

Selecting top education staff using the 16PF[®] and ABLE[®]

Business need: Recruiting a new headteacher

The Cherwell School is one of Oxford's leading state schools, with specialist status in science. The school has a great reputation in the local community for its excellent results, with 78% of its students receiving five or more A* to C grades in GCSE exams in 2011, and 64% of A-level candidates achieving A* to B results. Students come from a range of backgrounds, but with many parents working for Oxford University and having their own expertise in academia and education, the school has high expectations to live up to.

It was within this context of academic excellence that in 2010 the school's Governing Body were faced with the task of recruiting a new headteacher. As Kaye Johnson, one of the parent governors, explains, recruiting a 'superhead' for a failing school is one thing; finding a leader who can balance being an inspirational figurehead with the need to listen to the staff who helped make the school great is quite another. The brief was not simple, and having struggled to find someone to fit the bill for several months, the Board turned to OPP for advice.

Product choice: 16PF[®] and ABLE[®] provide objective insight

As Kaye tells us, the responsibility placed on the school's Governing Body is huge: "In an outstanding school like this one, the challenge is to take achievements that are already excellent to an even higher level!" In recruiting a new headteacher the Governors are influencing the next generation of students in the school, its relationship with and standing in the local community – the head is a strategic leader who gives overall direction. Traditionally, recruitment has taken place using some rather old-fashioned methods – work-based tests, school visits and an interview – but we really felt in need of further information to support our decision-making, and quickly."



OPP advised the Governors that a combination of two tools would give them the insight and objectivity they needed: the 16PF instrument, which measures personality traits and can be mapped onto a job description; and the ABLE Series[®] of tests, measuring a person's aptitude and potential to learn and succeed quickly in different types of work.

The selection panel had a good idea of the type of person they wanted, but needed tools that would uncover the candidates' genuine qualities and abilities, so that they could be really confident that the person filling this crucial role would be up to the job. "The person needed to be able to set a clear vision for the future, make difficult political decisions, monitor and understand budgets, deal with periods of great change and embrace new technology – all within a very, very public role... in short, they needed to grasp many different things and hold them all together."

Solution: Pinpointing leadership qualities

OPP's first task was to identify exactly what type of profile was needed – or in 16PF terms, what type of profile was undesirable for this particular post (known as a 'danger-zone profile'). A job analysis was completed that identified not only which of the personality traits measured by the 16PF were the most relevant, but also where potential problem areas would lie within each trait. By highlighting danger zones rather than creating an 'ideal' profile, the risk of excluding potentially excellent candidates who would be able to flex their style to excel in all areas was eliminated.

The 16PF factors of Perfectionism, Abstractedness, Self-Reliance, Rule-Consciousness, Dominance and Apprehension were looked at in particular. For example, the job description specified that the postholder should practise a collaborative style, maintaining effective communication with staff, parents, governors and students; so someone with a very high score on Self-Reliance would tend to work too independently for this role. They needed to balance thinking strategically with implementing evidence-based plans, so very high and very low Abstractedness scores were recognised as possible danger zones.

Additionally, as candidates' aptitude was a key factor, the Critical Information Analysis and Business Decision Analysis tests from the ABLE Series were administered. These gave information about the candidates' ability to analyse numerical data and use it to form conceptual frameworks and make sound decisions in practical contexts.

The selection panel had started out with six candidates, and had already shortlisted three of them as part of a first day of tasks and panel interviews. A second day was added to the selection process, which consisted of the administration and feedback of the 16PF and ABLE tools to the three remaining candidates, of which two were external and one internal. This included a series of debriefs between OPP's consultant and the selection panel, where the results of the tools and their implications for the recruitment were explained. The 16PF *Management Potential Report* was used to present the candidates' results.

Benefits: The confidence to make the right choice

The selection panel found the psychometric results absolutely invaluable in making their final selection. Kaye comments: "Because we had one internal candidate, we wanted to make sure that the process was fair and objective for all the candidates. The results from the ABLE and 16PF assessments allowed us to back up impressions we already had about the candidates from the interviews with empirical evidence – but the process also revealed some surprising information that we would never have picked up on using our conventional methods."

The ABLE tests in particular were revelatory of certain skills and abilities that were absolutely key for the person taking up the role. In the end, the psychometric results gave the panel the confidence to recruit their internal candidate, even though he was less experienced than the others. The tests provided evidence that despite the fact that he did not have the proven track record of the other candidates, he did have the potential to learn and excel in the job – and indeed had already been acting up into the post on a temporary basis.

Kaye adds: "The perspective of an expert who didn't know any of the candidates and who could give a snapshot of each one from a psychological point of view proved to be the key to making the right decision. Via the assessments OPP's consultant was able to make the salient points much more clearly than we ever could, and clarify for us what we wanted and how we could achieve it."

Conclusion: Continuing to excel

The new headteacher has now been in place for a year, and the Governing Body is already delighted with the results he has been able to achieve. The school continues to excel academically, and the person appointed has proved to be a popular choice amongst students and staff alike.

With more changes and challenges within the school system on the horizon, The Cherwell School is grateful of the steady and affirmative hand their new leader is able bring to the role. Kaye concludes: "It was a very valuable and very useful thing to do, and was a good process for the candidates to go through as well. So I can't say thank you enough really!"

For information about how OPP could work with your organisation for individual, team or leadership development, please contact our Sales Team on +44 (0)845 603 9958 or by email at enquiry@opp.eu.com.