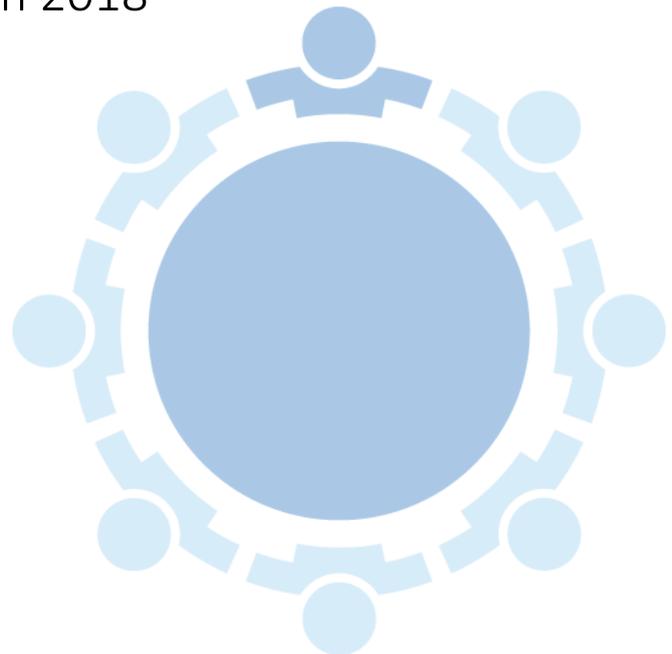


# Taking Headteacher Appraisal Seriously

A report on the current headteacher  
performance appraisal landscape in English  
schools.

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### **National Governance Association**

The National Governance Association (NGA) is an independent charity representing and supporting governors, trustees and clerks in maintained schools and academies in England. The NGA's goal is to improve the wellbeing of children and young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. It does this by providing information, guidance, research, advice and training. It also works closely with, and lobbies, UK government and educational bodies, and is the leading campaigning national membership organisation for school governors and trustees.

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## Executive Summary

In the wake of changes to the educational landscape, this research has been conducted to explore how schools are currently conducting headteacher appraisal, including the challenges they face and the obstacles they need to overcome to ensure an effective, robust and meaningful process is in place. To do this, NGA surveyed 1,164 chairs of governors and trustees of state-schools in England and interviewed 10 headteachers, chairs of governors and external advisors.

### Background

For over 15 years, those governing in English schools have played an integral role in performance managing the headteacher. However, a number of recent legislative and policy changes (outlined on pages 9-10 of this report) have impacted on how headteacher performance management is conducted in schools.

Firstly, the government introduced new appraisal regulations in 2012 designed to give maintained 'schools more freedom over managing their' headteacher (DfE, 2012). Secondly, over the past few years there has been a rise in the number of academies - schools which are under no statutory obligation to carry out appraisals and have the ability to set their own appraisal arrangements. As most academies are now part of multi-academy trusts (MATs), the majority do not conform to the traditional headteacher-governing body model and have different lines of accountability and management systems (NGA, 2016).

### More freedom but little change?

Despite these changes, the data suggests that many schools are following historic practices, based on old regulatory procedures. When the findings from this study are compared to research by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) conducted in 2012/13 (see page 11-12 of this report for a summary), there is little difference between the process used to appraise the headteacher today compared to the process commonly used six years ago (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). All survey respondents noted that their school used an 'objective-setting' (Jennings and Lomas, 2003: 369) approach to appraise the headteacher, with the survey also finding that:

- 94.7% of respondents said that their school, including a large number of academies, put together an appraisal panel of two to three individuals (although, even for maintained schools, the current regulations make no mention of an appraisal panel or its size) to conduct the headteachers' appraisal.
- 87% of academies still appointed an external advisor, with many maintained schools and academies also continuing the practice of using a school improvement partner (SIP) as the external advisor, or using an external advisor recommended by the local authority.
- The majority of schools continued to conduct the headteacher appraisal in the autumn term. Although some survey respondents had thought through the benefits of conducting the appraisal at a different time of year, and decided that the autumn term was still best, many suggested that the decision had not been thought through and was simply an 'historic' trend.

Following the procedures outlined above does not, in itself, constitute 'bad practice'. However, it does suggest that large numbers of schools have not actively considered ways to improve the headteacher performance appraisal process.

### Obstacles to headteacher appraisal and NGA recommendations

When reviewing how headteacher performance appraisal is carried out, there are some areas of practice identified in this report (outlined below) which may hinder the governing board's ability to ensure that headteacher performance management is robust.

Accompanying these findings are some recommendations for those governing. These are taken largely from NGA's updated headteacher appraisal guidance which will shortly be published on the NGA Guidance Centre.



### 1. There was some confusion as to who should 'lead' the headteacher appraisal process

In a typical standalone school, the data suggests that the headteacher appraisal process usually involves three meetings between: the external advisor and headteacher; the external advisor and the appraisal panel; and the external advisor, headteacher and appraisal panel. However, the order and importance of these meetings varied from school to school, with some schools making decisions concerning the headteachers performance and objectives before all relevant parties had been consulted. For instance, one approach was for the headteacher and external advisor to decide upon the headteachers performance and objectives *before* meeting the appraisal panel. This raises questions around whether the balance between the various parties in relation to advice and decision making is sufficiently delineated.

The process in groups of schools (such as MATs) was often different to that of standalone schools. Here, executive leaders (such as the chief executive) often led the appraisal with support/advice from those governing. However, issues around who should have a stake in the process were also present, with the interview data highlighting confusion and tension around the role of those governing, or other executive leaders, in the process. This confusion was often due to unclear delegation processes and a lack of communication between the different layers of governance and management.

#### NGA recommendation one

Any decisions made concerning the headteachers performance, and future objectives, should be made in the final meeting (between the headteacher, external advisor [if using] and panel members) to ensure that all appropriate voices are heard. Any 'pre-meetings' involving the external advisor should revolve around collating evidence and collecting thoughts rather than making judgements or decisions.

In groups of schools, it is important that appraisal arrangements are clearly outlined in an annually updated scheme of delegation. This must be published on the groups' website and everyone involved in the appraisal process should be made aware of these arrangements. In line with other sectors, NGA suggest that executive leaders should line-manage headteachers/heads of school within a trust, but that those governing should be able to feed into the process proportionately.

### 2. There was disagreement as to whether all appraisal panel members need training

84.1% of survey respondents chose panel members 'to a great extent' or 'somewhat' based on whether they had experience in performance appraisal as part of their professional role. However, only 58.3% of respondents with less than one years' experience appraising the headteacher had received training. One interviewee implicitly suggested that this was because experience in a professional capacity is enough to ensure that panel members are competent enough to appraise the headteacher. Whether those with experience needed training was, however, a contentious issue. Other interview respondents emphasised that the purpose of headteacher appraisal training is to get those governing to understand how the process and regulations work in schools, knowledge that is not be transferable from other settings.

#### NGA recommendation two

All new panel members should receive some form of training. However, this should be proportionate to each panel members' experiences. Whereas those with less experience may benefit from more formal training, others may simply require an in-house coaching session, led by the external adviser, to introduce aspects of appraisal particular to schools. Whatever training is appropriate, all panel members should receive it well in advance of the headteacher appraisal meeting to allow them to ask any questions and make informed preparations.

### 3. There were issues around the role and appointment of an impartial external advisor

Nearly a quarter of survey respondents noted that their headteacher led the process of appointing an external advisor. Furthermore, the interviewees revealed that external advisors often conduct other roles



within a school, such as being the SIP and/or a mentor to the headteacher. One of the benefits of using an external advisor with knowledge of the school is that they may have a good understanding of how the headteacher has performed throughout the year. However, as the SIP will work closely with senior leaders in a school, conflating the SIP/external advisor role presents a potential conflict of interest.

Furthermore, survey respondents placed greater value upon external advisors that had been appointed by the governing board as opposed to those appointed by the headteacher. In addition, the survey data shows that nearly a quarter of external advisors were involved in making headteacher pay recommendations. As already touched upon, some of the external advisors interviewed also felt that they should 'lead' the appraisal process.

#### NGA recommendation three

The governing board is responsible for holding the headteacher to account. Where it is required to have an external advisor, or those governing have chosen to use an external adviser, the governing board must take ownership of the decision. It is not appropriate for the headteacher to decide who her/his external adviser will be.

The external adviser needs to have both a good understanding of school data and appraisal objective setting. The role of the adviser is to support and provide impartial advice, not to lead the process or have final say on the headteacher's objectives or pay.

The governing board should review the input of the external adviser on an annual basis and consider replacing the person at regular intervals.

#### 4. Not all schools used appropriate data sources to judge headteacher performance

The survey identified a wide range of data sources used by appraisal panels to assess the headteachers' performance. Although the majority of those surveyed used 'hard' data (such as exam results), for some objectives 'soft' evidence (such as developing the ethos of the school) was considered more applicable.

However, it is important that those governing understand what does and does not constitute an acceptable source of data. One interviewee, for instance, noted that their governing board made judgements on the quality of teaching based on observations made through 'learning walks'.

#### NGA recommendation four

The governing board and headteacher should agree when the objectives for the year are set, what success will look like and what evidence will be used to assess this. The evidence should be easily accessible and available to governing boards.

#### 5. Not all appraisal panels set their headteacher achievable performance objectives

Encouragingly, 99.3% of respondents linked their headteachers objectives to the schools' priorities. However, in an attempt to link school priorities to the headteachers appraisal, interviewees revealed a tendency to suggest unrealistic objectives or objectives outside of the headteachers' control (such as getting 'good' in the next Ofsted inspection, but an inspection not taking place in the appraisal period).

#### NGA recommendation five

Objectives must be realistic and achievable. They should be related to the school's priorities and there should be a clear 'success criteria' in place for each objective. Of course, there are always scenarios where an objective becomes completely redundant due to unforeseen circumstances.

Objectives should always be assessed at a formal sixth month review to check that they remain relevant. Where necessary, the objectives should be amended.



#### 6. There was a tendency to neglect the headteachers' professional development

The survey data shows that headteachers who have been in post for a long period of time are, on average, less likely to receive a professional development objective as part of their appraisal. For instance, the survey found that headteachers who had been in post for five years were 10.7% less likely to have a personal objective compared to those new to the post.

##### NGA recommendation six

Governing boards should actively encourage headteachers to continue to develop at all stages in their career. The [National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers](#), published by the DfE, may be useful in helping identify areas for development. At the end of the appraisal period, the headteacher and governing board should consider what impact any development activities have had on the headteacher's practice.

#### 7. Some headteachers were reluctant to share their objectives with the whole governing board

One external advisor interviewed for this study found that most of the headteachers she/he had worked with chose not to share their objectives beyond the appraisal panel – seeing this information as confidential and personal to them. However, she/he went on to emphasise that a key benefit of sharing objectives with the whole governing board was that this encouraged better challenge and support for the headteacher; allowing those governing to hold their headteacher to account against their objectives more appropriately.

##### NGA recommendation seven

Aside from some confidential personal objectives, NGA's view is that there is no good reason why the panel should not share the headteachers' objectives with the rest of the governing board. Ultimately, the appraisal panel act on behalf of those governing and the process should be used to focus the work of both the headteacher and governing board. If objectives are set correctly, they should not come as a surprise to other governors/trustees as they should be closely related to the strategic aims and priorities of the organisation.

#### 8. There were more headteachers receiving pay increments than there were headteachers meeting all of their objectives

The survey data shows that there were more headteachers receiving pay increments (63.0%) than there were headteachers meeting all of their objectives (49.3%). Appraisal panels either recommended a pay increment for their headteacher, or could not because they were at the top of their scale, 83.9% of the time.

##### NGA recommendation eight

Governing boards need to ensure that those making pay recommendations have a clear understanding of the pay policy and how it relates to the appraisal policy. The pay policy should clearly set out what needs to be achieved in order to be awarded a pay increase. This cannot be a tick box exercise. If the headteacher has not met all her/his objectives then those conducting the appraisal need to assess whether there were extenuating factors. The pay committee should receive a written recommendation justifying any pay award being recommended, or indeed when it is not.



## Introduction

For over 15 years, those governing in English schools have played an integral role in performance managing the headteacher. Not only has a legal ‘duty’ been placed on maintained school governors to appraise the headteacher since 2000, but headteacher performance management is today linked to the three core functions of school governance as identified by the Department for Education (DfE, 2017). One of the core aims of school governance is to hold ‘executive leaders to account for the educational performance of its organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff’ (DfE and NCTL, 2017: 9). Part of this process involves ensuring that the lead executive in a school is working to an expected standard, that there are rewards for excellence and that there are systems in place to identify underperformance. In addition, another core purpose of those governing is to shape the ‘vision, ethos and strategic direction’ (DfE and NCTL, 2017: 9) for their school(s) – ensuring that the lead executives’ work correlates with the schools’ priorities and future ambitions.

In recent years, there have been a number of research projects exploring what makes headteacher appraisal ‘effective’ and the individuals involved in the process (Crawford and Earley, 2004; Brown, 2005; Kerry, 2005; Spicer *et al.*, 2014; Earley *et al.*, 2016). However, much of this work draws upon data which is at least four/five years old, with a number of legislative and policy changes impacting upon the system since this time. Importantly, the government introduced new appraisal regulations for maintained schools in 2012 designed to relax many of the procedural rules outlined in previous regulations (2000, 2001 and 2006). Furthermore, academies and free schools are allowed to set their own appraisal arrangements for headteachers (NGA, 2015) and, with the exponential rise in the number of academies following the *Academies Act 2010*, many schools have adopted different leadership structures which do not conform to the traditional maintained school governance model (Long and Bolton, 2016). Particularly in multi-academy trusts (MATs), there are often several ‘tiers’ of management above the ‘head’ of a single school (Lord *et al.*, 2016). This has inevitably impacted upon the way schools conduct performance appraisal and the involvement of governing boards.

These changes to the educational landscape mean that more research is needed to explore how schools are currently conducting headteacher appraisal, the challenges they face and the obstacles they need to overcome to ensure an effective, robust and meaningful process. To do this, the National Governance Association (NGA) surveyed 1,164 chairs of governors and trustees of state-schools in England and interviewed 10 individuals (headteachers, chairs of governors and external advisors) involved in headteacher appraisal. This project was undertaken between June and September 2017 and the aim was to answer the following research questions:

1. What arrangements do governing boards make for headteacher appraisal?
2. How are performance objectives set?
3. How is performance against objectives measured?

This paper reports on the findings from this study. It firstly provides a brief review of the literature, summarising: how performance appraisal is defined; what the legislative and policy landscape of performance appraisal looks like in England; and how this project fits into the current literature. The findings from the survey and the interviews are then reported, revealing some interesting data around: training; headteacher personal development; how appraisal panels are constituted; and the various input from different individuals involved in the process.



## Literature review

### What is performance appraisal?

Performance appraisal is the ‘formal evaluation of an employee’s job performance in order to determine the degree to which ... [they are] ... performing effectively’ (Griffin and Ebert 2004, 216 cited Chartered Institute for Professional Development [CIPD] 2016, 12). Often, academics and policy makers use the phrase interchangeably with the terms ‘management’ or ‘review’ (Lussier and Hendon, 2012). However, NGA (2015) defines performance appraisal as the summative assessment of an individual’s work-related performance over a period of time (i.e. an appraisal cycle). As part of this process, the reviewer will also determine the criteria for assessing the employee’s performance for the next appraisal cycle, using the process as a mechanism for making ‘decisions about pay, job assignments [and] training opportunities’ (Murphy and Cleveland, 1995: 326).

There are many different ‘models’ for performance appraisal identified in the literature (CIPD, 2016; 2017). Some of the common approaches include:

1. **The objective, or ‘goal setting’, setting approach.** This commonly involves: reviewing objectives set for the employee in their previous performance management cycle; assessing the employee’s performance against these objectives; and setting objectives for the next cycle (Jennings and Lomas, 2003: 369; CIPD, 2016: 7).
2. **The 360-degree review approach.** Often used to complement the objective/goal setting approach, but also as a standalone method in some organisations, different stakeholders (i.e. colleagues, customers, managers etc.) offer feedback on their experiences with the employee under review. These are collated into a report and used by an appraiser to make a judgement on performance. Often, the 360-degree review also includes an element of self-appraisal (CIPD, 2017).
3. **Employer ranking and rating scales.** Primarily employed in the private sector, this approach has been heavily criticised. In its extreme, it is used to ‘rank’ employees from the most to the least effective within an organisation. However, today this technique is more commonly employed as a rating scale, with employees grouped into different performance categories (such as ‘excellent’ or ‘must improve’) (CIPD, 2016: 7).
4. **The informal approach.** The CIPD (2016: 7) note that, in many settings, ‘performance review meetings have been more frequent and less formalised’. In some organisations, performance management has become less focused around a single ‘appraisal meeting’, with employers emphasising the importance of a ‘continuous feedback culture’ and regular coaching and developmental meetings instead.

Whichever model is used, the overarching aim of performance appraisal is to improve outcomes for an organisation. It is a way of ‘aligning [employee] performance with ... strategic goals’ (DeNisi and Murphy, 2017: 427) and is one of the principle mechanisms for holding an employee accountable for their performance. Organisations can also use the appraisal process as a structured platform to set employees’ new organisational challenges and to identify any necessary continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities they may need. Employees should also gain from the process, improving their own ‘individual performance and productivity’ by learning ‘how to direct their time and effort in their current jobs and in their future development’ (DeNisi and Murphy 2017, 427). Performance appraisal can also have a ‘motivational’ impact, with organisations creating a formal link between performance, feedback, reward and development (Murphy and Cleveland, 1995).

Performance appraisal is therefore a mechanism for holding an employee accountable, improving their productivity and aligning the strategic aims of an organisation with employee responsibilities. However, there is a wide body of evidence to suggest that if the appraisal process is not taken seriously it can become a ‘waste of time’ and a ‘bureaucratic exercise’ (Quast, 2013). As Cunneen (2006 cited IES 2011, 5) outlines, ‘too often ... [performance appraisal] ... leads to a shallow discussion, with both parties colluding to meet the



organisation's prescribed administrative procedure and, in doing so, avoiding the more fundamental issue of performance improvement'. To be effective, one of the most important themes in the literature is that all individuals involved must commit to the process (Moran, 2013). As outlined by the CIPD (2016: 22), 'it is people's reactions to feedback, rather than the feedback itself that determine[s]' whether performance is improved.

### The legislative landscape underpinning headteacher appraisal in England<sup>1</sup>

The same principles outlined above apply to headteacher performance appraisal. For maintained schools in England, the 'objective-setting' approach (Jennings and Lomas, 2003) to headteacher appraisal has been a legal requirement for over 15 years. Government regulations introduced in 2000/1 placed a 'duty' on the governing body to appraise the headteacher. The regulations required governing bodies to appoint a panel of between two and three governors (some of whom needed to be foundation governors in schools with a religious character) and an external advisor to aid in the headteachers' performance appraisal. The 2000/1 regulations outlined that the external advisor needed to be local authority approved, with the 2006 regulations requiring the local authority school improvement partner (SIP) to be used as the external advisor where applicable.

The 2000/1 regulations made provision for the headteacher performance management 'cycle' to be over one year, with the appraisal split into two meetings; one at the beginning of the cycle (between the appraisal panel, headteacher and external advisor to 'agree objectives' linked to 'school leadership and management' and 'pupil progress') and one at the end of the cycle (between the headteacher, external advisor and appraisal panel to determine whether the headteacher had met their objectives for the previous performance cycle). The 2006 regulations recommended that these two phases be combined into one, consisting of: reviewing previous objectives for the headteacher; assimilating evidence to judge the headteachers' performance; establishing a 'performance criteria' for the coming year; outlining the support that will be provided to help the headteacher meet their objectives; deciding on timescales for achieving objectives; and assessing any training and development needs for the headteacher. Following this, the appraisal panel should then: review previous objectives; assimilate evidence to judge the headteachers' performance; establish a 'performance criteria' for the coming year; outline the support that will be provided to help the headteacher meet their objectives; decide on timescales for achieving objectives; and assess any training and development needs the headteacher might have.

The 2000-2012 regulations also gave a prescribed timeframe and schedule in which future objectives and decision on the past years' performance of the headteacher must be recorded, quality assured, moderated, revised and appealed; with the governing body needing to ensure that the headteachers objectives were 'agreed or set ... on or before 31st December'. The 2000/1 regulations also outlined what type of 'objectives' needed to be set for the headteacher and placed a duty on the panel to identify 'any training and developmental needs' the headteacher may require. The 2006 regulations expanded this requirement to ensure that the appraisers considered the headteachers' work-life balance, the headteacher's 'professional aspirations' and any 'relevant professional standards' (such as the headteacher standards). Finally, both the 2001 and 2006 regulations made it clear that the headteachers' pay should be linked to their performance.

In 2012, the DfE scaled back on the appraisal regulations by 'giving schools more freedom over managing their ... [headteachers] ... through simpler, less prescriptive ... regulations' (DfE, 2012). These regulations kept the provision for schools to follow an 'objective-setting' approach (Jennings and Lomas, 2003: 369), over a twelve month period (in most circumstances), led by the governing body. Furthermore, the regulations also kept the requirements for: governing bodies to agree an appraisal policy for all teaching staff; for schools to

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<sup>1</sup> The 'regulations' referred to and cited in this section are: [The Education \(School Teacher Appraisal\) Regulations 2000](#); [The Education \(School Teacher Appraisal\) \(England\) Regulations 2001](#); [The Education \(School Teacher Performance Management\) \(England\) Regulations 2006](#); and [The \(School Teachers' Appraisal\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#). These can all be found online at [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk).

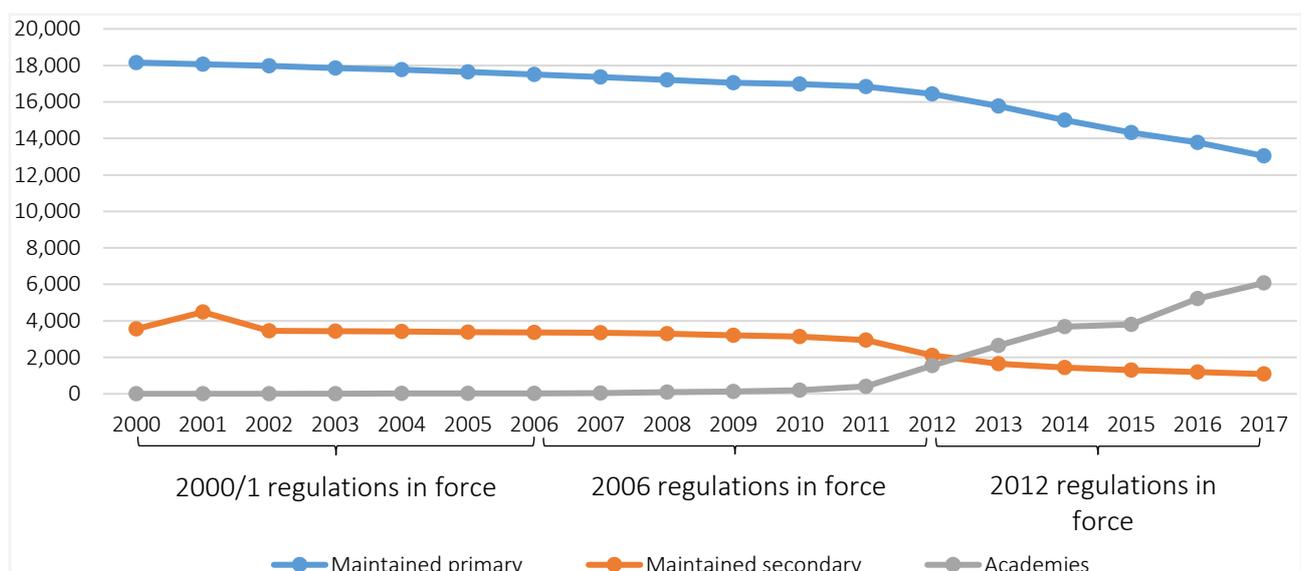


appoint an external advisor; to require the governing body to ‘make a recommendation concerning the headteacher pay’; and to ensure that a written report of the appraisal process be compiled. However, the 2012 regulations were less prescriptive about who the external advisor needed to be (removing the requirement for it to be the local authority SIP) and the type and number of governors required to conduct the process. In addition, the regulations also give the appraisal panel more flexibility to set their own objectives, with maintained schools now required to consider the school development plan in setting objectives and frame them around ‘improving the education of pupils at that school’. The timeframes outlined in the 2001 and 2006 regulations were also revoked, with those governing no longer required to conduct the appraisal at a certain time of year.

In addition to changes in maintained schools, there has also been an exponential rise in the number of academies and free schools that are free to set their own appraisal arrangements (NGA, 2015). The legislation allowing schools to become academies was introduced in 2002 (Long and Bolton, 2016). However, as figure one (below) shows, the majority of academies did not begin to convert until 2012, two years after the landmark *Academies Act 2010*. This legislation made it easier for primary and secondary maintained schools to convert to academy status, with subsequent legislation also allowing the education secretary to compel underperforming schools to convert (Long and Bolton, 2016).

Today, the number of academies makes up a large proportion of the state-funded education sector in England, particularly in terms of secondary schools. As of September 2017, there were 6,704 open academies, with official DfE statistics outlining that 22% of all primary schools and 68% of all secondary schools in England were either free schools or academies (DfE, 2017a: 7). Importantly, 74.5% of these academies are now formally part of a MAT led by a chief executive/executive headteacher with several layers of executive management (DfE, 2017b). These organisations do not conform to the traditional headteacher-governing body model and, as such, have different lines of accountability and line management systems (NGA, 2016).

Figure one: line graph showing the number of maintained schools compared to the number of academies in England since 2000.



Source: DfE official data (schools, pupils and their characteristics) from 2000 – 2017.



## Current research on headteacher appraisal

Much of the literature on headteacher performance appraisal is based around the regulations outlined above, taking the form of 'model policies' and step-by-step guides to headteacher appraisal (Robbins 2007; ASCL *et al.* 2007; NGA, 2015). There is also a small academic and policy-focused literature mapping the performance appraisal landscape in England (Brown, 2005; Kerry, 2005; Spicer *et al.*, 2014), with a particular focus on the role of the external advisor (Crawford and Earley, 2004; Earley *et al.*, 2016). Much of this recent work draws upon a study commissioned by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). This covered the process schools commonly followed in conducting performance appraisals of the headteacher, what the various input from individuals involved in the process looked like, and what makes performance appraisal 'effective'. The data collection period for the NCTL project was December 2012 to September 2013. It involved: a literature review of 56 'publicly-available works'; the assimilation of 13 telephone and face-to-face interviews; a survey of 1069 governing board chairs and 147 headteachers; and the development of 20 case studies (Spicer *et al.*, 2014).

The NCTL report (Spicer *et al.*, 2014) revealed a 'snap-shot' of some of the common features of headteacher appraisal in schools. As would be expected, nearly all governing board chairs who were surveyed outlined that their schools' followed an 'objective-setting approach' (Jennings and Lomas, 2003), conducted over a yearly cycle (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). This was often led by a panel of either two (25.0%) or three (67.6%) governors (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). Survey respondents revealed that 92.4% of appraisal panel members had professional experience in conducting headteacher performance appraisal and 73.1% had received some form of training (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, 98.3% of respondents outlined that their governing body had also hired an external advisor to assist the appraisal panel – with 59.1% of these closely associated with the local authority (Spicer *et al.*, 2014).

In terms of the process, the researchers found that a 'typical' appraisal consisted of a 'self-assessment' of the headteachers' own performance followed by 'a series of meetings: between the external advisor and headteacher; the external advisor and panel; and between the external advisor, headteacher and the panel; culminating with the headteacher and the panel' (Spicer *et al.*, 2014: 48). These meetings were often carried out over one day between September and December, with 83.7% of survey respondents conducting a 'formal appraisal of the head' annually and 16.3% doing so more than once in a year (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). Finally the survey found that appraisal panels generally decided whether the headteacher would receive a pay rise (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). 85.8% of panels made pay decisions for the headteacher, with 62.9% doing this as part of the same appraisal meeting (Spicer *et al.*, 2014).

As well as revealing how headteacher performance appraisal was undertaken by the majority of schools in 2012/13, the NCTL paper (Spicer *et al.*, 2014) also outlined several features of performance appraisal deemed to be 'effective' practice. The authors outlined that performance appraisal of the headteacher needed to be:

- **A strategic endeavour.** This means that it should be linked to the schools' strategic priorities and vision, specifically through the 'school development plan' (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). In addition, the researchers argued that performance appraisal of the headteacher, done effectively, is 'integral to the development of [the] overall governing [boards] capacity to meet the needs of the school' (Spicer *et al.*, 2014).
- **A structured and evidence-led process that is part of a wider performance management cycle.** This means that the appraisal should be incorporated into a yearly cycle of: setting objectives, monitoring progress towards meeting these objectives, and reviewing objectives for the next year (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). Any objectives set for the headteacher needed to be 'meaningful', 'challenging' and 'achievable', with data sources being vital in deliberating on the headteacher performance and future targets (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). Spicer *et al.* (2014) also argued that the process needed to strike a 'balance' between 'accountability', 'development' and 'reward'. Furthermore, the appraisal



meeting(s) should be just one aspect of the wider work being done to ensure that all headteachers' are reaching 'high levels of performance' (Spicer *et al.*, 2014).

- **Aimed toward the needs of the school and headteacher.** The process should be tailored to the developmental stage of both the school and headteacher (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). As such, the process should not be 'static' but should change based on 'individual' and 'organisational' necessities (Spicer *et al.*, 2014).
- **Taken seriously by all stakeholders involved.** In particular, the researchers stressed that the process needed to be built upon 'mutual respect, trust, candour and a willingness to challenge and to be challenged' (Spicer *et al.*, 2014).

As part of their research, the NCTL (Spicer *et al.*, 2014) also listed twenty 'challenges' which hindered the effectiveness of headteacher performance appraisal. Many of these revolved around skills, competencies and training of appraisal panel members. The authors highlighted that weak governing boards, with limited knowledge of how the headteacher appraisal works, sometimes had a tendency to rely too heavily 'on the headteacher and/or external advisor' to lead the process (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). The NCTL also found that many performance management systems lacked 'clear procedures and documentation', with governing boards also not having the necessary skills 'to use data effectively' (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, governing boards often struggled to find the time to schedule meetings, with some lacking any 'succession' arrangements to introduce new members to the panel (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). Some governing boards also neglected the headteachers 'personal development' when setting objectives (Spicer *et al.*, 2014).

Although all of the challenges identified by Spicer *et al.* (2014) remain important for those governing to consider, one of the most relevant to current concerns revolved around headteacher pay. In particular, the researchers found that appraisal panels often felt 'pressurised' to see the headteachers performance favourably, with fear of losing the headteacher driving a culture of 'over-pay' (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). Today, there is a growing literature to suggest that burgeoning headteacher and executive pay has been compounded by the legislative changes outlined above. Unlike maintained schools, academies are not bound to the school teachers pay and conditions document (STPCD). This means that they are free to set their own pay decisions for executive leaders (Allcroft, 2016). Partly due to the fact that there is no benchmarking data for paying 'chief executives' or 'executive headteachers' of MATs, many executive leaders are remunerated well above the top range of the STPCD for school leaders (£108,283 which rises to £115,582 in inner London) (Allcroft, 2016). Furthermore, *Schools Week* reporting that, in 2016, 'pay rises across the chief executives in the top ten chains totalled nearly £90,000 – with three receiving increases of at least £20,000 in the past 12 months' (Dickens, 2017).

### The need for more research

There can be no doubt that the current literature provides a critical 'snap-shot' of the headteacher performance appraisal process in, and prior to, 2012/13. However, the legislative landscape has changed significantly since the research was carried out, with particular concerns emerging from the education sector around burgeoning headteacher and executive pay. Crucially, only 3.5% of respondents to the NCTL chairs survey governed in an organisation responsible for more than one school (or equivalent) and only 11.5% governed in academies (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, 93% of respondents outlined that the appraisal process in their school had been in place for two or more years; meaning that, even in maintained schools, the vast majority of respondents had not changed their appraisal arrangements since the introduction of the 2012 regulations (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). Given that the NCTL report was the last major primary research study into headteacher appraisal, this research was carried out to see if, and how, practice has changed and whether any new challenges are present in today's climate.



## Findings

### Methodology and research design

The aim of this paper is to make a useful contribution to the current literature by providing an updated assessment of performance appraisal in schools. To do this, the project aimed to answer three overarching questions:

1. What arrangements do governing boards make for headteacher appraisal?
2. How are performance objectives set?
3. How is performance against objectives measured?

The research was carried out in two phases.

Phase one consisted of an online survey of 1,164 chairs of governors and trustees. Respondents completed the survey between April and May 2017 and were self-selecting from the NGA's weekly e-newsletter. Although this means that the findings cannot be generalised to include the whole governance population in England, it is likely that they reflect common practice in many schools; making the findings relevant to the majority of governing boards across England.

Phase two involved semi-structured interviews with four chairs of governors, three external advisors and three headteachers across five different schools. These were carried out between July and September. Interviewees were selected to gather a broad range of different experiences across the sector. This included both maintained and academy schools across infant, primary and secondary phases.

This project was carried out in line with the British Educational Research Associations (BERA, 2014) ethical guidelines. Informed consent was sought for all participants taking part in this project, no respondents were coerced into taking part and all answers were kept confidential.

In scoping the survey, NGA was aware that performance management arrangements in groups may be different to that of standalone schools. In groups of schools, especially MATs, the role that those governing in the trust will play in terms of the performance appraisal of headteachers of individual schools will vary. This will be recorded in the groups' governance structure and scheme of delegation. NGA's view is that, unless the headteacher/principal with oversight of a single school within a MAT (sometimes called 'head of school') is also the chief executive of the MAT, they should be performance managed by other executive leaders above them (such as a 'chief executive', 'director of education' or 'executive headteacher'). This practice is widespread in the public and third sector where line management in any organisation is carried out by paid professionals with the sole exception of the chief executive (who is held accountable by a board of trustees). Nevertheless, those governing may still 'feed in' to the headteacher performance appraisal process, either at a local level in MATs (through local academy committee<sup>2</sup> members – although common practice is for this to be the chair of the local academy committee) or through a board of trustees in a MAT.

The survey and interviews did include schools that were part of a MAT. To avoid complication, the study focused on the process of performance management in single schools only and did not look at performance management across groups as a whole. This means that, in a MAT, the focus was on the leader responsible for the day-to-day running of an individual school within the group who may not necessarily be the lead executive of the organisation.

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<sup>2</sup> The phrase "local academy committee" refers to the local/regional committees of a MAT. While many MATs continue to use the term local governing body (LGB), NGA prefer to use academy committee. This makes it clear that they are committees appointed by a MAT board with some governance functions, if described in the scheme of delegation, but that they are different to governing bodies in a maintained school.

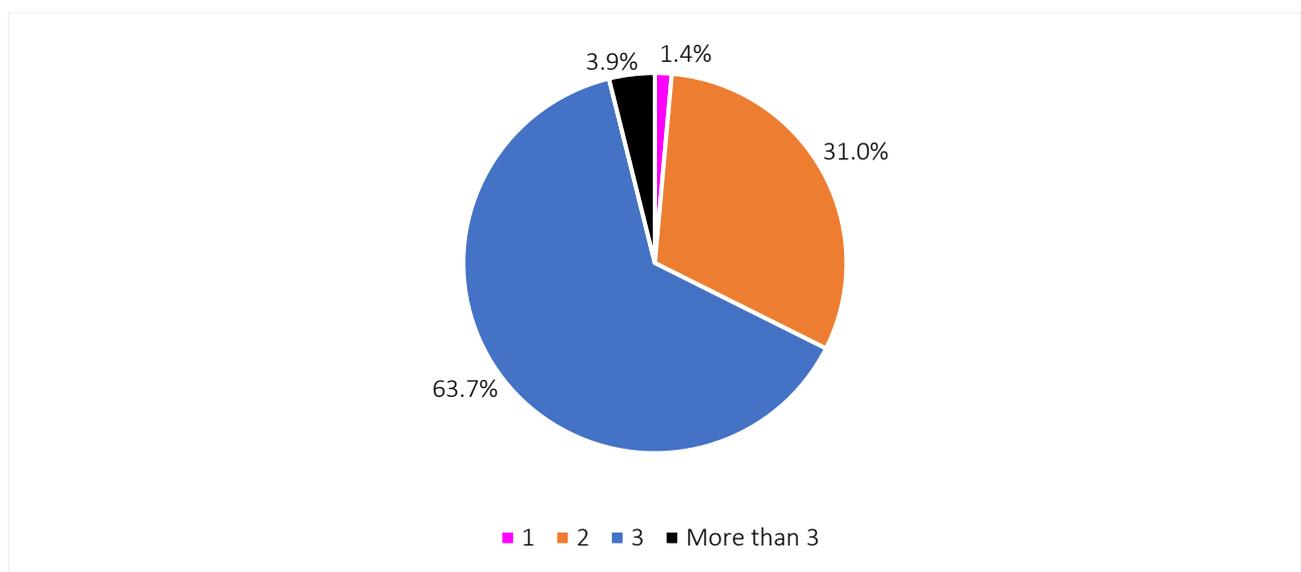


### The appraisal panel: constitution, training and experience

In line with the research goals, one of the central aims of the project was to capture how appraisal panels are constituted (in terms of the number of members and their roles in the school); what training, if any, panel member receive; and their experience of appraising, either in a school or in another professional context.

Much like the NCTL research (Spicer *et al.*, 2014), the findings suggest that many schools are still putting together an appraisal panel of two to three governors to appraise the headteacher. Figure two shows that 94.7% of governing boards used two or three people on their headteacher appraisal panel, with very few using either less than two or more than three. The number of panel members involved in the appraisal of the headteacher differed little by phase or school type, with many academies also choosing to adopt this structure.

Figure two: the number of panel members involved in headteacher performance management amongst survey respondents.



The interviews revealed that, in some settings, non-governing board members sat on the appraisal panel. In two schools that were part of academy trusts, there was an ‘assumption’ that the executive headteacher/chief executive would sit on the panel alongside academy committee members, or would lead the process independently without a panel. Furthermore, in one foundation school (that had four members on the appraisal panel) the vicar of the local church sat on the appraisal panel.

Most of those surveyed had considerable experience performance managing the headteacher, with the majority of respondents (51.9%) having between two and five years’ experience. Only 19.2% had one or less years’ experience and 28.9% had six or more years’ experience. Respondents also reported very little rotation on the appraisal panel over time. 39.3% of respondents reported that *all* panel members were the same as last year, with 43.7% reporting that *most* panel members were the same as last year. Only 17% reported that most or all panel members were new to headteacher appraisal this year.

When choosing appraisal panel members from amongst the governing board, interviewees suggested that they were appointed either because they volunteered, or because a decision was made by the full board based on skills and/or experience. Interviewees outlined that panel members were expected to be enthusiastic, be able to balance sitting on the panel with their own time commitments, and be expected to ‘buy-in’ to the ethos and values of the school. Furthermore, interviewees also flagged up several skills which governors/trustees brought from their professional life which they found ‘useful’ on the appraisal panel. These were:

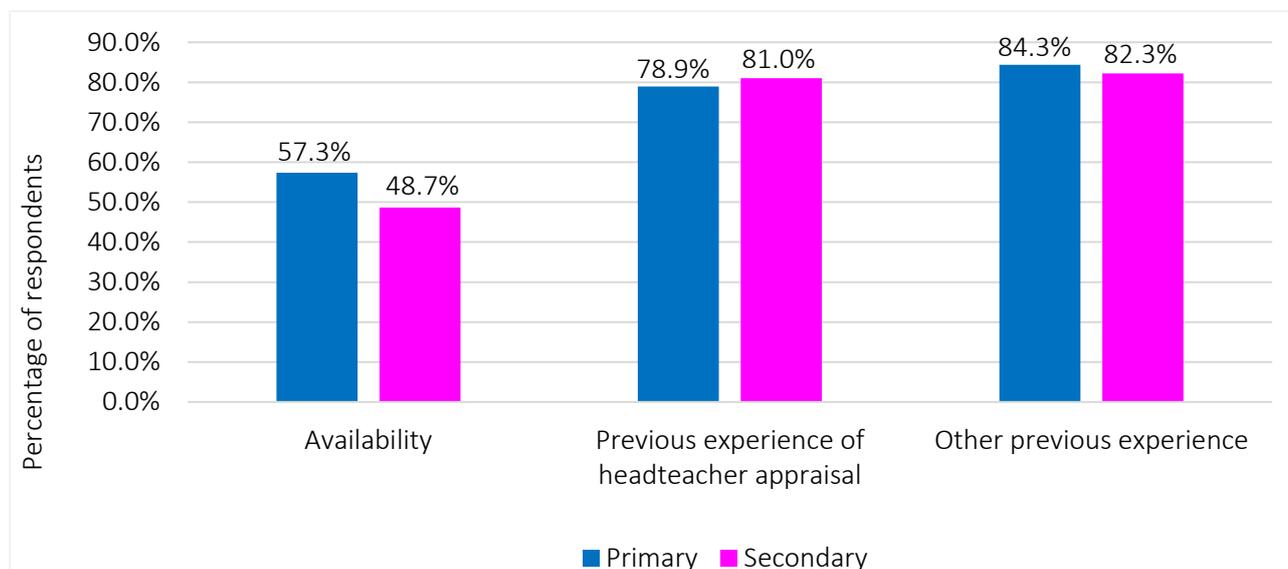


- experience in human resources
- being a previous headteacher/ deputy
- being a parent
- business management
- accountancy skills
- risk management experience
- having a pastoral/ theological background

It is interesting to note that, when choosing panel members, those surveyed outlined that their governing board valued professional experience in performance appraisal more than previous experience performance appraising the headteacher. 84.1% of all survey respondents chose panel members ‘to a great extent’ or ‘somewhat’ based on whether they had experience in performance appraisal as part of their professional role. Furthermore, 80.0% also chose panel members to a ‘great extent’ or ‘somewhat’ based on whether they had previous experience appraising the headteacher.

Skills and experience aside, over half (56.1%) of survey respondents chose panel members to a ‘great extent’ or ‘somewhat’ based on their availability. Nursery/primary schools were more likely (a difference of 8.7%) than secondary schools to choose panel members based on their availability (See figure three). This may be because primary school governing boards are generally smaller than secondary governing boards (Holland, 2017), meaning that there is less choice concerning who is going to sit on the appraisal panel.

Figure three: survey respondents’ reasons for appointing members to the appraisal panel broken down by school phase.



Some interviewees noted that members of the appraisal panel were chosen based on the fact that they were the chair/vice chair of the governing board, or because they had chaired certain committees. According to some interviewees, this gave them the confidence and knowledge to make an informed judgement on the headteacher performance and help set future objectives. As one interviewee outlined:

More often than not, one of the people ... involved in the head teacher performance management is either the chair or the vice chair (plus others). In my experience, they're usually very knowledgeable and very experienced people. Their knowledge and experience is perfect for the role. [In] some other schools, you often get newer members of [the] governing body or less confident people [who sit on the panel]. They need a lot more support through the process. What I find is they're not as challenging ... as others.



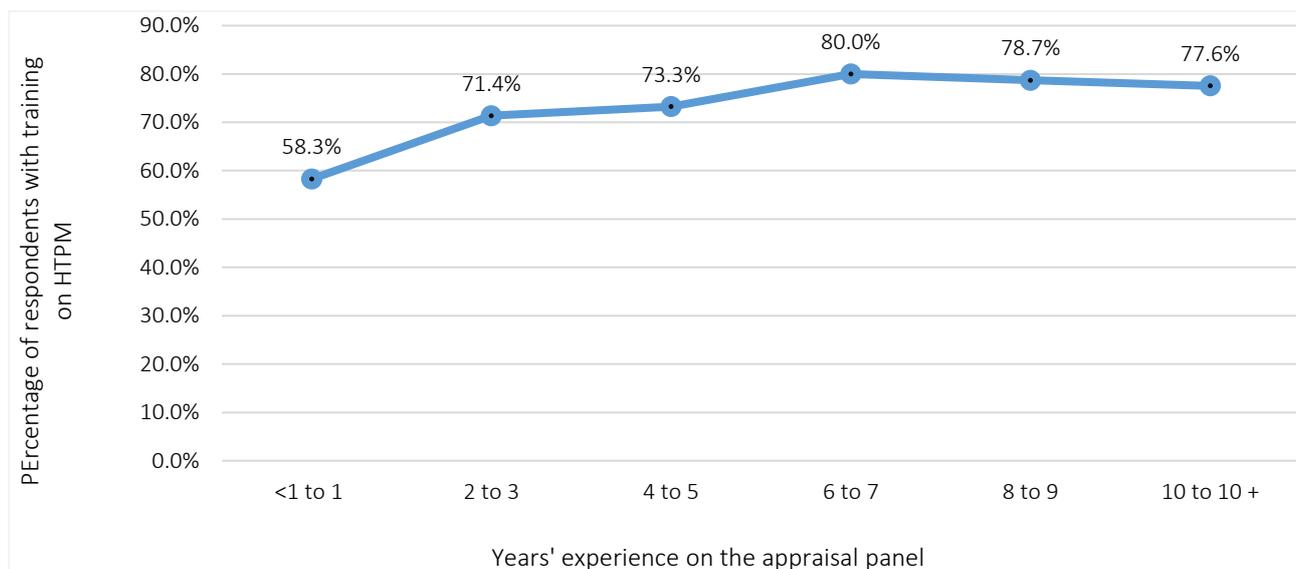
Although there was broad agreement that either the chair or vice-chair should sit on the panel, there was mixed opinions as to which one it should be or whether both should be there. One interviewee noted the benefit of allowing the vice-chair to administer the process to ‘unburden’ the chair. However, another said that the chair had the most knowledge of the headteachers’ performance.

‘[The chair] knows more about the reasons why some things haven't progressed or other things have progressed than the others do`.

Regardless of whether the chair/vice-chair is chosen, one interviewee noted the importance of keeping someone in a leadership position on the governing board separate from the process in case a complaint is raised by the headteacher.

In terms of formal training in sitting on the appraisal panel, the survey found that only 68.4% of respondents overall had received training – lower than the figure cited in the NCTL report (Spicer *et al.* 2014). In addition, the survey data suggests that, the longer a panel member has been in post, the more likely it is that they will receive training. Figure four shows that only 58.3% of respondents with less than one years’ experience appraising the headteacher had received training compared to 80.0% of those with 6 to 7 years’ experience sitting on the appraisal panel. This suggests that panel members are waiting until they are sitting on the panel before receiving any training.

Figure four: the percentage of respondents who had received training on headteacher performance management compared to the number of years’ experience they had on the appraisal panel.



The range of training carried out by interviewees varied considerably from none at all to being involved in training other governors on headteacher performance management. One interviewee argued that experience was able to act as a substitute for training: ‘The previous Chair had a senior role in a university where [they had been] involved in [performance management] and the new Chair runs a business so he is responsible for a whole range of objectives for the appraisal. So although it's not school specific training I am very confident both of them are capable of doing the job’. Nevertheless, another interviewee emphasised that the purpose of the training was to get those governing to understand how the process and the regulations work in schools, knowledge that would not be transferable from other settings.

### The external advisor

Another important consideration is around the appointment of the ‘external advisor’. *The Education (School Teachers’ Appraisal) (England) Regulations 2012* outlined that the role of the external advisor is to support



and advise the governing board, not to represent the interests of another individual/group or to make decisions on behalf of the appraisal panel – particularly in terms of performance related pay.

As already outlined, it is a legal requirement that all maintained schools employ an external advisor. Although there is no such legal expectation for academies, the survey data found that 87.0% chose to appoint an external advisor. Those in a single academy trust were slightly more likely (88.6%) to appoint an external advisor than those in a MAT (85.5%). The data also shows that the majority of schools surveyed (57.3%) had used the same external advisor for less than two years, with only 42.7% using the same external advisor for three years' or more.

Data from an 'open question' in the survey, and themes emergent from the interviews, gave a good indication of the skills and experience offered by external advisors. Interviewees outlined that external advisors were often selected based on whether they showed signs of being: independent, professional, trustworthy and challenging.

The external advisors that were interviewed also had significant experience as:

- Ofsted inspectors
- leadership coaches
- school improvement partners
- national college leaders
- local authority advisors
- ex-teachers or ex-headteachers

The external advisors interviewed also had many years' experience (between 3 and 6 years' experience for all those interviewed) in the role, although not all external advisors had received formal training.

The 2001 headteacher appraisal regulations stated that schools were required to select an external advisor from a centrally approved list 'maintained by the Secretary of State'. In selecting an external advisor, many of those surveyed used a similar system, relying on an 'approved list' of external advisors provided by the local authority instead. In line with the 2006 regulations, other survey respondents still used their school improvement partner/advisor (SIP/SIA) to act in the external advisor role. This was not just restricted to maintained schools; the survey revealed that academies would often buy into the local authority school improvement services and use a SIP (or SIA) as an external advisor.

One of the benefits of using the SIP as the external advisor is that they have a good knowledge of the schools priorities and how the headteacher has performed throughout the year. However, as the SIP will work closely with senior leaders in a school, conflating the SIP/external advisor role presents a potential conflict of interest. Such an arrangement can hinder the ability of the external advisor to provide impartial advice. To give one example, one interviewee acted as the external advisor, school improvement partner and mentor for the headteacher. Working this closely with the headteacher, particularly through the mentoring role, means that they could have developed a vested interest in the headteacher having a 'good' appraisal.

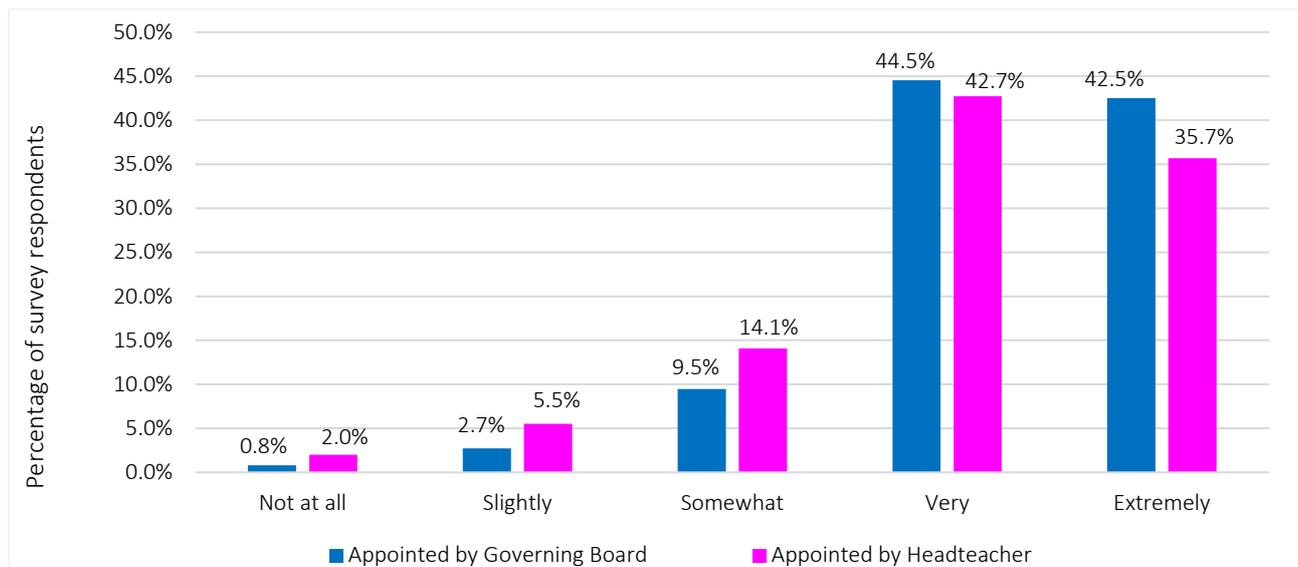
Aside from using the SIP by default, some schools actively sought an external advisor from elsewhere. In a substantial proportion of schools, the headteacher was directly involved in the appointment of the external advisor. Overall, 21.3% of survey respondents noted that the headteacher had appointed the external advisor.

On average, those schools where the headteacher appointed the external advisor were slightly smaller (mean number of students = 420.72) than those where the governing board appointed the external advisor (mean number of students = 486.19). Breaking this down, the headteacher was more likely to appoint the external advisor in a nursery/primary school (22.9%) than in a secondary school (16.6%). In addition, maintained schools were more likely to appoint an external advisor than academies (14.7%).



Interestingly, the perceived usefulness of the external advisor was less in those settings where the headteacher appointed them, compared to those where the governing board appointed them. Figure five shows that respondents were 8.6% more likely to see the external advisor as either ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ useful if they were appointed by the governing board instead of the headteacher. Furthermore, for those where the headteacher appointed the external advisor, the data also shows that 21.6% of respondents found them ‘not at all’, ‘slightly’ or ‘somewhat’ useful compared to those respondents who noted that the governing board had recruited them, where only 13% found them ‘not at all’, ‘slightly’ or ‘somewhat’ useful.

Figure five: perceived usefulness of the external advisor compared to whether the headteacher or governing board had appointed them.



Given that the external advisor is there to offer support and advice for the appraisal panel, their perceived usefulness is an important indicator of how effectively they are being employed in a school. Interestingly, only 20 out of 903 respondents explicitly reported interviewing external advisor candidates prior to appointment. In addition, from the interviews, the process for appointing the external advisor ranged from the informal (‘we didn’t go through a formal appointments process, it was very much we spoke - we approached a number of people who said that she [i.e. the external advisor] was very good’) to a ‘brief interview’ and a commissioned piece of work. Amongst those survey respondents where the governing board did appoint the external advisor themselves, many relied on recommendations from other chairs of governors, an approved list from the diocese, or an external agency.

When asked about their role in the process, many external advisors saw themselves as there to ensure that the performance management process was ‘challenging’ and ‘appropriate’. They helped headteachers and the panel with the wording of targets and ensured that objectives were challenging and realistic. Two external advisors described this aspect of their role as that of a ‘facilitator’:

I hope my role is a facilitator ... I’m there to facilitate the discussion and ensure that the targets that are set are appropriate. They’re appropriately challenging and so on. But also that the success criteria are appropriate as well. I’m a moderator, I suppose, of the targets and success criteria, and just to guide the discussion.

Other external advisors described themselves as a ‘sound board’, critical friend and ‘honest broker’ in discussions. Additional tasks undertaken by external advisors as identified through the interviews included:

- collating and analysing information before the meeting, including the school development plan
- writing up notes from the previous appraisal



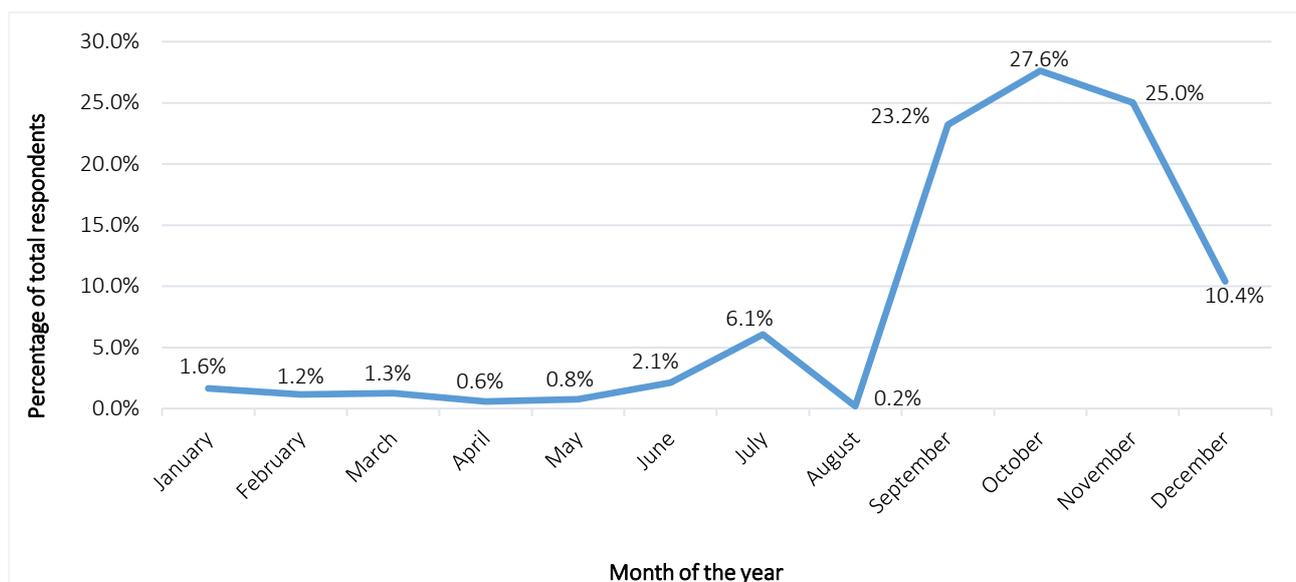
- reviewing the latest RAISEonline reports and the headteacher reports to governors

The data also suggests that the external advisor often agrees the sources of evidence that the headteacher will present to the governing board to say that they have met their objectives. After the meeting, the external advisor also writes up a report outlining any actions that have been made by the appraisal panel.

### Time of year for the annual appraisal

As well as deciding who is going to sit on the appraisal panel, and who the external advisor is going to be, the governing board also need to consider where the performance appraisal will fall in the school calendar. From those schools surveyed, it was common for the appraisal panel to be convened for the headteachers' annual performance appraisal meeting in the autumn term – favouring the months September through to November (see figure six). Overall, only 13.7% of respondents reported holding the appraisal panel at a different time of year (between January and July). When asked 'why' respondents chose a specific time of year, some noted that the appraisal arrangements 'pre-dated them' or that the choice was 'historic' – perhaps reflecting the requirements in the appraisal regulations pre-2012. Sometimes, those governing conducted the appraisal of the headteacher based on nothing more than the time of year that the headteacher was employed or the availability of those governing.

Figure six: the time of year that survey respondents completed their headteacher performance management.



Nevertheless, some survey respondents did note that the time of year was chosen deliberately. Figure six shows that, although most respondents conducted the appraisal in the autumn term (i.e. beginning of a new academic year), there was a small spike in June/July (i.e. end of an academic year). Survey respondents reported choosing June/July because it gave the headteacher time to prepare for the new academic year over the summer holidays and allowed for other staff in the school to receive their appraisals as early as possible in the autumn term.

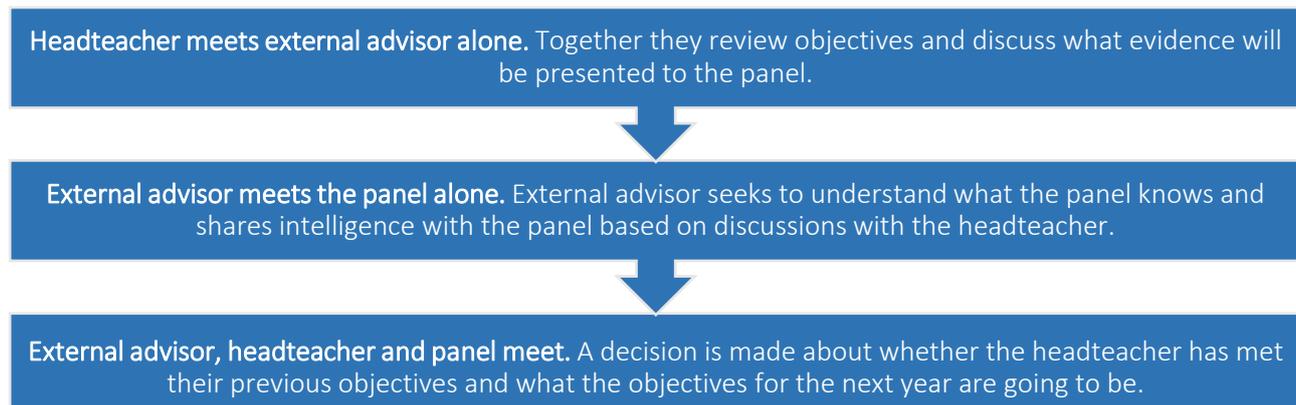
The majority of respondents, however, preferred to conduct the headteacher appraisal in the autumn term as this aligned with the release of SAT, GCSE and A-level results (or equivalent) as well as DfE performance data (such as Analyse School Performance data). Regardless of the time of year, many respondents chose to conduct the performance appraisal after the governing board had ratified the schools' strategic priorities through the school improvement plan (SIP) or school development plan (SDP). This was so that the schools' strategic priorities could inform the headteachers objectives for the coming year.



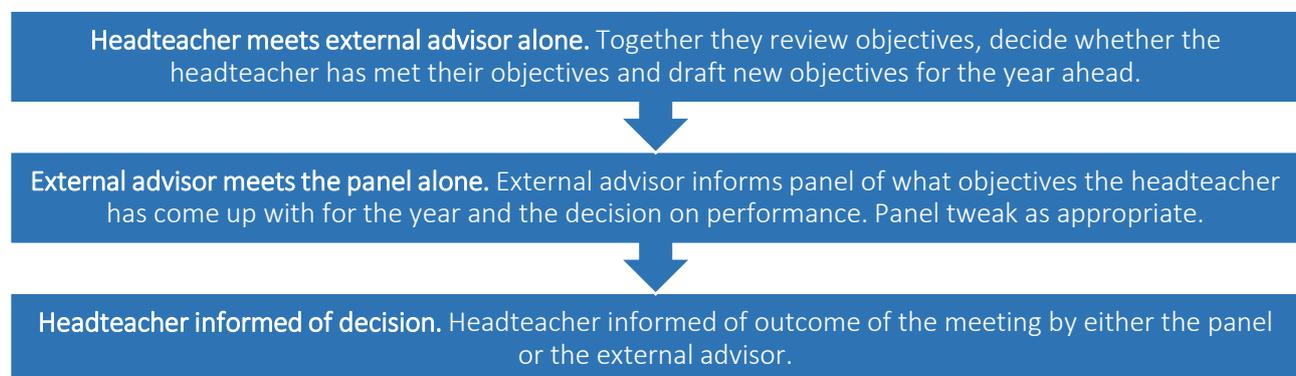
### How the appraisal is conducted

In terms of how annual appraisals are conducted, the flow diagrams below shows four structures for the annual appraisal identified through the interviews. Often, interviewees reported that the annual appraisal was carried out through a two or three stage process over a maximum of half a day.

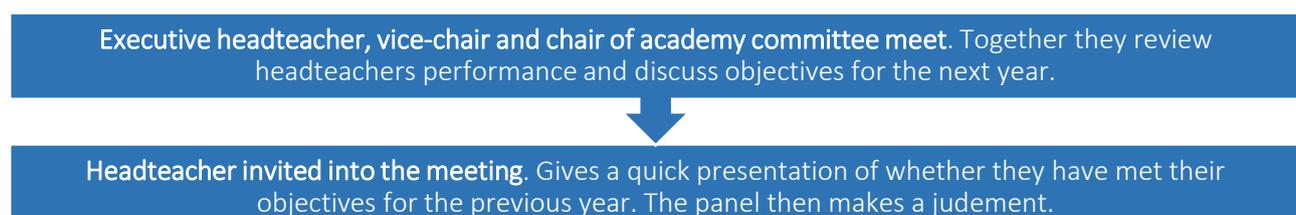
**Model one:** This model was used by the two local authority maintained schools interviewed in phase two of the project. One interviewee explicitly outlined that the process lasted roughly three hours, with an hour for each meeting. This model allowed those governing to have an appropriate input in objective setting and deliberating on the headteachers performance.



**Model two:** This model was used by a school which was part of an 'empty MAT' (i.e. a MAT looking to expand but currently only comprising of one school). In this example, most of the 'decision making' was done in the meeting between the headteacher and the external advisor. Although the panel got to 'tweak' the objectives, they never got to scrutinise the headteacher face-to-face.



**Model three:** This model was used by a school in an established MAT. The executive headteacher, vice-chair and chair all had an input in scrutinising the headteachers performance. With this model, a decision on the headteachers performance was largely made before the headteacher had the opportunity to present their case to the panel.





**Model four:** In this model, also used by a school in a MAT, most of the decision making was done by the headteacher and the chief executive. Here, the local governing board acted in an ‘advisory capacity’. However, their input was limited as they fed into the process after decisions on the headteachers performance/objective had been made.

Headteacher meets with Chief Executive alone. Together they review objectives and decide whether the headteacher has met their objectives. They also draft new objectives for the coming year.



Headteacher meets with Chair of academy committee and Chief Executive. Whether the objectives have been met, and objectives for the next year, are agreed.

The research shows that one of the most important things to consider when planning the appraisal process is at what stage decisions are made on the headteachers performance and their objectives for the next year. In three of the four models outlined above, decisions were made by a few individuals in the first stages of the process which then limited the input from other parties later in the process. For example, in model two, the external advisor and headteacher decided on performance and objectives for the next year, giving the appraisal panel a limited opportunity to either tweak or ‘rubber-stamp’ the process. On the other hand, in model three, the headteacher was only able to present their case *after* a discussion on his/her performance had already taken place. Finally, in model four, the chair of the academy committee was not involved in shaping the objectives, or deciding on performance, but was called upon to agree with the headteachers’/chief executives’ decision *after* the majority of debate had occurred.

Part of knowing at what stage decisions should be made is knowing who should ‘lead’ on the appraisal process. Interestingly, there was some disagreement amongst interviewees as to who should be responsible for taking the lead. On the one hand, one interviewee alluded to the idea that it was the headteachers decision as to who should lead the process:

Different heads work in slightly different ways ... some prefer me [i.e. the external advisor] to take more of a lead in terms of suggesting what the targets might be. Other heads come more prepared really in terms of - when you think about performance management targets - what do you think to these?

In contrast, one of the interviewees outlined that the appraisal panel should take the lead:

What I make very, very clear at the beginning of [the appraisal process] is you [i.e. the appraisal panel] are leading this meeting, and also, in the meeting that follows, when you are discussing your evaluations with the headteacher, you are leading that meeting as well.

Finally, another outlined that the external advisor is responsible for leading the process:

In terms of leading a discussion, I suspect in most cases I [the external advisor] do the leading ... I kind of chair the discussion, but the headteacher, the governors all make a contribution. It's a joint effort.

In groups of schools, particularly MATs, management of the headteacher is usually done by other executive leaders within the organisation (such as executive headteachers or chief executives). Nevertheless, two interviewees were unclear on who led the appraisal process in their academy trust. In one case, this caused tension between executive leaders and the academy committee.

### Evidence used to assess the headteachers performance

One of the key elements to a successful annual performance appraisal is the use of evidence in deciding whether the headteacher has met their objectives or not for the previous year, as well as using this evidence to set objectives for the coming year. For the interviewees, perhaps the most important source of



information used to make this decision was the headteachers' personal self-evaluation as well as the whole school self-evaluation form. This was seen as a useful 'way-in' to discussing the headteachers performance and, as the interviewees outlined, was often treated as the focal point of discussion throughout the process.

Those interviewed noted several ways the headteacher self-evaluation could be delivered, including:

- as a presentation from the headteacher
- as a written document in which the headteacher summarised why they have/have not met each objective

Although the headteacher self-evaluation is a useful document, interviewees noted that it was a subjective self-appraisal and, as such, needed to be cross referenced with other sources of evidence. On the one hand, two interviewees outlined that the headteacher could often be 'overly critical' of their own performance throughout the year. However, others noted that the headteacher self-evaluation was also an opportunity for the headteacher to 'sell' themselves to the governing board.

Appraisal panel members need to know their school well in order to ensure that they can judge the accuracy of the headteachers self-assessment:

When [the headteacher] puts together [his/her self-appraisal form] and says how successful [they have] been against [their appraisal] objectives ... we have a pretty good idea. [He/she] would not be able to pull the wool over our eyes.

This is why one of the key sources of evidence that those governing used to assess the performance of the headteacher was their own knowledge. As one interviewee outlined:

One of the key things for me is that the governors understand what's happening in the school. If they really understand what's happening in the school, they should know what the key things that need addressing are.

Sometimes, however, those governing used their knowledge of the school inappropriately, evaluating the headteachers performance based on judgements that governors are not qualified to make and impeding on the headteachers' operational remit over the day-to-day management of the school. One interviewee outlined, for instance, that:

We do attend school more than a lot of governing bodies that I've seen, so we don't tend to just go into the meetings. We do learning walks. We do book scrutinies. We do lesson observation. We do quite a lot other than just have our committee meetings.

In contrast, another interviewee outlined that they relied on their 'memory' to link the headteachers objectives to the school development plan.

**'Making sure that you have the evidence and you can support your decisions is everything'.**

This is why other sources of evidence, other than 'knowing the school well', are also important in evaluating the headteachers performance and deciding on future objectives. Looking at the survey results, many respondents simply wrote that the appraisal panel considered 'data' or 'schools results' when deciding on the headteachers performance. However, the table shows some of the specific pieces of evidence that panel members were using when deciding whether the headteacher had met their objectives or not. Each 'occurrence' indicates a specific mention of a source of information in the survey:

Sources of information	Occurrences
School advisor reports	71
RAISEonline (now analyse school performance)	71



Ofsted outcomes	66
Monthly/termly headteacher reports	64
GCSE/SATs/pupil assessment	57
Parental feedback	48
Governor visits	39
Governor knowledge of school performance	33
Headteacher self-appraisal	26
School self-evaluation form	24
External review of school performance	23
General stakeholder feedback	21
Student attendance trajectories	19
Discussions at committee	12
Headteacher termly reports	11
Chair of governor monthly discussions	10
Staff appraisals	10
360-degree review of headteachers' performance	9
Fischer Family Trust (FFT) data	9
Data (i.e. minutes) from full governing board meeting	6
Panel evaluation of headteachers performance	5
The position of the school in the league table	3

The interviews revealed that many of those who took part used many of the same sources as listed above. The interviewees also revealed an important distinction between collecting data for 'hard' and 'soft' targets. Whereas hard targets (such as academic performance) were 'easy' to evidence through performance data, 'soft' targets (such as those around relationship building and the schools' ethos) were more difficult to evidence:

#### Evidence for 'hard' targets

- progress measures
- Ofsted reports
- (historically) RAISEonline
- SATs results
- SIPP reports
- attendance and absence data
- exclusions and vulnerable children data
- 360 review reports
- staff surveys

#### Evidence for 'soft' targets

- evidence from governor learning walks
- feedback from staff
- pupil voice debates
- Q&A in the appraisal meeting
- photographic evidence of school projects

#### Objective setting

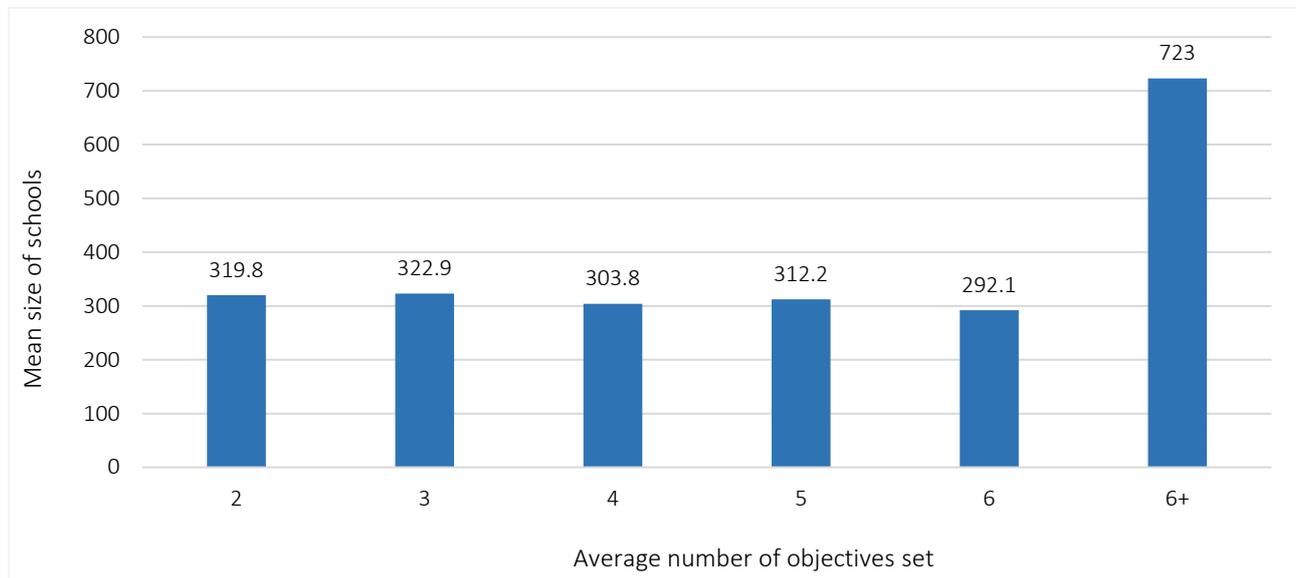
As well as assessing the performance of the headteacher, another central part of the appraisal process is setting the headteacher new objectives. Overall, 59.3% of survey respondents outlined that their school set three objectives for their headteacher, with 27.4% setting four objectives. Figure seven shows that, aside from those who set more than six performance objectives for the headteacher, the size of schools did not affect how many objectives the appraisal panel set. On the contrary, the data suggests that, on average, schools that set four to six objectives for their headteacher were slightly smaller than those that set three.

All respondents set a modal average of three objectives for their headteacher regardless of how long the headteacher had been in post at their school. Encouragingly, 99.3% of respondents noted that their



headteachers' objectives were linked to the school's priorities. Furthermore, 91.4% included a personal development objective in the headteachers performance appraisal.

Figure seven: the average size of schools for each number of objectives set for the headteacher.



Across all of the interviews conducted, the objectives set for the headteacher revolved around:

- strategically leading the school
- operationally managing the school
- ensuring high standards of academic performance
- ensuring high quality pastoral care and ethos
- showing optimistic personal behaviour
- developing the senior leadership team
- financial management
- facilitating stakeholder relations

Sometimes, the objectives in each school were context specific – linked to activities such as building work, academy growth and restructuring. Usually each objective set for the headteacher had between three and five specific 'targets' which were used to assess whether the headteacher had met their objective.

For instance, one headteacher in an academy trust was tasked with 'becoming more informed about the accounting officer's role' as part of their overarching finance objective. In terms of academic performance, headteachers were also tasked with closing the gap between certain pupil groups, obtaining 'outstanding' provision and outcomes and ensuring high standards of teaching.

When deciding on objectives going forward, most survey respondents (57.8%) used the headteacher standards and 32.4% used the teacher standards to compare the headteachers performance against the standards, link future objectives to the domains in the headteacher standards and as a 'reference point' when setting objectives and the success criteria for the headteacher.

Nevertheless, there were several respondents who 'did not know' whether the teacher (20.4%) or headteacher standards (21.1%) had been used as part of the appraisal process in their school. Furthermore, there was some indication that respondents were not aware that the headteacher/teacher standards existed.

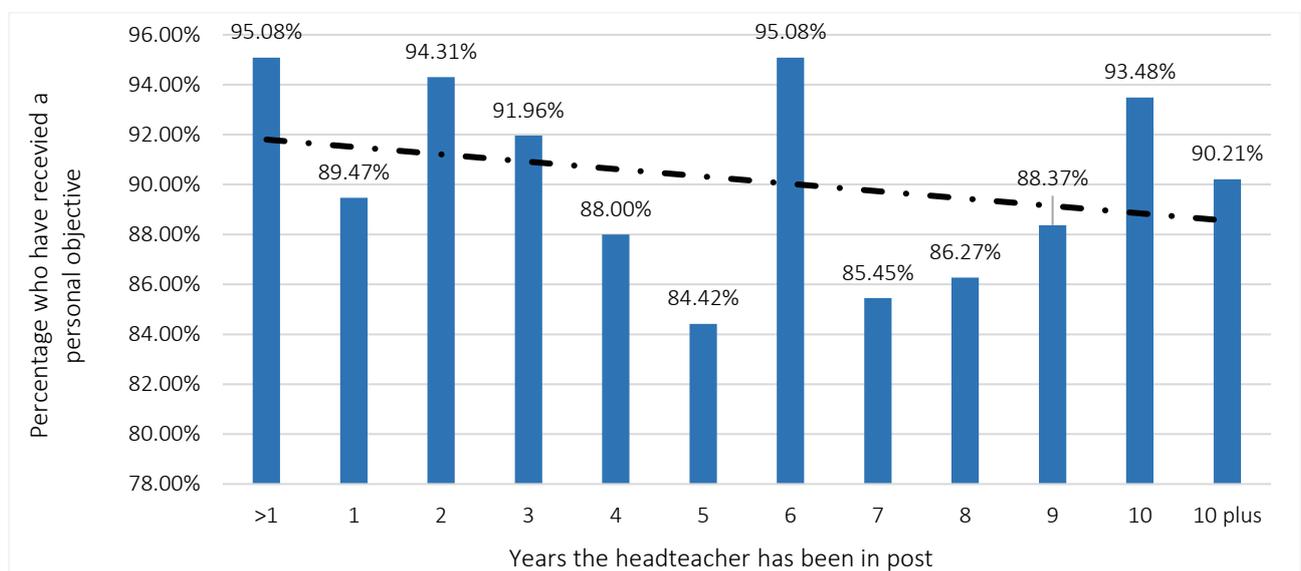


‘I am not aware whether we have used any standards or ... what standards these questions refer to’.

Breaking the survey data down, 21.7% of primary/nursery schools did not know if the teacher standards had been used and 22.2% did not know if the headteacher standards had been used. This is in comparison to secondary schools where 16.3% did not know if teacher standards had been used and 19.2% did not know if the headteacher standards had been used.

Looking at personal objectives, although most interviewees took into account the continuing professional development (CPD) needs of the headteacher, there were some that avoided these types of objectives. Furthermore, the survey showed that the longer a headteacher had been in post in respondents’ schools, the less likely they were (on average) to receive a personal objective (see figure eight).

Figure eight: percentage of headteachers who have received a personal objective compared to the number of years’ they have been in post



Aside from a spike in the number of headteachers receiving a personal objective in their sixth year of post, the trend seems to suggest that headteachers’ with less than one years’ experience in post were most likely to receive a personal objective. However, the number of headteachers receiving personal objectives dropped each year, before slowly picking up again when the headteacher had been in post between seven and ten years. One explanation for this trend is that newer headteachers may request and/or require more CPD to adapt to the challenges needed to manage their school. In contrast, headteachers with seven to ten years’ experience in post may be looking for new challenges, such as executive headship opportunities.

On a final note, interviewees outlined several aspects of good practice and things to avoid when setting objectives. They outlined that the objectives should always be based on the schools key performance indicators (KPIs) and the strategic priorities. In addition, for each objective, a ‘success criteria’ should be in place. This usually includes around five targets which will be used to measure whether the headteacher has met each objective. Finally, the interviews revealed a general appreciation that objectives should be aspirational, challenging and realistic. On the other hand, several interviewees outlined that unrealistic and ‘impossible’ objectives should be avoided. As one interviewee outlined:

Occasionally I've had to discuss with governors about ... being ... a bit more realistic. You occasionally get a governor that says ... ‘I think your target is to ensure we're outstanding at the next inspection’. When a school's requires improvement at that particular moment in time, you think, well, that's not



realistic, is it? ... I think sometimes governors haven't got a complete understanding of what's realistic. But in most cases, most governors do.

A particular point of interest from the interview stage came from the views of a headteacher; when interviewed they noted that they were unable to complete several of their objectives last year because they were based on events outside of their control: 'Two of them [i.e. objectives] I couldn't meet. One of them was related to an Ofsted inspection which didn't happen. The other one was related to a teaching school application which couldn't happen because the Ofsted inspection hadn't happened'. In this sense, appraisal panels also need to think about how objectives are phrased so that headteachers have an opportunity to meet them under any circumstances.

### Remuneration arrangements

Often, the final aspect of performance management is for the panel to make a recommendation to a separate pay committee concerning whether the headteacher should receive a pay increment. According to the school teachers pay and conditions document (STPCD), pay progression (outside of taking on additional responsibilities) 'must be clearly attributable to the performance of the individual'. Unlike maintained schools, academies are not legally bound to the STPCD although many still choose to adopt it.

The link between 'performance' and 'pay' often converges on whether the headteacher has met all of his/her objectives for the year. However, the survey data shows that there were more headteachers receiving pay increments (63.0%) than there were headteachers meeting all of their objectives (49.3%). Appraisal panels either recommended a pay increment for their headteacher, or could not because they were at the top of their scale, 83.9% of the time. Only 13.5% of respondents actively made the decision that the headteachers pay was not going to be increased.

Figure nine: The panels' recommendation on awarding pay increments to the headteacher and how many objectives the headteacher had met.

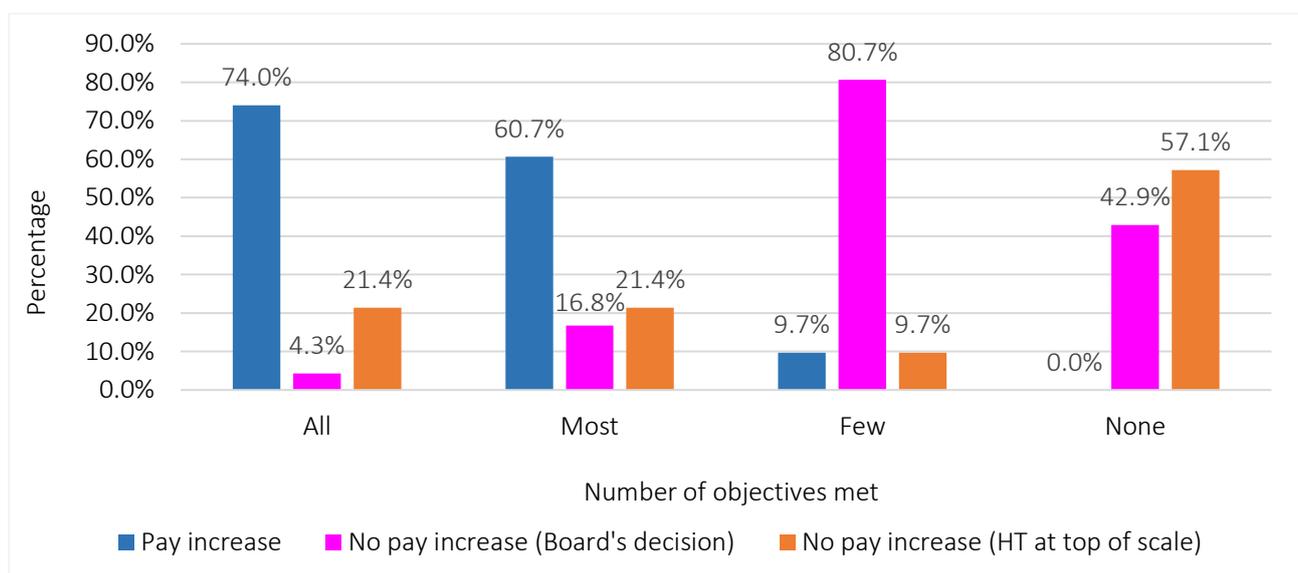


Figure nine (above) shows that, in general, those surveyed were unlikely to hold back on a pay rise if their headteacher had met *all* or *most* of their objectives. Whereas only 4.3% of respondents refused a pay increment if their headteacher had met all of their objectives, and 16.8% if the headteacher had met most, 80.7% refused to recommend a pay increase if the headteacher had met only a few objectives. Including those at the top of their scale, only 9.7% awarded a pay increase if their headteacher has met a few objectives and no respondents awarded a pay increment if the headteacher had achieved no objectives.



It is worth noting that external advisors should not be involved in making a pay recommendation for the headteacher. However, 24.6% of survey respondents reported that their external advisor was involved in making a recommendation about the headteacher's pay.

### Monitoring performance throughout the year

Finally, although this project focused on the annual performance appraisal, the data suggests that those governing did not simply rely on one yearly meeting to monitor the headteachers performance and to review their objectives. The survey found that 84.0% of respondents conducted a formal mid-year review of the headteachers objectives. The interview data also suggested that appraisal panels conducted more than one mid-year review over a twelve month period. As one headteacher outlined:

I have three reviews a year ... where I will ... self-evaluate where I think I'm at and then the governors will look at ... [the evidence] ... I've provided them with and decide whether they think: 'yes, I'm on track; no, I'm not; I'm doing the right thing; I'm not doing the right thing', and give me some feedback, ask if I need any additional support. [T]hen at the final review we agree we've met - or they decide if they think I've met or not met [the objectives], based on the evidence I've provided for my review.

As well as 'formal reviews', interviewees also noted tracking the headteachers performance throughout the year through weekly and monthly meetings between the chair of governors and/or the appraisal panel and the headteacher.

Finally, throughout the year governors and trustees should also be challenging and supporting the headteacher; holding them to account for the educational performance and fiscal management of their organisation. One interviewee outlined that the governing board 'can measure and monitor any work that ... [the headteacher has] ... completed against ... [his/her performance appraisal] ... objectives to ensure that we can say, at the end of the year, that's been achieved, that's been achieved, that hasn't been achieved and the reason why'. One obstacle which impedes this function is that some headteachers are reluctant to share their objectives with the whole governing board. This emerged as a concern for one participant interviewed who said that:

Clearly the [headteachers' targets] are linked to the [school development] plan... [so] I've also said to the succession of head teachers we've had, why don't you, in your report for the governors, actually say 'these are my targets'? But they've mostly chosen not to do that.

This process of keeping the objectives 'secret' from other governors/trustees not on the appraisal panel creates issues in terms of challenge and accountability. It diminishes the ability for those governing to effectively support and challenge the headteacher throughout the year as those not on the appraisal panel will remain unaware of the headteacher's priorities.



## Discussion, conclusion and recommendations for governing boards

This research has built upon, and contributed too, the current literature on headteacher appraisal; providing an updated overview of the headteacher performance landscape in England. While NGA endorse all of the principles of 'effective practice' outlined in the NCTL (Spicer *et al.*, 2014) study (see page 11-12 of this report for an overview), this project has revealed other challenges schools currently face in creating a robust and meaningful process.

Some of the most salient challenges uncovered include: ensuring that governing boards are actively thinking about tailoring the process to the needs of schools; that all panel members have the skills and resources to performance appraise the headteacher effectively; that the right stakeholders are 'leading' and contributing to the process; and that headteacher objectives are achievable and linked to robust pay decisions.

### More freedom but little change?

As outlined on pages 9 – 10, new appraisal regulations were introduced in 2012. These were designed to give maintained 'schools more freedom over managing their' headteacher and were less prescriptive than the regulations which proceeded them. There has also been an exponential rise in the number of academies (which are not legally bound to the appraisal regulations). As most academies are now part of MATs, the majority also have different lines of accountability and management systems (NGA, 2016).

Yet, despite these changes, the data suggests that many schools are following historic practices, based on old regulatory procedures. When the findings from this study are compared to the NCTL 2012/13 research (see page 11-12 of this report), there is little difference between the process used to appraise the headteacher today compared to the process commonly used six years ago (Spicer *et al.*, 2014). All survey respondents noted that their school used an 'objective-setting' (Jennings and Lomas, 2003: 369) approach to appraise the headteacher, with the survey also finding that:

- 94.7% of respondents said that their school, including a large number of academies, put together an appraisal panel of two to three individuals (although, even for maintained schools, the current regulations make no mention of an appraisal panel or its size) to conduct the headteachers' appraisal.
- 87% of academies still appointed an external advisor, with many maintained schools and academies also continuing the practice of using a school improvement partner (SIP) as the external advisor, or using an external advisor recommended by the local authority.
- The majority of schools continued to conduct the headteacher appraisal in the autumn term. Although some survey respondents had thought through the benefits of conducting the appraisal at a different time of year, and decided that the autumn term was still best, many suggested that the decision had not been thought through and was simply an 'historic' trend.

Following the practices outlined above does not necessarily constitute 'bad practice'. However, it does suggest that large numbers of schools have not actively considered ways to improve the headteacher performance appraisal process.

### Areas that schools may consider changing

There are some areas of practice identified in this report (outlined below) which contradict what NGA, and the wider literature, would consider to be good practice.

#### Thinking about who should lead the process (pages 20-22 of this report)

In line with Spicer *et al.* (2014: 48), this study also found that the headteacher appraisal process often consists of 'a series of meetings: between the external advisor and headteacher; the external advisor and panel; and between the external advisor, headteacher' in a typical standalone school. However, the order and importance of these meetings varied from school to school, with some schools making decisions



concerning the headteachers performance and objectives before all relevant parties had been consulted. For instance, one approach was for the headteacher and external advisor to decide upon the headteachers performance and objectives *before* meeting the appraisal panel. This raises questions around whether the balance between the various parties in relation to advice and decision making is sufficiently delineated. In addition, the interview data also shows some tension as to whether the external advisor, appraisal panel or the headteacher believes that they should 'lead' the process.

The process in groups was often different to standalone schools. Here, executive leaders (such as the chief executive) often led the appraisal with support/advice from those governing. However, issues around who should have a stake in the process were also present, with the data suggesting that there was often tension and confusion around the role of those governing, or other executive leaders, in the process. This confusion was often due to unclear delegation processes within the group and a lack of communication between the different layers of governance and management.

#### NGA recommends

Any decisions made concerning the headteachers performance, and future objectives, should be made in the final meeting (between the headteacher, external advisor [if using] and panel members) to ensure that all appropriate voices are heard. Any 'pre-meetings' involving the external advisor should revolve around collating evidence and collecting thoughts rather than making judgements or decisions.

In groups of schools, it is important that appraisal arrangements are clearly outlined in an annually updated scheme of delegation. This must be published on the groups' website and everyone involved in the appraisal process should be made aware of these arrangements. In line with other sectors, NGA suggest that executive leaders should line-manage headteachers/heads of school within a trust, but that those governing should be able to feed into the process proportionately.

#### Creating robust performance objectives (pages 23-26 of this report)

Spicer *et al* (2014) suggest that the headteachers' objectives need to be linked to the school priorities and be 'meaningful', 'challenging' and 'achievable'. Encouragingly, 99.3% of respondents linked their headteachers' objectives to the schools' priorities. However, there was a tendency amongst some interviewees to neglect the 'achievable' element of this mantra and to set objectives with elements outside of their headteachers' control (such as getting 'good' in the next Ofsted inspection, but an inspection not taking place in the appraisal period).

In addition, despite the literature being clear that identifying professional development needs is one of the major benefits of performance appraisal (see pages 25-26 of this report), the survey data shows that headteachers who had been in post for a long period of time were, on average, less likely to receive a professional development objective as part of their appraisal. For example, those who had been in post for five years were 10.7% less likely to have a personal objective compared to those new to the post.

Furthermore, one of the most contentious issues to emerge from the study was whether the headteachers' objectives should be shared with those governors or trustees not part of the appraisal panel. One interviewee (who was an external advisor) outlined that most headteachers chose not to share their objectives beyond the appraisal panel – seeing this information as personal to them. However, interviewees noted that a key benefit of sharing objectives with the whole governing board was that this allowed those governing to hold their headteacher to account against their objectives more appropriately.

#### NGA recommends

Objectives must be realistic and achievable. They should be related to the school's priorities and there should be a clear 'success criteria' in place for each objective. Of course, there are always scenarios where an objective becomes completely redundant due to unforeseen circumstances. Objectives should always be



assessed at a formal sixth month review to check that they remain relevant. Where necessary the objectives should be amended.

Governing boards should also actively encourage headteachers to continue to develop at all stages in their career. The [National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers](#), published by the DfE, may be useful in helping identify areas for development. At the end of the appraisal period, the headteacher and governing board should consider at the end of the appraisal period what impact any development activities have had on the headteacher's practice.

Finally, aside from some confidential personal objectives, NGA's view is that there is no good reason why the panel should not share the headteachers' objectives with the rest of the governing board. Ultimately, the appraisal panel act on behalf of those governing and the process should be used to focus the work of both the headteacher and governing board. If objectives are set correctly, they should not come as a surprise to other governors/trustees as they should be closely related to the strategic aims and priorities of the organisation.

#### Training for appraisal panel members (pages 14-16 of this report)

This study has also revealed tensions around whether those panel members with professional experience in performance appraisal need training on headteacher performance management. 84.1% of all survey respondents chose panel members 'to a great extent' or 'somewhat' based on whether they had experience in performance appraisal as part of their professional role. However, only 58.3% of respondents with less than one years' experience appraising the headteacher had received training. One interviewee implicitly suggested that this was because experience in a professional capacity is enough to ensure that panel members are competent in appraising the headteacher. Whether those with experience needed training was, however, a contentious issue. Other interviewees emphasised that the purpose of headteacher appraisal training was to get those governing to understand how the process and regulations work in schools, knowledge that would not be transferable from other settings.

#### NGA recommends

All new panel members should receive some form of training. However, this should be proportional to each panel members' experiences. Whereas those with less experience may benefit from more formal training, others may simply require an in-house coaching session, led by the external adviser, to introduce aspects of appraisal particular to schools. Regardless of what is appropriate, all panel members should receive their training well in advance of the headteacher appraisal meeting to allow them to ask any questions and make informed preparations.

#### Making evidence-based judgments on the headteachers' performance (pages 22-23 of this report)

While it was encouraging to see a wealth of different 'soft' and 'hard' data sources being used to make an informed judgement on the headteachers' performance, some interviewees revealed that they were making judgement on the headteachers performance based on inappropriate evidence. One interviewee noted that their governing board made a judgement on the quality of teaching based on observations made through exercises such as 'book scrutinise' and 'lesson observations'. In addition, another interviewee outlined that they relied on their 'memory' to link the headteachers objectives to the school development plan.

#### NGA recommends

The governing board and headteacher should agree when the objectives for the year are set, what success will look like and what evidence will be used to assess this. The evidence should be easily accessible and available to governing boards.



### Considering the role of the external advisor (pages 16-19 of this report)

From the interviews and survey, issues emerged around appointing an impartial external advisor. Nearly a quarter of headteachers surveyed led the process of appointing an external advisor. Furthermore, the interviewees revealed that external advisors often conducted other roles within the school, such as being the SIP and/or a mentor to the headteacher.

One of the benefits of using an external advisor with a good understanding of the school is that they have good knowledge of how the headteacher has performed throughout the year. However, as the SIP will work closely with senior leaders in a school, conflating the SIP/external advisor role presents a potential conflict of interest. Furthermore, survey respondents placed greater value upon external advisors that had been appointed by the governing board as opposed to those appointed by the headteacher.

In terms of the role of the external advisor, the survey data shows that nearly a quarter were involved in making a pay recommendation for the headteacher and, as already touched upon, some external advisors felt that they should 'lead' the process. Evidently, such roles go beyond the remit of the external advisor as outlined in the appraisal regulations (see page 9-10).

#### NGA recommends

The governing board is responsible for holding the headteacher to account. Where it is required to have an external advisor, or those governing have chosen to use an external adviser, the governing board must take ownership of the decision. It is not appropriate for the headteacher to decide who her/his external adviser will be.

The external adviser needs to have both a good understanding of school data and good appraisal objective setting. The role of the adviser is to support and provide impartial advice, not to lead the process or have final say on the headteacher's objectives or pay.

The governing board should review the input of the external adviser on an annual basis and consider replacing the person at regular intervals.

### Recommending pay increments for the headteacher (pages 26-27 of this report)

The survey data shows that there were more headteachers receiving pay increments (63.0%) than there were headteachers meeting all of their objectives (49.3%). Appraisal panels either recommended a pay increment for their headteacher, or could not because they were at the top of their scale, 83.9% of the time.

#### NGA recommends

Governing boards need to ensure that those making pay recommendations have a clear understanding of the pay policy and how it relates to the appraisal policy. The pay policy should clearly set out what needs to be achieved in order to be awarded a pay increase. This cannot be a tick box exercise. If the headteacher has not met all her/his objectives then those conducting the appraisal need to assess whether there were extenuating factors. The pay committee should receive a written recommendation justifying any pay award being recommended, or indeed when it is not.



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