

The voice of the Voluntary Arts

## Taking on paid staff - How do we do it?

### II. Good practice in Selection and Induction

This Briefing follows on from Briefing 47 (*I. Good practice in Recruitment*) and offers guidelines on how to go about selecting an employee once the recruitment procedure has been accomplished, and how to then introduce them to the job.

#### C. SELECTION

##### Shortlisting (choosing people to interview)

- Sift carefully through the applications in order to match applicants as closely as possible with the job and person specification. At least two people should do this to avoid any bias, one of which ought to be the direct line manager. Short list individually and keep notes on a standard checklist.
- Set a maximum or minimum number of applicants to be selected i.e. how many people can be interviewed in the time available. If you expect a huge response to your advertisement include additional 'desirable criteria' to narrow the field. Setting a minimum can help decisions about whether to interview or re-advertise/redefine the person specification criteria if too few people apply.
- Work with photocopies of applications and keep originals in a safe place.
- Use a scoring system to help you make a decision. Such systems have pros and cons e.g. ticks and noughts, points, graded, weighted and comments systems (see references: *Just about managing*). Use a symbol to indicate when there is not enough information on which to assess the applicant on a particular criterion - a quick glance will then easily reveal either that your form asks inadequate questions or that your person specification could not be assessed by questions and answers.
- Use a code on the shortlisting form to make the final decision easier e.g. +2: definitely interview; +1: strong - maybe interview; -1: weak - maybe interview; -2: definitely not interview. Discuss applicants the panel disagrees on.

- Notify shortlisted applicants as soon as possible with interview times and dates. (You may wish to add a statement in the application form to the effect that unless applicants are notified within x number of days they can assume that they have not been chosen) Keep a small number of applicants on a reserve list. Keep originals of unsuccessful applications in a safe place but only for as long as they are deemed necessary (Data Protection Act). Circulate copies of successful applications to the interview panel.

##### Taking up references

- If particular qualifications, training or licenses are important to the job, it is reasonable to ask applicants for proof. Ensure the applicant knows that copies will be kept in the personnel file.
- References can be taken up at shortlist or offer stage. State clearly on the application form whether any references or medicals will be taken up and ask whether or not it is alright to contact the referee before making an offer of work and whether the applicant wishes to be informed before the referee is contacted. Note, however, that references are often biased towards the applicants previous job, and are often unreliable. Thus they should only be used to *confirm* the selection panel's decision not to influence it and only sought if you believe they are necessary and appropriate. An initial 'probationary' period is a better way of assessing suitability for a post.
- If you do contact a referee, enclose a s.a.e. marked 'confidential'. Include a job description and structured, relevant questions. Do not ask for personal information. A simple form confirming dates of employment, capacity and particular skills may suffice. When the envelopes come back do not open them until the selection panel has made its decision. If the references are negative the panel will then have to decide whether or not to let the references influence their decision and/or to follow up specific points with the candidate.



- Some jobs may require a particular level of physical fitness for the post. It is essential to seek advice first about obtaining medical information as there are legal implications involved in this process. Contact the Employment Medical Advisory Service (part of the Health and Safety Executive) in your area. (HSE infoline: 01787 881165)

### Who makes the decision?

The selection panel should at least involve the line manager and members of the management committee and could include people who will be working closely with the new worker and people from outside the organisation with specialist knowledge related to the new post. Candidates should be interviewed by more than one person, but no more than six. All interviewers must be fully aware of the organisations overall work, the application form, job description and the person specification. Your equal opportunities policy may state the necessary composition and require that panel members have training in interviewing techniques and equal opportunities law and good practice.

### Interviewing

A structured interview designed to discover all relevant information, assess competency and give every candidate the same opportunities to present themselves well will make it easier to match job and candidate. It will also ensure a consistent approach to each interview.

- The interview panel should agree on how they will conduct the interview i.e. who will cover which topics (job knowledge, training, etc), who will keep track of time, answer the candidates questions, close the interview and inform the candidate.
- List the questions and the points you wish to cover.
- Determine how people will keep a record of their views, and whether notes will be discussed after each or only after all candidates have been interviewed.
- Resolve how the panel will make its final decision i.e. a unanimous or majority decision. What happens if there is a tie?
- Decide how the successful and unsuccessful candidates will be notified. Agree a procedure if the chosen candidate does not accept. Discuss whether information will be given to all unsuccessful candidates about why they were unsuccessful, or only to those who ask (if so, be positive), and how i.e. verbally, in writing. If there are no suitable candidates will you re-advertise, or offer the best candidate training and support?
- Keep records detailing the reasons for selection or rejection throughout the process - these will be

crucial if a candidate claims unfair discrimination. Candidates have a right under data protection legislation to see all notes if they form part of a set of information about the candidate.

### Conducting the interview

- **Venue** - should be quiet, warm and undisturbed. Ensure that the candidates seat is nearest the door, not looking into bright sunlight, and comfortable. A glass and jug of water should be easily available. Make necessary adjustments for a candidate who has indicated a disability. Ensure arrangements for refreshments and lunch, if required, have been organised before hand.
- **Arrival** - the candidate and the panel will feel nervous. Welcome both warmly, show them the cloakroom facilities etc, and if possible let the candidate have a brief tour of the workplace.
- **Formality** - interviews need not be formal. Introduce your panel (gives time to settle down), give background information about your organisation and the job (helps everyone focus on the objective), have a time frame and stick to it (avoids confusion and rambling) allow candidates time for questions (gives them a chance to offer more). Be aware that a sloppy interview may elicit a sloppy response!
- **Interview questions** - base questions on the job description and person specification i.e. designed to elicit information about skills, knowledge and ability to do the job. Questions should be open ended i.e. those that cannot be answered by 'yes' or 'no', and usually begin with 'what', 'why', 'when', 'how'. Avoid putting words into the candidates mouth e.g. 'this job will be an opportunity to use your writing skills, won't it?' instead of 'how might this job use your skills?'
- **Note taking** - don't trust to memory. Listen carefully and write brief notes immediately.
- **Time to breathe** - allow at least 15 minutes between interviews to give time to run over if necessary and for making notes, going to the toilet, etc.

### Making the choice and notifying candidates

- Decide who to employ as soon as possible. A scoring system will help avoid stereotyping, using irrelevant information and making snap and subjective judgements.
- If a choice cannot be made between two or more candidates it may be necessary to ask them back for a second interview. Be cautious - this should not be a battleground for factions within the organisation.
- Inform applicants as soon as possible, and keep in touch if the decision is delayed.



## Equal opportunities considerations

Questions which are discriminatory on the basis of race, ethnic background, gender, marital status, nationality etc. must never be asked (on the application form and at interview) and don't ask some questions to men and not to women, or to people of one particular racial group and not to another. Watch out for questions that might be potentially discriminatory e.g. do you have children?, or that elicit information irrelevant to the job.

It is acceptable to ask all candidates whether they are entitled to work in the UK and to provide a national insurance number/evidence, and whether they have a disability and if so whether they would need specific adaptations/support to enable them to do the job. However, when interviewing focus on the ability NOT the disability.

## Notifying candidates

- Offer the job over the phone first. If the offer is conditional on references or medical checks state this clearly.
- If the candidate wants time to think, give a deadline.
- Once any references and checks are completed, send out an offer letter. A letter enables the specifics of the job to be re-stated, with the terms and conditions, any pre-conditions or post conditions.
- At the point at which an offer of work is unconditionally made and unconditionally accepted, a legal contract of employment comes into existence. If the offer was conditional the contract comes into existence once the conditions have been met or when the employer allows the employee to start work, even if the condition has not been met. Thus the offer letter should set out:  
The job title, the offer of the job, any conditions that apply to the offer, the terms, place of employment, starting date and probationary period, what the candidate should do (e.g. return a signed acceptance of the offer, agreement to references, date restraints on acceptance).
- Unsuccessful candidates should be informed in writing.
- File the original application form in the successful candidate's personnel folder. Keep the originals of the other candidates for at least a year.
- **Contract of employment** - a written statement outlining the main terms and conditions of employment is required by law to be issued to employees within two months of them starting work.

## Other issues to consider

You may find you need to consider these: police checks if an employee is to work with children, workers from abroad, taking on self-employed staff and recruiting volunteers.

Also, there will be occasions when the normal recruitment procedures may take too long or are too expensive. In these cases it may then be appropriate to speed up the procedure. (*Just about Managing* and ACAS gives good advice on all the above)

## D. INDUCTION

The settling in process is of utmost importance.

Employees that are made to feel welcome and are absolutely clear about their tasks and progress will be ready to contribute sooner - most labour turnover is among new employees as work efficiency and confidence is only reached after some time.

Even the smallest organisation should organise an induction - a training programme that helps new employees get to know the organisation, the job, and the people with whom they have contact. This will help avoid the dangers of new employees picking things up as they go along - which they may do haphazardly, incorrectly or not at all. It will instill confidence and make the person feel more at ease. Note - the information pack sent with the application form or job offer can start the process by helping the employee feel mentally prepared for the first day.

### Induction programme

Induction need not be a formal exercise but it must be thought through and well managed.

- Arrange an induction timetable and brief everyone on what they will do, when. The induction period should last from two to at least four weeks. In most organisations the new persons line manager will carry it out on a day-to-day basis.
- Analyse the employees job description and the relative importance of the various tasks. Decide how quickly the new person can be expected to take on each task. Ensure he/she understands *what* needs to be done, *why* it needs to be done, and *how* to do it before the task is undertaken. Set some easily achievable tasks and some fairly open-ended ones to create a sense of involvement and progress. Be clear about whether the employee is supposed to do them alone or with assistance. Never set tasks until the necessary training or background information has been provided, don't overload the person and allow time for absorbing the organisation.
- You could appoint a 'buddy' i.e. an experienced worker, to assist with the day-to-day queries.
- Create an induction pack and include:  
A check list of items that need to be covered; a timetable; a list of staff and job titles; names of health and safety representatives; a list of management committee(s) members; a recent



annual report, leaflets and basic written materials; policies e.g. equal opportunities, health and safety; procedures e.g. time-keeping including start, finish and meal times, petty cash; minutes of the last two staff meetings; other information.

- The timetable should cover a) regularly scheduled events e.g. staff meetings, management committee meetings (indicate whether attendance at these is necessary and whether any preparation is required), and feedback sessions. b) mid-probation and end-probation reviews, and other important events.

### The first day, and following weeks

- **First day** A warm and clear reception and time with the line manager is important. Outline the induction;
- Explain health and safety requirements and what to do in the event of an emergency. Ensure full understanding of these. Identify health and safety training needs;
- Give a tour of the workplace;
- Give a brief history/description of the organisation, its overall structure and how this job fits into it;
- Invitation for lunch or when/where lunch can be taken;
- Allow time to observe others at work, read quietly, ask questions, for settling at his/her desk;
- **Week one** The remainder of the week should focus on becoming familiar with basic systems and procedures, talking with new colleagues, watching activities and asking questions;
- **Week two** By the second week the employee will be ready for more on the organisations purpose, values, policies and procedures, and job specific information;
- **Weeks three and four** The focus should be on the specific skills and knowledge required for the job.

### Employees needing special attention

- School or college leavers - take into account inexperience and lack of awareness in a work context. Ensure they understand their position in the organisation and opportunities for developing skills.

- People returning to work after a break, or changing their work situation or career focus may feel apprehensive and out of touch with new developments. Make them feel at ease and ensure they know there is time and training available.
- Employees with disabilities - consider access, equipment and colleagues awareness and training. Specialist advice is available from the Disability Employment Adviser/Disability Service Teams of the Employment Service (telephone directory).
- Minorities - their induction should be the same as any other except attention should be paid to any sensitivities e.g. cultural or religious customs.

### Monitoring effectiveness

The recruitment and induction process should be reviewed for effectiveness - if at any stage the recruitment process failed to produce the expected result e.g. if the advertising method has produced too many candidates, you may want to examine what happened and why.

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### References

- ACAS - *Recruitment and Induction* September 1999  
Adirondack, S - *Just about Managing*, 3rd Edition, 1998, LVSC  
Hudson, Peter- *Managing Your Community Building*, 1996  
Community Matters  
NCVO - *The Good Employment Guide for the Voluntary Sector*, 1999

### Further Information

A list of resources (organisations and books) is available from Briefing 47

### VAN Briefings:

- 44 Disability Discrimination Act Part III
- 45 How do I create an Equal Opportunities Policy?
- 46 Data Protection Act 1998
- 47 Taking on Paid Staff - how do we do it?  
II. Good practice in Recruitment

### Note

Whilst we have taken reasonable precautions to ensure the information offered here is accurate, this Briefing simply provides a reference for good practice. It is in no way a definitive statement and nor is it legally comprehensive. We recommend therefore that you do further reading and take legal advice before taking action on any of the matters covered herein.



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