



Diocese of Westminster

Education Service

RECRUITING TO RESERVED POSTS: GUIDANCE FOR GOVERNORS AND DIRECTORS

to accompany CES guidance

[Note on recruitment of staff for Governing Bodies](#)

November 2024

For an editable version with full appendices, please contact catherinemcmahon@rcdow.org.uk

Inform Education Service of reserved post vacancy –
SEL, Executive Head, Head Teacher, Deputy Head, Head of RE, Chaplain.

Arrange a Governors planning meeting:

Governors/Directors, LA (if VA school), Education Service.

- Create recruitment timeline
- review JD and Person Spec
- draft job advert and decide where to advertise
- create application pack
- form interview panel/s and schedule

Place the advert or instruct a recruitment agency

- Catholic Teachers Gazette
- TES
- Parish website
- Local newspaper
- Diocesan Website
- School Website

Prepare application packs and send out as requested with the agreed documentation. Arrange visits to school for candidates. Internal candidates must fully complete the application paperwork.

Shortlisting: All members of the interview panel should participate. Assess all applications against the essential and desirable criteria of the job description/person spec. Internal candidates must be assessed in the same way as external candidates. The priest's reference is part of the shortlisting process, make sure you have a reference for each candidate – you cannot shortlist without one.

Inform candidates whether they have been selected for interview

Interview Day: The day is led by the Chair of Governors/Directors.

- Begin with prayer
- Have a clear timetable for the day
- Have a mix of practical exercises and interviews
- Inform the candidates of next steps and when you will contact them
- You must have received references for all candidates before a decision can be made.

Making an Appointment:

This is a Governors/Directors decision, external advisors (including LA and the Education Service) can have informal input but cannot make an appointment. External advisors will offer informal feedback to unsuccessful candidates.

If no appointment is made, you may begin the process again. Consider any feedback received from candidates and potential candidates who visited the school. Think about the breadth of advertising, the wording of the advert or whether using a recruitment agency would be beneficial.

Recruitment Process for Reserved Posts

What is a Reserved Post and why do we need them?

Certain key posts require that their holders not only refrain from doing anything *“which is incompatible with the precepts, or with the upholding of the tenets”* of the school’s religious ethos but, in the case of Headteachers or Principals, that they are able and fit to *“preserve and develop”* that ethos and, in the case of certain other designated posts, that they hold *“religious opinions”, “attend religious worship”* and *“give, or are willing to give, religious education”* in accordance with the precepts and tenets of the religious faith of the school. ([‘Christ at the Centre’ by Mgr. Marcus Stock 2012.](#))

The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales have collectively mandated that in Catholic schools certain key posts carry a requirement that they are held by ‘practising Catholics’. These are:

- Headteacher / Principal / Head of School (which includes Executive Headteachers)
- Deputy Headteacher / Principal / Head of School
- Chief Executive Officer
- Deputy Chief Executive Officer
- Head or Co-Ordinator of Religious Education (at both school and multi-academy trust company level)
- Chaplain (including Directors of Chaplaincy)
- Members of multi-academy trust company central teams with responsibility for Catholic Life / Mission / Ethos
- Any role which requires the individual to have responsibility for the spiritual and/or liturgical life of the Catholic school or multi-academy trust company (for example, Prayer and Liturgy Co-ordinator and Director of Primary Education or Secondary Education where it would involve oversight of collective worship and Religious Education).

If you are unsure if your vacant post is ‘Reserved’, contact the Education Service for guidance.

It is the Governors/Trust Directors responsibility to recruit the Head Teacher or equivalent school leader and this document is designed to guide them through the process. It can be modified for the recruitment of other reserved posts.

1 When the Governing Body becomes aware of a vacancy, notify the Deputy Director of Education, Catherine McMahon, immediately: catherinemcmahon@rcdow.org.uk
If in doubt, phone 07522229440.

2 Appoint a Recruitment Panel and arrange a planning meeting.

[The Bishops Memorandum on the Appointment of Teachers 2024](#) requires that dioceses are involved in recruitment processes. Governing Bodies must give sufficient advance notification to the Diocese of a vacancy for any senior post to which the requirement to be a practising Catholic is applied before taking any action, including appointing an acting Head Teacher or Principal, acting Deputy Head Teacher or Deputy Principal, or advertising the vacancy. It is particularly important to agree all meeting and interview dates with the diocese in advance, to allow Diocesan Officers to be involved from the beginning of the process, including drawing up job descriptions, person specifications and advertisements.

Governors/Directors appoint a Recruitment Panel comprised of:

- The Chair of Governors or Chair of Board of Directors
- Several Foundation Governors/Directors with relevant skills or experience
- A member of the Education Service team
- An LA representative in VA schools

- An independent adviser may be included in MATs

Foundation Governors/Directors must be in the majority on the panel as they are the members who have the final vote to select the successful candidate. The Education Service, the LA and any external advisers can have input into the final decision, but they do not vote. Ensure you have an odd number of voting members on the panel to avoid a tie; a minimum of 3 Foundations Governors is required. Employees of the school or Trust cannot be part of the recruitment process, including the current post holder or staff governors.

Use this initial planning meeting to set the advertising budget for the post, the timetable for the process (work backwards from when you would like the candidate to start), review the job description and person specification for the post, choose what else you would like in the recruitment pack (prospectus, Ofsted report etc), create the advert and choose where you will advertise the vacancy.

Don't forget to schedule a full Governing Body/Board of Directors meeting to ratify the decision to appoint the successful candidate. Any offer made is subject to this ratification.

You may need a separate meeting to formulate the interview day timetable and elements of the interview process. This can also be discussed by email or on-line. The interview schedule, activities and questions should be shared with the full interview panel for comment prior to the schedule being agreed.

Safer recruitment

Please ensure that at least one Foundation Governor on the panel is safer recruitment trained and that you have HR advice throughout. At all stages in the recruitment process safer recruitment needs to be a focus and the commitment of the school or MAT to a robust assessment process needs to be clear.

Things to consider:

- Advert: does your advert make a clear statement that all candidates will be subject to a robust assessment and DBS checks?
- Shortlisting: applications need to be assessed against the job description and person specification including experience of working with children. Any gaps in employment history need to be noted and followed up by question in the interview.
- References: you should take references including the priest's reference **before the interview** to check if there are any issues which need to be followed up during the interview. The references should come from the current employer and if this is not the case the reasons should be followed up in the interview. If there has been a gap in employment, then a reference is required from the last employer where they have worked with children in addition to other references.
- Interviews: include safeguarding questions, always include an activity interacting with children so that the relationships with children can be assessed including feedback from the children. This would be as appropriate to the role.
- Any appointment is always made subject to clearances.
- Induction must include safeguarding and school procedures.

3 The advert and where to place it.

Think about the wording of your advert, the LA or MAT HR adviser will be able to help you.

The advert should include:

In VA schools: The Diocese of Westminster in partnership with xxxxx Local Authority
For MATs: Catholic Diocese of Westminster – xxxx Academy Trust

There are many publications and websites available to place your advert, prices vary, and you may wish to obtain quotes to inform your advertising strategy. Many can be found here: [Vacancies in Catholic schools](#). You can advertise locally, in neighbouring dioceses and in parishes. We also publish vacancies on our [website](#) and through social media. Advertising the post on your school or MAT website also allows you to direct applicants to the application paperwork.

You may wish to employ a recruitment agency to manage the recruitment process for you, this comes with a cost but does afford you expert HR guidance. There are many recruitment agencies in the market and we can make recommendations.

4 **The Application Pack.**

Much of the information an applicant would need is already available and should be on your school website. Below is a list of resources you may wish to include:

- Covering letter from the Chair of Governors/Trust
- Job description and person spec for the role
- School and/or Trust information e.g. prospectus, access to most recent S5/8 and CSI reports
- [‘Catholic Education’](#) – a short document from CES
- A clear statement about the pay scale being offered
- [CES application form](#)

You will need to consider how to facilitate candidate visits to school. Usually, a member of SLT will show applicants around and answer any questions they may have. It is generally not acceptable for the current post holder to do this.

5 **Essential requirements for Reserved Posts and References**

The preservation and development of the quality and distinctive nature of Catholic schools depends on the faith, practice and commitment of the teachers in the schools, working with their Governing Body. The Catholic Church understands the vocation of a teacher as a form of ministry within the Church. All teachers in Catholic schools are employed to participate in the Church’s teaching office, exercising this ministry in accordance with the Church’s teachings. This requires teachers to be witnesses in word and deed to the Divine Teacher, Jesus Christ. To find Catholic teachers who combine personal conviction and practice of the faith with the required professional qualifications and experience, especially in specialist subjects, is always a high priority.

All staff must respect and support the aims and objectives of a Catholic school. [The Bishops Memorandum on the Appointment of Teachers 2024](#)

Applicants who do not meet the essential criteria for reserved posts cannot be shortlisted. The applicant must be a practicing Catholic in good standing with the Church, you must be able to obtain a priest’s reference from the priest where the applicant attends mass. The priest must confirm that the applicant regularly attends mass and is in full communion with the Church. If the reference does not specifically confirm this, contact the priest for clarification. A template reference is included at appendix A. **The priest’s reference forms part of the shortlisting process, so it is important that all references are obtained before the shortlisting meeting.**

6 Shortlisting

It is best practice for the whole interview panel to participate in shortlisting, gathering together for a face-to-face meeting enables the panel to discuss the finer points of each application, however the meeting can also take place on-line. Where it is not possible for the Education Service panel member to attend, application forms should be sent out beforehand to allow the service to advise on any issues that need to be discussed by Governors/Directors. Internal applications must be treated with the same rigour as external ones. **Numerical scoring is not acceptable in shortlisting, because of the lack of possibility of moderation of judgements. Candidates can be described as not meeting, meeting or exceeding the requirement.**

7 What happens on interview day?

Appendix B shows an example one day interview schedule for three candidates and a two-day interview schedule for four candidates. Head Teacher interviews often take place over two days, with a presentation and formal interview on day two, with the option to cut candidates during the process. There are many different elements governors can use that allow candidates to showcase their skills. Think about the essential and desirable criteria in the job description and person specification – how can you test them at interview – what are the key skills for the post?

Common elements in the interview process for school leaders include:

- An in-tray exercise to test responses to challenges a leader may face
- A data exercise to test ability to interrogate and interpret progress and/or attainment data and relate it to school improvement or narrowing the gap
- Leading collective worship with a group of pupils to assess the candidate's ability as the spiritual leader of the school. Do they appreciate the difference between leading an assembly and leading collective worship?
- Staff panel interview to assess how the candidate relates to existing staff, this can be for individual candidates or in a group
- School Council interview, using pre-agreed questions to assess how the candidates interact with pupils. This can be for individual candidates or in a group
- Posts with teaching responsibility may be asked to teach a class
- Chaplaincy candidates may be asked to lead reflection, worship or prayer
- Carousel interviews with small panels to assess knowledge in specific topics/areas
- Presentation on a specific topic, usually without the use of PowerPoint
- Final interview

The Chair of Governors/Directors is in charge of the day and will run proceedings. Make the candidates welcome and assign a member of staff to guide candidates around the building and make sure they are in the correct room at the correct time. Designate a room in school as the candidate's base so they have a space to go to between elements.

Allow time in the schedule for feedback from panel members and to give candidates a break. Ensure lunch and refreshments are available for all and be mindful of how far candidates have to travel when scheduling the day. There will inevitably be some down time for candidates during the presentation/formal interview where all panel members will be involved.

It is important that the day stays to time. If elements over run, the day will become long and complicated and can create a bad impression.

Carousel Interviews and topics

The panel can split into groups, with a Governor/Director to Chair each group. There are generally three or four members per group including an Education Service representative and the external advisers. Questions are chosen in advance, with the same questions for each candidate. The purpose of the carousel groups is to identify areas of strength and weakness that can be pursued in the formal interview. Once the candidates have met with each group, the panel reconvenes to discuss the relevant performance of each candidate. This will determine how many, if any of the candidates have shown themselves suitable to proceed to the presentation/formal interview. If the Governors/Directors agree (guided by the advisers) that any of the candidates are not suitable to go forward to the formal interview, they will be informed by the Chair of Governor/Directors.

The three carousel topics are usually:

- Catholic Life and Ethos: this looks at the distinctive nature of a Catholic school, pastoral care, worship, the school in the mission of the Church. (RE is covered in the Curriculum panel).
- Leadership & Management: it is good to ensure that the distinctive elements of leadership in a Catholic school are explored and clarified within the context of this interview.
- Curriculum & Standards: RE is included here as it is a core subject and 10% of curriculum time. Moral/Social and Cultural development within subjects of the curriculum is treated within this context.

Some sample interview questions are included at the end of this guidance.

The Presentation and Final Interview

This final session usually lasts around an hour, with a ten-minute presentation and questions and then around half an hour to follow up on any remaining areas of strength or weakness. The presentation task needs to be succinct and clearly focussed on the school and its future based on information that the candidate can access. Time allocated to the presentation must be exact and someone must be charged to give the candidate warning of a minute remaining. Candidates should be informed in advance if they use a/v equipment (e.g. PowerPoint), but a presentation without PowerPoint is preferable.

The final interview and presentation should include the whole panel, with pre-agreed questions that are the same for each candidate. Follow up questions may take up areas of concern from the letter of application/form, carousel interviews, exercises and staff/pupil interview.

The Chair of Governors/Directors leads, panel members ask agreed questions in turn.

Finally, the chair asks the following:

- Do you have any questions for the panel?
- Are you still a firm candidate for the post?
- Has anything changed since completing the application form which alters your status in terms of criminal convictions and safeguarding?

And the Education service representative confirms Catholic Practice.

8 Coming to a decision and contacting the candidates

Once the final candidate has been dismissed, it is worth the panel having a pause before deliberation begins. The Chair of Governors/Directors leads the deliberation.

- Seek opinion of the advisers in turn – are any candidates appointable?
- Seek each Governor/Director's opinion – are any candidates appointable?
- What is the consensus – can any candidates be eliminated outright?

- What are the relative strengths and weaknesses of the remaining candidates across all the elements of the interview?
- Seek a vote from Governors/Directors: preferably a unanimous decision, but if there is a majority decision, discuss further and seek a further vote on the majority candidate.
- If no one appointed, consider re-advertising strategies
- If you have a positive decision, the Chair of Governors/Directors contacts the candidate and offers the job, subject to ratification by the Full Governing Body/Board of Directors and subject to any stipulations e.g. appointing a mentor, further training etc. Be clear on the salary and terms and conditions offered.
- Contact the unsuccessful candidates and offer feedback from the Education Service or LA adviser. This can be done at the time or later.
- Once the full governing body/board of directors have met and assuming the decision is ratified, ensure that your HR provider arranges the appointment paperwork and induction process.

9 Next steps

Governors/Directors will need to decide how the decision is communicated to staff, Local Governing Bodies (in MATs), parents and the wider school community. If no appointment was made, this will also need to be made public, with a clear plan for what will happen in any interim period between appointments.

The Education Service will help arrange a mentor to support a new Head Teacher and the new Head will be expected to attend Diocesan Induction and the Diocesan Head Teachers Annual Conference.

Appendix A.

Template reference requests

For Parish Priests

CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Father

[Name] [Address]

has given your name as a referee in support of his/her application for the post of Headteacher at [School].

As you know, the Headteacher of a Catholic school in this diocese must be a practising Catholic in good standing with the Church. This Diocese uses the following definition:

“...a ‘practising Catholic’ is to be defined as someone who has been sacramentally initiated into the Catholic Church and who adheres to those substantive life choices which do not impair them from receiving the sacraments of the Church and which will not be in any way detrimental or prejudicial to the religious ethos and character of the school. Inspired by the Gospel and sustained by God’s grace, a ‘practising Catholic’ will give sincere external expression to their interior faith through specific religious, moral and ethical behaviour which is in accordance with the teaching of Christ and the Catholic Church.”(from “Christ at the Centre” Marcus Stock)

I would be grateful for your confirmation that this applicant meets these requirements either in writing or by telephone.

Please note that you are not required to offer an opinion as to his or her professional suitability for the post.

The panel meets to consider the applications on [date] and a response in time for this meeting would be most helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Work Reference

Dear xxxxxxxxxxx,

Reference for xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Post applied for:

The governors of (school) have received an application from the above-named person and your name is given as a referee.

To help you provide a reference, I am enclosing the job description, which gives details of the duties and responsibilities of the post, and the person specification, which lists experience and skills considered necessary to do the job.

Please give your opinion as to the candidates' general character, experience and suitability for the post on headed paper if it is an employer's reference. Please give as detailed a reference as you can by identifying strengths and weaknesses on each of the essential requirements set out in the person specification, describing instances as evidence, if possible. Where appropriate, please include reference to any training and development undertaken.

Also enclosed is a standard reference form which requests information in relation to disciplinary record, etc. Please complete this and return it with your reference by XXXXXXXXXXXX.

The post for which this application has been made is exempt from Section 4 (2) of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 by virtue of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 as amended by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) (Amendments) Order 1986. It is not contrary to the Act to reveal any information you may have concerning convictions, which would otherwise be considered "spent" in relation to this application and which you consider relevant to the applicant's suitability for employment. Any such information will be kept in strict confidence and used only in consideration of the suitability of this applicant for a position where such an exemption is appropriate.

Please note that this is an open reference, and details may be queried with or made available to the candidate.

I would be grateful if you would return the reference to me as quickly as possible and by XXXXXXXX at the latest so that the members of the selection panel have it available for their consideration.

It would be especially helpful if you could say whether you support this application unreservedly.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Yours sincerely

Appendix B

Sample Shortlisting Grid

Appendix C

Sample Interview Schedule:

- One day, three candidates
- Two days, four candidates

Sample Presentation assessment sheet

Sample Interview Assessment sheet

Sample questions:

- Catholic Life
- Curriculum
- Leadership
- General questions

Panel Member Interview Assessment sheets (including all questions)

Appendix D

Sample exercises- data, in-tray etc