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National College
for School Leadership

Schools and academies

A guide to recruiting and selecting a new headteacher

Resource

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Introduction

Recruiting a headteacher is arguably the most important task a governing body will undertake. Appointing a high-quality head to lead teaching and learning in your school is something under the direct control of governors that positively affects school improvement. There is good evidence that failure to recruit a permanent, high-quality head can lead to performance dips for schools (Day et al, 2007; HMCI, 2010). It is a task we know governors take seriously.

The context in which governors are now recruiting has changed over the decades. Gone are the days where large numbers of aspiring heads would travel the length of the country to secure their first headship. Retirement of the baby-boom generation and low geographical mobility (three-fifths of headship posts are filled within a local authority area) mean that the number of applicants has reduced over the years. In addition, there remain challenges for particular schools, such as rural and faith schools. Primary and special schools have more difficulty recruiting than secondary schools (two-fifths of these types of school have to re-advertise). Governors need to understand the constrained circumstances in which they are now recruiting, whilst not compromising on the need to select a good candidate who will deliver the governing body's vision for the school and excellent outcomes for the pupils.

It is therefore even more important that, using a thorough and well-planned process, governors give themselves the best opportunity of getting the best head for their school. This guide is an attempt to provide advice on the main steps of recruiting a headteacher and covers recent changes to the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). More detailed support materials can be found at: www.nationalcollege.org.uk/recruiting-headteachers-senior-leaders, and practical resources through <http://www.nga.org.uk/>

The law and your options

When your headteacher resigns, there are several things you must do depending on the nature of your school. Here we reference the main sources of legal guidance.

The governors' guide to the law (DfE, 2012a) has recently been revised and can be accessed at www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/governance/b0065507/gttl (section 11 deals with staffing appointments). To reduce bureaucracy, it is unlikely that this and any future revisions to legislation will come with accompanying guidance so governors will be in a position to interpret and apply the law for their own circumstances. This means advice should be sought where required.

The main points governors need to be aware of are as follows:

- Governing bodies must appoint an acting headteacher if the outgoing head leaves before a replacement is in post.
- Governing bodies must recruit a new headteacher as soon as is practicably possible (ie, legally you cannot prolong acting head arrangements indefinitely).
- If you are a local authority school you must notify the local authority of your headteacher's resignation and the local authority has the right to an advisory place on your selection panel. You must also notify the local authority of the shortlisted candidates selected for interview.
- Diocesan and other religious bodies have no automatic right to offer advice to schools with a religious character (with the exception of Roman Catholic schools set up by a religious order where there is not only a right to advise, but also to propose candidates for nomination). It is considered good practice for schools with a religious character to provide advisory rights to the relevant diocese or religious body.
- If your institution is an academy, whom you must notify depends on your governance structure. For sponsored academies, you **must** notify your sponsor, although it is highly likely your outgoing principal will have done this directly. Most academy trusts delegate the responsibility for recruiting a headteacher to the academy's local governing body. However, some sponsored academies and academy chains will undertake this process centrally rather than through a local governing body.
- At time of writing, there remains a legal requirement for one member of the panel to have undertaken training on safer recruitment (DfE, 2012b). You can read about this at www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/pastoralcare/a0010797/safer-recruitment-training-for-school-staff and access the training itself via the Department for Education e-learning portal at www.education.gov.uk/e-learning/login/index.php.

The resignation or retirement of a school's serving headteacher can present the governing body with a good opportunity to review the school's future leadership arrangements. The governors might want consider new models of school leadership ranging from entering a federation or a multi-academy, through to becoming a co-operative trust, or remaining a standalone school or academy.

Considering a federation is a particularly important option for a small school that on its own may not be able to attract a high-calibre candidate, whereas a federation of schools might. The departure of a headteacher can be the prompt that a governing body needs to consider federation properly, but a federation can provide many other benefits, including improved teaching and learning (Chapman et al, 2011; Ofsted, 2011) and improved governance. Although a federation can take some time to negotiate with preferred partners, arrangements can be made for interim or acting headship while negotiations are ongoing. If governors research, visit and consider options, this can be more fruitful than rushing headlong into an expensive like-for-like recruitment which may not succeed.

It is important that governors are aware of changes in the system so that they can secure the right arrangements for the leadership of the school to help it succeed in the future. You may also want to consider the model of headship that you offer within the school (eg co-headship, executive headship, etc). More information on these options for school leadership can be found either by conducting an internet search for actual examples of schools that have considered these options or by visiting www.nationalcollege.org.uk/modelsandpartnerships.

Steps in the recruitment and selection process

There are seven main steps in the recruitment and selection process. Each of these is set out below.

1: Preparation

Governing body decides to recruit

The start of the preparation stage comes when the governing body decides to recruit. This decision will need to follow a full meeting of the governing body at which the governors have had the opportunity to talk about the needs of the school and its vision for the future. The governing body must then select a panel of at least three governors to conduct the process and it is this panel that then interviews appropriate applicants and recommends one of the people interviewed to the full governing body for final approval. It is therefore important that as you set your dates and timescales for the recruitment process, you schedule a full governing body meeting for the night of the interviews (or the following day). Academies are not subject to the same regulations as local authority maintained schools and, subject to their articles of association, are free to set their own procedures.

Candidates sometimes tell stories of facing panels of up to 20 people at interview. The general advice is to aim for a panel of between three and eight people, with five being the optimum number. When setting up the panel it is important that everyone is clear about the distinction between advisory and decision-making roles. Only governors on the panel have a vote and the chair of the panel does not have a casting vote (which is why an odd number of panel members is preferable).

Time of year

The time of year you recruit can affect the likelihood of a successful appointment. Notice periods of potential candidates and the rhythms of the school year can influence the size and quality of the field you get. Research indicates that half of all headteacher posts are advertised between January and March (EDS, 2010). Further evidence suggests that secondary schools advertising in January and February get higher application fields than at any other time of year.

Schools that advertise for a headteacher in the summer term and particularly from June onwards are unlikely to recruit for the start of the school year in September and therefore are more likely to need a temporary acting head in place for the start of the new school year. Full details of notice periods are in the Burgundy Book (LGA et al, 2000) but generally speaking, a successful candidate who is currently an assistant or deputy head will have to give notice for their current post usually by the half-term before taking up the new post. For serving headteachers this is a full term before they take up their new post. For those serving in academies, notice periods may be different depending on individual contracts of employment, but are unlikely to be shorter.

The average length of the recruitment process also becomes much longer (143–175 days for posts advertised from March to June compared with 93–102 days for those advertised between November and January). It's important then that, through sensitive dialogue with your existing head, governors try to get maximum notice of any vacancy. It is also a good idea for governing bodies to have done their thinking about a recruitment process so that if the unexpected occurs they can swing into action quickly.

Securing professional support for the process

Whether or not you have human resources (HR) expertise on your governing body we recommend that the governing body obtains advice at the start of and during the recruitment process. Broadly, the main types of advice and support needed are:

- HR expertise

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- educational expertise
 - administrative support

Schools are likely to have to pay for this support, but it is a small amount compared with the reputational costs of a running a poor recruitment process or the long-term costs to the school of making the wrong appointment.

HR expertise

Your HR support should be the guardian of the whole recruitment process to ensure that it is professionally run. This should include as a minimum:

- advising on the advert and the application pack so it generates the largest and most appropriate application field
- ensuring compliance with recruitment and equalities legislation
- ensuring the process follows best practice in recruitment
- helping you establish appropriate shortlisting criteria and a sifting process
- agreeing with you appropriate assessment exercises and interview questions (led by governors' knowledge of the school and its challenges)
- producing the relevant paperwork to support the selection process and ensuring this is kept as a safe and secure record
- ensuring sensible timescales for the recruitment process are followed

Educational expertise

Many other countries have a highly controlled process for appointing new headteachers. Often this involves headteacher appointments being made by central ministries, local administrations or groups of existing headteachers. Governing bodies in England have significant autonomy in the process but this means that it is important that you get the right educational expertise to support you in making your appointment decision.

Your educational support should ensure that you can attract and select the best candidate to take your school forward. In general it is good practice that the outgoing head plays no role in the process, but some governing bodies have considered using other headteachers to support the process. You may need to consider local competition issues if you choose to do this.

Educational adviser support to the panel should include:

- helping you tailor the job description and person specification to meet the specific educational needs of your school
- shaping the assessment exercises to reflect the educational challenges of your particular school
- providing the professional experience and ability to judge candidates' relative strengths on leading teaching and learning, and expertise on their suitability for your headship post

Administrative expertise

The administrative management of the process is a critical component of a smooth recruitment process. This may be done by your HR professional or more likely your school office or school business manager. It should include clear plans for:

- placing the advert in your agreed choice of media
- producing the application packs and supporting information

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- sending application packs or making them available online
 - handling expressions of interest from potential candidates
 - arranging pre-visits from interested candidates
 - issuing invitations to interview and managing queries
 - scheduling interviews and accommodation
 - meeting and greeting candidates on the day

Some possible sources of support and expertise

There is an increasing array of providers that could support your school's recruitment process. You will need to make a decision on what they can offer and the accompanying value for money. They include but are not limited to:

- **Local authorities:** some local authorities may still 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 either free or charged support.
- **Central HR support teams in academy chains and larger federations:** support is usually provided free to schools within the chain or federation but some are beginning to charge for services to schools outside the chain.
- **Freelance consultants:** these are individuals offering HR, recruitment or educational advice to support schools.
- **Commercial recruitment agencies:** these are usually either large recruitment agencies that have diversified to have an education arm, or bespoke agencies solely dealing with appointing educational leaders.
- **Companies providing services to schools:** some legal and accountancy services are now offering a broader range of services to schools which may include recruitment services.
- **Headhunting firms:** for high-value roles there are firms that will seek out and engage talent for specific posts.
- **Professional associations:** some associations are beginning to offer a wider portfolio of bespoke services to schools which may include recruitment support.

Reputation is always a helpful indicator of what you might get so do ask around local schools that have recruited recently. Do get more than one quote as both HR and educational support can be expensive. Your finance policy may also require you to get more than one quote.

2: Definition

The definition stage involves the process of clarifying the needs of the school, the job to be done and the person needed to do it. Getting this right is so important because it drives the subsequent parts of the whole recruitment process, from drafting your advert text through to shaping the marking criteria you use at interview. The key tasks in this step are writing the job description and agreeing the person specification.

The **job description** lists the accountabilities and tasks that will be carried out by the headteacher as part of his or her professional duties. There are now many types of headship role (executive head, headteacher, head of school etc) and many different ways to set out a job description. Whilst not recommending any individual approach, we have drawn together a number of actual examples to help governors in this [task](#). An internet search for 'headteacher job description' will lead you to further examples. Many governing bodies save time by starting with an example and customising it, but make sure any example you start with has been recently updated and fits the distinct needs of your school.

The formats and vocabulary of job descriptions vary, but good practice could include:

- job details
- job purpose
- dimensions
- principal accountabilities
- competencies
- performance standard
- organisational chart and context

The **person specification** details the knowledge, skills, experience, abilities and personal qualities you are seeking in your ideal candidate and should be informed by the job description. The criteria for the person specification can be grouped in a number of ways. Headings might include:

- qualifications
- experience
- professional knowledge
- professional skills
- philosophy and commitment
- personal qualities

Again, whilst not recommending any particular method, we have provided a few examples for different roles [here](#).

What about recent changes to NPQH?

In the past where governors appointed a first-time head it was a mandatory requirement for the candidate to hold the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). On 8 February 2012, NPQH became optional, in line with ministers wanting to give schools greater freedom. This means first-time headteachers no longer have to hold the qualification in order to take up a headship post.

This means governing bodies now have greater autonomy when recruiting headteachers and will be able to appoint suitable candidates who do not hold NPQH if they choose to do so. Conversely, many governing bodies continue to make NPQH an essential part of the person specification (85 per cent of governors surveyed as part of the National College's annual survey said that NPQH would be either a 'must have' or a 'good to have'). This is also then a viable choice and governing bodies are still able to prioritise candidates with NPQH over those who do not have NPQH.

NPQH is still endorsed by government as the qualification of choice for anyone aspiring to headship and the programme will continue to be subsidised through full or part scholarships to participants.

Defining the pay level of the post

Governors make an important decision on setting the pay that the post commands and therefore should seek advice on this. It is an important decision: if the salary is too low then the role will be deemed unattractive and you may significantly limit the field of applicants, while if it is too high you may saddle the school with a financial commitment it cannot meet. Governing bodies need to obtain local benchmarking data to enable them to make an informed decision. The starting salary will depend on a number of things:

- The size of the school and its individual characteristics: the governing body needs to have a sound reason for offering a salary outside the normal range.

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- How governors define the scope of the advertised role within this: there is scope for increasing the salary if the role is over and above the usual role of headteacher (see School Teachers' Pay and Conditions (STPCD, DfE, 2011)).
 - What the school can afford and ensuring any starting pay is sustainable over time are critical factors.
 - Academies are not subject to the STPCD (although many use it), but it is still important that an appropriate salary is set for the post.

Most adverts sensibly set a pay range that allows governors to decide a new headteacher's starting salary depending on his or her experience and interview performance. Governors need to give some thought to what they would do if their successful candidate asks for more during negotiations as this could (and does) happen in real-life interview situations. Keep in mind that candidates were aware of the salary range when they applied for the post and if they wanted a higher paid post they should really have had these conversations before the process started or applied for a different role.

3: Attraction

Taking a marketing approach to candidate attraction

Some governing bodies fall into the trap of believing their headship vacancy is irresistible and that there is no need to actively sell the school in order to generate a field of high-quality candidates. However, in the light of smaller fields some governing bodies are increasingly taking a more proactive marketing approach to selling their school's headship vacancy.

Hard-to-fill factors and what you should expect in field sizes

Some headship roles are more difficult to fill than others. Nationally, it is harder to fill headships in primary, faith and special schools. The number of candidates your post attracts will also be different. Primaries might expect five applications and interview on average two or three candidates, with the smallest schools tending to be at the lower end of the range. Secondary schools might expect 15 applications and interview on average 5 candidates. Special schools and Roman Catholic schools are markedly lower in each phase.

Broadly speaking, school performance doesn't affect school desirability. There are always those seeking the challenge of a low-performing school and always those who are reluctant to take on a high-performing school (where they might feel the only way is down). However, local factors can also block recruitment such as:

- an uncontrolled budget deficit
- a governing body with a reputation for poor relationships with previous headteachers
- sudden and unexpected removal of a headteacher
- falling rolls and/or the threat of future closure or merger

A comprehensive marketing approach that deals with these issues head-on can go a long way to meeting the concerns of potential applicants.

The main point to be aware of as a recruiting governing body is that you are unlikely to get very large fields for your post. Having a clear understanding of what might be typical for your school can help you benchmark the success or otherwise of your own recruitment process. You should always make your decisions to interview on the quality of the field rather than quantity and in many cases you may be interviewing low numbers.

Getting into the right mindset

The headteacher recruitment market is highly competitive, particularly in the first few months of the calendar year. Recruiters need to hold the attention of potential candidates in order to convert initial interest in a role into a firm application. Those who succeed in this market often turn the traditional recruitment proposition on its head. Instead of seeing recruitment as a process of buying talent from the available pool, they approach it as a process of selling their headship opportunity to those candidates they would like to apply.

At the heart of positive recruitment campaigns is a commitment to candidate care.

Examples of new-style sell behaviour

Job information is tailored to the specific recruitment process, with a fluent explanation of the school's current agenda and the challenges an incoming head will face.

Job information highlights career benefits to the candidate in return for taking on a challenging role.

Candidates' first contact with the school is positive and (within reason) visits are accommodated at times convenient for candidates.

Requests for further information are met promptly and efficiently by a named person.

Candidates get ready access to a named person who is able to prioritise requests for an informal conversation or to return calls quickly.

Information and documents are available online. Applications can be submitted electronically.

All applications are acknowledged and every candidate receives a letter or email about the success or failure of their application.

Good advertising and routes to market

The quality of advertising for school leadership posts has improved in recent years. Until quite recently, 81 per cent of governors designed their own advert without professional help. This led to a situation in which both governors and potential candidates were critical of adverts, with 65 per cent of governors rating their own advert as being of only average quality and 31 per cent of prospective candidates rating adverts as good.

There are several ways to advertise your post to candidates, ranging from traditional print routes, through websites and local and national noticeboards to engaging recruitment agencies and headhunting. You will need to make a choice based on your knowledge of the likely field and your budget. Governors should never underestimate the importance of actively seeking to grow a field for their post by all means necessary. In a tight recruitment market, sitting back is no longer an option.

The school's website will often be the first line of investigation by prospective candidates so it is important that it portrays a positive impression of the school.

What do prospective candidates look for?

There is nothing mysterious about the principles of effective recruitment advertising. The theory is straightforward and we set out some helpful principles below. Getting the right starting point is key. Job advertisements are marketing tools, not public notices. There is a limit to what they can achieve. The purpose of a job advertisement is not to recruit a headteacher in one step; it is to capture attention and create initial interest in a role, encouraging potential candidates to find out more. No more, no less.

Research conducted for the National College into the attitudes of individuals applying for headship found that the single most important factor in deciding whether to apply for a role was location, primarily whether a role was within commuting distance but also whether a location was attractive for candidates to live or work in. Local authority spheres were also important (in both a positive and a negative way) but issues such as a school specialism were neutral factors.

This confirms the importance of getting the basics right. Effective advertising always includes:

- location
- name of the employing organisation
- job title
- salary

Effective recruitment advertising:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">— tries to differentiate what you are offering from other offers— is relevant to the target audience, highlighting ideas that are important to them, not you— communicates directly and concisely— is never boastful— includes a clear call to action	<p>What makes your job different from the others on the page? Why is it a better career opportunity than the next job?</p> <p>Think like a candidate. What would you want to know? Why would you want this job? And what don't you need to read here?</p> <p>Words are money, so use the budget to market the job, not to reproduce the job description. Less is more.</p> <p>Organisations that have 'done it all' can appear daunting to candidates and can appear to be a poor career choice because of lack of challenge.</p> <p>This tells potential candidates how to get more information, preferably by going online.</p>

These principles are deceptively simple. Applying them properly can sometimes be an extremely challenging process.

The application pack

After a good advert, the application pack is the next stage of candidate attraction. If candidates feel that the information they receive is not sufficiently detailed or a true reflection of the school then you may lose good-quality applicants. Our past research has revealed an often striking mismatch between what candidates want to see and what they actually receive (over 75 per cent felt that what they received did not accurately represent the school). Candidates most wanted to get an understanding of the school's own evaluation of its challenges, together with a sense of current plans for improvement. They also wanted a summary of key financial issues. However, less than 30 per cent of packs provided this type of information, leaving some candidates in the dark about the job they were applying for and therefore less likely to follow up their initial interest in the school.

4: Selection

Shortlisting

Only the recruitment panel alongside the advisers will see the application forms and shortlist candidates against the person-specification criteria. You should have a well-planned marking scheme that allows you to justify your differentiation between candidates in the event of an appeal. Remember, this process is about reducing your application field down to those with the potential to undertake the advertised role (ie those who meet the person specification). You shouldn't take through those that don't make the grade, including internal candidates, as this can lead to sapping applicants' confidence as they struggle in the process proper. If this applies to all the applicants, you will need to go back to before step 1 and explore your options, from re-advertising the post through to appointing an acting, interim or executive head.

Interviewing and selection

You will need to decide the selection activities that you want candidates to undertake in order to make the best, evidence-based judgement on their relative strengths. Interview days are often called assessment centres, and they must be professionally planned and run. This will be particularly important when candidates may have spent several days out of their own schools in order to apply.

Remember that if, as part of your selection process, candidates meet student panels, staff panels and other governors, it is important to ensure that final selection decisions rest firmly with members of the appointed governor selection panel. You may need to make this clear to everyone involved in any selection activities, for example listening to presentations. It is therefore helpful not to ask others involved for their opinion about who they would appoint, but rather what they felt were each candidate's strengths and what they suggest the selection panel should probe.

There are numerous activities that you could use to gather evidence about whether a candidate meets the criteria for the post. Debate rages about which are most effective and up to date. Your HR and educational professional(s) should be able to advise you of the options and which might be most appropriate for your school's post.

Options include:

- presentations by candidates
- leading an assembly
- learning walks
- meeting pupils
- role play
- psychometric testing
- data-interpretation exercises
- carousel panel interviews
- teaching a lesson
- leading a discussion with pupils
- group exercises with other candidates
- in-tray exercises and case studies
- personality profiling

If a two-day process is undertaken, at the end of the first day candidates who are not appointable should not be invited back for the second day.

All selection panels without exception will undertake a formal, in-depth interview as part of the process, so agreeing the right questions for these will be critical. This is usually the final part of the assessment process. You should draw these from your job description and person specification and you may follow the format of a core question covering a key area, followed up by prompt questions to use should the candidate not cover the areas you are looking to judge them on.

Interview questions should gather proven evidence about what candidates have done. There will clearly be a need for questions about how they will apply their proven experience to taking the school forward and their vision for the school itself, but panels should beware of asking too many hypothetical questions about what candidates would do without testing the strength of their performance to date. Governors should not ask inappropriate questions that contravene equalities legislation, for example questions about intentions to have a family. The whole selection process should comply with both the boundaries and spirit of equalities legislation.

High-quality feedback at the end of the interview is really important, so think through how as a panel you might agree a strategy to gather materials for this during the process.

There is no recommended set of questions for interview (though probably not, “So, X, what kind of sandwiches can you bring to the picnic?” – real example) but we have drawn together a selection of questions, together with some samples of selection [exercises](#) which we hope you will find useful. There is no one-size-fits-all approach and the most important thing is to tailor all the exercises to the context and future challenges of your individual school.

References

Safer Recruitment guidance suggests references for candidates should be taken up before the interview process. Any offer made to candidates should always be made subject to satisfactory references. In the rare case that references do reveal any problems (such as protracted periods of unexplained past absence) then it is best to seek a view from your HR support about how to move forward.

5: Appointment

The full governing body will need to approve the decision of the selection panel of governors. Usually this is a brief meeting where the selection panel outlines who the preferred candidate is and the reasons for selecting that candidate. This is followed by an endorsement vote of all governors. Once the full governing body has ratified the decision of the appointment panel, you will need to make your offer of appointment to your chosen candidate and inform the unsuccessful applicants of the outcome of their application. In the case of a community, voluntary-controlled, community special or maintained nursery school, the actual appointment is made by the local authority. In the case of an academy, foundation, voluntary-aided or foundation special school, the school itself makes the appointment.

Key things to consider

- Be realistic about what you can expect from a headteacher, but do not appoint if you have not seen the right person.
- Inform the successful candidate first. He or she might decline the offer and you might want to offer it to the next in line (assuming that this candidate also met your criteria).
- Although verbal acceptances are binding in law, they are difficult to enforce. Ensure that contracts are drawn up and issued swiftly to enable the candidate to tender his or her resignation.
- Unsuccessful candidates should be treated with respect. You should offer feedback, but be aware that anything you say could be used in an appeal.
- Take particular care to offer development feedback to unsuccessful internal candidates.

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- Successful candidates need feedback too, and any development areas could form part of their professional development or performance management plan.

What is the protocol for making the offer?

Candidates should not normally be asked to wait at the school for a decision, which may be made after a lengthy discussion. The chair of governors is usually the person who calls the chosen candidate to make a verbal offer. This constitutes a contract in law, conditional on satisfactory checks into staff qualification requirements, health, criminal record and any other checks required by the employing authority. Ensure you comply with any recommendations concerning checks on child protection issues. A formal contract of employment will follow, drawn up by the employer (school or local authority). As the candidate would be unwise to resign from his or her current post before receiving the contract, the chair should check that it has been sent as soon as possible, especially if it is close to resignation deadlines.

Only contact unsuccessful candidates once the verbal offer has been accepted by the preferred candidate. It is good practice for governors to ask their HR or educational expert to give feedback to all unsuccessful candidates in case anyone chooses to appeal the decision. Feedback should only be given verbally and on the basis of evidence of performance against the person specification. If another party informs the successful candidate, be sure to follow up with a congratulatory call from the chair of governors shortly afterwards. Finally, agree with the successful applicant when you will inform staff and parents of your decision.

6: Induction

Successful recruitment processes do not end with the appointment decision. Governors have a responsibility for the induction of the new headteacher and this begins as soon as the appointment has been agreed.

Induction is too often unstructured and left to chance. Your new headteacher will feel supported by the governing body and confident in taking up the reins if you start planning the induction early. Inductions should use any relevant data gathered during the selection process. The chair should also devote some time to introducing the head to local networks and stakeholders and also ensure that your head designate is kept apprised of any key decisions or events that occur between appointment and taking up post. It would also be appropriate to arrange or facilitate discussions with staff and the outgoing headteacher.

You should also investigate and use the growing number of programmes available nationally and locally for induction (often through local authorities), especially if it is your new head's first post. First-time heads can access the support of a professional partner and further peer support from www.nationalcollege.org.uk/headstart. It is also anticipated that from January 2013, College licensees will be delivering Level 4 of the modular curriculum entitled Leading an Organisation, which will be aimed at headteachers and might be something governors would want to support their new head to access.

7: Evaluation

At the end of the interview process, you will either have made an appointment or decided that you need to readvertise the post or even reconsider your school's leadership model and structure. In either case, you should consider taking the time to evaluate the process. This serves two purposes. If you need to readvertise, an evaluation will identify any aspects of the process you need to change or improve. If you have made a successful appointment, a record of your experience will be valuable for colleagues recruiting in the future.

If you have experienced difficulties recruiting, obtaining objective external advice before re-advertising could also prevent you from repeating costly mistakes.

Common pitfalls to avoid

Over the years governors have openly told us about the parts of their recruitment process that were particularly problematic. Recruiting governors could bear in mind these anonymised reflections of those that have gone before them.

- For certain reasons we just didn't advertise at the right time and this made it difficult to secure a field of strong candidates. If we had realised this we would have made timing a priority.
- We had a real problem with the timings of the whole process; halfway through we realised that we just hadn't given candidates enough time to visit the school or complete their applications. This led to a lack of applications.
- It's probably fair to say we panicked a bit and rushed into putting out an advert. This probably didn't reflect our aspirations for the future of the school and I thought for our school we could have had a wider discussion about possible federation.
- I'm not sure we got the balance right between asking candidates about what they would do for our school and what they had successfully done already in their previous roles. I finished the interview and remember thinking I'd heard lots of good words and intentions but had no idea of whether our preferred choice had the proven success and experience. We should have probed their evidence and experience more.
- Halfway through the penny dropped that some candidates were interviewing us as much as we were them. I'm not confident we had quite done the required thinking about selling our school and what being head of our school could do for them as much as we were expecting them to do for us. I'm not sure that we didn't lose one particularly strong candidate through just assuming that they wanted the post full stop and not wooing the field enough.
- I'm not quite sure how it came about but when we'd factored in the local authority and diocese the selection panel was 11. We couldn't even fit in the room let alone what it must have felt like as an interviewee on the other side of the table. Making our final decision was tricky to say the least!
- We had a strong internal candidate for the post and everyone knew we expected them to get the post. Then on the day an exceptional candidate turned up (who has since been exceptional) and the internal candidate didn't get it. I think we were guilty of raising expectations and it hasn't been easy to manage the fall-out since.
- We weren't prepared for what to do when only two candidates applied for the role. We automatically assumed this was a weak field and considered readvertising. By the time we'd realised that the second applicant was actually strong and came with a good reputation, predictably they'd picked up a job elsewhere in the interim.
- We weren't expecting to have to recruit a new head and it was all a mad rush to secure a head for September. In the end I felt we recruited the least worse option rather than the best and the school has suffered since. We should have considered an interim appointment until we could recruit again at a better time of year.
- You've got to be really clear about what are appropriate and inappropriate questions before the interview starts. One of the panel members who said they do a lot of recruiting asked when one candidate was planning to have children: the silence (of all of us) in the room was very uncomfortable to say the least.

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