# Recruiting a CEO

A toolkit for multi academy trust boards

This toolkit provides practical tools and templates to guide multi academy trust (MAT) boards through CEO recruitment. It can be adapted and used alongside [recruiting a headteacher guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/recruiting-a-headteacher) which was developed jointly by the NGA and the Department for Education (DfE) and also applies to CEO recruitment.

### Recruiting other senior roles

Parts of this toolkit can be applied to other roles, including heads of school in a MAT and the senior executive leader in a SAT. You may also wish to refer to our [toolkit for recruiting headteachers in a maintained school](https://www.nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre/headteacher-recruitment-toolkit/) for information related to the different skills and qualities that are assessed when recruiting the leader of a single school.

Recruiting heads of school in a MAT is delegated to the CEO. The role those governing have is dependent on the trust’s recruitment policy and/or scheme of delegation. We expect the [local tier of governance](https://www.nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre/mats-local-tier-role/) to have a consultative role in recruitment planning and to be represented on the selection panel, but we know this is not the case in every trust. Local governors’ school-specific knowledge can be valuable to the recruitment process and complement the trust-wide perspective of central staff.

Trust boards must abide by any requirements in their funding agreement and articles of association on recruiting the CEO. They should also follow the procedures set out in the trust’s recruitment policy.

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## Planning and preparation

### Specialist support

Specialist support is essential to the board throughout the process. Support may be available from:

* Diocesan boards of education
* Central HR teams in larger trusts
* Professional associations such as ASCL and NAHT
* Commercial recruitment agencies
* Consultants – [available from NGA](https://www.nga.org.uk/training/consultancy/)

Remember that the relevant financial procedures must be followed when [procuring professional services](https://www.nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre/procurement-schools-trusts/).

Church trusts should consult their diocese/religious authority before launching a recruitment process. Some will have their own employment guidance or protocols which the trust will be expected to use.

### Notice periods

Build in sufficient time for candidates’ notice periods, which may vary. It may be helpful to refer to notice periods for maintained school headteachers:

* 30 April to leave at the end of the summer term
* 30 September to leave at the end of the autumn term
* 31 January to leave at the end of the spring term

Those for current CEOs will often be longer.

The trust board should first approach the [Regional Director](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/regional-department-for-education-dfe-directors/about) to discuss recruitment plans and the trust’s options. Church trusts will also need to discuss recruitment plans with their diocese at an early stage.

### Determine the recruitment budget

The trust board should agree the budget for staff recruitment as part of annual budget planning. A maximum spend should be allocated for the CEO recruitment process, taking into account the cost of buying expertise, agency fees, and any recruitment exercises planned. Also consider costs (and the time required) for a second recruitment round.

### Agree a recruitment timeline

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Task | Deadline/timeframe |
| Planning  |  |
| Create recruitment materials  |  |
| Advertise  |  |
| Deadline for applications |  |
| Shortlisting  |  |
| Invitation to interview |  |
| Interview date(s) |  |
| Decision  |  |
| Start date |  |

### Refer to your vision and strategy

Ask the following questions to build a picture of the type of leader needed to support the trust’s vision and deliver against strategic priorities.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Questions | Your considerations |
| What are the key things the trust will need to do over the next three to five years? Think about:* the balance between central strategy and local accountability
* the need to develop leaders within the trust
* expectations for organisational change and improvement
* consistency of standards and expectations across all schools in the trust

  |  |
| What are the trust’s strengths and areas for development?  |  |
| What kind of leadership is needed to achieve these objectives and make necessary progress?  |  |

### Determine salary and working arrangements

It is important for trust boards to be clear about the role that they are recruiting to and how it will fit into the organisational structure of the trust. Consider the following questions:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Questions | Your considerations |
| What is the salary and pay range for the role? This may be a good time for the trust board to redetermine the pay range – see our guidance on [executive pay](https://www.nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre/setting-executive-pay/). |  |
| What are the specific functions of a CEO in your trust according to the scheme of delegation? For example, would they be expected to be particularly involved in a given area, such as school improvement or finance and operations. Consider the capacity of the trust’s central team and the organisational structure surrounding the role. |  |
| Are there opportunities for [flexible working](https://www.nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre/flexible-working-in-schools-and-trusts/)? Have you considered alternative models of leadership such as co-CEOs? |  |

### Appoint a selection panel

### Safer recruitment

Safer recruitment procedures deter and prevent unsuitable people from applying for, or securing, employment in your trust.

NGA provides [safer recruitment e-learning](https://www.nga.org.uk/training/directory/safer-recruitment/) that is designed to fulfill the compliance obligations of trustees and local governors who have been asked to sit on a recruitment panel.

### The module covers:

* preparing to recruit
* selecting the right people
* choosing wisely
* checking thoroughly
* remaining vigilant

The board should appoint a selection panel of at least three trustees to undertake the shortlisting and selection stages.

The board will need to take the following into account:

* We recommend that at least one panel member receives safer recruitment training.
* All members should have relevant skills and experience or the opportunity to receive training.
* Panel members should not be employed by the trust or have any other conflicts of interest.
* Consider the diversity of thought and experiences of those on the panel.

Church trusts may also have agreements in place with their diocese regarding their involvement in the panel.

While the outgoing CEO can provide helpful information in the planning stages, they should have a very limited role in subsequent stages of the process; they should not be involved in the work or decision making of the selection panel.

When recruiting heads of school at academy level, we recommend that the local committee chair is a selection panel member, particularly in larger trusts. We would also expect the CEO, as the line manager of the role being recruited for, to be on the panel. Other panel members would likely include a trustee, and any central trust staff most relevant to the job functions of the role.

## Advertisement

The following stages can be led by the selection panel, drawing upon the expertise of additional trustees where appropriate. Specialist support will also be essential for the panel to gain independent, expert advice.

### Produce a job description

A good job description identifies the purpose, main tasks, responsibilities, and duties of the role. For a CEO, this will likely differ greatly from the traditional headteacher role in a school, with a larger focus on resource management and operations than on matters such as school improvement. We have a [template CEO job description](https://www.nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre/mat-ceo-job-description/?tokenValidated=true) which boards can use to help develop the parameters of the role.

There is no set format for a job description, but the following template offers a guide:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Job title and purpose* one or two sentences to summarise the role
 |  |
| Principal accountabilities* key tasks for which the CEO is personally responsible (use active verbs such as manage, create, deliver, establish)
* who will manage the post holder
 |  |
| Dimensions and context* size and breadth of the role, including organisational structure
* relationships within and outside the trust
* trust performance and growth plans
 |  |

### Produce a person specification

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Assessment methods |
| A | Application form |
| I | Interview |
| T | Test |
| P | Presentation (or other selection activities) |

Think carefully about the specific knowledge, skills, attributes, and qualities required for the role in the context of the trust. This will include the ability to lead a large organisation and undertake the range of operational responsibilities demanded of the role as outlined in the job description.

There is no set format for a person specification, but the following template and key provides a starting point.

When creating the person specification, trustees may also want to refer to:

* [The Seven Principles of Public Life](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life) (the Nolan principles)
* The [Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education](https://www.nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre/embedding-ethical-leadership-in-education/)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Person specification | Essential or desirable | Assessment method(delete as appropriate) |
| QualificationsConsider why certain qualifications are necessary or if equivalent knowledge and skills can be obtained through experience. |  | A/I/T/P  |
| ExperienceLength of experience is not a measure of competence – it is the nature and quality of the experience that is important, and what skills and knowledge it has given the candidate. Trusts are increasingly considering CEO candidates who have not been headteachers previously. |  | A/I/T/P  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Professional knowledgeFor example: finance, HR, curriculum, school systems, government policy/political environment, context (religious/social dimensions), safeguarding, special needs. |  | A/I/T/P  |
| Professional skillsFor example: people management, resources management, strategic planning, and effective communication. |  | A/I/T/P |
| Philosophy and commitmentThis is about the vision, ethos, and culture of your trust. |  | A/I/T/P |
| Personal qualitiesThis is about how people work – their behaviours, style, and approach. Think carefully and objectively about what’s important. |  | A/I/T/P  |
| Trusts with a religious characterBe explicit if the post is to be filled by an individual practising a specific faith or if preference will be given to candidates of a specific faith. |  | A/I/T/P  |

### Produce an application pack

### Inclusive recruitment practices

Under the Equality Act 2010, trusts must not discriminate against any prospective employee based on a protected characteristic.

The board should consider what it can do to make the recruitment process as inclusive as possible and maximise opportunities for prospective candidates, regardless of their background. This includes making reasonable adjustments and reducing bias within recruitment processes, such as by:

* not setting criteria that would exclude certain groups from applying\*
* ensuring all language used is inclusive
* using objective and justifiable scoring systems
* selection panel members receiving unconscious bias training

NGA offers [equality and diversity e-learning](https://www.nga.org.uk/training/directory/equality-diversity-practical-guide-governors/) that covers the Equality Act and its impact on recruitment.

\*There may be specific exceptions for church trusts.

The application pack ensures that all potential applicants have access to consistent information and provides an opportunity to demonstrate the vision, ethos, and culture of the trust. The pack should include:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Content | Complete? |
| Cover letter from the chair of the board |  |
| Contextual information about the trust |  |
| Salary range and benefits |  |
| Job description |  |
| Person specification |  |
| Key dates in the recruitment process |  |
| Equality monitoring form  |  |
| How to apply (application form) |  |

The application may require candidates to submit a covering letter and/or written answers to set questions.

Boards can also consider psychometric testing (generally used to assess a candidate’s ability and/or personality) – this should not be overly relied upon but can be helpful in ruling out unsuitable candidates at an early stage and revealing questions to ask in the final stages.

### Produce an advertisement

### Using a recruitment agency: questions to ask

* What will the cost be? When is the fee chargeable?
* Where will they advertise the post?
* Does the agency have recent evidence of providing successful candidates for similar roles?
* For church trusts, what experience do they have with this?
* Are they able to provide references from previously satisfied customers?
* Who within the agency will be handling the vacancy and what is their level of expertise?
* How will they assess skills and experiences when shortlisting?
* When and how will they communicate progress?
* What do they expect from the panel?
* What happens if there is a failure to appoint?

An effective advertisement will reach a wide range of potential applicants and increase the chances that the right person for the job will apply. You should advertise as widely as necessary, using different media to attract a diverse range of candidates. This could be through:

* [The DfE teacher vacancy service](https://teaching-vacancies.service.gov.uk/)
* [The Times Educational Supplement (Tes)](https://www.tes.com/jobs/)
* [Schools Week](https://www.educationweekjobs.co.uk/)
* Professional associations (such as ASCL and NAHT)
* Other online jobs sites

The advert should include a safeguarding statement outlining the trust’s commitment to safeguarding and the checks that will be carried out, as well as a privacy notice to inform applicants on how their data will be processed.

Alternatively, trust boards may consider using a recruitment agency to save the panel time and make the shortlisting process more effective. This can be particularly helpful for sourcing candidates who may not have otherwise applied for a CEO role. The benefits of using an agency should be assessed against the full costs of contracting with one.

## 3. Shortlisting

The selection panel will need to review all applications and identify those who meet the person specification and so will progress to interview. The process followed will depend on the number of applications received – if the trust receives a large number of applications, consider incorporating a longlisting process before the shortlisting stage.

### Suggested shortlisting process:

1. Use the person specification to list the essential and desirable criteria on a grid.

Example scoring system

3: strong evidence that criteria has been met

2: reasonable evidence criteria has been met

1: little evidence that criteria has been met

0: fails to meet criteria

1. Design a scoring system (such as the example shown) and decide minimum thresholds for candidates to meet.
2. Each panel member scores each candidate against the criteria.
3. The panel then compares results and ranks candidates. Start by reviewing essential criteria, and if too many candidates remain, consider desirable criteria.

You will now have your shortlist of candidates to interview.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Candidate 1 | Candidate 2 | Candidate 3 | Candidate 4 |
| *Essential criteria A* | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| *Essential criteria B* | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| *Essential criteria C* | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Total score | 8 | 6 | 4 | 7 |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Desirable criteria A* | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| *Desirable criteria B* | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Total score | 5 | 6 | 3 | 4 |
| Shortlist decision | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |

### Safer recruitment: searches and references

As part of due diligence, [Keeping Children Safe in Education](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2) (KCSiE) states that schools should consider carrying out an online search on shortlisted candidates to identify any incidents or issues that have happened and are publicly available online which should be explored with the applicant at interview.

Shortlisted candidates should be informed where online searches are carried out. KCSiE also states that shortlisted candidates should complete a self-declaration form to share relevant information that may need to be discussed and considered at interview.

It is advisable to source references for all (including internal) shortlisted candidates at this point as well. Any concerns can be explored further with the referee and taken up with the candidate at interview.

Information may also come to light through these checks that warrant discounting candidates from the recruitment process at this stage.

## 4. Selection

Finalise the selection day(s) and programme of activities that will be held for shortlisted candidates, making clear what they will be tested on. Also inform candidates of any activities, such as presentations, that they need to prepare for in advance.

For candidates applying on a job-sharing basis, set out which activities will be undertaken individually or jointly. The trust may have a job-share policy which panels can refer to for further guidance on how to manage the process.

Take care to ensure that all candidates are treated fairly and that both internal and external applicants are offered the same opportunities.

### Interview the candidates

Agree to core questions that all candidates will be asked, as well as the desired responses and evidence for each answer. Additional questions can be asked if needed to expand upon any information from the application form or to explore a candidate’s response in greater depth.

Questions should be designed to test whether the candidates meet the criteria set out in the person specification. They could cover knowledge of the role, safeguarding, communications, finance, people management, leadership, etc.

The types of questions that might be used will increase the chances of getting the information needed from candidates – these include:

* Open: Tell me about a time when you…
* Extending: Tell me more about how…
* Clarifying: Can you just explain…
* Hypothetical: What would you do if…

A numerical scoring system should be decided in advance and each panel member should independently score each candidate on each question, with notes to explain why.

### Other selection activities

### Example questions

* How would you go about assessing and ensuring sufficient leadership capacity in the trust?
* What is your approach to building a healthy workplace culture?
* Can you give an example of where your leadership has been effective?
* Provide an example of when you have developed constructive relationships with external stakeholders.
* Tell me about a time you led an organisation through a period of significant change?
* How will you ensure organisation wide buy-in to the trust’s values?
* How would you set and monitor educational standards throughout the trust?
* How would you ensure financial sustainability and compliance?
* What do you think the senior leadership team and wider staff are looking for from a leader?
* What do you see as the key challenges in this role?
* Describe the ideal relationship between the CEO and the trust board. What would you do if a trustee came up with an idea that you disagreed with?

Testing candidates in a variety of ways will enable the selection panel to form a well-rounded view of each candidate. The panel should have determined which criteria to test from the person specification and which activities will best test them.

Activities could include:

* presentations to the selection panel
* role play exercises, such as a mock SLT meeting
* financial or budgeting task
* drafting a report to the trust board or a committee

Again, the selection panel members will each need to make notes on how each candidate performs in the different activities.

Be aware of the limitations of involving wider staff (involving the candidate in a staff meeting for example) – this could give internal candidates an unfair advantage given existing relationships.

### Reaching a decision

Following the selection activities, the panel will need to reach a consensus on the best candidate based on the evidence gathered. Ensure sufficient time is allocated to this stage of the process and do not attempt to complete this while candidates are waiting on site.

Consider:

* all the evidence from the application form, interviews, and tests
* any structured feedback received from staff or other trustees involved in the process
* advice from the diocese where relevant
* advice from specialist support

The evidence considered should directly relate to the criteria being tested, although it may be useful to consider any notable informal interactions that have been recorded.

### Notetaking

The selection panel will need to take detailed notes during the selection process to help it reach a fair and thorough decision. This information may need to be relied upon in future to justify the panel’s decision in the event of challenge.

All paperwork from the shortlisting and selection stages is confidential to those trustees involved in the process and must be retained in line with data protection principles. Candidates may also request to view any information relating to them held by the trust.

## 5. Appointment

The full trust board must ratify the appointment at a board meeting where the selection panel identifies the preferred candidate and their reasons for recommending them. The board should also appoint the individual as the Accounting Officer from the date on which their employment commences.

An offer of conditional appointment should then be made to the successful candidate, subject to any outstanding references or safeguarding checks. If they accept, unsuccessful candidates can then be informed and offered constructive feedback. Support can also be given to unsuccessful internal candidates, for example by discussing development opportunities to address any areas for improvement identified.

Following the acceptance of a conditional offer, the following actions need to be completed:

### Unable to appoint

An appointment should not be made if none of the candidates are considered suitable. If the recruitment process is unsuccessful, interim arrangements to cover the post must be put in place.

An evaluation of the recruitment process (see section six), including how the post was advertised and how it could be improved to attract more suitable candidates, may be helpful in determining the options for securing a suitable candidate from any subsequent recruitment activity.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Action | Complete? |
| Agree a salary |  |
| Agree a start date |  |
| Make a formal offer in writing, subject to references and checks |  |
| Request and scrutinise references |  |
| Complete required safeguarding checks |  |
| Employment terms and conditions shared with appointee (within two months of start date) |  |

The appointment for headship roles at academy level will be made by whoever is specified in the recruitment policy and/or scheme of delegation.

## 6. Post-appointment

### Announce the appointment

Once confirmation in writing has been received from the candidate and all pre-appointment checks have been satisfied, the trust community should be informed of the appointment. This includes staff, pupils, parents, and the diocese (where relevant). The timing of the announcement should also take into account the need for the appointee to communicate their departure from their current workplace.

Appropriate communication channels can be used to inform parties of the new CEO’s name, accompanied by a brief biography.

### Arrange an induction

A structured induction programme should be in place to ensure that the new CEO settles into their role. This can begin prior to their first day to ensure the transition is smooth and there is a timely handover from the outgoing postholder.

The chair should arrange the appraisal cycle and schedule review meetings with the appointee so that a framework for support is established at the outset, including mentoring and coaching if appropriate. The new leader should also meet with the trust board, central trust team, and wider staff body.

### Evaluate the recruitment process

It is good practice to spend time assessing the effectiveness of the recruitment process, including taking feedback from the appointee, to establish what went well and any changes that could be made to improve future recruitment processes.

Consider:

* if the method of recruitment attracted a good pool of applicants
* the results of the equality monitoring of all those who applied in comparison to those shortlisted
* if there were any questions that produced consistently poor responses from candidates
* if assessment tasks adequately tested skills and attributes in the way intended
* if there were any difficulties in take up of the job offer