

Headteacher development

A guide for governing board chairs

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National Governance Association

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and clerks at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

Introduction

Being a headteacher is one of the most rewarding and challenging roles in public service. Headteachers create the conditions in which teachers and other staff can thrive so that pupils can succeed; a headteacher who takes their own professional development seriously is more likely to influence those they lead to do the same.

Governance requires a strong partnership between the governing board and senior executive leader – the headteacher or the chief executive – and their team. Chairs have an important role in supporting their headteacher to identify and access the continuing professional development (CPD) and learning they need to build their capacity and expertise. Their professional nourishment should be prioritised alongside achieving a work-life balance, good physical and mental health, and emotional wellbeing.

This guide for chairs outlines ways in which you can invest in, support, and positively influence your headteacher’s CPD. Purposeful conversations between you and your headteacher are a crucial component of this work – this guide introduces CPD themes to help guide and structure your discussions.

This guide has been written in partnership with [HeadsUp4HTs](#), a network that aims to celebrate and promote the invaluable work of headteachers, as well as providing a range of support services to schools and organisations within the education sector.

Terminology

This guidance refers to:

- **Headteachers** – to describe the lead executive in a school or trust.
- **Governing boards** – to cover both the maintained governing body, the academy board of trustees and academy level committees.

Further reading and resources

[The Chairs Handbook](#): an NGA guide for school and academy trust governing board chairs

[Promoting school leaders' wellbeing](#): an evaluation tool from NGA and Schools Advisory Service

The [HeadsUp4HTs website](#): case studies, think pieces and access to support

1. Laying foundations through induction

Chairs involved in appointing a new headteacher are well placed to invest in their development at an early stage by ensuring they receive an effective induction. In practice, this does not mean making extensive arrangements yourself, but checking that the right connections have been made with the local authority, trust, local networks and service providers as appropriate so that the headteacher has access to an induction programme which:

- supports them to become fully effective as quickly as possible
- helps them to become familiar with their leadership context: structures, personnel procedures and services
- signposts to further professional development and support opportunities

Induction programmes vary depending on the context but are likely to provide key information to the new headteacher (in the form of a handbook, for example), together with introductory meetings with key people in and outside of the organisation. NGA's [headteacher recruitment toolkit](#) includes an induction checklist that may help you to review your own programme.

You are also an integral part of the headteacher's induction – your induction meeting(s) with a new headteacher are important in the process and provide an opportunity to:

- introduce the new headteacher to the governance of the school or trust (responsibilities, accountabilities, structures, delegation, reporting) – headteachers may require training on governance just as much as new governors or chairs do
- establish a shared mission, values and sense of purpose
- agree engagement routines: how often you meet, how you remain in touch

2. Supporting ongoing CPD

CPD is not an add on, but a key element of your routine conversations with the headteacher. Those involved in headteacher appraisal can help set the tone for future conversations by encouraging the headteacher to think about the CPD needed to support objectives, which also helps to move the process away from accountability and towards professional growth. Examples of CPD include, but are not restricted to:

- Attending courses, briefings, networks and conferences both locally and nationally.
- Shadowing opportunities that build knowledge and skills (eg shadowing business professionals in or outside the school sector).
- Mentoring.
- Coaching.
- Supervision (often available through the local authority).
- Peer support and networking.
- Time for reading and research.

The key is for chairs to be intentional in their approach to offering support. Many headteachers, especially those in their first role, will not prioritise support for themselves over others. It can be helpful to consider rephrasing the questions you ask your headteacher. For example, “what support would you like?” might be better rephrased as: “this is the support that is available (see above), let’s discuss which is most appropriate and plan how you can access it”.

3. Mentoring and coaching

Headteachers at all stages of their career can benefit from having a mentor and/or coach. As chair, you can have a positive influence by:

- Discussing and understanding your headteacher's perspective on mentoring and coaching.
- Establishing whether they have means and opportunity to find a suitable mentor and/or coach – what support might they need to find the right mentor/coach?
- Helping to ensure that sufficient funds have been allocated in the CPD budget to cover any costs.
- Encouraging your headteacher to develop by acting as a mentor/coach themselves.

A mentor is usually an experienced headteacher themselves and is especially useful to a first-time headteacher (although not exclusively so). The mentoring relationship is important as it allows headteachers to seek advice and guidance on issues that are specific to their role, drawing on the experience and wisdom of an established headteacher.

A professional coach can be someone from within education or from other sectors. The coaching relationship allows the headteacher to explore and develop their leadership, professional identity and provides the opportunity for them to discuss their role as a leader in a safe and non-judgemental space.

In most cases, the roles of coach and mentor are performed by separate people. Where one person fulfils both roles, it is important that:

- The identified person has experience of being a headteacher.
- There is a clear framework for identifying when the session is mentoring and when it is coaching.

Headteachers should be encouraged to find a mentor and/or coach who will be a good fit for them and will share their experience and practice without being formulaic. The relationship the headteacher has with their mentor/coach can also bring positive benefits to the chair-headteacher relationship.

[HeadsUp4HTs](#) is a diverse network of experienced headteachers and coaches offering peer support sessions. This network is useful to headteachers who are interested in a creative approach to resolving challenges and achieving their goals. HeadsUp4HTs can also help headteachers to connect to other professionals to establish a mentoring and/or coaching relationship.

4. Conversations about CPD

Purposeful conversations about CPD are likely to happen when working relationships are positive, respectful and aligned with same goals.

Use the following themes alongside the [headteacher standards](#) to guide conversations with your headteacher about CPD, discussing what they might need and how they might access it. There should be no set formula for such conversations – take time to listen and understand your headteacher’s context and predispositions.

CPD theme	Potential discussion points
Educational leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Translating vision and values into strategy ■ Managing change ■ Project management ■ Leading curriculum development ■ Leading a group of schools
Organisational management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Operational planning ■ Leading and managing finance ■ HR and people management ■ Issue and complaints resolution
Relationships and accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Working with governing boards ■ Working with senior executive leaders ■ Engaging with parents and the community ■ Engaging with agencies like the LA or the RSC ■ Engaging with inspection and review processes ■ Writing and delivering reports ■ Delegation and distributed leadership ■ Managing conflict
Learning, skills and professional growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Personal organisation and time management ■ Reading and reflection ■ Engaging with research and inquiry ■ Career goals ■ Influencing ■ Mentoring and coaching ■ Supervision ■ Feedback and appraisal ■ Difficult conversations
Access to peer support and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Local leaders ■ School networks and school-to-school support ■ Outside the locality and national ■ Outside of the education sector ■ Moral and emotional support networks ■ Perceived impact and value ■ Finding the best fit

Thank you for reading this guide. If you have any feedback you'd like to share, please email kcfeedback@nga.org.uk.

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