



## National CPD Team

### **Headteacher Appointment Procedures** Survey Report and Advice August 2005

**This paper considers three issues:**

1. What procedures do local authorities currently use in appointing headteachers to schools within their areas?
2. What issues arise from the procedures adopted?
3. How might these issues be addressed?

## **Introduction**

The aim of the National CPD Team is to lead and support the development of world-class CPD in Scotland. This paper is the second in a series of occasional publications which aim to enrich ongoing discussion, to clarify concerns, to identify possible solutions and suggest future actions.

This report is based on a survey of a sample of eleven authorities across Scotland. The sample covers all parts of the country, and authorities of different kinds – rural, city, large, small, central and remote.

## **Summary**

It is hoped that this paper will offer information and guidance to authorities for their consideration, as to how the Standard for Headship may be used within the headteacher appointment process, as well as addressing the actions that could be taken in relation to other issues that arise in connection with this process.

The section that follows sets out the immediate context within which headteacher appointment procedures are being considered at both national and local authority level. The next section describes in some detail the procedures currently in use in headteacher appointments in a substantial sample of local authorities in Scotland. There then follows a section in which issues arising from the present context and the procedures currently in use in headteacher appointments are identified. The final section suggests some practical steps that authorities could take in addressing these issues.

## **Background**

The document 'Ambitious Excellent Schools' published in 2004 by the Scottish Executive Education Department stated that the Executive would:

- revise the Standard for Headship during 2005 to ensure it continues to reflect shared leadership priorities in education
- establish new routes to achieve the Standard for Headship during 2006 to provide choice and alternatives to the Scottish Qualification for Headship (SQH)
- recommend new and more rigorous procedures for selecting headteachers to take effect from the end of 2005

In addition, the Executive has stated that achievement of, or participation in, the Scottish Qualification for Headship should be mandatory for anyone appointed to the post of headteacher in a school in Scotland from August 2005.

Concern has been expressed by some teachers and authority officers in relation to the introduction of mandatory status. There are fears that there may be an insufficient number of qualified candidates, and that other excellent candidates, not qualified through SQH, may be excluded. Although there is a clear acknowledgement of the excellent contribution that SQH programmes have made to leadership development in Scotland, authorities also question whether successful completion of SQH is in itself a sufficient guarantee that a candidate is ready to take up headship at that point.

The Minister has responded positively to these concerns in the letter from the Executive (17 June 2005) to Directors of Education, in which he stated that they would have discretion to make a judgment that a candidate was operating at a level equivalent to the Standard, and to appoint that candidate to the post of headteacher, even if he or she did not possess the Scottish Qualification for Headship. While this discretion has been welcomed, it may create

difficulties for directors in situations where the Standard itself has not been used as part of the headteacher appointment process.

## **1. Headteacher appointment procedures currently used**

### **Administration.**

The issue and reception of information to and from candidates was dealt with for the most part by each council's corporate personnel service or department. While many councils had started with a personnel section within, dedicated to its own education service, only 2 of the sample contacted retained this arrangement.

### **Information issued to candidates.**

All councils issued a job specification, person specification and general information about the school and the authority to candidates, along with the application form, although one did not allow the issue of the person spec to candidates. While some also issued more detailed documentation such as the school development plan and standards and quality report, others regarded this as research which is properly part of the candidates' preparation for interview, and indeed a sign of the quality of the candidates' commitment to that process. Some authorities, especially those with schools in remote areas, issued quite detailed information on the area itself, covering issues such as accommodation, transport, population and arrangements for relocation.

One council, concerned about the very small number of candidates applying for headteacher posts, had begun consciously to market such posts through the quality of the presentation of the information it was sending out. It had extended the range of information that it issued, including information on plans for refurbishment and new build for schools, as well as on the operation of its Learning Communities. The thinking behind this was not only to make posts as attractive as possible, but also to show that headteachers would be supported in post, and not left feeling isolated. The council also created a virtual tour of a school for which it was advertising the post of headteacher, and made this available through the internet

### **Visits to schools.**

Councils generally made such visits available to candidates, who could choose to participate if they so wished. In such cases, the visit was solely for the purpose of informing the candidates. There was, however, one instance where information from the visit was fed into the selection process. In this case each of the candidates was taken on a conducted tour of the school by two senior pupils, during the course of which each candidate also met a small group of staff for a cup of tea and a chat. The staff and pupils involved were not asked to comment directly on the candidates, or to make any judgment about their suitability; they were however asked to comment on how well the visit had gone. These comments were made available to the appointments committee.

### **Information sought from candidates.**

All councils used a standard application form, but they varied in their attitude to other forms of information. Some regarded the submission of a CV as unacceptable, regarding it as important that all relevant information should be presented in a standard way. Others tolerated CV's - candidates could submit them if they wished. One council, in the process of revising its application form, regarded the submission of a CV as potentially helpful; this council asked candidates to supplement their application form with a personal statement

outlining why they were interested in the post.

### **References**

All councils took up references, but the point at which they did so varied, with some doing so only for short leeted candidates. In one instance, the council sought references only for the candidate recommended for appointment, prior to endorsing that recommendation. One council expressed concern at the wide variation in the range of information it received in references for different candidates, and was questioning the value of references in the selection process for this reason.

### **SQH and the Standard for Headship.**

All councils regarded a candidate's achievement of, or current participation in, SQH as a significant and positive factor, but none would exclude someone regarded as a good candidate who did not have this qualification. Some took the view that previous experience suggested that possession of this qualification did not necessarily mean that a candidate was ready for headship. In focus group discussions all welcomed the fact that the issue of flexible routes to the Standard was now being addressed.

The Standard for Headship itself, as a statement of competences, was not widely used. In one instance, it was being used as a template against which to check all the information which a candidate had provided; in this way it was used as an assessment tool in the leeting process. In another case, it was used as a framework from which interview questions could be derived. One council had established a working party to consider how its appointment procedures in respect of headteacher appointments could be improved; as part of this the working party will consider how the Standard might be used, and whether and how 'emotional intelligence' could be assessed.

### **Leeting**

Practice varied widely in a number of regards, as noted below:

#### **(a) Long Leets.**

Some councils interviewed a long leet of candidates prior to recommending a short leet and informing the school board of this; in some cases, councils stated that this depended on the number of candidates. There is, however, a sense of practice evolving here beyond the original function of the long leet, which was to cut the number of very good candidates down to a number which could reasonably be subject to an in-depth interview with a larger and more diverse appointment committee. Where a long leet interview was carried out, it was usually conducted by a group comprising education professionals, sometimes with input from elected members; the school board was not usually represented at this stage. In this situation, the focus of the interview tended to be more on the professional readiness and competence of the candidate for headship, rather than on the 'fit' of the candidate to the specific school, although this was a factor that was taken into consideration. Where a short leet followed this process, the appointment committee was often preponderantly, and in one case exclusively, made up of elected representatives and school board members, with an officer present as an observer, but with a casting vote should the committee be evenly split in its decision.

#### **(b) Short leets.**

In other councils, a short leet of candidates was drawn up, and presented to the school board. In such cases, the leet was created by two or more officers, sometimes with input from elected members, and representatives of the school board. In all

cases, the appointment committee conformed to statutory requirements.

### **Assessment Techniques**

(a) Interview.

In all cases interviews, whether long leet or short leet, lasted 40 - 60 minutes. Interviews were based on questions formulated by the appointment committee; in doing this, committees in some councils made reference to documents such as 'How Good Is Our School' and the Standard for Headship. The same questions were asked of all candidates with supplementary questions for clarification being allowed.

(c) Presentation.

Presentations were generally of 10 minutes in length; practice varied as to whether candidates were notified in advance of the day of interview of the topic to be addressed. Where no advance notice was given, candidates were asked to arrive 30 minutes before the start of the interview itself. They were then given the topic, and the opportunity to prepare their 10-minute presentation. Councils that adopted this approach did so not only because they thought that this approach would test how well candidates could think 'on their feet', but also because they felt confident that the presentation that they would hear would be entirely the candidate's own work.

(d) Supplementary Interview.

One council carried out four supplementary interviews on the day of the school visit, which candidates were obliged to attend. On the day of the visit, each candidate met individually with each of four interviewers. Each interview lasted for about 15 minutes, and was focused on a single issue - quality improvement, for example. Each interviewer then recorded his or her view of the candidate's knowledge and competence in relation to the issue under discussion. These records were then gathered for each candidate - they were not collated into a single assessment - and made available to the appointment committee as part of the information it could consider in reaching a recommendation for appointment.

(e) ' Problem' Scenario.

In one council, the appointment committee had the option of giving the candidates a scenario to consider. The task for the candidates was to outline to the committee the problem contained in the scenario and how it could be addressed and resolved. In this case the candidates would be unaware of the scenario until the day of interview, when they would have 30 minutes to prepare their response to it, and 10 minutes to present this response to the committee.

(f) Written Exercise.

Another council gave its appointment committees the opportunity to require candidates to submit a piece of written work on a given educational topic, the work to be done under timed and supervised conditions.

(g) Group Discussion.

The same council offered the appointment committee the option to meet with all the candidates leeted, and to conduct a group discussion.

### **School-board Involvement**

All councils met their statutory obligations to involve school boards in the process of

headteacher selection and appointment. Some went beyond this by involving school board representatives in areas other than the formal interview - in the leeting process, or in adding one or two 'possible' candidates to a list of three or four 'definite' candidates identified by officers in the leeting process. School board members were also given training in the selection procedures to be followed, as and when this was required.

## **2. What issues arise from these procedures?**

(a) The rigour and extent of the process.

The extensiveness of the process applied to headteacher appointments varies widely between authorities. The formal interview and presentation, however, are common to the selection processes followed in all councils, and are the main means by which candidates are assessed. There is a general feeling that the process is not sufficiently rigorous or extensive, even where councils have put other processes in place.

(b) The balance between preparation and assessment for headship

The general feeling that the selection process is not sufficiently extensive noted above gives rise to the question of how extensive and rigorous the assessment of candidates should be. In industry and commerce senior managers may be considered for appointment in a sector other than the one in which they are currently employed. In such cases firms may take the view that they are not completely certain of the real value and worth of qualifications and experience gained elsewhere, and so a very extensive assessment of candidates is necessary. There may be a parallel in education to the extent that local authorities, some much smaller now than they were before 1996, may now have many applications from candidates whom they feel that they do not know as employees, developed and supported 'in house', yet are continuing to use the techniques and procedures that were developed under the much larger regions. This tends to argue in favour of a much more extensive assessment process. Balancing this however, is the fact that there now exists a national Standard for Headship that did not exist previously; arguably, the more confidence authorities have that candidates have prepared themselves for and met this standard, the less they will feel the need to assess the competence and professionalism of candidates. They will surely though always wish to satisfy themselves that the successful candidate is well suited to the school and authority to which he or she is being appointed.

(c) SQH and the Standard for Headship.

Successful completion of SQH is not seen as guaranteeing that the candidate is ready for headship. Councils all made the point that they would not exclude from consideration or appointment someone whom they saw as a good candidate who had not completed, or who was not currently involved in, the SQH. This gave rise to the further view that there should be ways other than through the SQH by which candidates could meet the Standard for Headship. Many councils welcomed that this issue will be addressed through the development of alternative routes to achieving the Standard.

The Standard for Headship itself was little used in the selection process. A few councils however, had realised its potential and were using it in a variety of ways. There is considerable potential for further development here.

(d) The balance of professional and non-professional input.

The view was often expressed that the right balance between professional and non-

professional input to the process of selection has not been struck. In some cases the long leet was explicitly seen as a means by which the professional input to the process could be given more prominence. Particular concern was expressed about the nature and extent of the contribution of the school board. Again however, this was seen as a question of balance; it was not suggested that there should be no school board input at all.

An apparently conflicting trend of thinking in some councils was to consider whether, and if so how and to what extent, other stakeholders such as staff and pupils could be involved in the selection process.

(e) The number of candidates applying for headteacher posts.

The low number of candidates applying for headteacher posts gave much cause for concern in both the primary and secondary sectors, although this was particularly evident in the primary sector. A variety of views were expressed as to why this should be - the effect of the recent job sizing exercise on depute headteacher and headteacher posts, the perceived isolation of headship, the high degree of public accountability and exposure, were all advanced as possible reasons, although no council reported having researched this. It was striking that all councils, regardless of size and location, shared this concern.

One council had taken the view that headteacher posts required to be better marketed, and had taken steps to do this in a variety of ways.

(f) The rigidity of headteacher appointments.

One council had created a headteacher post designed to operate at the level of the authority, to support headteachers in schools. It was reported that this had worked well.

A number of councils expressed their view that it would be beneficial to all to be able to move headteachers around within the authority; current practice of appointment to a specific school does not permit this. One authority is currently employing its depute headteachers on a new form of contract which appoints DHTs to the authority rather than to a specific school, so that they can be moved between schools as required.

(g) Training.

While all councils offered training to members of appointment committees, this was not always required for elected members, as it was for officers of the council. Training was offered to school boards as and when required. The nature of the training offered in almost all cases was mainly procedural, designed to ensure that the process was known, fair and not open to challenge on the grounds that it was flawed in some way. Two councils stated that members of appointment committees were given training in recruitment, selection and all assessment methods.

### 3.Suggested areas for action

#### National level

The revised Standard for Headship is currently under consultation.

Further consultation on flexible routes to achieving the standard will be published over the next few months

Headteacher appointment procedures are already under consideration as part of the programme set out in the document 'Ambitious Excellent Schools'.

#### Authority level

The suggested areas for action set out below relate to the short to medium term, that is until national guidelines are issued in respect of headteacher appointment procedures, and alternative approaches to achieving the Standard for Headship have been established.

- Raise awareness of the Standard for Headship for all involved in headteacher appointments - councillors, school board members, headteachers, future applicants.
- Give training to all involved in the appointment of headteachers, covering
  - the process
  - assessment techniques and methods
  - analysis of information
  - use of the Standard for Headship
- Map information supplied by candidates against the Standard for Headship as part of the leeting and assessment process
- Revise and restructure documentation to reflect the Standard (an inter-authority working group could undertake this task)
  - application forms
  - candidate reference forms
- Consider whether references based on the Standard should be sought for all candidates, and considered as part of the leeting process
- Reorientate the 'long leet' process to become a professional exercise in which all information supplied by the candidates who do not possess the SQH is assessed against the Standard, regardless of the number of candidates
- Ensure that all candidates on a short leet recommended to the appointment committee have the SQH, or have been assessed by a professional group against the Standard
- Use the Standard as a framework from which questions asked in the interview and topics for presentations to be given there, are drawn
- Consider ways of extending the candidate assessment process e.g. the supplementary interview referred to at 2 (d) above could be focused on key areas of the Standard
- Ensure that the appointment process addresses three key questions concerning the applicants:
  - who is **qualified** for headship?
  - who is **ready** for headship?
  - who is **best suited** to this particular school?

(The first two of these questions could be addressed through the process of creating a short leet of candidates recommended to the school board and its appointment committee for their consideration, and the third question as the main focus of the interview process itself.)

- Consider ways of attracting more applicants, for example through better 'marketing' of headteacher post vacancies in schools

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