

In Headship – Frequently Asked Questions – July 2026

Who is the In Headship qualification for?

The In Headship programme is for headteachers, normally within their first two years of headship, and is designed to provide headteachers with the support they require in transitioning to their new role. The programme is open to all new headteachers who already hold the GTCS Standard for Headship, including those in a substantive post and those in an acting post (if the post will be held for longer than the duration of the programme).

The In Headship programme encompasses the role of headteacher as a strategic leader within, across and beyond the school community. It is designed to facilitate and support headteachers in the transition through the early stages of headship, to enable them to develop as effective strategic leaders who contribute to system leadership.

The programme is underpinned by a focus on professional problem solving and school improvement and structured to extend the personal, professional and intellectual knowledge and skills that new headteachers need to be able to lead school improvement in a dynamic policy context and anticipate and address the challenges that this may bring.

Normally participants will have at least 60 credits at SCQF Level 11 achieved through undertaking other elements of the Specialist Qualification for Headship Masters pathway.

I am a current headteacher – do I need to complete this qualification?

In Headship is not a mandatory qualification. It is designed to provide headteachers with the support they require in transitioning to their new role (normally within two years of taking up post).

I have been a headteacher for more than two years; can I apply for the programme?

Whilst as an experienced headteacher, you would find In Headship valuable to your ongoing professional learning, it is designed for those in the early days of headship. There are other programmes available which also offer tailored support as well as a range of university or local authority programmes. You can find out more about programmes across the system on the [Education Scotland professional learning and leadership website](#).

What is the duration of the programme?

The In Headship programme will take approximately one year to complete.

How is the programme funded?

The Scottish Government is committed to supporting teachers to participate in the professional learning and leadership programmes. The 2026 programme will be fully funded.

When will the programme commence?

The In Headship programme will begin in Autumn 2026 and continue for approximately 12 months.

How will the programme be delivered?

The In Headship programme is delivered as a partnership between Education Scotland, local authorities and currently the following Universities:

- University of Highlands and Islands
- University of Stirling

The programme consists of three core elements which will be delivered across the 60 credits at SCQF Level 11. The core elements are:

- Shaping professional identity and practice: critical reflection in the transition to headship
- Pursuing equity and excellence
- Building capacity in self and others.

An important and distinguishing feature of the programme is that its core elements and assessment are integrated and complementary to the role of headteacher.

Further information can be found on the [In Headship](#) page on our website.

What happens after I complete this qualification?

On successful completion, you will be awarded a postgraduate qualification with 60 credits. In Headship is situated within a Masters Framework, which enables participants who successfully undertake all three elements of the pathway to be awarded the Specialist Qualification for Headship.

What happens if I need to withdraw/defer from the qualification?

There may be opportunities for you to apply/transfer to a later cohort of the programme. Individual university guidelines regarding deferral or withdrawal will apply.

Applying for the qualification

How do I apply for the qualification?

After considering the programme information, it would be beneficial for you to discuss your potential application with relevant individuals in your local authority in the first instance. Once you are ready to apply you can access the application form via your local authority professional learning coordinator. When completed, the application form should then be sent to your local authority coordinator for endorsement. If you are applying from the Independent sector, please contact EDSPLL@educationscotland.gov.scot for an application form.

What happens after I submit my application form?

Once your application is endorsed, your details will be sent to Education Scotland and the partner university. The programme begins with a national online event, enabling participants to network and be introduced to core programme content. This is then followed by a programme of study from each university. The In Headship programme will start with induction in early Autumn 2026, with the national event following soon after (date to be shared).

Do I need to have a sponsor/approval to apply for the qualification?

Your application must be endorsed by your local authority/employer. As part of the programme you will also be required to identify a critical colleague who will support your learning throughout the programme, for example a peer headteacher.