

How to recruit and select the best person for the job

Being clear on what your organisation needs, and understanding the legal requirements around recruitment are important first steps.

Top tips:

- Write or review the job profile: does the title fit the job? Are the job's purpose, scope and key duties clear? Is any clarification or updating needed?
- Write or review the person profile – what are the requirements around experience, knowledge, qualifications, skills and competencies? Competencies describe particular behaviours or abilities. In a person profile these should be expressed in a way that can actually be observed in the recruitment process
- Distinguish between the essential requirements (the candidate must have these to be able to do the job) and the desirable elements (nice to have)
- Make sure that all of the elements you have listed are reasonable and justifiable - challenge what you have written, particularly in the essential column
- Understand the difference between direct and indirect discrimination, both of which are illegal in the UK unless the condition can be justified. Direct Discrimination is treating a person or a group less favourably than others. Indirect Discrimination is applying a condition (e.g. minimum height 5'6") which certain groups will be less able to meet (e.g. women). The scope of the law currently covers sex, race, disability, religion, belief, sexual orientation and age
- Specific to the Disability Discrimination Act, you need to make reasonable adjustments to ensure a disabled person would not be at a disadvantage in your selection methods (such as allowing a partially sighted person larger type-faced documents to read, if that is what they needed). Work with the individual concerned to identify the best way that reasonable adjustments can be made to help them give of their best in the selection process.

Planning the recruitment process

Planning the process helps ensure that you are making the best use of your time and resources as a recruiter.

Top tips:

- Decide the number of recruitment stages you need, bearing in mind time scales and who else should be involved. View the stages as a series of filters
- In the early stages, set wide filters, geared to screening out candidates who do not meet key criteria in your Person Profile. Methods to use here might include structured CV/application form screening, telephone interviewing etc.
- Later stages will be more in-depth. Consider using exercises such as structured interviews, psychometric tests or work-sample exercises that can make finer distinctions between candidates who have all passed your initial filters
- Involve colleagues, HR team members and/or line managers as appropriate, ensuring that they are appropriately briefed /trained
- Decide what type of information you want to capture from each exercise and when. Use a grid linking the criteria in your Person Profile to the exercises you intend to use, so that your recruitment process is squarely structured around the most important, relevant and justifiable qualities
- Remember some exercises are better than others at capturing certain types of information
- Remember also that selection is a two-way process - make sure it looks and feels right from the candidate's perspective.

Attracting the right candidates

The best selection process in the world will not work if you do not have eligible candidates in appropriate and manageable numbers.

Top tips:

- Have a clear picture of the organisation as well as of the role and the sort of person you want to apply. What will attract the candidates to your role? Why should the successful candidate want to accept this job?
- Think about your ideal candidate profile, and the implications this might have on your attraction strategies and where and how these candidates can be reached.

How scarce are they? Where will they be living? Do you need to attract candidates who are 'not actively looking' as well as active job-seekers?

- Think also about your budget and timescales - if you decide to advertise, these will affect your choice of local or national media, technical press etc.
- Develop strategies to attract candidates - which newspapers/publications will they read? Will they tend to use agencies/consultancies, or jobsites/websites?
- Monitor the effectiveness of the different methods you use for future reference.

Assessing CVs and application forms

This is often the first stage of the selection process - making the right decisions here will make the later selection stages more focused and effective.

Top tips:

- First decide whether you want candidates to complete an application form or to submit a CV - both have advantages and drawbacks
- Whichever method you use, be clear about what your selection criteria are and what can be realistically inferred about a candidate from their CV or application form. Develop a structured approach so you can assess each candidate's application fairly and consistently, and give yourself the time and space to do this important activity properly
- Don't let your own bias and subjective opinions interfere with the selection process
- Communicate professionally and promptly with all candidates - both the unsuccessful ones and the ones proceeding to the next stage. Candidates who have had a bad experience of an organisation's selection process make for bad PR; imagine every candidate as a possible customer - they might be one already, become one, or know one.

Effective interviewing

Interviewing remains a key part in most selection and assessment processes, but the quality of the interview can make or break the selection process.

In one survey, roughly one third of respondents reported being put off a job by the person interviewing them.

Top tips:

- Using the job and person profiles, structure the interview to glean the information you want from this stage of the selection process. Interviews can be used to assess candidates' past experience, their specialist ability, knowledge and skills, their behavioural style (competency-based), or potential for a role with questions along the lines of: 'how would you deal with this particular scenario...?'
- Decide on whether you want to interview alone, with a colleague, or as a panel - each has its strengths and drawbacks
- Set out the interview room avoiding 'formal, interviewers-behind-table', layouts if possible. Ensure that the room is free from noise and distractions
- Start the interview on time. Welcome the candidate and give introductions. Explain when candidates will have an opportunity to ask their own questions, and make sure time is factored in for this
- Plan your questions, and who will ask what (if appropriate). Make good use of open questions - how / what / where / when / why / who - to allow good information to be collected, and be prepared to 'dig deeper' for further information or to clarify particular points. Make the questions clear and unambiguous, and avoid in-company jargon
- Follow an interview structure - explore important areas that **arise** by all means, but you need to cover the original ground that you set yourself
- Record the candidate's answers as fully and as accurately as you can. Show an interest and appreciation of the responses, but avoid showing approval / disapproval of any particular points
- Finish the interview on time. Thank the candidates for their participation
- Take time, as soon as you can after the interview, to weigh up the candidate's responses. Be objective in this process. Using an agreed structured rating scale can help different interviewers and assessors compare and contrast their findings at a later point.

Using other types of selection methods

Besides interviewing, using other types of assessment methods can help to broaden the range of information being taken into account in the selection process. As no one exercise is going to be perfect, this can help to make the process fairer and more objective.

As with interviewing, any other exercises you use need to relate clearly to your Person Profile.

They must be well designed and be fairly and consistently administered. They must be scored by people with appropriate training who have been briefed on the requirements.

Top tips:

- Make simulation exercises (such as role play and group discussions) replicate aspects of the job as realistically as possible. Exercises can be very effective, but are often time-consuming and can be expensive
- Psychometric tests and personality questionnaires can yield very objective and relevant information, but will need trained expertise to administer. Ensure you use reputable exercises with demonstrable evidence of their quality
- Presentation exercises are very relevant when an assessment of communication skills, and /or aspects of technical knowledge is required. Make sure the topic for presentation is well-wordsed and not over-complicated, clear but still sufficiently open to allow scope for different candidate approaches to be shown
- Group and role play exercises can give insights into candidates' communication, team working and leadership styles, depending on the topic. Assessor and 'actor' training are particularly important when planning to use role play exercises
- In an Assessment Centre, a number of different exercises are run on the same day or days with different assessors. The range of exercises chosen will provide the opportunity to assess the important skill areas or competencies. Assessment Centres are very effective when properly designed and run.

Final checks and offers

Having run a number of different exercises, the information needs to be brought together, decisions taken, offers made and the successful candidate(s) brought on board.

Top tips:

- As soon as possible after the final exercises have been completed, bring together the results. Use a grid format to show the different results/scores for each candidate against the skill areas or competencies highlighted in the Person Profile
- Weigh up the patterns of scores fairly and objectively. Give this process the time it deserves and remember, the process needs to be capable of scrutiny if, for example, a rejected candidate subsequently challenges the decision taken
- Offers can be conditional upon factors such as medicals, references etc. Make offers promptly, and if made verbally, follow up in writing swiftly
- It is important to take up references and to check up on qualifications. Personal or character references tend to be less widely used these days. Focus on factual information when taking up references in preference to more subjective non-factual information
- Keep the candidate who has been offered and has accepted the role interested and motivated in the new opportunity during any extended notice periods. Communicate frequently with them so they can hit the ground running from day one
- Think back over the whole recruitment process; evaluate its success, and make refinements as necessary.