The latest headteacher standards, titled the National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers, were published in January 2015. This guidance is intended to support members in understanding the background of the new standards and using them appropriately and effectively. It should be read alongside the standards themselves and the DfE’s own supporting guidance.

**Introduction**

1. The National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers replace the headteacher standards that were originally published in 2004.

2. The new headteacher standards are designed to update and simplify the previous standards by reflecting aspects of school leadership which have become more significant since 2004.

3. They are non-mandatory (unlike the Teachers’ Standards, which are mandatory for all teachers, including headteachers).

4. They are designed to be accessible and usable across all phases and sectors, from nursery through to secondary and sixth form colleges.

5. They may be adapted by employers to work in executive headship contexts, but are unlikely to be appropriate to wider CEO roles.

6. Because they are non-mandatory and written for a wide range of settings, employers (governing bodies, trust boards, local authorities) may choose to adapt them.

7. No employer (governing body, trust board, local authority) is obliged to use them. Any employer is free to use a different set of standards if they so wish, or indeed not to use a set of standards at all.

8. The standards are written to encapsulate a very high level of leadership performance – they are aspirational standards. In this they differ from the Teachers’ Standards, which encapsulate a minimum acceptable standard.

9. Because of this, the headteacher standards cannot be used as a minimum baseline in their entirety in performance management contexts. It is important that governors, employers, and those involved in headteacher and school leader performance management and appraisal understand this point.

**Background**

10. ASCL was consulted over the standards and submitted a response which asked for the new standards to reflect a set of nine observable ‘common sense’ leadership behaviours which we felt were the core of successful leadership. These are listed in Appendix 1.

11. We are pleased that priorities are reflected in the four ‘domains’ of the new standards.

**Using the new standards**

12. The DfE’s own supplementary guidance suggests four main ways the new standards might be used, as well as some ways in which the standards should not be used. This guidance should be read carefully by all headteachers, employers and other potential users of the new standards.

13. It is particularly important to emphasise that the standards are not a ‘minimum acceptable level of performance’ and cannot therefore be used in the same way for performance management as the Teachers’ Standards.

14. They can however be used as a background document for performance management, for example to inform a discussion or audit intended to identify a manageable and sensible set of priorities for school improvement. These in turn can be reflected in headteachers’ (and other leaders’) actual targets, which should combine both aspiration on the one hand and realism and manageability on the other.

15. It is good practice for employers to specify, for example in their performance management or appraisal policies, whether the headteacher standards are being used, and if so how, in heads’ appraisal or performance management. It is particularly important for headteachers to be clear about this as the standards are non-mandatory.

16. The DfE guidance also makes clear that the standards are not an ‘off the peg’ role description for headteachers, although they may be used to inform or shape role descriptions which governors and other employers write when recruiting a new headteacher. An illustration of how this might be done is in Appendix 2.
Role descriptions used in recruitment often become contractually binding job descriptions. It is entirely appropriate for job descriptions to expect high aspiration and to cover the wide range of areas for which headteachers are responsible. However, it would be advisable for members, and employers, to consider carefully the extent to which the standards demanded by such job descriptions are realistic and manageable in their specific contexts.

The new standards will be used in professional development contexts, for example informing the design of leadership development programmes. Members involved in such work will find them a useful framework and resource.

Further reading

Appendix 1
In its response to the consultation on the standards, ASCL proposed the following framework.

The points below were those suggested by ASCL when asked what the new headteacher standards should contain. Most of these areas are incorporated explicitly or implicitly in the new standards.

Headteachers:

1. Develop and communicate an ambitious vision for excellence for all pupils, informed by strong values.
   - Articulate and share the school’s distinctive aims and ethos.
   - Promote the school’s aims and ethos with parents, staff, students and the wider community.
   - Exercise the school’s autonomy through confident strategic leadership and take direct responsibility for its continuous improvement.
   - Provide a curriculum for all students which is challenging, aspirational and relevant.

2. Promote ambitious standards of progress, achievement and outcomes by all pupils.
   - Be accountable for pupils’ progress and achievement.
   - Set rigorous expectations in all subjects and areas of learning and hold teachers to account for pupils’ progress and outcomes.
   - Systematically monitor and intervene to improve pupils’ learning and progress, and teachers’ effectiveness.
   - Inform parents effectively about pupils’ learning.

3. Inspire and lead excellent teaching which leads to strong progress in learning by pupils.
   - Take responsibility for the quality and effectiveness of all teaching in the school, having regard to the Teachers’ Standards.
   - Rigorously monitor the quality of teaching and hold teachers systematically to account for it.
   - Set high expectations for pupils’ behaviour and engagement and ensure these are promoted by all staff so that the school is an ordered and respectful community.

4. Lead the professional development of teachers and create a strong culture of aspiration among teachers.
   - Ensure that teachers develop and update their subject knowledge.
   - Ensure that professional development needs are systematically identified and addressed.
   - Create an expectation of continuous professional learning and improvement at all career stages.
   - Take appropriate responsibility for the initial training of teachers.
   - Identify and develop future leaders.

5. Promote effective leadership at all levels in the school.
   - Create teams with appropriately complementary strengths which are led effectively, interact appropriately with other teams and are focused on continuous improvement.
   - Delegate responsibilities effectively.
   - Create a culture of accountability and transparency.
   - Promote a strong sense of common purpose.
   - Ensure that all systems, procedures and processes needed for the efficient running of the school are in place and regularly reviewed.
   - Work effectively with governors in the interests of the school, providing them with appropriate advice and information to enable them to discharge their responsibilities.

6. Create a safe and caring environment for all pupils.
   - Ensure that appropriate pastoral care, guidance and support is available for all pupils, including the most
vulnerable, those who have special needs or who are disabled.

- Ensure that all pupils are safe at all times and are taught how to behave safely in and beyond school.
- Engage parents effectively in the education and development of their children.

7 Promote wider learning by pupils.

- Provide a challenging and varied co-curriculum for all pupils which enables them to develop a broad range of interests and skills.
- Ensure that pupils’ character and values are systematically developed so that they gain in confidence and are able to tackle challenges resiliently.

8 Ensure financial and resource planning, management and monitoring is robust, honest and enables the school to meet the present and future needs of pupils.

9 Fulfil wider professional responsibilities in the school-led system.

- Develop the capacity to identify and address leadership needs beyond the school.
- Contribute to local and national leadership and school improvement opportunities.
- Exercise wider leadership within and beyond the local community in the interests of promoting the importance of education.

Appendix 2

Using the headteacher standards to inform a job description.

The new headteacher standards are not intended to be an ‘off the peg’ job or role description for headteachers. However they may be used to inform and shape job descriptions. An example, for illustration only, of how this might be done is given below.

The role of the headteacher of Anywhere School will be to:

Vision and core purpose

1 Articulate clear values and moral purpose for the leadership of Anywhere School, focused on providing a first class education for our students.

2 Communicate compellingly the school’s vision and drive the strategic leadership, empowering all students and staff to excel.

3 Model positive relationships and attitudes towards our students, and to engage parents, governors and members of the local community in the constant improvement of all that we do.

4 Ensure that the education and interests of our students are at the centre of everything we do at Anywhere School.

Meeting our objectives through improving learning and achievement in the classroom

5 Lead the improvement and development of Anywhere School on the basis of evidence and knowledge about effective practice, and to promote a strong culture of continuous professional development for our staff.

6 Demonstrate political astuteness in promoting the interests of our school in the context of our core objectives, translating opportunities arising from local and national policy into the school’s context.

7 Ensure that the Anywhere School’s development as an academy is consistent with our core objectives and seeks further to serve our local community.

8 Demand ambitious standards for all students, overcoming disadvantage and advancing equality, instilling a strong sense of accountability in staff for the impact of their work on students’ outcomes.

9 Maintain and secure outstanding teaching for all students through an understanding of the features of successful classroom practice and curriculum design.

Leadership and management

10 Promote the sharing of best practice between teachers and a culture where less good practice is challenged and improved.

11 Create an ethos within which all staff are motivated and supported to develop their own skills and subject knowledge and to support each other.

12 Identify emerging talents at all levels in Anywhere School, coaching current and aspiring leaders in a climate where excellence is the standard, leading to good succession planning.

13 Hold all staff to account for their professional conduct and practice.

14 Ensure that the school’s systems, organisation and processes are well considered, efficient and fit for purpose, upholding the principles of transparency, integrity and probity.
Provide a safe, calm and well-ordered environment for all students and staff, with a strong focus on safeguarding and the development of exemplary behaviour in school and in the wider society.

Establish, implement and maintain rigorous and transparent systems for managing the performance of all staff, addressing under-performance, supporting staff to improve and valuing excellent practice.

Welcome strong governance and actively support the governing body to deliver its functions ever more effectively – in particular its functions to set school strategy and hold the headteacher to account for student, staff and financial performance.

Exercise strategic, curriculum-led financial planning to ensure the equitable deployment of budgets and resources, in the best interests of achievement and the school’s sustainability.

Distribute leadership throughout the organisation, forging teams of colleagues who have distinct roles and responsibilities and hold each other to account for their decision making.

Development and contribution

Develop the capacity of Anywhere School to work with other schools and improve the quality of education at system level.

Develop effective relationships with other services to improve academic and social outcomes for all students.

Harness the findings of well evidenced research to help contribute to the self-improving and school led system.

Make Anywhere School a centre of good practice in initial and continuing teacher education.

Inspire and influence others - within and beyond the school - to believe in the fundamental importance of education in young people’s lives and to promote the value of education.