



## Ethics in staff recruitment

### Introduction

Most organisations recognise the need to adopt a formal and standardised process when recruiting staff, though some still prefer informal methods, and this will typically include preparing formal job descriptions and person specifications, advertising, interviewing and taking up references. This briefing note is not intended to prescribe the process by which new members of staff are recruited, though that is important, but rather to explore some of the ethical issues that surround the process. Increasingly organisations not only have a recruitment process but also a code of practice which they expect to be followed by everyone involved in the process.

### Recruitment policy

Ideally your organisation will adopt a formal recruitment policy which reflects the organisation's values. An example, which you may wish to amend to use in your own organisation, is shown in the box.

Our staff recruitment policy reflects our values of fast, flexible, professional, respectful and accountable. We seek to appoint staff with appropriate knowledge, competence and attitude. Equality of opportunity is important and our recruitment and selection procedures have been designed to provide ways to assess and appoint the most capable and effective staff while ensuring that all individuals are treated with fairness and sensitivity. It is our policy to recruit the most appropriate person for each vacancy. Selection is ultimately a subjective process, but a systematic approach will help to ensure that decisions are soundly based, consistent, defensible and efficient.

### Responsibilities

#### Managing the process

A complete process will encompass the following:

- One person will take responsibility for managing the entire process, though of course others may be involved. That person will however ensure that all involved are aware of their responsibilities and will ensure that all the requirements are observed. If necessary, the responsible person will provide briefing or training to others involved.
- Preparing a job description and a person specification which are clear, comprehensive and concise
- Writing an advertisement designed to attract people who meet the person specification.
- Establishing a panel, if appropriate, to select the new employee. Ideally, interviews should be undertaken by a panel of at least two people. Smaller panels are often more effective than large panels. The panel members should be able to assess candidates' capabilities against the identified criteria. If there is a panel, one member should be appointed as chairman.
- Agreeing the format for the selection process including, for example, whether to use standardised application forms or whether simply to ask for CVs, whether to

ask for a covering letter and what it should cover, the use of tests, whether to use a scoring matrix, the length of the interview etc.

- Depending on the number of candidates, it may be necessary to develop a 'long list' for a telephone interview, or some other form of pre-selection.
- Selecting 'short listed' candidates for interview (with other panel members, if appropriate) according to whether they possess the requirements identified in the person specification for the vacant post. No other criteria may be used. It is unfair to ask too many candidates to interview, so limit the short list to four or five.
- Confirming an interview date, location and booking rooms.
- Be clear to candidates in advance about your policy on paying expenses to attend an interview.

## **Interviews**

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Chairmen of interview panels are responsible for ensuring that they have received appropriate information and training in recruitment and selection including knowledge of relevant policies.

The interview process is intended to give the panel an opportunity to assess the relative merits of the candidates measured against the job description and person specification to establish which candidate is most suitable for the job. So, interviews must be conducted in a fair and equitable way. Panel members should take time, together, to prepare questions in advance, designed to test whether candidates meet the person specification and to ensure that every candidate is not only asked the same questions but given every opportunity to give a good account of themselves.

Panel members should take notes during each interview to evidence their decision.

When the selection process is complete, the next step is to consider in turn whether each candidate is appointable. If more than one is appointable, the appointable candidates should be ranked. If the top ranked candidate subsequently turns down the offer, it is then possible to work through the list of appointable candidates.

## **Confidentiality**

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At the end of the interview process, panel members should ensure that all their paperwork is given to the Chairman. They should treat all information gained during the entire selection process as confidential.

In particular, they should not divulge who has been invited to interview or divulge any information that they learn about candidates during the selection process to any third party without the permission of the candidate.

No records of any candidate are used for any purpose other than recruitment without the permission of the candidate.

It is normal to retain files for a period, typically six to 12 months, in case of queries related to the process and then to destroy them.

## **Checking the facts**

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Before confirming any offer of employment, it is usual to take up references from at least two, and preferably three, referees which should include the most recent employer and ideally one other employer. Ideally, references should be taken up by phone and effort should be made to verify the authenticity of the referee. As with the interview, there should be a list of standard questions. References should ideally all be taken up by the same person.

If qualifications are important, then candidates should be asked to provide evidence, such as degree certificates, to substantiate all claims in their CV.

For some jobs, medical clearance may all be required.

### **Appointment and feedback**

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When you have satisfied yourself that all requirements have been fulfilled, then you are in a position to advise the candidates of the outcome of the selection process

A member of the panel should be designated to give feedback to candidates after the selection process if they request it.