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Primary school headteacher recruitment and selection in England: The processes and the problematic aspects

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Primary school headteacher recruitment and selection in England: The processes and the problematic aspects

Abstract

Appointing a headteacher in England is important but under-researched, hence the study reported here. We interviewed and surveyed chairs of governing boards that had recently undertaken the appointment process. Governing bodies follow broadly similar recruitment and selection processes, which have a number of problematic aspects: the unique nature of the context; the complexity of the processes; ensuring adequate recruitment; the processes are demanding, resource intensive, a considerable responsibility and difficult to organise especially when there are internal candidates; the skills required are specialised; engaging external expertise can be beneficial, but not without challenges; and the chair's involvement is typically substantial.

(100 words)

Key words

Headteacher recruitment

Headteacher selection

Headteacher appointment

Introduction

The recruitment and selection of a new headteacher when the present incumbent leaves her/his post is an important moment in the life of a school. In England, this appointment process is the responsibility of a 'governing board' (GB) of some kind (DfE, 2017a) and a considerable amount rests on securing the right outcome. It is a high stakes moment for the school's GB and the school's stakeholders (James, et al., 2010; 2011; Farrell, Connolly and James, 2017). The process is also important for the person appointed and the other candidates. Despite its significance, the appointment process has not been extensively researched, which is why we undertook the study we are reporting here.

The overall aim of the study was to analyse the processes of recruiting and selecting primary school headteachers in England, with a view to analysing those aspects that were experienced as problematic by those organising the recruitment and selection processes. Our main interest was in identifying which aspects are problematic, and how and why they are problematic.

Primary schools in England educate students aged between five and 11 years, and they number approximately 17000 (DfE 2017). The governance arrangements of these schools are diverse and changing. A growing minority have academy status and are part of a group of schools referred to as a multi-academy trust (MAT) (DfE, 2016). The MAT board and/or the Executive Principal/Chief Executive of the MAT may have a role in appointing the headteacher of an individual academy in the MAT. Other primary schools, currently the majority, remain under the remit of the local authority and may not be part of any formal grouping. In these schools, the local authority will have an advisory role in the headteacher appointment process. The church, through the local diocese, may have a role in governing primary academies and local authority primary schools that have a religious affiliation.

The challenges associated with appointing a headteacher are particularly acute for primary school GBs. In general, primary schools' capacity as institutions to support the appointment

process will be less than that of secondary schools, which are typically larger and have more resources. Primary school GBs, especially those in disadvantaged settings, often struggle to recruit members more so than secondary school GBs, which impacts negatively on their overall capability (James, et al., 2014). This recruitment difficulty may well negatively affect their expertise in headteacher appointment. Further, recruitment and selection challenges are likely to be exacerbated in primary schools in particular by the shortage of candidates, which is a long-standing issue (Draper and McMichael, 2003). We therefore deliberately chose to research headteacher recruitment and selection in primary schools because researching in those particularly challenging settings would give the richest insights into the problematics of the process generally.

Our intention here is to give an account of the research we undertook. Following this introduction, we: review the literature relevant to the main focus of the study; set out the methodology of the empirical stage; describe the findings; and discuss the findings in relation to the key themes in the literature review. The final section recaps the study and summarises the outcomes.

A review of the relevant literature

In this section, we first review and analyse the literature on recruitment and selection to understand what is known about the processes generally in a range of settings, and to identify and explore the nature of any aspects that are considered problematic. Our rationale for reviewing this literature set is twofold. First, it supports our interpretation of the data. Second, we wanted to locate our findings in the wider recruitment and selection literature and to contribute to that literature. We then review literature on the recruitment and selection of headteachers to show what is already known about the processes and to explain the rationale for our research aim and research questions.

Recruitment and selection

The appointing process, in work organisations generally, which is typically known as recruitment and selection (French and Rumbles, 2010), is considered to be problematic (Breaugh and Starke, 2000) and, according to Lievens and Chapman (2009), inadequately understood. Recruitment and selection are different processes. Recruitment is the process of attracting candidates to a vacancy while selection is the process assessing the suitability of candidates to fill the vacancy (Searle, 2009). The two processes are closely connected but Hook, Jenkins and Foot (2015) argue that they should be treated separately. They require different capabilities and may be undertaken by different individuals/groups and, indeed, recruitment may be outsourced to an external agency but not selection. However, in practice the recruitment and selection processes interact: the process of attracting candidates gives potential candidates a sense of the organisation and whether they would like to work there (Lievens and Chapman, 2009). Barber (1998) posits a final third phase following recruitment and selection, that of influencing job choice decisions, for example, the exact salary offered and the timeliness of job offer, with others such as Pilbeam and Corbidge (2010) suggesting a further induction phase.

Recruitment methods

The literature on recruitment has a number of themes. Unsurprisingly, generating initial interest in the post is considered important. It requires the post to be viewed positively (Barber and Roehling 1993), and recruitment messages to be understandable and credible (Breaugh and Billings 1988). The attributes of the message that generate attention include: being vivid in nature and using concrete language (Tybout and Artz, 1994); conveying unexpected information (Kiulik and Ambrose, 1993); and providing personally relevant information (Chaiken and Stangor, 1987). Other important aspects include: conveying the image of the recruiting organisation and its core values (Chapman et al., 2005; Lievens and

Chapman, 2009), ensuring that sufficient specific information is provided (Barber and Roehling, 1993); and providing realistic and accurate information (Philips, 1999). Candidates receiving consistent messages about the organisation and the post from multiple sources increases credibility (Harkins and Petty, 1981).

In recent times, internet-based methods for recruiting candidates have become increasingly important (Madia, 2011; CIPD, 2015). Potential candidates can access web-sites to find vacancies and to gather information about the post and then evaluate the appointing organisation (Allen, Mahto and Otondo, 2007). A recruiting organisation's website is an important information source. Despite the importance of web-based sources of information however, 'word of mouth' is important in the recruitment process (Van Hoye and Lievens, 2007) and can help potential candidates to gauge the attractiveness of the post and the recruiting organisation's requirements (Searle, 2009).

Those directly involved in the recruitment process can have a significant effect on potential applicants (Chapman et al., 2005). Messages conveyed in person about the post can be particularly influential (Tybout and Artz, 1994). The way recruiters deal with potential applicants will indicate how they will be treated as subsequent employees (Connerley and Rynes, 1997). Characteristics of 'recruiters' considered to be important include: the recruiter being informative (Powell, 1991); relating in a positive and warm manner (Chapman and Webster, 2006); having credibility (Maurer, Howe and Lee, 1992); and demonstrating trustworthiness and expertise (Stiff, 1994). Avoiding unintentional bias is important in all these interactions with potential candidates (CIPD, 2015; Knight 2017).

Selection

Selection paradigms

Selection paradigms are models or general approaches to candidate selection. Searle (2009) and others, for example Billsbury (2007), offer three: (1) Psychometric or predictivist; (2) Social process; and (3) Person-organisation fit.

Selection methods in the psychometric or predictivist paradigm use assessment tests of various kinds that are deemed to accurately measure the suitability of candidates and predict their future performance (Schmitt and Chan, 1998). Such selection methods are suitable if individual differences between applicants are stable and discernible using tests; when job roles are similarly stable and can be tightly defined; and when secure job performance criteria can be developed from those definitions. The candidate's role is a passive one in this kind of selection process; he/she is simply required to 'pass' various tests that assess their suitability. The role and interests of the appointing organisation are central (Billsbury, 2007).

Methods of selection in the social process paradigm enable exchanges between the applicant and the appointing organisation (Herriot, 1993), during which the applicant comes to fully understand the nature of the post, while the appointing organisation gains a sense of the applicant and their suitability. Selection methods of this kind are of particular value in selecting for *"one-off vacancies or senior professional roles"* (Searle 2009, p.153), where the applicant needs to fully understand the nature of the post and the context in which he/she will be working. According to Billsbury (2007), this approach brings the candidate's interests to the fore and the candidate is active in the selection process.

Modes of selection in the person-organisation fit paradigm focus on the interaction between the applicant and the appointing organisation (Bowen et al., 1991; Levesque, 2005) and there is *"a unique emphasis on achieving a beneficial goodness of fit"* (Searle, 2009, p.154). A range of methods are required that enable both parties to fully know and understand and then evaluate each other. As in the social process paradigm, selection methods in this paradigm are suitable for senior positions in complex settings, where both parties, the candidate and those appointing, need to know that the appointment is going to work

(Lievens and Chapman, 2009). Selection methods in this paradigm seek to balance the interests of the applicant and the recruiting organisation (Billsbury, 2007).

Selection methods

A wide range of selection methods are used in employee selection generally (Searle, 2003). The application form that applicants may be required to complete is widely used in the selection process and is important (Pilbeam and Corbidge, 2010). Three aspects of the overall design of the form are significant: (1) How easy/difficult the form is to complete; (2) Whether a standard structured or a flexible design is used; and (3) The dual purpose of the form, as the basis of the employee's future personnel record and the provision of selection information, purposes that may be in conflict (Pilbeam and Corbidge, 2010). Candidates visiting the appointing organisation are important and may affect the preferred candidate's decision to accept the job. The hosting of visits is significant as is how the host behaves/interacts with the candidates (Turban, Eyring and Campion, 1995). Psychometric tests may be used in the selection process and a range of different personality/psychological tests are available Chapman and Webster, 2003). The predictive validity of personality tests remains low and the inclusion of such tests can reduce the candidate's sense of the attractiveness of the organisation (Chapman and Webster, 2003). Work sampling, job simulations where candidates carry out a task/tasks that are typical of those they would undertake if appointed may be used as a selection method (Kanning et al., 2006). Such activities include in-tray exercises, role plays and data analysis activities. They need to be carefully designed, administered and assessed. When they are they: consistently show high job performance validity, can assess specific skills, and give a sense of cultural fit (Kanning et al., 2006). Assessment activities include group discussions and activities and presentations. Again, such tasks need to be carefully used but they can capture wide domains of knowledge and give useful information (Lievens and Chapman, 2009). Interviews are widely used as a selection activity (Buckley et al., 2000) and are typically central in the whole selection process (Herriot, 1993). The interview gives the contact that individuals seek at a deep level when joining a new work organisation. It enables a discussion about the nature of the post and what is required of the applicant. However, the interactional nature of the interview gives rise to a number of problematic aspects, such as inappropriate interviewer bias (Knight, 2017), lack of consistency of questions posed to different candidates and ensuring adherence to employment law. Interviews can either be carried out by an individual or a panel, with the composition of the panel a matter of debate (Pilbeam and Corbidge, 2010). Interviews can be structured, where a series of the same questions are put to each candidate, or unstructured, which is a more open and wide-ranging discussion. Structuring considerably enhances the interview method's value as a predictor of future performance (Pilbeam and Corbidge, 2010). Interviewer behaviour significantly influences the attractiveness of the organisation and the subsequent acceptance of job offers (Carless and Imber, 2007). Others' opinions of candidates in the form of references are widely and variously used, with divergence as to whether opinions and/or facts are sought from the referee and the weight given to them (Pilbeam and Corbidge, 2010). Their predictive validity is very low, possibly because referees are reluctant to express negative views.

Research on using different methods in combination reveals a complex picture with the predictive validity of multiple methods difficult to establish (Lievens and Chapman, 2009). Generally, using a range of selection methods that relate directly to job-performance enhances predictive validity, especially if the range includes structured interviews. Importantly, using a range of methods is a good way of establishing a person-organisation fit – see above. Thus the choice of methods is important as it conditions the applicant's sense of the organisation (Lievens and Chapman, 2009).

Transition to employment

Various activities are typically undertaken between the selection process and the candidate beginning employment and is a third phase in the appointment process (Barber, 1998). Pre-engagement activities include establishing a start date and the level of remuneration and undertaking medical checks. Timing is important during this stage (Barber, 1998) with delays experienced negatively by applicants (Rynes, Bretz and Gerhart, 1991). This stage opens up the possibility of both parties being able to withdraw (Pilbeam and Corbidge, 2010). Induction is also an important part of this final stage. In employment contexts generally, it can be viewed as part of the selection process, needing to be successfully completed before employment becomes permanent (Pilbeam and Corbidge, 2010).

The recruitment and selection of headteachers

The process of appointing headteachers in England has not been the subject of recent research. A key report by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL, 2006), gives extensive and detailed guidance (see below) but says little about the research that underpinned that guidance. The nature of advertisements for headteachers and the qualities required of applicants has been studied (Kirkham, 2000). Elsewhere, there have been some studies for example, Grummell, Devine and Lynch, (2009) in Ireland, Blackmore, Thomson and Barty (2006) and Gronn and Rawlings-Sanaei (2003) in Australia, and Whitaker (2203) in the US. Huber and Pashiardis (2008) give a very interesting comparative analysis and overview of the appointment process in various counties including England. However, given the significance of headteacher recruitment and selection, this research base is not extensive and does not focus on the problematic aspects of headteacher appointment. Where recruitment has been researched, the focus has been on the (limited) supply of applicants, see for example, studies of the shortage of supply in England by Draper and McMichael (2003) and by MacBeath, et al., (2009) in Scotland. De Grauwe's (2004) international review of site-based school management called for policies to *"improve recruitment and selection procedures"* (p. 9) but even then, the focus was on the supply of applicants.

Despite the lack of research into the headteacher appointment process, guidance is available to governors in England appointing a new headteacher. As mentioned above, the National College for School Leadership guidance (NCSL, 2006) gives very detailed guidance, particularly about the overall structure of the process. The detail provided is in some ways a testament to the challenging nature of the appointment process. The recently updated guidance from the Department for Education (DFE) and the National Governance Association (NGA) (DfE/NGA, 2017). This guidance stresses the significance of the process, that *"Recruiting a headteacher is arguably one of the most important tasks a board will undertake"* (p.6), emphasising that it is *"an important moment"* (p.17). The guidance makes clear that *"It is essential that the board has, or is able to access, the skills they need to carry out effective selection processes"* (p 13).

The competences required by governors specified by central government (DfE, 2017c) do not refer specifically to those necessary for headteacher recruitment and selection. Instead, they refer to an understanding of the way the school appoints staff in order to be able to scrutinise the school's practices. Thus the relevant competence is *"How staff are recruited to the organisation and how this compares to good recruitment and retention practice"* (DfE, 2017c p18).

Methodology

The overall aim of the research was to analyse the processes of recruiting and selecting primary school headteachers in England with a view to analysing those aspects that were experienced as problematic by those organising the recruitment and selection processes. The research questions were: What is the nature of the recruitment and selection processes of primary school headteachers in England? Which aspects are problematic and why? Problematic aspects are those that were experienced as difficult, challenging or awkward to

organise appropriately. A sequential mixed-methods design was used (Ivankova, Cresswell and Stick, 2016) as follows.

Eleven chairs of governing boards (ChGBs) that had recently undertaken the appointment process were interviewed by telephone to explore the nature of the process and its problematic aspects. Potential interviewees were approached following an analysis of headteacher recruitment advertisements in the *Times Educational Supplement* (TES, 2017). The data was analysed to identify consistent themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Saldana, 2009). The respondents are coded R1 to R11 in the 'Findings' section below.

Two surveys of ChGBs were undertaken in November 2015 and May 2016. For the first survey, 155 primary schools were identified through advertisements in the *Times Educational Supplement* (TES, 2017) during the early part of 2015. The ChGBs were contacted via the school by email and invited to participate in the survey. For the second survey, 115 primary schools that had advertised in the *Times Educational Supplement* in the early/mid part of 2016 were identified and ChGBs contacted as for the first survey. Both surveys were completed on-line. There were 24 responses in the first survey and 11 in the second survey. The respondents are coded R12 – R46 in the next section. The overall sample for both surveys was geographically-spread throughout England.

The survey questionnaires comprised both open and closed questions that explored the appointment process and related to themes identified in first survey. Approximately three quarters of the survey respondents had undertaken the appointment process for a single, local authority primary school, with the remainder undertaking it within a multi-academy trust structure (NGA, 2017). The respondents' responses to the open questions were analysed to identify consistent themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Saldana, 2009). For some aspects of the data analysis, percentages of respondents expressing a view were calculated to indicate the strength/extent of a particular emergent theme/issue.

Seven ChGBs who had recently undertaken the headteacher appointment process were interviewed by telephone. The respondents' experiences were analysed together with emergent themes from the initial set of interviews and the two surveys. The respondents are coded R47 to R53 in the subsequent 'Findings' section.

The research conformed to the British Educational Research Association guidelines for the ethical conduct of research (BERA 2011).

The findings

Various themes, each typically with a number of sub-themes, emerged from the analysis of the whole data set that illustrate the nature of the processes of headteacher recruitment and selection and the problematic aspects as follows. The purpose of reporting data in a quantitative/numerical form is illustrative not statistical.

General issues

From the survey data, the numbers of applicants ranged from none to six. On average, 2.3 candidates were invited for selection, with only one GB inviting more than four. Half of the survey respondents reported that their GBs made an appointment the first time they undertook the appointment process. Eleven (37%) reported having to repeat the process before being able to appoint, and in four cases (13%) more than two attempts were needed. The low number of appointable applicants was typically the reason for repeating the recruitment process. When the number of applicants was low, GBs reported being concerned about the robustness of the process if there was only one appointable candidate and/or only an internal candidate.

The standard of the school as judged by Ofsted was a data theme, with a recent poor Ofsted inspection outcome considered to hinder the recruitment progress. One respondent (R52) reported that the school had had a *"horrendous inspection"* actually during the recruitment

stage as a result of which the *"school went from Good to RI* (Requires Improvement)*",* which significantly affected the whole process.

Many respondents felt their GBs carried a *"weight of responsibility"* (R28) and had a *"huge decision to make"* (R10) in appointing a headteacher. R6 said he *"felt daunted"* especially because of *"the lack of guidance"*. For R49, *"thinking that you might not get the right candidate is quite frightening".* Others referred to the *"uncertainty"* around whether a *"good candidate would apply"* (R21), particularly if the new appointment was to *"follow a supremely successful and popular leader"* (R20). For R9, *"the most difficult aspect is knowing that if you make the wrong decision it can have a negative impact on all stakeholders"*.

The *"workload and commitment needed"* (R30) emerged as a theme. The appointment process was experienced as *"time-consuming"* (R51). Thus R17 had not anticipated the *"time required to get all the information together and for the interviews etc."*. The nature of the selection process, coupled with the lack of experience, meant that some of those involved felt drained by it: *"Four of our governors had not experienced recruitment at this level before and found it extremely tiring"* (R28). Another commented: *"The two-day (selection) process was emotionally and physically exhausting"* (R35).

Respondents reported experiencing a *"pressure to appoint"* (R51, R45), and the need to have a contingency plan if they did not appoint (R53). A variety of measures were used to fill the vacancy on an interim basis if an appointment could not be made, including asking the deputy headteacher/principal to 'act up' or appointing an acting headteacher/principal.

From the survey data, the majority of the leaving headteachers gave at least two terms notice with some giving more. However, some gave only one term's notice, which put the GB under significant time pressure. Some respondents reported encountering problems because they had to recruit *"too close to the end of the school year"* (R20). A significant theme was respondents regretting that they had *"not started early enough"* (R29).

Sixteen of the 35 survey respondents reported that there was an internal candidate and in 10 instances, he/she was successful. Managing internal candidates was a significant theme. R25 felt that *"Managing the sensitivities with staff, parents and the candidate's expectations"* was important, as was ensuring *"the process did not give the internal candidate any in-built advantage"* (R3). When the internal candidate was shortlisted following the recruitment stage, ensuring the selection process remained fair and robust was a concern. As R7 outlined:

> "[The internal] *candidate was already co-head for two days a week so we knew they could do the job well. We were running an open process and we wanted it to look like that too"*.

In some instances, the internal candidate was not shortlisted/appointed, which necessitated careful handling.

Financial concerns relating to the appointment process emerged as a theme. The high cost of advertising and the significant expense of engaging support from external sources was a theme (R45; R51). The desire to make a good appointment, which could incur additional expense through, for example, widespread advertising, had to be balanced against the need to keep the costs as low as possible (R25; R28; R37).

The overall recruitment and selection capability of the governing board

The capability of the GB in recruitment and selection was a significant theme with a number of sub-themes.

Some GBs comprised relatively new members who had not been through the process of appointing a headteacher before, which was the case for respondent R18: *"We have a*

relatively new governing body with only two governors with more than three years on the governing body - chair and vice chair".

The responsibility for the appointment processes was usually delegated to a small group – a panel – with the ChGB a panel member in all but one case. From the survey data, panels averaged five members. Governor willingness to be involved, expertise in recruitment and selection, category of governor, and specific governor responsibilities all influenced decisions about panel membership. Availability was also a consideration and could be problematic as R23 put it, *"We are quite a small governing body, we did have to work along to tight deadlines, so availability was an issue"*. Availability of GB members could exacerbate time pressures, with one respondent reporting, *"it was a challenge to get governors together to meet the timescale"*.

The expertise of the GB in recruitment and selection emerged as a theme. The process required skills different from those required for 'everyday governing'. Specialist knowledge and skills were required for a number of tasks, and to ensure the process was *"legal"* and *"robust"* (R7). The need for project management expertise was a theme, as was what to prioritise in the information about the post. The expertise of GB members who had experience of the headteacher role, such as retired headteachers, was highly valued as was *"the support of the HT* [The outgoing headteacher]*"* (R5) when available. Governors brought experience either from their professional life, for example R38 who worked in human resource management, or from their time as governors. In one instance, a GB member had worked in the local authority and been involved in headteacher recruitment and selection (R8).

Forms of advice from outside the GB, for example, from the local authority, on how the process should be undertaken included: individuals "*attending initial scoping meetings*" to help shape the whole process (R5); "*steering*" the GB through the process (R7); "*helping to shortlist candidates*" (R4, R10); and providing *"insider knowledge"* about candidates (R2). Forms of support from within the school included individuals providing *"admin* (administrative) *support"* (R8); "*posting the advertisement and collating applications*" (R7); and "*putting together application packs*" (R9),

GBs were very proactive in securing advice and support, which were obtained from various sources. Eighty-three per cent (n=25) of the survey respondents used local authority advice; 50% used publications (n=15); 43% used the diocese (n=13); and 37% used school improvement advisers or specialist recruitment consultants (n=11). Some GBs used the local authority more generally to ensure the appointment process was legally compliant.

The advice and support received helped GBs to complete the process appropriately and the positive view of both emerged as a theme. In particular, the advice provided by the local authority advisors and the diocese in the case of church schools (R5, R6, R7, R25, R30, R35, R40) was regard positively with respondents viewing it as *"invaluable"* (R1, R3), *"vital"* (R22) and *"essential"* (R21). For R48, *"HR* [the human resources department of the local authority] *kept us on track, advised us what to do and when".* Advice from specialist headteacher recruitment and selection consultancies was well received. Documentary guidance provided by the local authority was typically valued, as well as local contacts, such as ChGBs in other schools, who were able to share their experience (R53). For some, this external advice *"saved a considerable amount of time"* (R6). When the school had a business manager (SBM) their administrative support was highly valued: *"The SBM was a rock and we could not have achieved what we did without her help and support"* (R5).

Concerns about the quality of advice also emerged as a theme, with various sub-themes. One related to the capability of those giving support, which was a particular concern for R50. The quality of the local authority's written guidance was criticised for being either too detailed or being "*sparse and unclear"* (R26). In some instances, local authorities attempted to control and dominate the process by, for example, chairing meetings (R48). In other cases,

they were experienced as *"distant"*, not being *"proactive"* and offering little help beyond signposting those requesting advice to written guidance (R50, R51). The low quality of the advice of external organisations, for example, in preparing advertisements in relation to the cost, was a sub-theme.

Communication with stakeholders about the appointment process

Communication with parents about the appointment process was considered important; poor communication was deemed to hinder the process. It could be problematic especially when there was a history of parental dissatisfaction, or where school-parent communication had been unsatisfactory. In one instance, pressure from parents was a reason for the current headteacher's resignation:

> "[The] *resignation of the headteacher was due to some unacceptable behaviour from some parents. Managing the news* (of the headteacher's resignation) *and creating a positive not a blame atmosphere was important and the second issue was reducing anxiety of a vocal minority about whether we would be able to recruit successfully and what would happen if not"* (R19).

Communicating with the staff was a theme especially when the departing headteacher had been popular with staff. As various respondents put it, they could feel *"anxious"* about the appointment process, and *"vulnerable"* and *"unsettled"*, particularly if there had been recent disturbing events such as a restructuring of responsibility posts, or staff redundancies.

The role and responsibility of the chair of the governing board

The ChGB was usually responsible for organising the appointment process, a responsibility they typically experienced as taxing, and described variously as: *"significant"* (R48; R45, R53); *"overwhelming"* (R48); *"pressured"* (R51); and *"stressful"* (R27).

The stages in the recruitment and selection processes

The present incumbent's resignation typically triggered the appointment process. The notice period they gave and their leaving date were significant (see above). They conditioned the nature of the process and how it would be organised/experienced by the GB. Typically, GBs felt under immediate pressure to start the process almost straightaway to meet various recruitment and notice deadlines built into the system (TES, 2013).

Preparing job and person specifications required a skill-set different to that required for 'everyday governing'. Some GBs, for example, R8 and R38, were able to draw on members' professional experience for these tasks. Preparing the job specification proved more straightforward than the person specification largely because guidance and pro-formas were available from various sources.

Preparing the application pack posed some challenges with the lack of technology skills to complete the task and deciding on the content emerging as themes. For R39, getting the information for applicants *"just right for our school was a challenge".* Other issues related to: getting a *"consensus of opinion"* from those involved (R6); concerns that these initial stages were *"time-consuming"* (R9, R19); and the difficulty *"co-ordinating the process"* (R17). However, some respondents found the task enjoyable and a useful opportunity for GBs to consider the needs of the school.

The challenge of preparing the advertisement emerged as a theme. Some sources of support for this activity were criticised, particularly in terms of their cost and effectiveness (see above). Making a school 'stand-out' was especially difficult.

Organising visits to the school by applicants could be problematic for a range of reasons, typically related to the hosting of such visits. When GB members were not available, the task fell to the departing headteacher, which could be difficult if her/his departure was problematic

for any reason; or to the deputy headteacher, which again could be difficult if he/she was a candidate.

The selection process

In all cases, the selection process comprised developing a shortlist of applicants to participate in the full selection process, which ran over two days, with the various assessment activities in the first day and additional activities and the interview in the second. Typically, the panel decided who they wished to continue into the second day's selection activities at the end of the first day. Not all respondents felt that a two-day process was necessary.

Shortlisting applicants to participate in the full selection process

The shortlisting stage could be difficult because of the shortage of appointable candidates (see above). It was a key moment, with GBs finding the decision not to shortlist any candidates and to re-advertise difficult, which was more problematic if there was an internal candidate (see above). Sometimes the internal candidate was strong but GBs felt the need to 'test them' against external candidates.

Selection activities

All the GBs that were able to develop a short-list of candidates used a range of activities and a formal interview. On average, six different activities were used, ranging from two activities to 10. The most popular activities across the 30 survey respondents were: presentations (28); presenting a verbal report on the pupil performance data (24); observing a lesson and giving feedback (23); meeting with the school council (22); meetings with staff (20); and meetings with the school leadership team (6). The least popular were: a group activity with other candidates (0); creating a play activity with students (1); psychometric testing (2); and meeting with parents (3).

Using a large number of selection activities presented governors with various organisational challenges. Further, scoring/assessing candidates' performance in all the activities could be problematic: *"At certain points in the* (selection) *process, the decision-making became very hard"* particularly in relation to *"scoring, weightings and marking"* (R54).

Interestingly, respondents reported that deciding whom to take through to the second day of selection activities was relatively straightforward and they typically chose one or two candidates.

Deciding on a schedule of interview questions could be challenging and time-consuming, with the lack of guidance an issue for example for R26. Others, however, found this process easy with R5 reporting that it *"went well and to time"*.

Deciding who to appoint was typically straightforward. However, in some instances that was not the case and there were reports of difficult discussions between panel members. Another issue at this point was that some external advisors were keen not only to offer their opinion but to be the decision-makers. In one instance, the ChGB's preferred choice was not selected.

Post-decision activities

Respondents reported few problems with this stage. The panel reported the decision to the GB for approval, which was not experienced as problematic. Candidates and other stakeholders were informed and a salary agreed. This process, which though significant and needing careful handling, did not appear to be difficult.

Most interview respondents had yet to reach the induction stage but had established contact with the new appointee and arranged initial meetings. From the survey, one respondent (R13) reported *"excellent cooperation between our school and the candidate"*. Another

stated (R16) that the *"candidate has spent a day in school and plans two more before the end of term"* in preparation for their new role.

Discussion and concluding comments

The data indicates that many aspects of the process of appointing a new headteacher are problematic for those responsible for organising and/or involved in the process. We discuss some of the more significant aspects in this section.

The appointment process has various problematic aspects. The unique nature of the school/appointment context means that the appointment process has to be created to suit that context. Any guidance available to school governing bodies has to be interpreted to suit that context. The elements of the process and those involved interact, so the process, although apparently linear, is complex. Organising the process is therefore particularly challenging. Candidate recruitment can be difficult for a variety of reasons. There is a case for arguing that GBs could use more creative recruitment strategies. The appointment process is a considerable responsibility for those involved, which exacerbates any organisational challenges. The skills required are specialised and are very different from those required for 'everyday governing'. Importantly they may not be available in the GB. Engaging external expertise can be beneficial, but is not without challenges. The involvement of the ChGB in the process is typically substantial. The appointment process is resource intensive. Organising the process when there are internal candidates can be particularly challenging. Interestingly however, governors appear to respond positively and pro-actively to the challenges. Finally, selection processes in the person-organisation fit paradigm are typically most useful. The focus on interaction between the applicant and those appointing (Bowen et al., 1991; Levesque, 2005) enables an understanding to be developed in all those involved that the appointment is going to work

We consider that the research we have reported in this article contributes to the field by giving important insights into a significant educational leadership and management issue, the recruitment and selection of headteachers. It gives further insights into the work of school governors in England and, in identifying the most challenging aspects of a crucial leadership and management 'moment' for a school, will enable resources to help school governors to focus on the most difficult aspects.

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