TOMORROW'S LEADERS TODAY

What are we learning about... recruiting primary school headteachers?

Evidence Into Practice Guide

NCSL
National College for
School Leadership

**Inspiring leaders;
improving children's lives**

How many candidates are putting themselves forward for primary headteacher posts?

In 2006–7, just over 12 per cent of primary schools in England initiated a recruitment campaign for a headteacher with an advert in the Times Education Supplement. That was around 2,100 schools in total – of which 63 per cent were successful in making an appointment at the first attempt[1].

In each year since 1999–2000, more than 30 per cent of primary schools seeking a new headteacher failed to make an appointment after a first advert. In 2006/07, 37 per cent failed to make an appointment – compared with 25 per cent of secondary schools that failed to appoint.

The overall trend in the number of applicants to primary headship since 2000 has been one of decline. Beneath the headline trend, there have been fluctuations according to school size. In 2006–7, the number of applications to group 3 and 4 schools increased slightly compared with the previous year, whilst applications to group 1 and 2 schools declined over the same period. The average number of applications to group 5 schools in 2006–7 was 6.0.

Average number of applications received per primary headteacher post, School group sizes 1-4, 2000–2007[1]
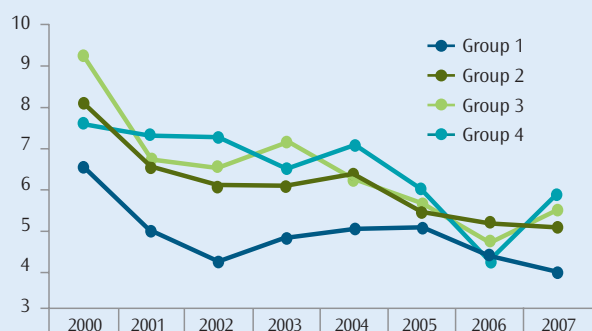
Response data for primary schools contrast sharply with the secondary sector, where around 15 applications were received for each advertised post in 2006–7. The table opposite shows the average response rates for primary headteacher recruitment campaigns in 2006–7.

Average response rates to advertisements for primary headteacher posts (England and Wales), 2006–7[1]

School Group Size	Number of application forms sent out	Number of applications received	Number of candidates shortlisted*
1	9.6	4.0	2.9
2	11.3	5.1	3.3
3	15.1	5.6	3.4
4	20.0	5.9	3.9
5	12.0	6.0	4.0

* not all shortlisted candidates attend interview – in 2006–7, typically interview numbers were 0.5 of a candidate less than the number shortlisted.

Of course, a low number of applications is not a bar to successful recruitment in itself. Two (or even one) good quality candidates may be enough to make a strong appointment.

Relatively little is known about how far school leaders are likely to travel or relocate for a new job. However, qualitative surveys[3] suggest relatively low levels of mobility amongst school leaders generally. This is because candidates appear to look for a particular type of school which is related to preferences for specific challenges and communities, and to avoid long commutes or moving far. These negative preferences appear to be driven by: house price differentials; a desire to live in locations with opportunities for work for partners; and the incompatibility of long commutes and long hours. Although these findings were derived from a mixed sample of primary and secondary practitioners, these preferences are strongly consistent with other survey data for primary leaders specifically.

The **Evidence into Practice Guide** – What are we learning about the school leadership labour market?, also provides useful background.

WHAT IF … I reviewed the way we recruit primary headteachers?

A wide range of resources to support effective recruitment are available through NCSL's Tomorrow's Leaders Today website. **www.ncsl.org.uk/recruitingleaders**

| KEY QUESTIONS	POTENTIAL ACTIONS
Compared with available benchmark data, are campaigns generating an expected level of enquiry?	Compare the quality of advertisements for "successful" and "unsuccessful" recruitment campaigns. Which approaches are working best? Assess which advertising channels are generating the best response in order to direct resources effectively. Consider boosting individual school campaigns with wider "employer brand" campaigns at city or locality level. See NCSL resource, "Turning Heads" to explore these themes in greater detail. **www.ncsl.org.uk/media-af1-cf-turning-heads-2.pdf**
Are requests for application forms being converted into actual applications at an expected ratio?	Seek feedback from "non-responders" – why did they choose not to apply? Review candidate information pack to improve its relevance (and attractiveness) to potential candidates. Would easier access to pre-application school visits and/or informal discussions about the role encourage applicants? Review the application form – does it encourage or discourage applicants to apply?
Are applicants staying in the recruitment process once they have applied?	Seek feedback from candidates who drop out – why did they leave the process? Did they feel the assessment process was appropriate and well managed? Review recruitment process management to improve "candidate care".
Are governors' expectations realistic?	Work with governors to establish a shared understanding of the labour market and likely response levels. Do governors recognise trends which signal the emergence of a newer, younger cohort of headteachers who may appear different to outgoing headteachers and have different aspirations and development needs?

What is the age profile of wider leadership teams at primary level?

Although attention has focused on headteacher appointments, trends in primary leadership generally suggest that succession planning needs to look across the whole leadership team.

The demographic profile for deputy and assistant headteachers suggests similarities to the headteacher population, with an ageing workforce. Furthermore, primary schools appeared to register a reduction in candidate interest in primary deputy headteacher posts in 2006–7 compared with the year before. Fewer individuals requested job details in response to adverts for deputy headteacher posts and fewer candidates made applications[1].

In addition, the age profile for deputies and assistants highlights the shortfall in supply of 'traditional candidates' for future headships – particularly those in their late 30s and early 40s who have been a key source of candidates in the past.

Age profile of deputy and assistant headteachers, nursery and primary, 2006[4]
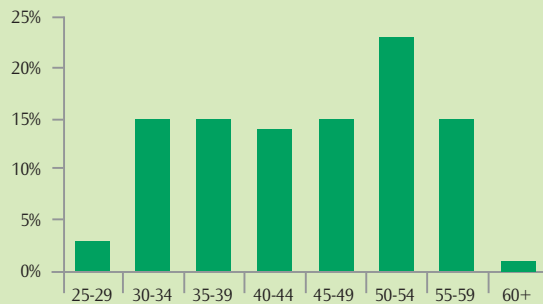
WHAT IF… I aligned succession plans with school organisation planning?

As the workforce profile is changing, so too is the shape of primary headship. Primary schools are becoming larger[5], the number of collaborations and federations is increasing[6] and different models of headship are emerging.

Whilst the 'one head, one school' model will continue to be the most effective structure for many primary schools[7], local authorities and others are also developing different models of leadership involving greater collaboration between schools and other agencies. This is driven by the need to develop effective, sustainable schools which meet community need, not by headship recruitment challenges. However, succession planning is a key component of wider school planning.

Different models of leadership are explored in greater detail in the 'Explore the different models' pages of NCSL's website at: **www.ncsl.org.uk/modelsofleadership**

CASE STUDY – Establishing suitable schools in East Riding

The East Riding of Yorkshire faces particular challenges in managing school places. The authority covers a large area, some parts of which are very sparsely populated. Whilst the number of births is now stabilising, school rolls have fallen significantly over recent years.

Rather than simply closing schools – which would only make matters worse and generate only modest financial savings - the authority has established a Sustainability Task Group. It is based on the belief that there is significant benefit to be gained from schools working more closely together and combining their resources through formal relationships such as a collaboration or federation. The governing bodies of all schools have been invited to undertake discussions which will be fed back during the course of the next academic year.

The approach has the potential to harness the enthusiasm and creativity that comes from local solutions. Already, the authority can point to real change:

- One high school is working in a formal federation with its main feeder primary school.
- Two village schools have combined to consolidate Key Stage 2 provision on one site, whilst Key Stage 1 and extended services remain available in both communities.
- In one market town, the secondary school and its primary feeders are working in a loose federation having established a joint strategic committee of all the governing bodies.

The process is being managed with the clear intention that the experience of pupils remains at the heart of change. Work is continuing to develop models for collaborative business management across groups of small primary schools and to produce protocols for managing joint service level agreements for local authority activity across partnerships.

The work is still in its infancy, but it has the potential to change thinking about school leadership in quite radical ways and establish a wholly new approach to succession planning.

Contact details: David Stork, Workforce Reform Strategy Manager, East Riding of Yorkshire Council david.stork@eastriding.gov.uk

Useful additional research resources

Primary Executive Headship (Barnes, 2006, NCSL) explores the experiences of heads leading more than one school in England, identifying key learning from the process of establishing new school models.

www.ncsl.org.uk/media-7ba-ff-primary-executive-headship.pdf

Does Every Primary School Need a Headteacher? (Collins et al, 2005, NCSL) examines school models in the Netherlands where 80 per cent of primary schools are part of a federation of some kind. The study identifies some of the key advantages and disadvantages for leadership across multi-school organisations.

www.ncsl.org.uk/federations-does-every-primary-school-need-a-headteacher.pdf

A Study of Hard Federations of Small Primary Schools (Ireson, 2007, NCSL) looks at the leadership of hard federations in the UK, identifying key issues for practitioners and policy makers.

www.ncsl.org.uk/media-085-02-federations-report3.pdf

Emerging Patterns of School Leadership (Chapman et al, Manchester University, 2008, NCSL) identifies emerging practice and possible future directions based on a review of schools and collaborative partnerships which have developed interesting approaches to leadership, management and governance practices.

www.ncsl.org.uk/emerging-patterns-of-school-leadership.pdf

Which primary schools find it hardest to recruit?

Most primary schools – almost two thirds – appoint a new headteacher successfully at the first attempt. However, there is a clear trend in the number of schools failing to make an appointment after an initial advert. Since 1997, the number of primary schools advertising twice (or more) has doubled[3].

Research[3] supports the common perception that the primary schools in London and the south east are likely to face recruitment difficulties, as well as those in areas of urban deprivation and faith schools – especially Roman Catholic schools. Whilst schools in the south west and inner London found recruiting a new head easier in 2006–07, re-advertisement rates reached new record high levels for schools in the north west and east of England.

However, these categories account for only a quarter of the primary schools advertising more than once for a headteacher. Most primary schools which experience difficulty defy any easy categorisation, underlining the fact that any primary school can face difficulties making appointments if local recruitment and succession strategy is weak or ill-targeted.

Summary of key risk factors which influence recruitment success[3]

Factors which have a clear impact on recruitment success	Factors which have no clear impact on recruitment success
Geography: Regions with the highest rate of 'hard to recruit' headships are London, the south east and east England. Qualitative surveys link geographical recruitment challenges with high house prices. The north east has the lowest rate of hard-to-fill vacancies.	**Salary:** Evidence suggests that salary level alone has limited impact on whether a school is successful in recruiting. Qualitative surveys suggest that what matters is an appropriate differential between head and other leadership roles and that the salary matches the size of the challenge.
Faith schools: Faith schools are more likely to have recruitment difficulties than community schools – with Roman Catholic schools more likely to experience difficulties than Church of England schools. This has particular implications for those regions – such as the north west – which have a higher proportion of faith schools than others.	**School group size:** There is no clear evidence that group size alone increases the likelihood of recruitment failure. However, other factors can impact on attractiveness - such as the location of small schools, or negative perceptions about combining heavy teaching workloads with headship responsibilities.
Social deprivation: Primary schools which have a high level of eligibility for free school meals are more likely to experience recruitment difficulties.	**Timing:** Although the headship recruitment market has become increasingly seasonal, there is no evidence that the month in which a post is first advertised correlates to recruitment difficulties.

Qualitative research has also identified a range of additional risk factors. A simple tool for assessing exposure to these factors – with suggested strategies for mitigating them – is available at **www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstodayresources**

WHAT IF... I fail to recruit?

SCENARIO	OPTIONS
We are offering an attractive job, but our recruitment process was weak.	If so, this might be relatively easy to fix for a second recruitment campaign. An improved attraction strategy, better candidate management and a clearer focus on process management might help secure a successful appointment at a second attempt. See What if...I reviewed the way we recruit primary headteachers? for resources.
We ran a model recruitment campaign, but still no-one applied.	This scenario might require a more fundamental review. Is an alternative recruitment strategy required (such as an active candidate search)? Perhaps a different model of school leadership is required to appeal to a different recruitment market altogether (see case studies for examples).
We are not confident that an immediate re-advertisement would generate a different result.	A non-appointment can be an opportunity to consider transitional arrangements which might support effective succession planning over the longer term. Options might include: formalising acting-up arrangements over a longer term basis (with external mentoring support if appropriate) in order to provide a structured development opportunity; seconding an aspiring deputy from another school in order to give them experience of headship; seeking an interim headteacher from an external source or creating a temporary partnership with a neighbouring school under that school's headteacher. Often these solutions are brokered by local authorities, building capacity in the system as a whole as well as supporting individual schools.

See case study section

How might the gender imbalance amongst primary school leaders affect succession planning?

More women than ever are becoming headteachers. Whilst in the early 1990s most primary headteachers were men, by 2006 67 per cent of primary heads were women[4], reflecting the long-term trend of 'feminisation' of the profession. However, given that (in 2006) 84 per cent of all primary school teachers were female[4], women are still under-represented at the top level.

Research evidence suggests at least three ways in which considerations about the gender balance of the workforce might affect succession planning.

Support for career development from entry level	Research suggests that gender differences in aspirations for promotion are discernible at an early stage in individuals' career development. Amongst teachers aged 21-30, one study[8] found that whilst 100 per cent of male teachers within a sample group intended to seek promotion, only 71 per cent of female teachers reported the same ambition. This gap widened amongst older teachers. In a sample of teachers over 50, for example, 20 per cent of men were seeking promotion but only 3 per cent of women. Specifically in relation to headship, 25 per cent of men declare an ambition to become a headteacher on entry to the profession, compared with 10 per cent of women[9].
Shaping headteacher roles to meet changing needs and appeal to candidates	Evidence suggests that around 80 per cent of female primary headteachers have at least one child and are far more likely to have caring responsibilities than their male counterparts[9]. Such responsibilities appear to influence behaviour in the jobs market. Amongst heads with caring responsibilities, 70 per cent identify 'a supportive governing body' as a particular priority for selecting a future role – compared with just 46 per cent of those without caring responsibilities[3].
Ensuring selection processes are open and engaging	There is some evidence that women can be less confident when approaching recruitment processes. Women are more likely to doubt that they will get a headship than men and more likely to doubt their own ability[9]. This may be why (for larger primary schools) 23 per cent of female headteachers were internal appointments compared with less than 8 per cent of male heads[3]. That is, women perform better in familiar circumstances where their experience is recognised.
	Gender discrimination is seen as less of an issue to progression than once may have been the case. Evidence suggests that perceptions of direct discrimination or sexism have declined markedly since the 1990s – although a 2004 survey[9] suggested around 30 per cent of female primary heads reported experience of sexism in relation to job applications (compared with 16 per cent of male primary heads).

WHAT IF... I did more to meet the needs of aspiring women headteachers?

A 2008 survey[10] of women who aspire to headship identified those factors which individuals saw as the most important factors in helping them progress to headship. The five most important factors (in rank order) were reported as:

1	opportunities to practise leadership skills
2	mentoring and advice from senior leaders
3	undertaking NPQH
4	opportunities to work with other schools and organisations
5	support from local authority or diocese

In the same survey, those women who felt they lacked the necessary skills for headship were asked to identify their own perceived skill gaps. Almost half (48 per cent) identified 'budget and financial skills' as a development area. Some 28 per cent identified (lack of) 'confidence and self belief' as a development need, with 24 per cent mentioning 'accountability and performance management' issues as a learning requirement. This data provides a useful evidence base for shaping local development programmes.

Evidence also underlines the need to invest in the skills and professionalism of governing bodies. Governors have a key role: to create a supportive environment which will attract aspiring headteachers with carer responsibilities; and to remain open to appointing candidates whose career path may not have followed traditional patterns. Almost 60 per cent of female candidates are likely to have taken career breaks, for example, compared with less than 10 per cent of men[9] so that female candidates' CVs – and potential future needs – will often appear different to interview panels.

Evidence suggests the need to address system-level change to:

- Ensure succession planning strategies encourage aspirations for headship amongst all teachers early in their career to counter gender bias.
- Take account of the changing needs of younger newly appointed heads as the average age of appointment falls[1].

In 2007, women accounted for only 53 per cent of newly appointed headteachers aged under 35 but 82 per cent of those appointed over age 45.

This may lead to exploration of different models of headship which are likely to be more appealing to (say) younger female candidates. Job-share headship, for example, may be attractive to women especially[12], encouraging more candidates to put themselves forward.

For a governor perspective on job-share headships see the NCSL Research Associate report 'Keep your head' at: **www.ncsl.org.uk/keep-your-head-summary.pdf**

See case study section

What do aspiring primary heads look for in a role?

All other factors aside – school type, location etc – the role of headship itself must be sufficiently attractive to potential candidates in order to secure a successful appointment.

The Evidence into Practice Guide – What are we learning about…NPQH Graduates? identifies some of the key issues which shape candidates perceptions about the attractiveness (and disincentives) of headship. That guide highlights the central importance of work-life balance issues as a key influence on candidates' attitudes.

Evidence suggests that work-life balance factors are especially important to primary headteachers. More primary heads describe their job as 'very stressful' compared with secondary heads[11]. In the same survey, primary heads identified 'administrative demands' as the factor which demotivated

them most as a headteacher. This is especially important in smaller schools where the responsibilities of headship are combined with a significant teaching workload.

Heads with 'caring responsibilities' – a characteristic of primary heads especially – identify different critical factors in career decisions to those without caring responsibilities[3]. They place greater emphasis on roles in which:

- a governing body is supportive of a head's personal circumstances

- are convenient in terms of distance from their current location (to avoid long commutes)

- are in a convenient location for the availability of work for a partner and availability of a school for their own children.

WHAT IF… I looked at practical steps to address candidates' concerns?

The development of school business management roles for primary schools as part of NCSL's primary leadership plan offers a practical means for addressing workload issues at leadership level. As well as freeing up to 30 per cent of a headteacher's time, investment in business management skills can also deliver significant value for money savings. Some headteachers and governing bodies have been exploring how they can pool resources to employ school business managers on a joint basis, providing support across a group of primary schools.

More information (including updates on school business management demonstration projects) is available at: **www.ncsl.org.uk/sbmfuture**

More widely, evidence of the factors which candidates define as critical and important to employment choices[3] suggests the tactics which might have the greatest impact are to:

- be clear about the values and challenges of the school

- look in the right places for the people suited to that context

- ensure that the recruitment process is run efficiently and reflects school values

- consider whether the salary on offer provides sufficient differential from other leadership posts and is perceived to match the level of challenge of the post

- negotiate the benefits package directly with the favoured candidate to shape it to their needs – and indicate this approach in recruitment communications

- look locally

- identify a clear objective or goal to offer candidates a measurable challenge

- emphasise the needs of the local community and indicate support for a headteacher in engaging that community

- be open to flexible working arrangements such as job-share

- look for, and be prepared to accept, candidates who are currently in a smaller or more junior post

- demonstrate how you will manage headteacher workload

- develop an attractive package of professional development opportunities (see for example NCSL's Early Headship Provision **www.ncsl.org.uk/ehp**) and set aside sufficient resources to finance them.

Case Studies

CASE STUDY – Creating flexible leadership capacity in Kent

A programme which was designed to support school improvement (rather than as a direct response to the succession planning challenge) has had the effect of developing a pool of school leaders in Kent who are able to step into headship when a permanent headteacher is absent.

Kent's Primary Excellence Project has been running since 2003. In this project, the local authority seconds a full-time headteacher to each of the 23 clusters of primary schools in the county. The seconded heads' schools must have a deputy head who can step in as full-time acting headteacher. The project has built capacity for 'covering' headships and brought about valuable learning and development for the seconded heads, the acting heads and acting deputies. There have been three phases to the work so far. In Phase four (2008) the programme will be devolved to the new local children's services.

An external evaluation report indicated how the project is both promoting succession planning and building leadership capacity, reporting that : 'Acting headteachers and, in turn, the acting deputies, are responding well to a challenge that they did not expect to have and, thus, the plan for growing leaders is taking root.'

Contact details: Sheila Wilding, Senior Adviser Improvement Partnerships, Advisory Service Kent sheila.wilding@kent.gov.uk

CASE STUDY
Co-headship in Northumberland

Acklington Church of England First School is a small village school in Northumberland.

Nichola Brannen was appointed as headteacher in January 2006. She took maternity leave from May 2006, returning full-time in November the same year. With the encouragement of an adviser from the diocese, she took the idea of a job share to her governors in spring 2007. They were very supportive and advertised nationally for a part-time teaching head, equivalent to 0.4 of a full-time post. As a result, Suzanne Connolly was appointed from September 2007.

Nichola and Suzanne did not know one another before working together but have found that the arrangement has been an excellent way of balancing a headship role, with a very young family. They have learnt a lot about what is needed to make such an arrangement work.

Nichola and Suzanne's key learning points have been:

- As far as possible, do all you can to create the impression of being 'one head'.

- Be seen together by staff and parents at key times etc.

- Don't take on separate projects – prioritise what you need to do together, then carry out the work in ways which mean a project can be handed from one person to the next.

- Communication is key – with each other, staff, pupils and parents.

Contact details: Nichola Brannen and Suzanne Connolly, Acklington CofE First School
Acklington Morpeth, Northumberland
Admin@acklington.northumberland.sch.uk
01670 760335

Sources

1 Education Data Surveys, January 2008, 23rd Annual Report of Senior Staff Appointments in Schools

3 Hay Group, Education Data Surveys, 2007, Making The Match, Research Into "Hard To Recruit" Headship Posts, Nottingham, NCSL, (unpublished)

4 DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families), January 2007, School Workforce in England, Revised, London, DCSF

5 Southworth, G & Weindling, D, August 2002, Leadership in Large Primary Schools, Nottingham, NCSL

6 Ireson, J, January 2007, A Study of Hard Federations of Small Primary Schools, Nottingham, NCSL

7 NCSL (National College for School Leadership), 2007, Primary Leadership: Advice to the Secretary of State, Nottingham, NCSL

8 Thornton, M & Bricheno, P, 2000, Primary School Teachers' Careers in England and Wales: The Relationship Between Gender, Role, Position and Promotion Aspirations, University of Hertfordshire

9 Coleman, M, undated (2004 data), Gender and Headship In the Twenty-First Century, Nottingham, NCSL

10 ICM, 2008, Women Into Headship, Nottingham, NCSL

11 Mori, 2005, Follow-Up Research Into the State of School Leadership in England, London, Mori Social Research Institute

12 Paterson, F, 2006, What is the place of co-headship in a profession facing headteacher shortages?, Nottingham, NCSL

What are we learning about... recruiting primary school headteachers?

About this guide

This guide examines what we know about recruiting primary school headteachers. Although the information may be of interest to individual school leaders and governing bodies, it is designed for people who work across groups of schools in local authorities, dioceses and other local partnerships to secure enough high calibre school leaders.

The guide asks four key questions:

- How many candidates are putting themselves forward for primary headteacher posts?

- What is the age profile of wider leadership teams at primary level?

- Which primary schools find it hardest to recruit?

- How might the gender imbalance amongst primary school leaders affect succession planning?

- What do aspiring primary headteachers look for in a role?

The guide explores some of the facts and figures to help succession planners develop their own answers to these questions and brings together key intelligence about recruiting primary headteachers to inform local strategy.

A range of additional online resources, which include more case studies and practical tools, are available at
www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday/resource

Evidence into Practice Guides

This is one in a series of guides that share intelligence and insights into the leadership succession challenge facing schools. Guides will be published during 2008 and 2009 as local strategy develops. Guides currently available can be downloaded from
www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstodayresources

Finding, developing and keeping great headteachers

NCSL
National College for
School Leadership

Inspiring leaders;
improving children's lives