

FAQs from school governors on appointing a headteacher

Does the governing body have to appoint a headteacher?

Every school must have a headteacher. The governing body may wish to appoint a headteacher through an advertisement and selection process or by approaching a neighbouring school to consider a collective model of leadership. A governing body with an interest in considering the latter approach is advised to consult their School Improvement Advisor

What sort of help can we get for this appointment from the Local Authority?

There is a statutory duty to inform the Local Authority at the beginning of the process to appoint a headteacher. As soon as you receive the resignation letter from your headteacher you should contact your School Improvement Advisor. They can help and advise you throughout the whole process.

As a Church Controlled, or Aided, school do we receive additional support?

As a church school (either Church of England or Roman Catholic) you are required to inform the appropriate Director of Education for the Diocese when a vacancy occurs. Diocesan representatives will provide additional advice on advertisement content and assist with short-listing and on selection days. In Church VA schools the Diocesan representative is there by right with support from the Local Authority.

We are an Academy?

The School Staffing Regulations apply to maintained schools (community, foundation, voluntary aided and voluntary controlled), but not to Academies. Academies are free to make their own decisions about recruitment, but in doing so will have act in accordance with general employment and equalities legislation. You will need to check your Funding Agreement and contact your adviser from the DfE. Advice is available from the Learning and Achievement service if requested.

Is it appropriate for staff governors to be on the selection panel?

Clearly, staff governors will be very closely affected in their work by the appointment of a new headteacher. For this reason it is not a good idea to have staff governors on the appointing panel.

I am not on the Panel, what input do I have in the process?

At the initial meeting of the full governing body to discuss the vacancy each governor is able to contribute. This is the opportunity to record and agree what the governing body is looking for in the candidate they wish to appoint. Most interview timetables include a time for governors to meet candidates informally although this meeting is not part of the formal selection process. The governing body has delegated the actual selection to the panel, later to be ratified by the whole governing body. Each candidate must be treated equally in the process.

Education (School Government) Regulations 1989 (amended 1991, 1993, 1996) Reg 25(s).

How can the school staff be involved in the appointment?

Most selection procedures allow for informal meetings between the staff of the school and the candidates, but great care needs to be exercised in ensuring that this does not become an ad hoc part of the process. It is helpful to keep staff/governors informed about the general progress (e.g. the timetable).

How shall we use our job advertisement to ensure that we get the best possible applicants?

The governing body should consider the most appropriate way of advertising the post. It should decide the best way of reaching its target audience, taking into consideration the type of media to be used and the level of exposure the advertisement will receive. The usual venue is the Times Educational Supplement (TES) although governors may choose alternative national venues for their advert. In addition governors may consider additional means for advertising the post, including the internet. The advertisement must be honest and clear. The Learning and Achievement Service will be able to help with exemplars.

What can, and cannot, we specify as requirements for the post? (e.g. gender, age, religion)?

You need a good headteacher. You do not need to know about his/her home or personal life. This has no bearing on a candidate's ability to do the job. You cannot discriminate on the grounds of race, gender, religion and belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

Are there qualifications for headteachers?

The requirement to have gained the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) has been removed. However governing bodies can still ask for the qualification in the advertisement and qualifications

What can we afford?

The governing body needs to be clear about the financial parameters before going forward with the recruitment process. This will include: an examination of the school's budget, noting the guidelines for the group size of the school and a review of the Individual Salary Range "ISR" for the post. Take advice from the appropriate officers in the Local Authority.

When should the governing body and selection panel respectively talk about salaries?

The governing body should address the question of salaries by setting the salary range prior to advertisement in accordance with the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions document. Normally the selection panel agrees the actual salary before the appointment, although the candidate may wish to negotiate this point.

What happens if we don't appoint?

Making the right appointment for a headteacher is so important that it is better to have the short-term inconvenience of having to start the whole process again for the longer-term benefit of the school. Remember the person you choose may be in post for many years!

Who hosts the day, the headteacher or the governing body?

It is the governing body that is the host of the process to appoint a headteacher. The departing headteacher does not have any role or part in the appointment of his or her successor. The headteacher must not be a member of selection panel or involved in the shortlisting procedure.

What happens if we cannot make up our minds - or there is a tied vote for candidates?

Regulations state that the Chair of a Panel when appointing a headteacher has no casting vote in the event of a tie. Education (School Government) Regulations 1989 (amended 1991, 1993, 1996) Reg. 29(1).

What if the whole governing body at the ratification does not accept the Panel's recommendation for the appointment?

The decision to make the appointment is not delegated to the selection panel, but it is this panel that has been through the whole process and given considerable time and effort to it. In appointing the selection panel, the governing body is placing its confidence in a smaller group of governors to put a recommendation before the full governing body. The decision for ratification before the governing body is either to accept or not to accept the panel's recommendation. It only requires a majority. In a corporate governing body, all governors should support the final decision of the majority.

What about confidentiality?

People apply for the vacancy in confidence and governors must respect confidentiality of any information given to them as part of this process, (e.g. in application forms and references). All paper work should be stored for six months following the appointment in case of challenge, and then shredded. Confidentiality also applies to anything spoken during the selection process and interviews and must not be repeated outside these confines.

Are there any special considerations if we short list an internal candidate?

Where there is an internal candidate the governors must ensure there is no discrimination and that all candidates are treated fairly and equally. Any exercises on interview days such as using data should be anonymous.

How do we arrange informal visits to the school?

The majority of governing bodies welcome informal visits to their school, by appointment. It is important that visits for prospective candidates are dealt with professionally and positively and not seen as an inconvenience. It is recommended that the current headteacher or a governor deal with visits to ensure a consistent and impartial approach to all potential applicants. Visits after short listing are at the discretion of the governors who will need to ensure that the decision to allow visits or not does not favour one candidate over others.

Who shall we have on the Appointments Panel? Who is best placed to make a judgement

The Panel must have a minimum of 3 governors, but could include all the governing body. Ideally the selection panel would have between 4 and 8 governors. The remaining governors would then, if necessary, be able to form a panel to hear any complaint made against the recruiting panel (for example discrimination). The governing body may choose to invite other people with expertise to join the selection pane. These would not have a vote. The Director of Peoples Services, or representative, has a right to attend. The law makes no distinction amongst categories of governors for membership of the Panel. It is mandatory that at least one member of the panel is trained in 'Safer Recruitment' and the existing headteacher is excluded from the selection panel.

What might be suitable tasks to include in the interview process for a senior leader?

Some example tasks include:

- Budget analysis
- Performance data analysis
- Presentations on a set topic
- Leading a school assembly
- Lesson observations (or delivering lessons, if the post includes a teaching commitment)
- Teaching
- Meeting with pupils, staff and parents
- In-tray exercises (these are designed to test ability to prioritise, perform under pressure, think strategically and creatively, and pay attention to detail)
- Group discussions
- Formal interview