

Headteacher recruitment toolkit

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National Governance Association

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and clerks at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

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Contents

Introduction	2
Part A - preparing to recruit.....	3
Align the recruitment process to the vision and strategy for the school/trust	3
Commit to carrying out a recruitment process that is fair and inclusive	3
Obtain support and specialist advice for the recruitment process	4
Appointing a selection panel.....	4
Defining the role	5
Producing a job description	5
Producing a person specification	5
Producing an advertisement and application pack.....	6
Using the services of a recruitment agency	6
Part B - the recruitment stage	7
Recruiting virtually	7
Shortlisting.....	7
Interview Questions.....	8
Reaching a decision.....	9
Post appointment	9
Further Reading	10
Appendix - person specification template:	11



Introduction

The recruitment of a headteacher is one of the most important tasks carried out by a governing board. This individual will be responsible for implementing the culture and ethos set by the board, as well as the operational management of the school on a day-to-day basis, so it is vital that the board identifies the right candidate.

In 2017, the Department for Education published the non-statutory guidance [Recruiting a headteacher](#): a guide to the recruitment and selection of headteachers and other leadership roles. The guidance was produced jointly by the DfE and NGA, with support from the Association of School College Leaders (ASCL), the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and a range of other stakeholders.

This toolkit, which was developed in parallel, is published by NGA and should be read alongside the DfE guidance. This toolkit comprises two parts:

- Part A: preparing to recruit
- Part B: the recruitment stage

The guidance within this toolkit is suitable for all types of school and governance structure. The term 'headteacher' is used throughout. NGA recognises that those responsible for leading a school or group of schools may have a different job title (principal, executive, senior executive leader). This guidance applies to all, irrespective of title.

An e-learning module on headteacher recruitment accompanies this guidance and is available from NGA's [Learning Link](#).



Part A - preparing to recruit

The following stages are typically undertaken by the full governing board or a working group of the governing board.

Section 5 of the DfE guidance details the necessary planning and preparation for the recruitment process.

Align the recruitment process to the vision and strategy for the school/trust

Asking the following questions will help build a picture of the type of leader and leadership structure needed to support the school's/trust's vision and ensure delivery against strategic priorities:

- What are the most important things your school will need to do over the next few years?
- What are your school's strengths, and what are its areas for development? What kind of leadership is needed to make the necessary progress on development areas?
- How difficult have other schools in your area, or other similar schools, found it to recruit headteachers recently? Might you need to think about alternative models of leadership if you are unable to recruit a suitable candidate?
- What is your current and projected financial situation? Is this an opportunity to reduce costs? How might you do that? What might be the implications?
- Do those recruiting have a shared sense of the type of leadership and leadership structure the school or trust needs?

Questions for schools that are part of a multi academy trust (MAT) or federation and schools considering joining or forming a MAT:

- How might being part of a different school structure affect the type of headteacher you need?
- What are the different leadership options available e.g. senior executives, heads of school?
- Who leads the recruitment process in our MAT - the local governing body, MAT trustees, the executive headteacher or CEO – or a combination of all of these?

Schools with a religious character should ensure that any review of their vision is carried out in line with the expectations of their appropriate faith body/diocesan authority. Schools with a religious character may need to consult their diocesan authority/faith body before launching a recruitment process.

Documentation relating to selecting and appointing staff can be found at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools>

<http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/>

Commit to carrying out a recruitment process that is fair and inclusive

When recruiting staff, employers and governing boards must be aware of their responsibilities set out in the Equality Act 2010. Schools must not discriminate against any prospective employee on the basis of any protected characteristic (including race, sex or disability). However, the governing board's commitment to equality should extend beyond a legal obligation to avoid discriminatory practices; it should embody a school culture that encourages and helps pupils to become good global citizens and to appreciate the diverse society in which they live.



Those preparing to recruit should ask themselves:

- Is the leadership and workforce of the school/trust representative of the community it serves?
- What can we do to make the recruitment process as inclusive as it can be and maximise opportunities for prospective leaders regardless of their backgrounds?

Interrogation of employment data (recruitment, pay etc.) can reveal trends and patterns that shine a light on the school's inclusive employment practices.

Further information is available from the DfE's [equality act 2010 advice for schools](#) and NGA's guidance on [equality and diversity](#).

Obtain support and specialist advice for the recruitment process

It is essential that the board has, or is able to access, the skills they need to carry out effective selection processes and follow agreed procedures - this is explained in **section 4** of the DfE guidance. Support is available through a variety of sources and providers. The governing board should consider the available options and the value for money offered. Options include, but are not limited to:

- Local authorities - some local authorities provide free support, but most are moving towards charging for this support and some no longer provide the service.
- Diocesan boards of education - as with local authorities, they may provide free or charged for support.
- Central HR support teams in academy trusts and larger federations - support is usually provided free to schools within the trust or federation.
- Consultants and service providers offering HR, recruitment or educational advice to support schools.
- School to school support provided through networks.
- Commercial recruitment agencies working in the school sector.
- Professional associations - some associations offer a portfolio of bespoke services to schools. This includes the main leadership associations [ASCL](#) and [NAHT](#) who offer resources that include recruitment advice and support.

The governing board/selection panel should consider what type of support and provider will best meet their needs and provide value for money in the context of the recruitment process. When procuring professional services, the board/panel should follow adopted procedures.

Appointing a selection panel

The following stage is carried out by the full governing board

The task of shortlisting, interviewing and recommending candidates for appointment is carried out by a panel made up of governing board members. **Section 5.4** of the DfE guidance explains what the governing board needs to take into account when appointing the selection panel, including the size and structure of the panel and the required skills and training.

NGA advises that the selection panel has relevant skills and experience or the opportunity to receive training on recruitment and selection practice. This should include their responsibilities under the equality act and ensuring that the process is inclusive. In maintained schools, it is a legal requirement for at least one panel member to have received safer recruitment training. NGA provide [safer recruitment training](#) that helps governors and trustees understand how to comply with safer recruitment practice, and how to implement it effectively.



The following stages can be carried out by the full governing board, the selection panel, a wider working group (or a combination of these) and utilising professional advice and support as appropriate.

Defining the role

This section should be read in conjunction with **section 5.2** of the DfE guidance.

It is critical that the board is clear about the role it is recruiting to, and the specific accountabilities and responsibilities the post holder will have. In addition to the information provided in the DfE guidance, boards may need to consider and clarify:

- What does the organisational structure surrounding the role and/or the scheme of delegation for a MAT or federation look like?
- Will the role be graded on a headteacher or deputy head pay range for the school? If graded as deputy head, the role is not in fact a headteacher and this needs to be made clear to applicants.
- Who will be the key “head” contact for the DfE?
- Statutory responsibilities that can only be carried out by the post holder.
- Opportunities for flexible working, e.g. remaining open to the possibility of a job share.
- Whose name will go on any Ofsted report as the accountable headteacher? (It should be clearly set out who the accountable officer and lead for teaching and learning will be).

The needs of the school will underpin consideration of all these points and will ultimately define the role responsibilities and level of accountability.

Producing a job description

This section should be read in conjunction with **section 5.6.2** of the DfE guidance.

There is no set format for a job description, but it should cover the primary purpose of the role, its scope, context and main responsibilities. Ensure that the language used is inclusive, avoiding terminology such as “headmaster”. The following template offers a guide to what a job description might cover.

Job description template:

Job title and purpose	One or two sentences to summarise the role.
Principal accountabilities	Key tasks for which the post holder is personally responsible - begin with active verbs e.g. manage, create, deliver, drive, establish, and who will manage the post holder (in some trusts/federations, a headteacher might not be the senior executive leader).
Dimensions and context	Size and breadth of the role, including organisational structure, relationships within and outside the school, school performance.
Standards and competencies	The necessary skills, qualifications and experience for carrying out the role.

Producing a person specification

This section should be read in conjunction with **section 5.6.3** of the DfE guidance.

There is no set format for a person specification, but criteria should be clearly separated into what is essential and what is desirable. Outlining how the requirements will be tested (such as through interviews or tests) will support subsequent stages of the recruitment process. When determining essential and desirable criteria, boards might find it helpful to consider:



- [The 7 principles of public life](#) (the Nolan principles)
- [DfE Headteachers' standards](#)
- [Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education](#)
- A [person specification template](#) is provided as an appendix to this toolkit.

Producing an advertisement and application pack

An effective advertisement for the vacancy will reach a wide range of potential applicants and increase the chances that the right person for the job will apply. This is explained in **section 6** of the DfE guidance.

Advertise as widely as necessary to attract a diverse range of candidates using a range of media. This could be through local authority websites; the Times Educational Supplement; Schools Week; online job sites; professional associations (ASCL and NAHT); and the DfE teacher vacancy service. Thought should be given to how individuals from under-represented groups can be encouraged to apply.

An accompanying application pack ensures that all potential applicants have access to consistent information. It can be shared across different media, and provides an opportunity to demonstrate the school's vision, ethos and culture.

The application pack should contain:

- information about the school / trust
- role description
- person specification
- key dates in the recruitment process (deadlines for applications; shortlisting date; interview date; start date)
- details of any opportunities to visit the school
- details on how to apply

Using the services of a recruitment agency

This section should be read in conjunction with **section 6.3** of the DfE guidance.

A number of recruitment agencies specialise in the recruitment of headteachers and matching candidates to the specifications of the school/trust. Using this type of service may save the panel time and make the short-listing process more effective.

Fees are usually only chargeable if suitable candidates are provided; however, boards should assess the benefits of using an agency against the full costs of contracting with one before deciding to take this approach.

Considerations for using a recruitment agency	
1	What will the cost be? When is the fee chargeable? What does the fee cover? How does this compare with other agencies?
2	Where will they advertise the post? Do you have a say in this and will you need to contribute to costs?
3	Does the agency have evidence of providing successful candidates for similar roles in the recent past?
4	If recruiting to a school of religious character, what experience do they have of doing this?
5	Are they able to provide references from previously satisfied customers/schools/MATs?
6	Do they have capacity to carry out this recruitment?
7	Who within the agency will be handling the vacancy and what is their level of expertise?
8	How many hours will they spend working on this vacancy? When/how will they communicate progress?
9	What do they expect from you? What is your role? How will your wishes be taken into account?
10	What happens if there is a failure to appoint?



Part B - the recruitment stage

The recruitment stage is carried out by the panel utilising professional advice and support as appropriate.

Recruiting virtually

During the coronavirus pandemic, many boards conducted their recruitment processes remotely. This remains an option for boards, although there are benefits to conducting the process in person where possible. A key requirement for headteachers is good interpersonal skills. It is easier to evaluate these skills in person, as this reflects the context in which the headteacher will be working day-to-day. **Section 7.3** of the DfE guidance proposes selection activities and other features of the recruitment day, many of which can only be conducted in person.

Ultimately, boards should organise their recruitment process in the manner they think is most likely to identify the best candidate. If the board chooses to complete all or part of the process remotely, they should adapt recruitment tasks accordingly. Care should be taken to plan tasks that will assess how well candidates meet the selection criteria (rather than on the basis of suitability for video conferencing).

Shortlisting

Section 7 of the DfE guidance looks at the selection process itself, with **section 7.1** outlining the purpose of shortlisting.

Shortlisting can be time consuming, but careful attention at this stage will save time later. The following step by step guide will help to ensure only those candidates who best meet the essential criteria are interviewed:

Step by step guide to shortlisting	
Step 1	Using the person specification, list all the requirements of the job on a short-listing grid and split these requirements into those you consider “essential” and those you consider “desirable”.
Step 2	Design a system to score candidates on the extent to which they meet your essential and desirable criteria. For example: Numerical (4 = exceeds criteria; 3= meets criteria well; 2 = meets criteria; 1= barely meets criteria; 0 = fails to meet criteria) Met/Unmet (this could include a “partly met” criteria to add nuance) You can adjust scoring systems to suit your needs. Any thresholds to be applied should be determined in advance of the shortlisting activity - such as the failure to meet essential criteria in one or more areas results in automatic elimination.
Step 3	Go through the application forms and score each candidate against each criterion on a shortlisting grid (example given on page 8). Each member of the panel should do this separately.
Step 4	Once scoring is complete, the panel should come together to compare results. Looking at the essential criteria first, the panel should discard any applicants that fail to meet any threshold set.
Step 5	Remaining candidates can then be prioritised according to highest score first. If there are still a large number of applications, desirable criteria scores can be considered.
Step 6	You will have now arrived at your shortlist of candidates to interview.



Shortlisting grid template:

Shortlisting Criteria	Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Candidate 3	Candidate 4
Essential Criteria				
<i>Essential criteria A</i>	4	0	3	2
<i>Essential criteria B</i>	3	2	0	1
<i>Essential criteria C</i>				
Desirable Criteria				
<i>Desirable criteria A</i>	4	3	1	0
<i>Desirable criteria B</i>				
Total Score	11	5		
Shortlist?	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
Panel Member.....Date.....				

A similar grid can be used to score interview questions. The grids should be retained, once completed, so they can be used to justify the board’s decision in the event of a challenge.

Interview Questions

This section should be read in conjunction with **section 7.4.1** of the DfE guidance.

The panel should agree the questions to be asked in advance as well as the desired responses and evidence for each answer. It is vital that all candidates are asked the same core questions, which can then be supplemented by more specific follow-ups. Panel members will need to take notes of the answers given so that these can be reviewed when scoring the answers later.

The types of questions used will increase the chances of getting the information needed from candidates. For example:

Open: Tell me about a time when you...; How did you go about...?

Extending: Tell me more about how...

Clarifying: Can you just explain a bit more about....

Hypothetical: What would you do if...



Example Questions

- What strategies would you use to support a member of staff whose performance is not reaching an acceptable level?
- What does effective leadership look like to you?
- How would you go about achieving successful parental engagement?
- Tell me about an initiative you have developed through school that was successful
- What are the characteristics of an effective school?
- What values do you think you can bring to the role of headteacher?
- How would you monitor standards throughout the curriculum?
- What do you think the teaching staff and the senior leadership team are looking for from a headteacher?
- How would you like to see the school tackle pupil disadvantage and the attainment gap?
- What do you see as the key educational challenges in this role?
- Describe to me the ideal relationship between the headteacher and the governing board

Reaching a decision

Following the conclusion of selection activities, the panel will need to reach a final decision on which candidate to appoint (or decide to re-start the process if no suitable candidate was found).

Candidates should be assessed throughout the day, making it easier to reach a consensus, and justify the panel's decision in the event of a challenge being made.

Discussions can take some time and may need to be ratified by the full board (a requirement in maintained schools). Ensure sufficient time is allocated to this stage of the process and do not attempt to make a decision whilst candidates are waiting on site.

Once the panel have decided, and the decision has been ratified as required, the chair of the panel can offer the post to the agreed candidate. The offer is subject to references and safeguarding checks. If they accept, unsuccessful candidates can then be informed and offered feedback. Support should be given to unsuccessful internal candidates, for example by discussing development opportunities to address any areas for improvement highlighted by the selection panel.

If no suitable candidate is found, then the post will need to be re-advertised and interim arrangements put in place. If this does happen, it is sensible to evaluate the process, including how the post was advertised, and how it could be improved to attract more suitable candidates.

Post appointment

This section should be read in conjunction with **section 9** of the DfE guidance

Following the acceptance of a conditional offer (usually verbally), the following actions need to be completed:

Action	Complete?
Agree a salary with the candidate	
Make a formal offer in writing, still subject to references and checks	
Agree a start date	
Request and scrutinise references	
Complete required safeguarding checks (criminal record, barred list, prohibition and checks required by Keeping Children Safe in Education)	
Employment terms and conditions shared with appointee (within two months of start date)	



The board will also need to consider how to inform the school community. Communications should make staff, students and parents aware of the appointment as well as the trust/local authority/diocese. It is advisable to wait until confirmation has been received from the candidate in writing, and pre-appointment checks have been completed.

For the board, there is also an opportunity to evaluate the recruitment process, including taking feedback from the appointee. This will put the board in a better position for future recruitment processes.

The final post-appointment process is induction. This can begin prior to the headteacher’s first day and ensures that the transition to a new headteacher is smooth. The headteacher will need to be aware of the school’s current performance, and existing improvement plans. They will also want to get to know the governing board, SLT and wider staff body. From the board’s perspective, this should be considered as the first step in the headteacher’s ongoing professional development, for which they are responsible.

Induction Checklist	Completed?
Meeting with chair to establish a working relationship	
Formal handover from outgoing post holder, where possible	
Agreement of dates of appraisal cycle and review meetings with the chair, so a support framework can be established at the outset	
Opportunity to meet staff, especially SLT	
Opportunity to meet full governing board	
Sharing of relevant data, and school improvement plan	
Opportunity for new appointee to request any additional information or meetings	

Further Reading

- NGA guidance on [Executive pay: considerations for trust boards](#)
- [What governing boards and school leaders should expect from each other](#) - guidance written and backed by NGA and a number of partners from across the sector
- NGA [guide to headteacher appraisal](#)
- NGA guidance on [equality and diversity](#) – the governing board’s responsibilities, the importance of culture and monitoring impact

Support and development from NGA

- NGA's [Learning Link](#) offers flexible e-learning for governors, trustees, chairs and clerks
- NGA's team of knowledgeable and experienced [governance consultants](#) provide bespoke support for governing boards including external reviews of governance, mediation and facilitation of away days.



Appendix - person specification template:

Assessment method key:

A	Application form
I	Interview
T	Test
P	Presentation

	Criteria – essential/desirable	Assessment method
Qualifications	Be clear why you consider particular qualifications to be necessary. Can equivalent knowledge and skills be obtained through experience? Headteachers are not required to have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)	A/I/T/P (delete as appropriate)
Experience	Years 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.	A/I/T/P (delete as appropriate)
Professional knowledge	For example: curriculum, theory and best practice, school systems, government policy/political environment, context (religious/social dimensions), safeguarding, special needs.	A/I/T/P (delete as appropriate)
Professional skills	For example: teaching, people management, resources management, strategic planning and effective communication.	A/I/T/P (delete as appropriate)
Philosophy and commitment	This is about the vision, ethos and culture of your establishment. Consider whether the candidate is best placed to implement the vision and ethos set by the board.	A/I/T/P (delete as appropriate)
Personal qualities	This is about how people work – their behaviours, style and approach. Think carefully and objectively about what's important and remember you need to be able to test these qualities during your selection process.	A/I/T/P (delete as appropriate)
Schools with a religious character	It should be 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 (delete as appropriate)