

ISC EDI Group

Recruitment Stream (A paper from Nick Dennis, GSA Inclusion Committee member)

This is an outline paper to provoke discussion and reflection, rather than provide a model that fits all schools in varying circumstances. After each section is a prompt for reflection which will help shape strategy and action suited to the particular context each school finds itself in.

It applies to charitable and non-charitable schools equally

The context for Independent Schools

The Charity Governance Code was updated in 2020 to include 'equality, diversity and inclusion'.

Principle 6 states:

The board has a clear, agreed and effective approach to supporting equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the organisation and in its own practice. This approach supports good governance and the delivery of the organisation's charitable purposes.

There are also key outcomes:

- The principles of equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded in the organisation and help to deliver the charity's public benefit.
- Obstacles to participation are reduced, with the organisation's work designed and open for everyone included within its charitable purposes. This supports the charity to challenge inequality and achieve improved equality of outcomes.
- The board is more effective because it reflects different perspectives, experiences and skills, including, where applicable, from current and future beneficiaries.

Essentially, this means that the board needs to analyse and define how equality, diversity and inclusion are important for the charity and to monitor the charity's ability to meet its public benefit with these issues in mind.

To make sure that these measures are checked and the charity is accountable, the charity's specific objectives should be set out, monitored and published.

Recruitment of staff therefore, *is not just a management issue delegated and left to the leadership team*. Governors need to be aware of the recruitment practices and figures related to the charity's public benefit and published objectives. The constitution of the governing body itself should also reflect the diversity of the community/society which it serves.

Reflections

- Is there a strategy on EDI that the governors are driving and have had major input on?
- How are the governors managing the strategy and publishing their work for the community to see?

Understand the position

One of the issues schools face is understanding the problem within its own context. To help shape the charity's strategy, it might prove useful if the following information were to be collected:

- Composition of staff body in terms of roles, pay grade and protected characteristics;
- Promotion rates in different roles related to protected characteristics;
- Applications for roles, and the stages they progress to (longlist, shortlist, 1st Round, Final Round etc).

Much of this information may already be collected by the HR team at the school. If not, this might be one of the first things the school leadership team/board collects.

Reflection

- How much data do you have on your staff, at all grades, that is analysed for pay gaps?
- How do you check that bias is not operating in your performance management/appraisal system?
- How do you know that your current application process is fair?

Recruitment

Schools are only as good as the staff they recruit. It is therefore interesting to ask why some schools might be offering a recruitment process that is not as broad and inclusive as might be expected in other sectors. This is particularly important in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion as boards and senior staff have lamented privately that candidates from minority ethnic and underrepresented groups, simply do not exist. This reasoning is based on the notion that there is no competition for teaching talent. The salaries and lifestyle opportunities offered by international schools (a normal teaching salary abroad can often be more than a SLT/SMT post can command in England) suggest that this view needs to be reconsidered. To be competitive and also to attract the widest pool of candidates possible, schools should review and consider whether there is room for improvement in their hiring process in terms of tradition, and consider how people apply for jobs, buy goods and services in 2021. The work of the Behavioural Insights Team, the 'Nudge Unit' (www.bi.team), has focused on the 'choice architecture' that organisations provide in order to create positive outcomes. In helping people to save more, pay taxes on time or complete courses of education, the team came up with the 'EAST' model to help shape what organisations should do to increase participation/uptake.

- Easy
- Attractive
- Social
- Timely

By no means exhaustive and comprehensive, the 'EAST' model provides a structured way to consider how schools can improve recruitment processes by making a few, but important adjustments.

Make it Easy

In the book [Upstream](#), Dan Heath points out that, “[e]very system is perfectly *designed* to get the results it gets.” It is true that some schools struggle to recruit the teachers they need. There are varied reasons for this, but the application process system is normally overlooked as a way of explaining the dearth of candidates. Many schools still offer application forms that require applicants to fill out PDFs and Word documents. These forms require a great deal of time to fill out and also patience where additional formatting is required. Completing them is usually taken as a sign of commitment, but, societal expectations and the recruitment market has changed. The pandemic has collapsed the boundary between work life and home life even more. Posts outside of education require people to submit LinkedIn profiles or fill out simple web forms. Banking, shopping and dating are done via online smart tools that save details of the user. Applying for a job should be as easy as the other aspects of life and allows for additional analysis of data that can help organisations fine tune their approaches.

In [Talent Architects](#), Mandy Coalter outlines a two-stage application process that has led to doubling the number of applications. The first stage involves submitting a short application that may include a covering letter and a *short* application form. At the next stage, selected candidates are asked to fill in a more extensive application form that is similar to the form candidates are often asked to fill in at the very start of most other posts.

The benefits, Coalter argues, are clear. This two-stage process helps to attract excellent teachers who are not *actively* seeking a role but are intrigued enough to take action due to initial low barrier. It also attracts applications from teachers who are already at capacity due to work and family commitments and can find a little space/time to send off a relatively short application, (working parents would fit into this bracket).

Finally, applications processes should be designed with device access in mind. Most websites are visited via mobile devices and making forms easy to start on them and then complete on a desktop/laptop improves the chances that a person will apply.

Reflection

- How easy it to fill in an application for a position at your school in comparison to signing up and using a service liked LinkedIn?
- How does your recruitment process compare to other industries?
- Have you tested your recruitment process on a number of devices?

Make it Attractive

The job advert, the job description and where the ad is placed are key items in making an attractive offer to potential candidates. Schools often bemoan the lack of quality and range of candidates, but continue to follow a familiar pattern.

A typical approach, which many schools may recognise, might be:

- A position needs to be filled. The job wording is agreed at short notice and placed in the TES with a focus on school branding and the safeguarding information.
- The application pack usually talks about the ethos of the school and a laundry list of attributes needed to perform the job.
- It is normally then put on websites/publications like the TES and then applications are expected to roll in.
- No salary details are provided apart from the word 'competitive'.

Attractive job descriptions

Bias lurks in places we do not expect and job descriptions and adverts are prime locations for examining bias. Jargon is an important part of education discourse but jargon can also be location specific. This may seem appropriate, but it may be that it reveals that the leadership of the school may not be clear about what is expected of the candidate. Anything that is important can be expressed in a manner that is clear and maintains integrity. To illustrate, schools put a great deal of effort in forming the messages of the institution in terms of attracting parents and students. That same effort should go into the process of attracting as wide a talent pool as possible to work in your school.

'Applied', (www.beapplied.com), a company that specialises in recruitment and addressing bias, use [text analysis](#) to check the effect the words have on candidates. From their research, female candidates are deterred from applying to posts if the advert and job description had a great number of words like 'lead', 'competition' and 'confident' within them. As Iris Bohnet argues, people chose to apply for posts based on their preferences and whether they feel they 'belong'; job descriptions/adverts provide information and behavioural cues about both. Applied suggest a coding of words that is almost balanced in relation to 'gender coding' to attract a wide range of candidates. One major failing of job descriptions is the information included in them. Much of that information could be moved to the contract that the employee signs.

Attractive school brochures/prospectuses

School brochures/prospectuses are usually seen as a continuation of marketing but with a target market of parents. It may help to design a brochure that can also be attractive to teachers from diverse backgrounds or to have a specially designed brochure in terms of recruitment. A number of independent schools in the US do this, and Vodafone's brochure offers some pointers that differ significantly from UK independent schools in terms of images and messaging: <https://careers.vodafone.co.uk>

The advert

One major factor to consider is where should the advert be placed. ***Unsurprisingly, the usual channels will also produce the usual people.*** A little research will produce information about networks locally and nationally that you can tap into. BAMEed is an organisation that sends out a regular newsletter to many educators to minority ethnic educators across the country. This will extend your reach.

Many job adverts also follow a similar formula:

- The history of the school/what kind of school it is (boarding/day/selective) or location
- What teaching post they want and the kind of person they are looking for;
- The safeguarding statement.

An example would be:

Located in 500 acres of parkland with historic buildings, xxxxx is a leading school...

We require a dynamic/enthusiastic/outstanding/passionate teacher...

The successful candidate will be able to teach to Oxbridge level

This advert will attract certain groups but also exclude others who may be able to add to the educational experience offered. A huge issue is also the lack of information on the level of salary offered. State sector roles always have a salary level/range attached. Independent schools do not always offer such details but often ask applicants to state their salary details. This is problematic as there is clear evidence that a gender and ethnic minority pay gap exists. The Office for National Statistics (2019) reports:

- The ethnicity pay gap between White and ethnic minority employees has narrowed to its smallest level since 2012 in England and Wales.
- Most of the minority ethnic groups analysed continue to earn less than White British employees;
- The size of the ethnicity pay gap for those aged 30 years and over is larger than for those aged 16 to 29 years;
- The ethnicity pay gap differs across regions and is largest in London (23.8%) and smallest in Wales (1.4%).

In terms of gender, there is also evidence that women generally are paid less than men (<https://ig.ft.com/gender-pay-gap-UK/>) and suggestions that women may be paid less for doing exactly the same roles as men. The BBC cases regarding Carrie Gracie and Samira Ahmed offer salutary lessons for all organisations.

In such a context, determining the market value of a role, especially when negotiating a salary, is almost impossible to do when the roles advertised do not give an expected salary. It creates a vicious cycle which employers and recruiters often buy into when they ask for salary details.

If the person already employed is underpaid, then the likely salary they will be offered will be pegged to what they previously earned, baking in inequality. In some cases, it may even mean that the applicant is not considered because they 'do not earn the market rate' even if they are doing the job.

A way to make the advert more attractive would be to think about the messaging in the same way you will recruit students and also put the salary in the text.

A more open selection process

One of the things schools usually do when hiring someone is looking at the school they attended and the university they went to. We take these as proxies for the quality of the candidate to do the job. Removing this information, as well as other details, would allow schools to focus on the criteria they are selecting against and focus on the individual, not the institution. Why limit applications to Russell Group universities or Oxbridge? Are you interested in looking at the candidate who could do the job? If so, it might be time to rethink this aspect of selection. This could be done by removing the details in the first sift of applications and introducing them again later.

Reflection

- Is your recruitment process as considered as your marketing material for parents and students? If not, why not?

Make it social

Schools often focus on the ease and accessibility of the recruitment process, but not the experience of the candidate. For example, what is their journey or experience of the school before, and when they arrive, for interview? The people candidates meet is their first impression of the institution. Hence interviewers and colleagues involved in the process should see themselves not only as potential selectors but also ambassadors for the organisation.

The interview

Interviews could be more 'human-centred' for the candidate. If the inherent bias that is within the interview process could be recognised then it might be addressed if the following were included:

- Providing candidates real problems they might face in the role (drafting a letter, responding to complaint, advising a student/staff member on an issue);
- Assigning scores to candidate responses straight away (human memory is fallible);
- Compare responses **horizontally** across all candidates, (like marking exam papers where all the first question are marked first, then all of the second questions..etc), rather than discussing candidates one at a time;
- Remove panel interviews. Yes, they are efficient in terms of time, but it leads to group think and deference to the person with the most power in the room (usually the Head/Principal). As Iris Bohnet argues, "to state the obvious, if you have four interviewers, four data points from four individual interviewers trump one data point from one collective interview."

Reflection

- How do you avoid 'groupthink' in your recruitment process?
- Have you thought carefully about who meets the candidates when the step beyond your school gates? What would they feel? What would they see?
- What is the 'candidate journey' at your school? What would the best 'candidate journey' look like? How much of this 'best' scenario is present in your current practice?

Make it timely

If hiring staff is one of the most important things schools do, it is surprising that the measurement of how successful the process is, is achieved through the outcome of the appointment itself. The process itself is rarely scrutinised to see what can be improved. Schools rarely ask unsuccessful candidates for their feedback to see if the process works well. This is an incredible opportunity to really find out what worked well and what can be improved. Moreover, it also provides a marketing opportunity. If an applicant was unsuccessful but felt that their contribution was valued, it is likely that they will recommend the organisation to their contacts. Finally, a word about feedback to the candidate. Feedback to disappointed candidates should be given using the criteria you used for selection as a guide. Be kind, helpful and specific on the feedback. The unsuccessful candidates will appreciate it and consider your school as one that really does care about the 'human factor'.

Reflection

- Does the time the person put into their unsuccessful application matched by your organisation's time in providing feedback? If not, why not?
- If unsuccessful for a post, what would be the best feedback to receive from your point of view? How would you like to receive it? Is this mirrored in your current feedback processes?
- How do you *know* if your recruitment process as a whole is working well? What data beyond the appointed candidate do you have?