

Succession Planning

Key themes for school governors

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1. Introduction

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There are some very talented headteachers at work in this country – unfortunately in some areas there are not enough of them to go round.

This can make recruitment a difficult task for governors. In 2006 over 30 per cent of primary and secondary headships had to be re-advertised because no suitable candidate came forward.

Some areas and some types of school face particular problems. And the overall situation is predicted to become more difficult over the next three years.

Why is there a headteacher shortage?

Around 50 per cent of existing heads are over 50 and nearing retirement age. A quarter of headteachers are aged 55+ and more heads are leaving their schools before reaching retirement age.

Some teachers seek equally well-paid and as professionally challenging roles in other branches of education. In recent years, the number of opportunities for talented leaders has proliferated – as Advanced Skills Teachers, or as advisors for local authorities and education consultancies.

New approaches to recruitment and retention need to recognise and respond to these changes if they are to have a realistic chance of success.

The problem goes deeper than just numbers: there is a reluctance among some teachers who have headteacher potential to go for the top job. The fear of losing contact with children is cited by some teachers as a reason not to progress to senior leadership.

On average, teachers are appointed to their first headship in their early forties. But younger school leaders who have the right experience to progress are sometimes perceived as unsuitable for headship because of the short time they have been in the profession.

Some teachers are deterred by the perception of the leadership role as overworked, over-bureaucratic and over-accountable. In other words, for some, headship has an unattractive image. Yet the overwhelming majority of heads are positive about their role, and surveys show that over a third of teachers see themselves as potential school leaders.

What can be done?

In this booklet we set out what can be done by governing bodies to address the issue of leadership succession. It can mean rethinking the recruitment process to appeal to a wider range of candidates; but it can also mean more radical change to the leadership of the school or a look at how leadership is nurtured within a school.

In the following pages you'll find case studies, questions that other governors have raised, and pointers to further information.

The aim is to help you and your governing body meet the challenge – and help you find the right leader for your school.

2. Recruiting a headteacher

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The most important job for the governing body is to define what it is looking for in a new headteacher.

To do this, governors need to be clear about where they want their school to go. Does the school need someone who has experience of leading different types of school, or a head who has specialised in schools that are of a similar size and context to yours?

Will the new head have to manage a major building project, or downsize a school facing falling rolls? Answers to these questions will shape what is said in the job and person specifications. At this early stage, consult your local authority and diocese if appropriate for advice and support about the process for recruiting a headteacher. You may want to consider using a recruitment and selection specialist.

Above all, recruiting a new headteacher is not a job to leave until the day that the current head resigns. Start planning early – don't wait for that resignation letter to arrive. What are your current head's plans for the next few years? Has he or she given any thought to leadership succession?

Attracting potential candidates

The recruitment advertisement needs to inspire someone enough to persuade them to send for an application form, so make sure it celebrates your school and gives accurate contact information.

Think about the practical – such as which phone number to use and when the advert will appear.

Do you want candidates to ring over the weekend and get the school answering machine? How can you avoid that?

When thinking through what needs to go in the application pack, put yourself in the candidate's shoes. Don't put information that might be suitable for parents – it is a new head you are recruiting. Well-constructed, thoughtful information packs send a signal of professionalism to potential candidates. Consider including financial information and self-evaluation data.

Selection

Once you have drawn up a shortlist of candidates to invite to interview, the selection process is about assessing how these individuals would perform when faced with the day-to-day challenges of running your school.

You'll need a checklist of topics and questions that will form the basis of the interview. You may decide to use a range of recruitment tools, such as an in-tray exercise or a presentation. It's important that you understand what you want to learn about candidates from each activity, and that assessment is consistent for all the candidates.

Other points to bear in mind:

- The outgoing headteacher should not take part in the selection process. If a current deputy is applying, do not involve them in decisions about selection criteria.

Resources

The following publications are free to download or order from www.nationalcollege.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday:

Recruiting headteachers and senior leaders outlines step by step guidance on the selection process

Turning heads – taking a marketing approach to leadership recruitment shows how to take a candidate-focused approach to recruiting a headteacher

- Do involve the staff and students, possibly by taking candidates on a tour of the school, or by building staff or student representatives into the selection process.
- Consider the pros and cons of involving staff governors in the recruitment process.
- Make sure enough members of the governing body have had recruitment training – including safer recruitment.
- Contact governors at other schools who have been through the process to get their insights.
- The interview process itself is time-consuming: ensure that your chosen governors can have the time off work.
- The selection process must give a consistent experience to candidates; and the entire panel must see all the candidates.

Recruiting a new headteacher is costly, but you must choose the person you feel confident can drive forward your vision for the school. Further training and development might turn a borderline candidate into just the right person for your school. But if you don't find the right candidate, don't appoint anyone.

The appointment

Once you've made your decision, ring the successful candidate – don't make all the candidates wait around at your school for a decision and don't contact the unsuccessful candidates until your first choice has accepted.

Do take time to give in-depth feedback to unsuccessful candidates and ask them what they thought of the process.

Ensure all necessary checks are completed on the candidate, and make sure a contract is issued as soon as possible. Candidates will not resign from their existing posts until they have the contractual offer of employment.

Induction

After the appointment the chair of governors should make early contact and then keep in regular contact with the new head.

Don't wait until after the appointment is made to plan your induction process. Think about mentoring – this could be by an experienced head, or an experienced leader with knowledge of the education sector. It should not be the outgoing head from your school.

Find out what induction and mentoring your Local Authority offers for headteachers; and if they are a first-time head, encourage them to sign up for National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (National College) Early Headship Provision, which includes a flexible grant of £1,300 and a place on the development programme for new headteachers, New Visions.

Make sure the new head is informed and involved in any substantive decisions that need to be taken between appointment and taking up post, such as key appointments or building projects.

Resources

Build a job description or download a template from the section for governors in www.nationalcollege.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday

Look on the NGA website for their leaflet on successful recruitment – www.nga.org.uk

Resources

Make sure you follow safer recruitment practice. Find the details at:
www.nationalcollege.org.uk/saferrecruitment

Evaluate the process

If you make a successful appointment, identify and record what went well and what could be improved and use the information for your next senior appointment. Be prepared to share what worked with other governing bodies.

If the process was not successful you need to discover why. Get some external advice before re-advertising; and try to discover why people who asked for information did not follow through with an application.

Do not just repeat the same process: if it didn't work the first time, it won't work the second time.

3. Identifying and managing leadership talent

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Resources

Download or order a copy of **Greenhouse schools** from www.nationalcollege.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday which provides insights by headteachers of how they identified and developed talent at their schools

In other professions, and in the private sector, it's considered important to pinpoint future leaders and nurture them early in their careers. In the past this has not been a priority for schools, who may have good policies on professional development for teachers, but lacked policies focused on leadership succession.

Developing new leaders, encouraging the cautious or reluctant, spotting potential even before the individuals themselves are aware of it; these things will be critical in future leadership development.

And young teachers won't be keen to wait 20 years – the average apprenticeship of heads in the past – to get their hands on the top job.

As part of its local solutions succession planning strategy, National College has piloted schemes around the country aimed at bringing on new talent. Initiatives include:

- Schools joining forces to devise their own in-house leadership training programmes for middle leaders. Programmes are developed and led by existing headteachers, ensuring their credibility.
- Job swaps between schools for a period to give individuals experience of leadership roles in different types of school.
- Deputies and assistant heads seconded to neighbouring schools to help tackle a specific area – curriculum development or ICT strategy, for example. The other school gets an injection of expertise while the individual gains more leadership experience which he or she will bring back into their own school.

- Local authority or diocesan-led projects offering leadership training to staff from several schools.

Here are some issues to think about:

- How do you currently identify talent in your school? Is there a structured system? How do you support talented individuals once identified?
- What opportunities are there for potential leaders to experience leadership situations – in your own school and others?
- What opportunities are there for deputies and assistant heads to gain experience of working with the governing body?
- Can succession planning – a strategy to identify and develop talented leaders – be incorporated into performance management for your headteacher?
- What guidance is available in your school for middle leaders about progression to headship?
- How prepared are you to enter into agreements with other schools – work shadowing arrangements, temporary job swaps between deputies or assistant heads, secondments – in order to give aspiring leaders more experience?
- What advice and support can your local authority or diocesan body give?

Resources

Go for it – reasons to be a headteacher sets out compelling reasons to progress to headship. The accompanying DVD includes case studies of headteachers and what they enjoy about their role. The publication and film clips can be downloaded or ordered from www.nationalcollege.org.uk/successionplanning

Dartford grammar school, Kent

Dartford grammar school has a strong track record in spotting and developing its leaders at an early stage.

Teachers can gain an insight into top-level school leadership with a year's secondment to the senior management team. They participate in decision-making alongside the full team members and the experience is linked to their performance management.

The school provides aspiring leaders with experience of the wider education systems through exchanges and study visits abroad, via a county-wide leadership network and the EU-funded learning teacher network of 19 countries.

Jayne Maidment joined the school as an NQT and was appointed head of modern languages in her third year – Dartford is a language college and she oversees a department offering ten languages.

As part of a secondment to the management team, she helped plan the new curriculum and develop resources for KS4, working alongside the assistant head, and took over the running of the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma for years 7 to 11. International experience included attending a schools leaders' conference in America.

In terms of identifying those who would benefit from accelerated development, headteacher Tony Smith says he looks for:

"People who can immediately see the big picture and who look for ways to learn. They are willing to take risks and willing to learn from their mistakes. They actively look for feedback and constructive criticism."

4. Considering co-headship

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Co-headships are still relatively rare – there are fewer than 50 such arrangements in England – and many people are unsure how they operate. But when school governors are willing to consider the option they may increase the appeal of a vacancy.

Top tips

Ask your local authority contact if there are local examples of job shares or co-headships you can visit

Some local authorities welcome joint applications on the grounds of equality of opportunity. Such arrangements can attract applicants who may not have previously considered headship by offering an enhanced work-life balance, or by meeting the needs of candidates with young families.

In co-headship, the role of headteacher is shared between more than one person. Where two people share the role, they might both work full time, each with contracts for 0.5 headteacher and 0.5 deputy; or they might both work part-time, and together make up 1.0 headteacher role.

How it works

You can't split the day-to-day running down the middle – whichever head is there at the time deals with the problem. Workload can be split strategically – so that one head oversees the curriculum, for example – but both are accountable and have the power to make decisions when required.

And joint headship will fail if there is not solid trust between the two heads – once one has taken a decision the other must back their partner.

There needs to be excellent communication between all parties.

As far as recruiting two heads goes, candidates should be interviewed separately and must pass as individuals, even though they will have to work as a team. Adverts could make it clear that the governors are willing to consider a co-headship arrangement.

Potential gains to the school

Besides having two brains to do one job? This kind of leadership puts the concept of collaboration into practice and can make collaboration with other schools – and agencies – easier, too.

Two professionals of equal status working alongside each other is stimulating for them – they will challenge each other, which is good for the school.

It should also mean more time for them to support the professional development of other staff in coaching and mentoring. That, in turn, builds leadership capacity in the school, bringing on the leaders of the future.

And co-headship can be a useful way to hold on to experienced heads who might otherwise leave in search of new challenges. Splitting the role with another individual gives them more time for leadership roles outside school – as School Improvement Partners (SIPs), or in other national or LA advisory roles.

Resources

National College's publication Co-headship can be downloaded from www.nationalcollege.org.uk/modelsofheadship

Watch or download a short film about two examples of co-heads from Research TV at www.research-tv.com/stories/society/twoheads

Hurst Green Infant School, Oxted, Surrey

Hurst Green Infant School has had a co-headship arrangement in place for over four years.

Seeking a better work-life balance, the headteacher, Lin Driscoll put the idea of a shared role to her deputy, Jean Atkins, who was keen to trial the idea.

It was then put to the governors who, after some initial reservations, agreed to it. Staff were also supportive.

A survey was carried out with parents to gauge their views and they too responded favourably.

The two heads now split the working week between them. Lin works as head for three days and Jean as head for two, reverting to deputy for the other three. Jean is also a class teacher so when she is head, her class work is undertaken by her job-share partner.

Initially the arrangement was tightly timetabled and the information as to who would be headteacher on which day was displayed on the door of the head's room for parents to see.

"The organisation was reviewed regularly so that we could ensure best practice," Lin says. "The arrangement we have now, where we overlap for one morning each week, enables us to jointly attend some meetings or plan strategically together."

The way responsibilities are shared has also evolved.

"The practice has developed over time and although we both need to have knowledge of most things, there are areas where a natural delineation of responsibility has occurred," Lin says.

Jean adds: "Although we both work on all areas of headship, because I am a class teacher as well, I am able to get first-hand experience of the effectiveness of new initiatives in teaching and learning. Lin has taken a lead on some strategic issues, such as the business plan for the new Children's Centre and, initially, budgetary issues. Now that we have half a day overlap time we are able to work on strategic planning together."

Both heads attend governors' meetings and have half a vote each – "Although in practice as we have the same vision and aims for the school we have always agreed on all issues," says Jean.

Jean enjoys combining teaching with the main leadership role and, although she has done NPQH, does not necessarily see herself moving from co-headship to a full headteacher role. Co-headship brings clear, credible benefits to the school, she believes.

"If you get the right two people it can make a very strong team which is in the school's interests. It is hard work but it's also less stressful for the individuals working in partnership as they can support each other.

"From the governors' point of view, they get double the ideas and double the creativity coming into the school."

Lin adds: "The model of co-headship in this school has worked particularly well because of the unique arrangement and strong shared vision.

As a new headteacher Jean also found the mentoring side of the shared arrangement invaluable.

"Over time we have used our separate strengths to lead in areas where we naturally excel. As a team we complement each other and this has brought broader expertise to the school leadership team. We have supported each other at challenging times and try to ensure that we keep each other informed on a need to know basis."

"From a personal perspective I now enjoy the job much more than I used to as headship can be a lonely place. I considered early retirement at the time of the joint arrangement, despite my commitment to the school, but now feel this is not for me."

"I know from colleagues that other headteachers would remain in the profession if similar arrangements were more common."

5. Exploring federations and executive headships

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A headteacher resignation could be a catalyst for a governing body to explore which leadership model will be appropriate for their school for the coming years. One route might mean federating with other schools.

A federation is a group of schools that work in partnership in order to raise standards with some degree of shared governance.

Different types of federation are:

- **Hard federations** – two or more schools under a single governing body and an executive head
- **Soft federations** – an informal arrangement in which two or more governing bodies share some elements of governance and set up a joint strategic committee with some delegated powers.

There are several practical reasons why federating can be in the schools' interests. It can put an existing collaboration on a formal footing; weak schools can improve by federating with stronger schools, or two schools with falling rolls can link up to stay viable.

Federation can enrich pupil learning because teachers and support staff move between schools, sharing their knowledge and expertise.

Smaller schools will have access to more facilities or share staff such as a school business manager. As a unit, a federation has greater bargaining power when it comes to raising finance or negotiating with the local authority.

Resources

Case studies, benefits and examples of federations can be found at www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/federations and www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/tools/schoolhandbooks/federations/

Executive heads

Hard federations are led by an executive head who has overall responsibility for all the schools involved. The executive head will often focus on strategic issues – a Building Schools for the Future bid, liaison with other partners and agencies – while the day-to-day running of the school is delegated to headteachers or assistant heads. But the executive head remains accountable to the governors for the school's performance and for standards of teaching and learning.

Besides sharing the burdens of headship between individuals and generally making the job more strategic, the executive head model can also be a way of retaining an existing headteacher who might otherwise be looking for new challenges elsewhere.

Other points to consider:

- Will federating improve standards in the schools involved?
- Collaboration has to be worked at: the self-interest of individual schools can come to the fore when changes are on the table.
- How will multiple sites be managed?
- Will staff be happy to move between schools? Will it be confusing for pupils?
- Who drives decision making within the federation?
- The process of federation is not instantaneous. Governors should think about the time involved and set targets for when their federation should begin to achieve results.

Resources

National College has carried out research into federations. This can be downloaded free from www.nationalcollege.org.uk/modelsofheadship

Go to www.nationalcollege.org.uk/nextpractice for examples of pilot projects where headteachers have extended their leadership beyond the school to other schools, children's services and community organisations

City of Leeds Learning Federation

Liz Talmadge had been a headteacher for 12 years before becoming executive head of the City of Leeds Learning Federation. It encompasses two inner city secondary schools in a hard federation – City of Leeds School and Primrose High School. Both are in challenging circumstances.

Liz is also steering a PFI project to create a 0 –19 through school, incorporating the two secondaries, plus a primary, an early years centre and nursery in the same building.

Two headteachers deal with the day-to-day running of the secondary schools, while Liz focuses on the development and marketing of the federation and its vision.

“Essentially, the role I’m playing is to do the things that headteachers should not have to do because they should be focused on learning, teaching and raising standards,” she says.

One of the things Liz discovered is that the concept of a federation as laid down by statute is a different animal from the one now emerging in practice. “This is a continually evolving

organisation. Within that complex picture, we are working to redesign the role of governance and headship. Working out the governance aspect has probably been the biggest challenge so far.”

Although the changes are testing everyone, the vast majority of staff see the potential of the federation, says Liz, who says her role is also bringing a new dimension to the staff’s professional development. Being both apart from and in touch with teaching and learning in the schools, she says, puts her in a good position to mentor and coach other staff.

6. Retaining headteachers

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In some cases, the best way to secure leadership in the school in the short term is for the current headteacher to stay in post. This will give governors time to clarify what they need in a new headteacher.

Retaining your headteacher can mean making the job attractive and stimulating enough to keep them engaged. It can also mean affording them professional development opportunities or the chance to gain experience outside the school on secondments or as advisors to local or national bodies.

Ensuring your school leaders enjoy a reasonable work-life balance also comes into play here. The most dedicated heads are liable to become jaded by the pressures of the job and the effect it has on their family and personal lives. Enabling the head to share leadership responsibilities with other senior leaders is one way to ease the strain, as well as being a good professional development opportunity for an aspiring head. But the right strategy for work-life balance has to be tailored to the needs of the individual and the best interests of the school.

The demands of being a headteacher are great but there are still plenty of people who find the job immensely rewarding – in the Ipsos MORI State of School Leadership research commissioned by DCSF and National College, 90 per cent of heads said that they gain real satisfaction from their work. The challenge is to enable them to keep that level of satisfaction in their job, rather than have to look for it elsewhere.

Top tips

Allow your head and senior leaders to take up opportunities to work outside your school

Review work-life balance arrangements regularly: what suits one individual one year may not be appropriate for the long-term

Resources

Retaining school leaders provides a guide to keeping talented leaders engaged. Download or order free copies from www.nationalcollege.org.uk/successionplanning

The Teachers Pensions website sets out options available to headteachers and pension scheme members: www.teacherspensions.co.uk

See also recruitment and retention advice at www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/staffingandprofessionaldevelopment/recruitment

NGA's advice to governing bodies on work-life balance can be seen on the NGA website – www.nga.org.uk

Retaining an experienced special school headteacher

Yasmin had been in post as headteacher at a school for children with specific learning difficulties for three years.

Since joining she had brought the school out of serious weaknesses and dealt with significant long-standing child protection issues.

But Yasmin began to feel that her life was entirely about the school, the students and the job. She had a five-year-old child and worried that she was no longer doing a good job of being a mother.

Despite loving the job, she decided to resign, though she had no role to go to.

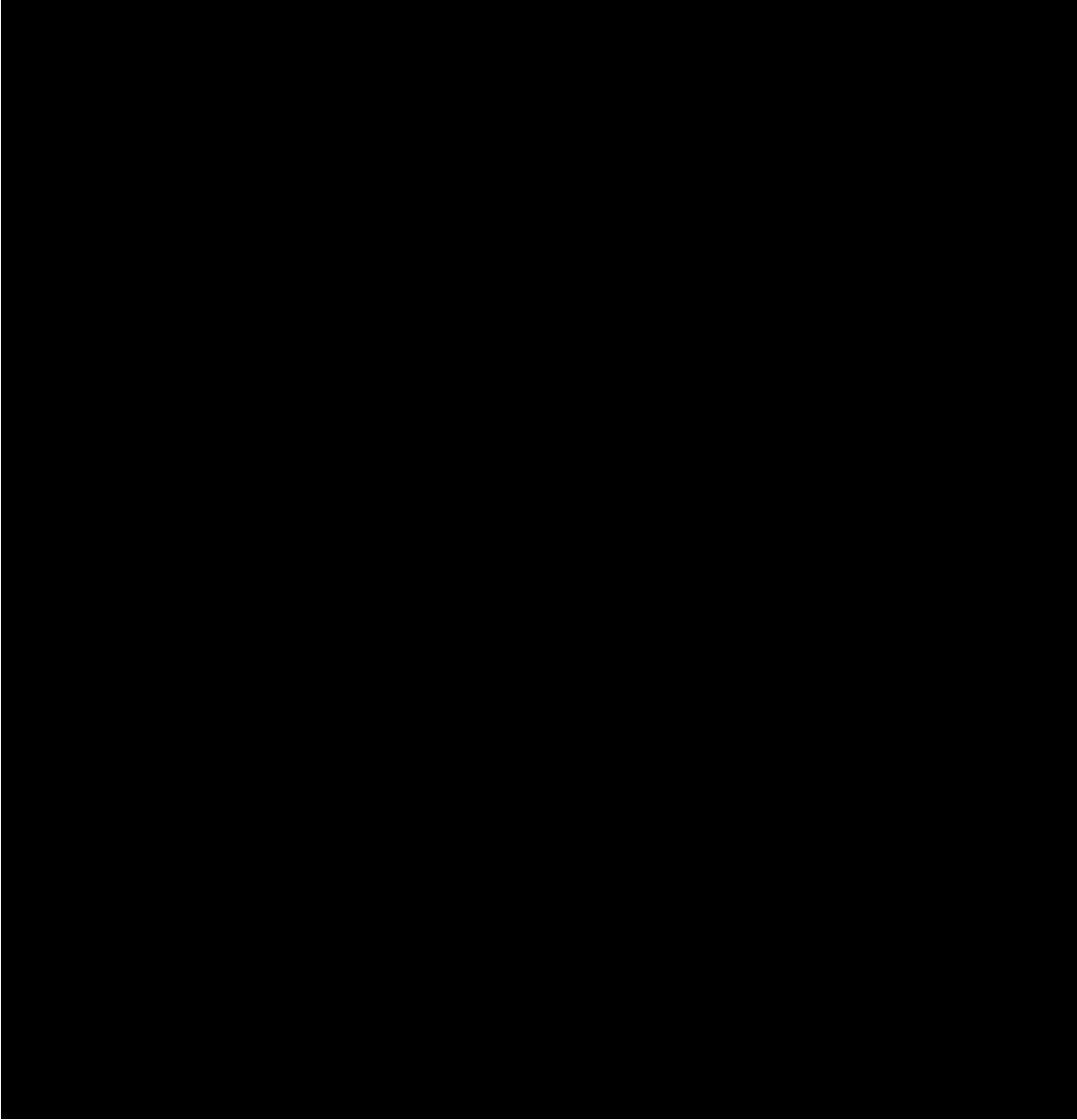
The governing body decided to take action to keep Yasmin in post. They offered her the option of working at

home one day a week, allowing her time to take her child to school and pick him up on that day. They were concerned that if the head went to a four-day contract, she would inevitably be paid for four days yet do five days' work, so working from home was a fairer arrangement.

As a result, Yasmin withdrew her resignation and continued to lead the school for another further two years, before moving on to another headship in a larger special school.

7. Conclusions and next steps

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The leadership shortage will not be resolved overnight. But work needs to start now if the anticipated problems are to be avoided. Several schools, local authorities, diocesan bodies and others are already taking steps, many of them supported by National College.

Top Tips

Talk to your existing head about succession planning and ways to develop the leadership potential of the staff in your school

If you already work in partnership with another school, would creating an executive head role offer any possibilities?

Resources

The NCOGS publication, **Succession Breeds Success** is free to download from www.nationalcollege.org.uk/successionplanning and outlines how to develop succession planning for the governing body itself

The headteacher shortage is a national problem: it is unlikely to be solved by schools working in isolation

- Think about actively identifying talent and about how teachers with leadership potential can be nurtured by the school.
- Look at giving opportunities for potential leaders to experience leadership situations – in and outside the school.
- Look at the work-life balance of your current headteacher. Is the demand on their personal and family life likely to make them want to move on in the near future?
- Put succession planning on the agenda for governors' meetings regularly. The staffing committee could look at the issues, or alternatively, create a working party on the topic.
- Talk to other governing bodies, local authority, diocese and partners about their approaches to leadership development.

The challenges that governing bodies face are to widen the pool of leadership talent and to bring on new leaders and to offer children the best possible leadership for their learning. Schools will be better placed to meet these challenges if they are willing to collaborate, share expertise and overcome historical rivalries to work in partnership.

8. Frequently asked questions

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Why is there a shortage of headteachers?

Around 50 per cent of existing heads are over 50 and nearing retirement age, which is creating a potentially serious problem. There has also been a fall in the number of teachers in their late 30s to 40s, so the pool of potential heads is smaller.

So will it take us longer to recruit a new head?

Potentially, yes. In 2006–7, 37 per cent of primary headships had to be readvertised.

How urgent is the problem?

The shortage is predicted to be at its worst between 2009 and 2011. So governing bodies need to be thinking now about how to identify new leaders, before a resignation letter from the current headteacher drops in the in-tray.

Headship is a good job. What puts people off?

Some see the role as weighed down by bureaucracy and accountability. Others feel they can get the same professional satisfaction – and salary – in other branches of education.

However, plenty of heads enjoy the job immensely and would not choose another career. Research also shows that deputies and assistant heads who are given a taste of headship – through secondment or by standing in for their head – are more likely to go on to apply for permanent headship. It indicates that the reality of the job is more enjoyable than its image suggests.

What is the Government doing?

The succession challenge is a priority for National College, who have received funding from DCSF to work with Local Authorities, dioceses, governors and others to develop local solutions appropriate to the local context. These include developing approaches to nurturing leadership talent and supporting teachers progress to headship.

In addition, NPQH, the headship qualification, is being redesigned to meet the changing needs of schools.

Isn't recruitment a job for individual governing bodies to handle?

To develop new leaders in sufficient numbers, schools and LAs need to work in collaboration. Initiatives such as headteacher shadowing schemes and leadership experience in different types and phases of school need the cooperation of groups of schools across an area.

But why should we help other schools to nurture leaders? What's in it for our children?

Collaboration is the watchword across the system, and those schools that continue to plough their own furrow are ultimately likely to find themselves at a disadvantage. By working with other schools and other partners to grow new leaders, the quality of leadership should improve and the pool of leaders increase, which will ultimately benefit all the children in that community.

If there is a shortage of heads then it may cost schools more money to attract the right candidate. If school funding is not going up how can this be achieved?

Developing a candidate-focused approach can help attract applications for a headship vacancy. This might include outlining the induction support available to the new headteacher, together with ways that the governing body intends to help them maintain a positive work-life balance.

Schools will need to review where they are spending their resources. They may need to make leadership a funding priority. But salary is not the defining issue it once was – the PricewaterhouseCoopers report on school leadership (published January 2007) showed that heads were not unhappy with their pay levels, but were concerned about workload.

If we develop leaders ourselves isn't there a danger that we limit the talent pool and deter external candidates from applying?

Identifying and developing talented leaders will benefit children in your school and in other schools. Developing talent from within is a long-term response to a problem that is set to worsen between now and 2009.

How do we identify potential leadership talent?

Research carried out for National College in more than 70 schools in the North West and the West Midlands suggests there are particular qualities that mark out teachers of leadership calibre. They include good communication skills, having vision and the ability to garner the respect of both staff and pupils. People skills are highly important.

Define 'people skills'

By people skills we mean enthusiasm, a sense of fun and knowing how to make people feel valued and trusted. A good role model, a team worker, but someone who also has the ability to inspire others.

How important is emotional intelligence?

Very, according to research which indicates that as much as 85 per cent of successful leadership depends on having emotional intelligence skills – ie, the ability to recognise, control and manage one's own emotions and those of other people.

Isn't staff professional development the responsibility of the headteacher?

Bringing on new talent may not seem like a key issue for governors because the head has operational responsibility for CPD. But governing bodies are responsible for standards and developing talent will have an impact on the teaching, learning and overall ethos of the school.

Many new heads have never been exposed to governors and don't understand governance or the role of the governing body.

Governing bodies can encourage their current headteachers to give earlier experience to school leaders of working with governing bodies, for example, by asking deputies to work with one of the committees such as curriculum and assessment committee; or asking middle leaders to present findings on a particular project to governors.

How do you start a conversation with a head about who might succeed them? Wouldn't you be accused of trying to encourage them to go?

The governing body has a responsibility for the standards and future of the school. If it loses all senior leaders at once that could leave the school in difficulties. Succession needs to be carefully planned. Avoid talking about the age of the current head, but try broaching the subject of their successor through performance management – where does your headteacher want to be in five years' time?

What else can governors do to identify talent?

Look for potential in candidates at other levels. For example, when recruiting deputies, try to establish whether they have the potential for headship.

You can also ensure succession planning is on the agenda regularly, and encourage the head to look at leadership development for even very junior staff.

Co-headship sounds interesting, but are two heads more expensive than one?

Yes – and no. One school replaced a very experienced and expensive head with two deputies who were also on high salaries. But when the deputies became co-heads their salaries were not as high as the previous head while the new deputies were lower down the leadership scale. However, cost shouldn't be the determining factor: co-headship may or may not save money but it may be the best option for the school.

We have been without a headteacher for a term. If we federate with a neighbouring school, that would solve our recruitment problem, wouldn't it?

Federating just to appoint an executive head is not in itself a solution to recruitment problems. Just because your school can't find a new head is not a reason to link up with another if you have no other justification for collaborating and no history of partnership of any kind. The driver should be what is best for pupils and parents.

We'd rather keep our current head than find a new one. What kind of opportunities can we offer our head to keep them enthused?

You can allow the head to take up a role outside school on a secondment or part-time basis with the local authority or a national body. Several serving heads have become SIPs (school improvement partners), for example, advising other headteachers on ways to improve their school. One of the positive side-effects is that the SIP head often brings new ideas back into his or her own school.

But what will happen to our school if our head or other senior leaders are working with other schools?

Your staff should return refreshed, reinvigorated and with new ideas to apply in school. Turn their temporary absence into an opportunity for others in school to act up and take on new responsibilities.

Why work with other schools?

There is a wider issue: if every school and every governing body continues to focus narrowly on what they see as their own interests, the system will come to a standstill. The role of head will be less and less appealing so leadership talent will head off in other directions. Collaboration is essential if we are to develop leadership talent in sufficient depth for the future.

Will governors need support and training to enable them to do their bit in all this?

Yes. Governors need advice, guidance and support, and this is available from local authorities, NGA, dioceses and other partners. National College has online resources for governors on succession planning at www.nationalcollege.org.uk/successionplanning.

Both the NGA and the National College want to see properly prepared governing bodies driving the process of leadership succession. Governing bodies who value professional development for their staff should see their own CPD as equally important.

The National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services is committed to excellence and dedicated to inclusiveness. We exist to develop and inspire great leaders of schools, early years settings and children's services. We share the same ambition – to make a positive difference to the lives of children and young people.

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