# Recruiting a headteacher

### Specialist support

Consider the support your board needs to carry out an effective recruitment process while achieving value for money. This support is essential throughout the process and may be available from:

* Local authorities
* Diocesan boards of education
* Central HR teams in larger federations
* School to school networking support
* 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/).

Schools with a religious character may be required to consult their diocese/religious authority before launching a recruitment process. Some will have their own employment guidance or protocols which schools will be expected to use.

A toolkit for maintained school governing bodies

This toolkit provides practical tools and templates to guide governing bodies through headteacher 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).

The legal framework for appointing a headteacher is set out in The School Staffing (England) Regulations 2009 and the relevant requirements from this have been included throughout.

## Contents

1. [Planning and preparation](#_Planning_and_preparation)
2. [Advertisement](#_Advertisement)
3. [Shortlisting](#_3._Shortlisting)
4. [Selection](#_4._Selection)
5. [Appointment](#_5._Appointment)
6. [Post-appointment](#_6._Post-appointment)

## Planning and preparation

Schools with a religious character will need to discuss recruitment plans and the school’s options with their diocese.

### Determine the recruitment budget

The board should agree the budget for staff recruitment as part of annual budget planning. A maximum spend should be allocated for the headteacher 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

### Notice periods

Notice periods for headteachers are widely incorporated into employment contracts as detailed in the Burgundy Book (which sets out the conditions of service for teachers in England):

* 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

Build sufficient time into the recruitment process to take account of candidates’ notice periods.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Task | Deadline/timeframe |
| Planning |  |
| Create recruitment materials |  |
| Advertise |  |
| Visits to school |  |
| 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 school’s vision and deliver against strategic priorities.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Questions | Your considerations |
| What are the key things the school will need to do over the next three to five years? |  |
| What are the school’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 boards to be clear about the role that they are recruiting to. While the specific accountabilities and responsibilities of the headteacher are relatively consistent in maintained schools, boards may still need to consider the following:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Questions | Your considerations |
| What is the salary and pay range for the role?  The School Teacher’s Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) sets out available pay ranges depending on the size and phase of the school – this may be a good time to redetermine the pay range. |  |
| 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? For example, co-headship, or creating/joining a federation and having an executive headteacher. |  |
| For federations, who will be the accountable leader and the key ‘head’ contact for the DfE? What does the organisational structure surrounding the role look like? |  |

### Appoint a selection panel

### Safer recruitment

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

NGA provides [safer recruitment e-learning](https://www.nga.org.uk/training/directory/safer-recruitment/) that is designed to fulfill the compliance obligations of 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 must appoint a selection panel consisting of at least three governors (excluding the headteacher) to undertake the shortlisting and selection stages.

The board will need to take the following into account:

* At least one panel member must have received 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 school or have any other conflicts of interest.
* Consider the diversity of thought and experiences of those on the panel.

Schools with a religious character may also have agreements in place with their diocese regarding their involvement in the panel.

While the outgoing headteacher 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 panel’s work or decision-making.

## Advertisement

The following stages can be led by the selection panel, drawing upon the expertise of additional governors 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. Given that headteacher responsibilities are generally consistent across schools, the panel should highlight any unique duties or expectations, both here and in the person specification.

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 headteacher is personally responsible (use active verbs such as manage, create, deliver, drive, establish) * who will manage the post holder (in some 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 |  |

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

When creating the person specification, boards 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 DfE [Headteachers’ standards](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-standards-of-excellence-for-headteachers)
* 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) |
| Qualifications  Consider why certain qualifications are necessary or if equivalent knowledge and skills can be obtained through experience. |  | A/I/T/P |
| Experience  Length 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 |
| Professional knowledge  For example: curriculum, school systems, government policy/political environment, context (religious/social dimensions), safeguarding, special educational needs. |  | A/I/T/P |
| Professional skills  For example: teaching, people management, resource management, strategic planning, and effective communication. |  | A/I/T/P |
| Philosophy and commitment  This is about the vision, ethos, and culture of your school. |  | A/I/T/P |
| Personal qualities  This is about how people work – their behaviours, style, and approach. Think carefully and objectively about what’s important. |  | A/I/T/P |
| Schools with a religious character  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 |

### Produce an application pack

### Inclusive recruitment practices

Under the Equality Act 2010, schools 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 are specific exceptions for certain schools designated as having a religious character.

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 school. The pack should include:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Content | Complete? |
| Cover letter from the chair of the board |  |
| Contextual information about the school |  |
| Salary range and benefits |  |
| Job description |  |
| Person specification |  |
| Key dates in the recruitment process, including opportunities to visit the school |  |
| 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 schools of religious character, 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?

The governing body must advertise headteacher vacancies unless it has good reason not to, for example, where there is a pressing need to appoint a headteacher quickly and the appropriate notice period cannot be observed.

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/)
* Local authority websites
* [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 school’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, governing boards may consider using a recruitment agency to save the panel time and make the shortlisting process more effective. 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 school 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 below) 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 |

The panel must notify the local authority in writing of the names of the applicants selected for interview.

If, within a period of seven days (beginning with the date it receives notification), the local authority makes written representations that any applicant is not suitable for the post, the selection panel must consider those representations. Where the panel ultimately decides to recommend a person about whom representations were made for appointment, the selection panel must notify:

* in community and voluntary-controlled schools, the board and local authority in writing of its reasons
* in foundation and voluntary-aided schools, the local authority in writing of its reasons

### 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. For example, candidates may conduct a learning walk that will be assessed or simply be given the opportunity to look around the school during the day. 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 local authority 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.

* In community and voluntary-controlled schools, the local authority has the right to attend all proceedings of the selection panel (including interviews) and provide advice. The board must consider any advice provided by the local authority.
* In foundation and voluntary-aided schools, the local authority may offer advice to the board, subject to the terms of any written agreement between them. For schools designated with a religious character, it is recommended they have an agreement with the diocesan authority to give it advisory rights. Any advice that is given must be considered by the board.

### 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, pedagogy, 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.

### Example questions

* What strategies would you use to support a staff member whose performance is falling below expectations?
* What is your approach to building a healthy workplace culture?
* Can you give an example of where your leadership has been effective?
* How would you go about achieving successful parental engagement?
* Tell me about a school initiative you have developed that was successful?
* What values do you think you can bring to the role?
* 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 leader?
* How would you lead the school in tackling pupil disadvantage and the attainment gap?
* What do you see as the key educational challenges in this role?
* Describe the ideal relationship between the headteacher and the governing body. What would you do if a governor came up with an idea that you disagreed with?

### Other selection activities

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 from the person specification to test and which activities will best test them. Activities could include:

* presentations to the selection panel
* student panel interview
* observing a lesson and providing feedback to the teacher
* role play exercises, such as a mock SLT meeting
* financial or budgeting task
* learning walks

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

It can be helpful to use pupils in the selection process, such as showing candidates around the school or forming a student interview panel.

Be aware of the limitations of using 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, pupils, or other governors involved in the process
* advice from the local authority or 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 governors 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 school.

## 5. Appointment

The full governing body must ratify the appointment at a board meeting where the selection panel identifies the preferred candidate and their reasons for recommending them.

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 is 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 6), 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 will be officially made by the employer.

* In community and voluntary-controlled schools, this is the local authority.
* In foundation and voluntary-aided schools, this is the governing body.

## 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 school community should be informed of the appointment. This includes staff, pupils, and parents, the local authority, 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 headteacher’s name, accompanied by a brief biography.

### Arrange an induction

A structured induction programme should be in place to ensure that the new headteacher 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 headteacher.

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 governing body, senior leadership 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