needed to lead it into its next phase of development. These include:

- current levels of pupil achievement and the school's overall performance
- development needs of the school
- make-up of the local community
- the school's situation in respect of students numbers
- budget
- likelihood of any major new initiative taking place, eg building work, extended services etc

Use these to inform the development of the job description and person specification (see overleaf). Try to establish seven or eight criteria to judge potential applicants against.

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

Since September 2005, schools have been 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 this task. While this is primarily developed to support the inspection, it is also a valuable strategic leadership and management tool for the school's own use. As such it provides an opportunity to identify:

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

Data on the school's performance and assessment will also help you to identify the priorities for teaching and learning. Documents such as the *Children Act 2004* (at www.opsi.gov.uk) and *Every Child Matters* (available from www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/publications) will help you understand the school's future direction.

How do I write a job description?

The job description lists the accountabilities and tasks to be carried out by the headteacher as part of their professional duties. 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 2006* (available at www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/payandperformance/pay). 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 reflect closely the job to be done in your school.

The formats of job descriptions vary, but good practice would include:

- job details – basic information about job title, reports to, etc
- purpose – a one-sentence summary of why the job exists
- dimensions – the significant areas the job has an impact on
- principal accountabilities – the outputs of the job
- competences – the inputs of the job (knowledge, skills, behaviours, attitudes)
- performance standards – statements of performance measures
- organisation chart – pictorial representation of where the job fits into the institution
- contextual information – supporting information about the context in which the job operates

How do I write a person specification?

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 and 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
- Strengthening community through collaboration and partnership

Try to keep to no more than seven or eight criteria for judging individuals against these requirements. Be disciplined as to which aspects are really essential and which are just nice to have.

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

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 gender, race and disability. Recent directives from the EU also prohibit discrimination on the grounds of religion, age and sexual orientation. In short, governors need to ensure that discrimination does not occur on any grounds.

Section 58-60 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003: SI2003/1660, outline specific provision for schools with a religious character in respect of the employment of teachers of the same faith as the character of the school.

They state that such schools may select and specifically appoint up to one-fifth of their staff (including the headteacher) on the grounds of their fitness and competence to give such religious education as is required.

It is recommended that further information on the issue of discrimination should be sought, for instance from local authority or diocese advisors, the reference above and from Chapter 11, paragraph 23 of the Guide to the law for School Governors.

What account should I take of NPQH?

Since April 2004, all first-time headteachers have been required to hold the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) *or* to 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.

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, generic knowledge, aptitudes and skills have been tested.

In short, think of your recruitment campaign like a marketing exercise. Your challenge is to “sell” your school and its headship opportunity to potential candidates. The complementary document, “Turning heads: taking a marketing approach to leadership recruitment,” offers more detailed advice and ideas about how to attract candidates to your post.

Checklist

By the end of the definition stage you will have:

- ✓ formulated a clear idea about the current and future needs of the school
- ✓ analysed the skills and experience already in the leadership team
- ✓ defined the skills and experience you are seeking in a new headteacher
- ✓ written a job description and a person specification

Step 3: Attraction

Introduction

The attraction stage is concerned with creating and communicating information about the school and the post that will attract the right candidates and in such numbers to provide you with a sufficiently large field of suitable candidates to ensure a real choice.

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, and 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. You will need to put yourselves in the candidate's position and consider what they need to know in order to decide whether to apply.

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 supporting 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.

Key things to consider

1. Don't rush to advertise – invest in preparing your process and defining your needs first.
2. Seek to impress as well as to be impressed. Efficiency and courtesy are the most important attributes at this stage.
3. Be honest, but optimistic – some of the best headteachers are attracted by the chance to make a real difference.
4. Help candidates to self-select by giving accurate information. There is no value in hiding your selection criteria.
5. Invest in a coherent and complete application pack, but don't include too much information.
6. Include an application form which tests for your threshold criteria, among other information, and specify that you don't want CVs.
7. School visits are a useful part of the self-selection process, but ensure that they are well planned and that all participants are briefed on their roles.
8. Offering continuing professional development to a new headteacher demonstrates a supportive attitude.

Frequently asked questions

How do I create a good advert?

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 will 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 your advert is included as many candidates apply within their own authorities.

You may need specialist support to help you design, produce and place your advertisement. Adverts are expensive. Good advice at this stage can help you maximise the effectiveness of your limited budget. Your local authority may be able to help you. Many have existing partnerships with recruitment advertising agencies.

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

Include the local authority logo as teachers and headteachers generally know the geographical area they wish to apply to. Other information included on the advert should be clear, concise and interesting. Communicate your most vital messages: the key characteristics of the school, your essential criteria, and what you will offer them. Church schools will indicate the religious commitment expected of candidates.

It is attractive to many candidates if you show that you welcome visits to the school. If you do, indicate in the advertisement whom they should contact. Some candidates prefer to visit before putting in an application. 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. Test the wording of the advertisement on the staff. They will tell you if they think it captures their school in the best possible way.

What should I put in an application pack?

The application pack serves two purposes. It tells the applicants how to apply and 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.

The application pack should inform candidates about:

- ethos, aims and current priorities
- the nature of the pupil intake
- organisation of classes
- 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

Checklist

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

Step 4: Selection

Introduction

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, sexuality, race or ethnic or national origin.

The selection stage is divided into two parts, shortlisting (choosing who to invite for interview) and interviewing (which may involve other assessments techniques as well as an interview to enable you to choose who to appoint).

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.

The subsequent interview stage may actually involve a range of assessments to help you gain a rounded view of each candidate's strengths and weaknesses. The only compulsory element is a formal panel interview.

The assessment process may take place over more than one day. The full recruitment guidance document contains further advice on the effectiveness of different candidate assessment exercises. You may feel that you need some specialist support or training to help you design effective exercises (and interpret their results correctly) to help you assess for the leadership qualities that are most important to your school. Your local authority or diocese should be able to help.

Remember that your programme for interview and assessment should be a two way process. Include time within the schedule for candidates to experience your school and ask you questions. There is no merit in making the interview and assessment process as tough as possible.

Key things to consider

1. Shortlist around six candidates for interview, if possible, based on your threshold criteria and whichever essential criteria can be discerned from the form.
2. Keep a record of all decisions made and the reasons for them.
3. Notify your diocese or local authority of your shortlist and consider any representations made by them.
4. Request references after shortlisting, keep them focused on factual verification and use them only to confirm rather than influence your appointment decision.

5. If the candidate is a serving headteacher, find out what's going on in their current school and how well it is doing.
6. If you have the time and budget to organise an assessment centre,¹ do so.
7. 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.
8. You must conduct a formal interview (with a senior representative of the local authority present if you are not a voluntary-aided or foundation school or an academy).
9. Prepare an assessment grid for each exercise used and ensure assessors complete it on the spot.
10. Ensure that all questions and exercises are related to one or more pre-agreed selection criteria.
11. Prepare panel members to ask good questions – open ended, focused, not leading, and without excessive preamble.
12. Reserve judgement until all the candidates have completed all the exercises.
13. Don't seek consensus too early when reaching your decision – ensure that all candidates are considered and all panel members have spoken.

Frequently asked questions

How many people should I invite to interview?

Be clear about your criteria to ensure a manageable number is invited for interview. Interviewing more than six candidates may make your programme rushed and present difficulties 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.

Who should be involved in making the decision?

Once the selection activities and the final interview have been held, the chair of the panel should lead the process of examining the evidence on each candidate and collating the scores.

¹ Assessment centres 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.

The final decision for appointment is the governors' but you will need very strong reasons to reject the advice of the local authority representative or external consultant.

Should staff get involved in the recruitment process?

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

How do I conduct an interview?

Prior to conducting the interview, you will need to decide:

- 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 the answers will be probed
- what sort of responses you hope to get to different questions and what will constitute a good answer in the light of your school's needs

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. Re-read all applications, job descriptions and person specifications.

Many of your candidates will have some experience of interviews, so inventive questions are likely to be the most testing. A consultant or local authority adviser will help you to probe answers and identify what your criteria look like in practice.

Avoid leading questions, multiple questions and hypothetical questions. Don't ask personal questions that aren't related to the job. Structure questions in a logical sequence so that you are not asking the candidates to leap from one topic to another.

Aim to speak for only 20 per cent of the time and allow candidates to speak for remaining 80 per cent. Show that you are interested in the answer by making eye contact.

Interrupt if you feel that the question has been answered and the candidate has started to wander off the point. Ask supplementary questions if these expectations are not met.

Delay discussions about individuals until all activities are completed.

Checklist

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

Step 5: Appointment

Introduction

Once the governing body has ratified the decision of the appointment panel, you will need to make your offer of appointment to your chosen candidate and inform the unsuccessful applicants. In the case of a community, voluntary-controlled, community special or maintained nursery school, the actual appointment is made by the local authority. In the case of a foundation, voluntary-aided or foundation special school, the school itself makes the appointment.

Key things to consider

1. Be realistic about what you can expect from a headteacher, but do not appoint if you have not seen the right person.
2. 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).
3. 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.
4. Unsuccessful candidates should be treated with respect. You may wish to offer feedback, but be aware that anything you say could be used in an appeal.
5. Take particular care to offer development feedback to unsuccessful internal candidates.
6. Successful candidates need feedback too – any development areas could form part of their professional development or performance management plan.

Frequently asked questions

How can I ensure that recruitment is safe?

You must obtain the guidance issued by the DfES entitled *Safeguarding Children: Safer Recruitment and Selection in Education Settings* (ref DfES/1568/2005 at www.teachernet.gov.uk). 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 who 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/recruitingleaders). 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.

What is the protocol for making the offer?

Candidates should not normally be asked to wait at the school for a decision, which may be made after a lengthy discussion. The chair of governors is usually the person 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 would be unwise to resign from their current post before receiving the contract, the chair should check that it has been sent as soon as possible.

Only contact unsuccessful candidates once the verbal offer has been accepted. It is good practice for governors to ask the local authority adviser or an external consultant to inform and give feedback to all unsuccessful candidates in case anyone chooses to appeal against your decision. Feedback should only be given verbally and on the basis of evidence of performance against the person specification. Feedback should also be given the successful candidate.

If the local authority informs the successful candidate, be sure to follow up with a congratulatory call from the chair of governors shortly afterwards. Finally, agree with the successful applicant when you will inform staff and parents of your decision.

What happens if I can't appoint?

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 offer before you need it. This will provide you with the reassurance you need to avoid making an inappropriate appointment out of desperation. Meanwhile, obtaining objective external advice will help you avoid repeating costly mistakes when re-advertising.

You may also wish to consider again the degree to which an alternative model of headship may be appropriate for your school. For instance, have you considered the prospect of offering the role as a job share? Is there a neighbouring school you may consider federating with, thereby enabling you to share a head? Such approaches are clearly not appropriate for all schools, but are becoming increasingly common. Further information on co-headship and federations can be accessed from NCSL's website www.ncsl.org.uk/modelsofheadship.

Checklist

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

Step 6: Induction

Introduction

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 confident in taking up the reins if you start planning the induction early. Inductions should make use of any relevant data gathered during the selection process. You should also investigate and make use of the growing number of formal programmes available nationally and locally for induction, especially if it is your new head's first post.

Key things to consider

1. A well-planned induction is critical for a successful recruitment process and to enable the new head to get up to speed as quickly as possible.
2. Make as much use as possible of data generated by the interview process to begin the head's performance management and professional development.
3. The chair of governors should devote some time to facilitating their new head's entry into formal and informal local networks.
4. The local authority will be a good source of advice on induction.
5. For first-time headteachers, Early Headship Provision provides funds and opportunities see www.ncsl.org.uk/ehp.
6. 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.
7. 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.

Frequently asked question

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

Inductions should make use of any relevant data gathered during the selection process. You should also investigate and make use of the growing number of formal programmes available nationally and locally for induction, especially if it is your new head's first post. Agree a programme of visits and meetings and decide who will do what and when. It is common for the chair to be in contact with the new headteacher, but your appointee might also welcome assistance in organising discussions with staff and the outgoing headteacher.

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. Newly appointed headteachers will also benefit from having a mentor, and your local authority should be able to help with this.

Checklist

At the end of the induction stage, you will have:

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

Step 7: Evaluation

Introduction

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 case, 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.

Key things to consider

1. If you need to re-advertise the post, take some time to evaluate your previous process and decide if anything needs changing.
2. 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.
3. If the recruitment was successful, also evaluate what went well and what could be improved. Store the learning safely to inform the next senior appointment you make.

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

A broader range of resources that support all our responsibilities for developing talented leadership can be found at www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday

The following publications may also be helpful:

DfES, Governing the school of the future, London, DfES, ref DfES/0786/2004 at <http://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 <http://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.



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**Finding, developing and
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