



HEADTEACHER / PRINCIPAL RECRUITMENT

A Supplementary Guide for
Governors/Trustees

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The practical hints you should know
and don't often get mentioned!

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A SUPPLEMENTARY RECRUITMENT HANDBOOK
AIMED AT SELECTION PANEL CHAIRS

Don't stay in the dark.....



The aim of this booklet of hints and tips is to smooth your way through the ups, downs and to avoid the pitfalls that occur throughout the crucial responsibility of recruiting a new Head or Principal for your school or academy. Compiled from the experience of supporting many Governing Bodies through their recruitment campaign, it aims to provide you with frank, honest advice to use as you see fit.

These few topics have been chosen because of the regularity with which they come up during every recruitment process, and are usually not dealt with in standard documentation. So just spend a few minutes reading about them – it could save you many hours of unnecessary work, hassle and, at worst, complaints. Obviously this should be read in conjunction with any statutory, local authority guidance or academy policy.

Examples include:

- 1. What are we going to pay our new Headteacher?**
- 2. How do we handle an internal candidate?**

Such advice should be readily available to Governors – in reality getting hold of the right person at the time when you need an answer isn't easy, and can hold up your progress. If you hit a stumbling block, contact details are provided at the end of this handbook. Please feel free to get in touch – a telephone enquiry costs you nothing except your time – and an item on your phone bill!

So please read on.....



.....shed some light and get some answers!

Who actually recruits the Head/Principal?

Can a Staff Governor be on the recruitment panel?



Don't run before you walk (identify the attributes before planning how to test for them).



How do we decide what to pay (explanation of the old ISR)?

Why do we need to advertise the salary, can't we negotiate that with the successful candidate?



Uploads, downloads and information.....

What do we need to tell staff?



How do we handle internal candidates?

Who should host school visits?

When to plan the selection day tasks.....



and what to include!

When and who should read references.



.....Finally -don't forget the legal ratification!



Who actually recruits the Head/Principal?

The legal responsibility lies with the whole Governing Body (GB), Academy Trustees or a combination depending on your legal framework. However, in practical terms it is well nigh impossible to involve all decision makers at every step of the way, therefore as soon as the Head/Principal resigns it is sensible to convene a whole GB/Trustees meeting to formally appoint the **Selection Panel**, which should be detailed in the minutes. They are formally entrusted with the delegated responsibility to organise and run the recruitment process and recommend the preferred applicant for ratification.

TIP: An odd number on the panel avoids the need for a casting vote.

It is important that the school community trusts these people with this responsibility at a time of uncertainty and unrest that this event inevitably causes.

Can a Staff Governor be on the recruitment panel?

All Governors are eligible but it is not best practice to include Staff Governors on the panel; not only does this offer a potential conflict of interest (eg they may know the current Deputy very well professionally and internal promotions may favour their own career prospects etc.) but frankly common sense should prevail – in what other organisation do the employees choose the boss? They can be involved in other ways to ensure staff views are considered and heard.

Any Governors accepting this responsibility should be made aware of the considerable time commitment this process will entail, not only in the planning stages, but time off for attendance on the selection day(s); ideally they need to attend meetings at every stage of the process, both planning and decision making ones, so they can make a fully informed decision. Reading applications can take considerably more time than anticipated – even with a shortlisting grid to assist you.



Don't run before you walk

(Identify the attributes before planning how to test for them)

Do not jump to planning the interview days at the start. The most important part of this whole process is identifying the key attributes, skills and experience that is required **TO LEAD YOUR SCHOOL / ACADEMY WHERE IT NEEDS TO GO IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS**, not forgetting that any new Head's CPD (Continuing Professional Development) is your responsibility.

This can mean you require a skill set that is radically different from the departing Head. It is therefore essential that Governors/Trustees have a clear idea of the immediate and long term future of the school or academy before drawing up the Job Description and Person Specification.

- Question 1 Where do we need to be in 3-5 year's time?
- Question 2 What is the skill set and type of leader we require to take us there?

Once you know what you are seeking it is much easier to test the candidates' abilities in these areas. Drawing up a clear profile of what you want will also inform how you phrase your advert.

TIP: The purpose of an advert is to attract and excite interest, not to write an essay on the school.



How do we know what salary to offer the new Head (the old ISR)?

The previously enforced Individual School Range (ISR) was a set of 7 points on the national Leadership Pay Scale detailed in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) designated for payment of school leaders; *it determines the prgressional pay range for your new Head/Principal.*

Although Academies and Free Schools are not constrained by the ISR and STPCD, in practice many have adopted this mechanism to show parity with other educational establishments and clarity for applicants. Lack of detail on pay has been shown to reduce initial interest in a vacancy, so be clear to encourage good initial levels of interest.

For maintained schools, agreeing the ISR is a whole GB decision, one of the key times this can be reviewed is on the appointment of a new Head. Initially you have to know which Group your school falls into: this arises from a mathematical calculation based on the age and number of students/pupils. If you do not know your school Group you can swiftly calculate this from the formula explained in the STPCD, or contact us for assistance (details at the end).

The law stipulates that Governors must set the ISR within the Group range eg, a Group 5 school must set their 7 point ISR from within the range L18-L31. Academies do have more flexibility.

There are limited and carefully designated options for additional discretionary pay, which is capped at 25%. Please call the number at the end of this document if you wish to discuss such options.



Why do we need to advertise the salary, can't we negotiate that with the successful candidate?

Simply, you don't have to, BUT if you want to attract good candidates you will do! No one is going to apply for a job if they don't know the salary on offer.

Just specifying you are a Group 4 school covers a salary range of £54,247 to £73,474, this doesn't provide clarity to the people you wish to attract; they will probably move on to read the next advert.

Point to note: you should appoint at one of the lowest 4 points of the advertised ISR.

TIP best practice dictates that this would be either of the lowest 2, so giving a natural salary progression for the incoming Head over the next 5-6 years.

So advertising your vacancy at L20-L26 will enable a shrewd aspiring Head to work out the starting salary being offered should be £62,694 or £64,221 (L20 or L21, *Fringe pay range 2015/16*). They have immediate clarity and can swiftly assess if your role will be financially appropriate for them to pursue. The final amount can, of course, be negotiated to secure your preferred choice of applicant within the parameters of the ISR and allowable discretionary pay. But the time for negotiation should be after an applicant has clearly demonstrated their worth.

Now you need to secure their interest and encourage them to apply.



Uploads, downloads and information.....

This is usually the biggest missed opportunity for schools, colleges and academies to sell themselves to potential candidates.....and – importantly – learn from the experience.

You are essentially working to attract the ‘Chief Executive’ of your school. Senior people like to deal with a PERSON who can efficiently handle their enquiry and deal intelligently with their questions. Consider if you seriously expect someone who you might be paying in excess of £60,000 to patiently download maybe 4, 5, 9 or in the case of one school 17 separate items of information? Aspiring Heads do not like the ‘remote’ application process where the only contact from the school might be an email receipt of their online application. I know this because I ask them and they are frank enough to tell me.

If you don’t have the capacity to offer a personal response mechanism (and even if you do) aim to distil all relevant information into one positive, promotional but realistic document that can easily be shared and viewed (**TIP** - remember not everyone may have the latest version of Word, so convert to a PDF format if you can). Decide if you wish this to be available for anyone to download or if you wish it to be sent upon request; the advantage of the latter is that you know who has enquired about the role and who has read some relatively confidential information about your school.

The advice on what to include is poor, most adverts omit any attractive or interesting feature to make a school stand out and then follow this with a generic Job Description and Person Specification.

Ensure you are realistic about your current situation. The National College commissioned some feedback from Headship applicants, their main findings included:

- Only 31% of applicants rated the advert as good or better
- 75% of applicants felt the information provided did not give an accurate representation of the school (!)
- 78% of applicants were disappointed that there were no details on the school’s finances
- 96% of applicants wanted to see some school Self Evaluation information
- 70% of applicants would have liked to see something from the School Development Plan

Now you know what they are seeking, it’s up to you to create, design and disclose relevant details in an appropriate and discrete manner. To see examples of adverts and packs that have received positive feedback and which secured quality applicants please visit our website. If you’d like assistance in compiling, designing and production of these crucial materials, please ask us!

What do we need to tell staff?

Transparency is good. Aim to keep all your staff informed of the progress throughout the recruitment campaign, it is a very unsettling period for them and rumours can – and do - flourish. Control how and when the leader’s resignation is announced, followed by something simple like a fortnightly briefing note in the staff room. **TIP** -a notice when the advert is going live always helps, as does ensuring that students and parents are informed of the resignation in a timely way.

Seeking staff views on the school, its upcoming challenges and what they’d like to see in their new Head or Principal is a useful way to involve them and ensuring the process is informed.

How do we handle internal candidates?

This is a possibility for every school and requires very sensitive managing. The overriding principle is that they must be treated like every other potential applicant, given the same information at the same time and selected against the information they provide on their form and in interview, not using any prior knowledge that Governors will inevitably have. This isn't easy.

Ensuring that you have a robust selection procedure is crucial, comprehensive records at each selection stage and accurate task marking are essential: confidentiality must be maintained. **TIP** - If you shortlist an internal candidate, it is strongly advisable not to use your own data in any task to avoid disadvantaging other applicants. There is often an assumption that the internal candidate will be appointed, consequently a transparent process will help you avoid any criticisms.

Whatever the final outcome, someone should be designated to give developmental feedback (especially if they haven't been successful). It is courteous to let them know the outcome promptly.



Who should host school visits?

Firstly – not any potential internal candidate. Choose someone who can exercise the utmost discretion and who is knowledgeable about the school. This is a crucial opportunity to market both the school and the vacancy and often one that is given insufficient thought beforehand.

At this stage visitors are not applicants, just prospective candidates, but they might be from other local schools and they need to be sure that any interest at this point remains confidential.

Some schools use the outgoing Head, who may be the best source of information and who will undoubtedly promote all that is good about the school, however, if radical changes are needed it may be diplomatic to provide another host(ess).

Generally an informed Governor is a good choice, but that does depend on their availability as consistency of 'message' is important. Consider if you are going to offer individual visits to suit enquirers or host a couple of group visits on specified and well publicised days. A chance to meet the outgoing Head for a Q&A session is generally appreciated. **TIP** - Ensure that the school community is aware of when these visits may take place.



When to plan the selection day tasks..... and what to include!

Once you have identified the type of person and skills you are seeking and have encapsulated this in the promotional material, then planning the selection day tasks becomes much easier. The earlier this can start the better – and definitely not at, or after, the shortlisting meeting.

Although staff generally think they should be involved, this is not their decision to make. Seek their input when identifying the person you require and invite their observations on selection days.

TIP – to involve staff, you can always arrange for an informal meeting between candidates and staff with refreshments, but draw a clear line between observations, formal feedback and opinions!

Do not underestimate the amount of time, thought, planning and coordination that is required for a smooth running selection day. **TIP** – plan this well in advance. Necessary features include:

- A school-based administrative coordinator to facilitate the day
- the cooperation of the school and students/pupils for activities such as assemblies, providing guides for candidates moving between tasks or fielding a pupil/student council panel
- attendance by all Governors on the Selection Panel
- adequate quiet rooms for tasks and interviews – with appropriate facilities for presentations
- a secure room for the candidates to sit while they are not required for any tasks, leave their personal belongings etc, ideally with some refreshments readily available
- refreshments for Governors, remembering they may be staying late to deselect at the end of the first day or deliberate the final decision after the candidates' departure
- sufficient time between interviews for Governors to discuss what they have just heard and brief themselves for the next candidate.

There is adequate information available on the types of tasks that can be used, but be sure that these are chosen and tailored to tell you the specific information you need to know, to make judgements against your key criteria; a list of generic questions from the LA will provide you with a sample of generic answers from which you may find it hard to choose the right Head for you.

TIP -if they are interested, other Governors can be involved through task supervision, meet, greet and hosting duties, presentation audience etc. However, be clear in that you seek the value from their observations but do not ask for opinions!

Ascend Education can provide professional, educational expertise at any stage, offering practical support, materials and marking grids, and a 'technical' expert if you need support for the educational / academic aspects at planning and in interviews. (For maintained schools, the Director of Education's representative should be present at the final interview to confirm you have an appointable candidate, preferably endorse your decision, or raise any concerns if appropriate.)



When and who should read references?

References should be sought from all shortlisted candidates' referees immediately following the shortlisting meeting. These can either be used to inform decisions, or to confirm judgements – the latter being strongly recommended as best practice.

ONE person (usually the Chair of the panel) should read all references prior to interview, so that any concerns can be investigated further, or even with the candidates if necessary. This practice ensures that the panel is not prejudiced while making their decisions based upon the evidence revealed by the selection process. Once a decision has been reached, the references from the preferred applicant should be shared with the panel.

TIP- if the panel are having difficulty choosing between the final two, reading out each candidate's references might provide some clarity, although treat the content with caution. Please remember these are only one person's view and they may not be experienced at writing a reference.



.....Finally -don't forget the whole GB ratification meeting.

Although the process may be different for academies the majority are adopting the current legal procedure. The appointment of both the Head (Principal) and the Deputy Head (Vice Principal) require ratification by the whole Governing Body.

It is a good idea to have this meeting time and date circulated at the beginning of the process, since **until a quorate meeting has ratified the panel's recommendation an offer should not be made.** Most GBs set this early in the evening of the final selection day, so the school or academy can secure their first choice of candidate. At peak recruitment times good applicants can be attending another interview the day after yours, and if you consider them to be good – so might another school!

This meeting should have a One Item Agenda:

“To ratify the Selection Panel's recommendation for the new Headteacher/Principal.”

This will only take 5 minute or less, the GB has delegated this responsibility to the appointed panel, so should trust in their judgement and ratify the recommendation without question.

In reality the rest of the Governors/Trustees will be keen to learn something about the successful applicant, so it is worth preparing a few biographical details to share, in particular this may be important if there has been an internal candidate - whatever the outcome. Please note: this meeting should not become a debate regarding the merits of a successful external candidate compared with the known internal one.

Remember to stress the confidentiality of this meeting and outline the plan for future announcements; it is courteous to the successful candidate, having accepted your offer, to be allowed time to resign from their current post before you publicise the outcome.

Once the meeting closes, it is courteous if the Chair calls the successful applicant and makes the offer, including confirming the salary (and subject to any outstanding checks) and congratulates them. Then go and celebrate! This is an arduous process requiring hard work and dedication from Governors, no one will say thank you but you need to know you will have done a good job if you have collected sound evidence leading to a clear decision.

And afterwards:

- Complete all contractual issues adhering to Safer Recruitment procedures
- Arrange to give feedback to all final candidates – another often-missed PR opportunity that may encourage other new staff to consider your school in the future
- Keep all paperwork securely for 6 months, then destroy
- Undertake a post recruitment review
- Arrange an induction programme and handover or familiarisation visits for your new leader.

Jacqueline Baker BSc

Following successful development and delivery of the Governor training in Surrey on Headteacher recruitment for 7 years, she now runs her own business which includes the professional guidance and practical support for Governors in the Headteacher recruitment process; previous clients include all phases, academies and faith schools, plus she has handled a range of posts on Senior Leadership Teams including Business Managers and Development Directors. She is an adviser to The Key and heads up leadership recruitment at Judicium Education, a specialist legal and HR Services Company.



As a former Chair of Governors, she has a firsthand experience and a genuine appreciation of your concerns and the practical issues facing you during the execution of this crucial responsibility.

Additionally, as a member and Ambassador of the Institute of Recruiters, she combines adherence to their code of ethical and professional conduct, with expertise and practical informed advice in the unique field of senior educational recruitment.



As an accredited user of the Thomas International PPA assessments, she can provide psychometric profiling of both the job and applicants, to support Governors with defining the requirements of the role and subsequently evidence for candidate selection.

Contact details:

For your confidential questions



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Free resources available to download from www.ascendededucation.co.uk or request by email

- Factsheet on the Leadership recruitment process
- Sample adverts and candidate packs
- Briefing on psychometric profiling and its value in recruitment
- Template for invitation to interview letters and reference requests
- Equal Opportunities Briefing sheet
- Example interview marking grid
- Pitfalls to avoid when interviewing

Other resources and templates are available upon request. Ascend Education's SMART recruitment process will streamline and professionalise your leadership selection.

www.ascendededucation.co.uk

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