

Frequently asked questions

General

Is the emphasis on nurturing younger leaders squeezing out opportunities for older ones?

Not at all. Ann Palmer, principal of the City of London Academy, emphasised that while she has a relatively young leadership team, she also calls on the experience and expertise of three very strong, experienced deputies to helping manage a complex multi-million-pound building project.

Tim Jones, headteacher of Norbury Primary School insisted it was never too late: “If you have something to offer, have the experience and get the relationships right, go for it. I am working with a deputy in her fifties who, after seeing a number of heads come and go, has decided to go for the job herself. If she works into her sixties, as many will, she will have 10 years’ good service.”

For headteachers who assume the role early in their careers, is burn-out a risk?

Yes, without a good work–life balance. Tim Jones says: “A lot of people talk about work–life balance but don’t actually do it. As a head, you have to think what you will delegate to other people, to make the job doable. I worry about people who are there all weekend and every night. If you are the head, you will be in control of that balance.”

What’s the best strategy for securing a first headship?

The key priority has to be deciding what kind of school you want to work with.

Chris Stone, headteacher of The Arthur Terry School, advised against “the scatter-gun approach”. “Understand yourself, what you believe in, what makes you scream, shout or cry,” he said. “I would go for one or two applications at a time, study the schools in depth and find out everything about them. Then write a quality letter geared towards that school in that set of circumstances. Don’t put things in it like ‘I want to develop people to their full potential.’ What does that mean? It’s a nothing statement. Say what you believe in. Be clear: less is more, two sides of A4.”

Above all, he believes a headteacher must have moral integrity and be able to model the values of the school they are aiming to lead. He said: “You will have to work out what you believe in. It must matter to you that the values of that institution are similar to your own.”

Models of leadership

Who has ultimate accountability when leadership is shared with a co-head or head of school?

At any one time, the school must have an accountable headteacher. As a result in a co-headship or job-share arrangement, one person is identified as the headteacher at any one point. To ensure clarity about who is the accountable headteacher, DCSF guidelines indicate that the maximum overlap or handover time between job-share or co-heads can only be half a day.

With the emergence of co-headships and heads of school, is the deputy headteacher role redundant?

Not at all. The deputy headteacher role is the only role where someone is required to deputise for the headteacher if asked to do so, and so their role is an important one.

It’s also important to remember that deputies will make up the majority of those appointed to first-time headships.