Applying for a position as a Head of School in the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts

This Guide is provided for applicants for leadership positions in schools in Fiji.

The selection process used for Head of School positions has included:

- Long-listing on qualifications and experience – those meeting the benchmark will progress to the next stage
- Short-listing on the response to Knowledge, Experience, Skills and Abilities (KESAs) specified in the role description – those meeting a benchmark agreed by the selection panel will progress to the job test stage
- Job test – a series of tests to be completed which assess specific capabilities in relation to KESAs
- Interview – for applicants meeting the benchmark on the job tests
- Referee checks – to confirm suitability of applicants meeting benchmark for appointment.

There may be more applicants who meet the benchmark for appointment after interview than there are positions available. In this case, applicants not appointed will be placed on an Order of Merit and considered for placement as positions become available.

Information about each stage of the process is outlined below.

**Part 1: Submitting a Written Application**

Applicants are asked to submit the following documents:

- Completed application form including a statement demonstrating how the applicant meets the KESAs specified in the role description; and
- An up to date CV or resume

Applicants are encouraged to submit an online application through the MEHA on-line application system.

Detailed guidelines are provided as part of the information package and all applicants are strongly encouraged to ensure they read and clearly understand those guidelines when doing their application.

**Qualifications and Experience**

At the long listing stage of the process, applicants are scored in relation to the qualifications they have completed and their teaching and educational leadership experience.

Educational leadership is defined as experience in the process of enlisting and guiding the talents and energies of teachers, pupils, and parents toward achieving common educational aims. Educational leadership experience could include time in formal leadership roles and also in undertaking leadership activities such as preparing sessions for student-free days programmes or through membership of a school management committee or on a Board.

Applicants should ensure that they clearly state in their CV and application:

- Qualifications completed – successful applicants will be required to provide evidence of completed qualifications if they are invited to attend a job test
- Teaching experience – summarise the number of years of teaching experience you have
- Educational leadership experience – summarise the number of years of educational leadership experience. For example if you have been with MEHA for 12 years, 8 years as a teacher and 4 years as an Assistant
Head Teacher then you would indicate in your application that you have 12 years teaching experience and 4 years educational leadership experience.

Knowledge, Experience, Skills and Abilities

As part of the application, applicants are asked to provide a written statement demonstrating how the applicant meets the requirements of all of the KESAs. The responses to these are reviewed by the selection panel and scored against an agreed marking guide.

Applicants should write 2 to 3 typed pages as a total response. A good response would:

- Be typed on a computer, although neatly hand-written applications are accepted
- Specifically address each KESA – either in groups or individually
- Include examples which demonstrate the applicant’s capability and which demonstrate successful outcomes
- Not make broad statements without any evidence
- Be well written, using good English language, grammar and punctuation without spelling mistakes
- Be written in no less than 10 point font, using an easily read font such as Times New Roman
- Use headings to improve clarity
- Not include statements such as “In this job I will…….” or “I am very good at…….”
- Structure appropriately, set out logically and answering the KESAs
- Where appropriate, use STAR responses – Situation, Task, Activity, Result – outlining what was the situation or context, what you were expected or asked to do, what you did and what was the result
- Not quote from other documents such as the curriculum or the strategic plan
- Not list responsibilities or tasks of your role, but would focus on specific achievements and where activities are detailed focus on the outcomes

Example of a good response to a KESA

KE5 Understanding of teams and how to build and maintain high performing teams

In my current role I am Head Teacher of a large primary school, with a team of 27 teachers and a number of support staff. I approach this role with the focus on achieving a successful school by working with all staff in a supportive team. Some strategies I use to build and maintain the team include:

- Weekly meetings – a short meeting held at the same time each week in which all staff members may raise issues for consideration and team agreement on the best approach to resolving the issue;
- Open door approach – my office door is always kept open and staff are encouraged to discuss issues with me at any time;
- Management by walking about – I regularly walk around the school during lesson time and during breaks to talk to students, staff and parents, to ensure I am across issues in the school and to encourage sharing of knowledge and learning;
- Providing regular performance feedback – all staff work best when they are clear on expectations and given constructive advice on strengths and improvement opportunities. I meet with each team member at least once a month to provide feedback and discuss where I can provide them with additional support or assistance;
• Student-free days programmes – the school approaches this programme as a team building opportunity and we have a planning committee to organise and deliver the programme each term, allowing for different team members to become involved and to ensure the needs of all are considered and met.

Some of the factors which demonstrate the high performance of our school team include consistent improvement in student results each year for the past three years, operating within budget and achieving a number of facility improvements including replacement of all computers in the past two years, all staff achieving fully-competent rating on their annual performance assessment and positive feedback from parents and the community on our performance.

Example of a poor response to a KESA

KE5 Understanding of teams and how to build and maintain high performing teams

I have a good understanding of teams, having been in a team on many occasions and also currently leading a team at a school and for the local football team. My football team won the last annual premiership and are clearly a high performing. I am confident that if I am successful in my application I would continue to learn how to build and maintain high performing teams.

KESA marking

The applicant statements addressing the KESAs are marked by at least two selection panel members and scoring is based on a marking guide agreed with the panel. In selection processes used for Heads of Schools during the first half of 2018, KESA statements have been marked on 2 main criteria. One is the quality of the presentation – e.g. grammar, ease of reading, English and computer skills and the other criteria is the quality of the applicant’s response to the KESAs - the content, the extent to which the KESAs have been addressed, evidence of understanding of the KESAs, the use of examples, and the use of STAR responses.

The selection panel carefully considers all applicant KESA statements and extensive moderation is undertaken to ensure consistency in marking. Every effort is made to ensure that all suitable applicants are progressed to the next stage of the recruitment process.

Part 2: Job Tests

Job tests are used as a key component of the selection process. Applicants who achieve the required benchmarks on the written application will be invited to complete job tests. For the Heads of Schools positions, four tests have been used to date.

Arrangements for these tests will vary based on the number of positions to be filled, their location and the availability of venues. Whilst MEHA strives to offer a range of possible locations, a range of factors need to be considered.

Consideration will be given to offering job tests online, when systems are established to manage this effectively.

Types of tests
Tests are usually completed on a computer. Computer skills are a skill and ability specified in the role description and are a key requirement for a Head of School – particularly in being able to manage school records and marks are allocated for preparing responses in accordance with the specified instructions.

Applicants who do not wish to complete the tests on a computer may complete and submit them on paper.

Tests may be in Word, Excel or PowerPoint and applicants are expected to have skills at the basic to intermediate level.

Tests will relate to the KESAs specified in the role description and applicants should expect activities which relate to a number of the KESAs.

In the past, tests completed have included:

- English Proficiency
- Finance, human and resource management
- Curriculum
- School leadership
- Change management
- Management of student behaviour

Marking Guide

Every test is developed in advance of the test session and a marking guide which specifies how marks are allocated is prepared by the selection panel and used for scoring. This ensures that every test is assessed using the same criteria and marks are allocated on the same basis. Tests are marked by two selection panel members.

Preparation for the job test

Applicants should prepare for the job test by ensuring they:

- Arrive on time for a specified test time and at the appropriate location - testing operates on a schedule due to the large number of applicants being tested. For this reason, applicants must arrive on time and at the specified location. Computer labs at test venues only have a set number of computers and testing schedules are arranged around this. If you attend a different centre without agreement, you may have to complete the test on paper
- Have pens, pencils and other stationery – do not assume this is provided
- Read the instructions carefully – to ensure you bring any relevant information with you
- Be well rested and arrive at least 10 minutes in advance so you can mentally prepare and not be rushed
- Review the role description and consider the type of tests you may be asked to complete and review information you think may be relevant to this

During the test

During the test, applicants should ensure they:

- Read the tasks carefully at the start
- Note the time limit and plan the time allocated to ensure the tasks can be completed and keep note of the time so you can complete the full test and do not miss out any tasks.
- Consider the KESAs for the role and how you can demonstrate these in your response, for example, a question which relates to a staffing issue will give you the opportunity to demonstrate staff management knowledge and skills. If a question asked “what action will you take if a staff member complains to you about another staff member?”, your response should indicate what action you will take and why and what you would consider to be a successful outcome.
- Note the guide in terms of length of responses – if a task indicates a guide of one page for a response, your answer should be approximately one page – a response of one short paragraph is unlikely to give enough detail, a response of two full pages may have too much detail which is not relevant.

**Part 3: Interviews**

The interview process for a Head of School position may not follow the traditional style of interview (the type of interview where you arrive and get asked a series of questions and respond without preparation time).

At the interview for Head of School positions, the focus is on demonstrating the high level skills required for the role – interviewees should expect complex questions which will reflect the most important aspects of the KESAs.

Scenarios, viewing videos of a class and providing feedback, planning for a significant change in the school, or implementation of a major curriculum change are the types of activities interviewees should expect. Interview questions will draw on teaching, management, leadership and education knowledge, experience, skills and abilities.

**Selection Panel**

Interviews will have a panel which is consistent with OMRS guidelines with:

- All panel members at or above the level of the position;
- At least one male and one female member;
- A member from another Ministry; and
- A member from outside the civil service for positions at Band J and above.

Panel members must use the information you provide during an interview to make their assessment.

If you know one or more panel members, do not assume that their prior knowledge of you will be included in their assessment – they can only score based on the information provided.

**Preparation for the interview**

Failing to take the interview seriously and to prepare will be obvious to selection panel members. Your answers and your self-confidence will show if you have not properly prepared.

As a guide, you should dedicate at least an hour to your preparation. An example of using an hour to preparation is shown below:
5 minutes re-reading and analysing the role description, focusing on the KESAs, to tailor your answers to focus on the most important aspects of the job.

5 minutes re-reading your resume and application, to remind yourself of how you pitched yourself in the first place.

15 minutes researching potential interview questions specific to the role – what sort of questions have been used in the past and what type of questions are used in other places for Head of School interviews.

20 minutes practicing answers to these questions, and recalling specific examples from your work experience, such as major accomplishments, challenges or milestones that will serve as information to strengthen your responses to behavioral-based interview questions.

15 minutes reviewing relevant MEHA plans, curriculum issues and other relevant strategic documents which should guide you in understanding MEHA priorities.

In addition to practicing these steps on your own, it can be useful to ask a friend or family member to pose as an interviewer, so you can get used to answering questions in real time.

**Prior to the interview**

Head of School interviews will usually have complex questions and you may be given some time to prepare your response to the questions. Ensure that you have notebook and a pen to write notes on and carefully follow instructions provided to you. Where the instructions specify a time limit on an interview question, prepare accordingly. The panel will be interviewing large numbers of applicants and must adhere to the interview schedule.

Being punctual is critical, as arriving late is viewed very badly by selection panels as it is very unprofessional. Try to arrive at least 10 minutes before your interview time to give yourself time to mentally prepare;

**During the interview**

- Think before you speak – listen carefully to the question and take a few moments to prepare your response in your head before you start talking;
- Answer in a structured way – your response should have an introduction, body and conclusion;
- Practice good nonverbal communication – make eye contact with panel members;
- Dress for the job or company – regardless of whether your interview is in person or by phone, dress for the job you have applied for. The selection panel needs to be confident that you understand the dress standard required for the position;
- Listen to the questions carefully and ensure you understand it before you start to talk – questions at senior levels often have multiple facets, and you need to be sure you respond to all of these in your response;
- Don’t talk too much – concisely answer the question asked and provide only the required detail – the panel do not want to know your life story, they want to understand your knowledge and experience as it relates to the question asked;
- Don’t be too familiar – if you know one or more panel members, do not be too familiar with them. Address all panel members formally and respond formally to questions asked;
- Use appropriate language – try to avoid jargon or language only people working in the Ministry will understand – remember that every selection panel has a member from another Ministry and, in many cases, from outside the civil service.
Part 4: Referee Checks

As part of your application you are required to nominate at least two professional referees who can provide a response to questions regarding your work performance. Referee checks are not scored as part of the selection but are a compulsory requirement and will be used to confirm suitability of applicants.

Referee checks are only done for applicants considered suitable for appointment.

A referee check requires the completion of specific job-related questions – this may be in writing or verbally. Written references providing generic information are not accepted.

Some key points to consider in nominating referees:

- Referees must be able to comment on your skills and abilities as they relate to the position you have applied for. They should not be personal referees, they should people you have worked with;
- They must be able to be contacted easily by email and you should ensure you provide accurate email addresses;
- It is appropriate to ask people who you would like to nominate as a referee in advance of nominating them on an application form; and
- If you reach the interview stage of the selection process, you should advise your referees and ask them to monitor their email and to provide an earliest response.