

Selection and Interviews

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Introduction

The overall aim of recruitment and selection for a position is to attract and choose the best person for the job.

The selection process requires a great deal of planning and commitment to finding the right person for the right job. It also requires extensive knowledge of the post, the organisation, the applicant pool, recruitment strategies and selection techniques.

Common errors are:

- spending too much (or too little) money on the recruitment process itself
- not matching the person chosen to the job
- not recruiting from the correct place
- poor selection techniques that do not reliably predict future job performance
- a selection committee without a clear idea of the position to be filled
- a recruitment process taking so long that the best applicants are lost to other positions

There are five main stages to all recruitment and selection- no matter how small or large the job.

- Understanding the post you want filled
- Assessing what sort of person you want
- Attracting the applicants you want
- Shortlisting the applicants
- Interviewing and selecting

Understanding the post you want filled

Follow this guide to preparing a job description your own and for the candidates better understanding of what the job will entail.

- Do you have clear idea of what is required?
- Does the existing post fulfil those needs, or should it be altered?
- Make sure the job description for the candidate is interesting; a poor job description will produce poor applicants- or none at all.

A job description should describe:

1. The Title

Senior Lecturer, Consultant, Receptionist

2. The Trust

3. The Hospital

4. The Department

Where will the job be? Include a short description under a heading of each working area as appropriate.

5. The Vacancy

Why has it arisen? Is it an expanding department? Has someone moved elsewhere?

6. The Work Pattern

Is it seven days a week? Will there be late nights?

7. The Work Load

How many existing patients are there? Are the numbers of patients increasing?

8. The Patient Demographics

What sort of people will the patients be? Bus drivers from North London or schoolgirls from Surrey.

9. The Co-Workers

Describe the groups of staff already present. Indicate where the vacancy falls- a receptionist among other receptionists, or a research worker among doctors.

10. Details of the post

What will the applicant be expected to do on a daily basis? Offer a realistic timetable. No-one can work in two different hospitals with no time allowance for travelling between them.

11. Salary, Terms and Conditions of Service

What salary scale- university, NHS?

12. The Amenities

Within the hospital; library, swimming pool
Nearby: good schools, five minute bus ride to Harrods

Assessing what sort of person you want

The person specification- a description of the ideal person for the post- is sent out with the job description. What kind of applicant are you most interested in. How will they fit in to the existing group?

Essential criteria

What qualifications or how many years of experience must they have?

Desirable criteria

What criteria would be advantageous in an applicant- special training, languages, experience abroad?

Technical Skills

Include a description of the skills fundamental to the job; an ability to colposcope or biopsy, for example, or telephone or computer skills.

Communication skills

More or less relevant depending on the post- obviously necessary if the position deals with the public or offers a service.

Personality type

How is personality important to the job? Will they be a team leader or a team player, or do you need a loner with novel ideas or the person who can make them work.

Personal presentation

How should they be dressed? Is neatness essential?

Equal Opportunities

Any job description and person specification must allow for equal opportunities. Sometimes a job may require an individual specific to the job, for example, an Arabic speaking female doctor in a primarily Arabic speaking female clinic, where male doctors would be culturally unacceptable.

Attracting the applicants you want

The post should be advertised in clear well defined terms, stating its essential requirements. Ensure that the job description, person specification and application forms are ready and gathered together ready to send out before the advertisement is placed.

The closing date and interview date should be agreed in advance by the committee. Many good candidates are lost if the time between the closing date and interview is too long.

Short listing the applicants

This must be done as soon as possible after the closing date by the previously established appointments committee. The committee should be unanimous on which candidates make the list. Good practice will list them in order- from probable to possible

Decide how many people can be reasonably interviewed. Then add one or two more over that number; often applicants fail to appear.

Measure each one against the person specification. With large numbers of applicants it is helpful to give a points score for each item on the person specification. Additional points for exceptional attributes can help in deciding who makes the short list.

Interviewing and selecting

'You may as well toss a coin' Professor Eysenck's opinion on the validity of the interview as a selection device is well known. Nevertheless the interview seems likely to remain as the principle selection device despite its faults.

To sharpen the effectiveness of the interview the panel should ask the candidate to give a presentation. This offers the chance for the candidate to show what they have achieved, show how they hope to fit in and illustrate their communication skills.

The interviewer needs to possess three different skills

- Information gathering, to elicit the facts
- Interpreting and evaluating information, to consider what the facts mean.
- Decision making, to act on the facts and the analysis.

Gathering the information, eliciting the facts

The right physical environment is important. Interviews require a quiet undisturbed room. If the interview is informal a circle of chairs of equal height and similar spacing may well be appropriate. If the interview is formal and held round a table.

Spacing and lighting are also important. The candidate should not be asked to walk miles to their seat, nor blink into the silhouettes of the interview panel against a window.

The chairman should make the candidate welcome introduce the panel by name, and say whom they represent.

The format of the interview should be outlined to the candidate. The interviewer needs to listen and to develop an interested and attentive interviewing style, with plenty of eye contact. Verbal reinforcement should be forthcoming from the interviewer. Silence can be used in a positive way to allow the candidate to develop their answers fully. Questions should be linked to what the candidate has said to elicit a flow of information.

They should include:

A. Problem questions

These suggest a situation specific to the job where the candidate must show their capacity to, for example, prioritise tasks under pressure. What was your most challenging situation in the last year and how did you deal with it?

B. Open questions

'Tell me about...'

C. Probing questions

'Why do you want to leave your present job' or 'What was your worst moment there?'

D. Closed questions

These interrupt the information flow in order for the interviewer to redirect it to a new topic.
'When did you...? or how many...?'

At the end consider if you have gathered the information necessary for a decision.

Ask the candidate back in if a question needs clarification.

Allow the candidate, to question the panel, or offer the information on areas such as salary, study facilities, start date, accommodation or questions regarding the job description.

Interpreting and evaluating the information

Interviewer, know thy self.

Factors to be aware of:

1. Be aware of your prejudices.
2. Be aware of allowing your own view of what is acceptable to interfere with your evaluation.
3. Be aware of stereotyping the candidate.
4. Think of alternative ways of interpreting the information. Your first thought may not be correct.
5. Beware of bias towards candidates you find highly likeable.
6. Be aware of transferred ambition fulfilment as a guide to the candidate's potential for fulfilling the job.
7. Keep the importance of appearance in perspective.

Acknowledge the possibility that the behaviour of the interviewee may not be typical of them under more normal conditions. When anxious and threatened someone's main concern is protecting their self-esteem. Conveying an accurate picture of reality is secondary to them.

Making the decision

The panel should:

- Consider whether each candidate is appointable.
Do they fulfil the essential criteria?
Do they match the person specification?
- Each panel member should rank the candidates without conferring with other panel members.
- Choose the best candidate.
Never choose person of lesser ability out of fear of being overshadowed. This produces a dull unprogressive unit. On the other hand Einstein might not fit well with the team.

- Use references to back up your choice, to screen for factors which disqualify rather than qualify.
References have greater value as a negative test rather than a positive one to highlight an abrasive personality or poor sickness record.

Cost

Bad selection can be a drain on resources as well as a drain on the team. Cost of recruitment and selection is not simply the cost of the exercise itself.

Don't let your fish slip through the net by taking too long to interview after advertising. Good candidates are lost in this way.

Summary

Pre-interview preparation is as important as the interview. Never take short cuts or you will not appoint the best person for the post. It is vital to know exactly what your job entails and what you expect the person in the post to offer.

Match your applicants to the person specification carefully. During the interview gather as much information as possible through open questions and scenarios. Evaluate your information, prioritise the candidates and then make your decision. Use references to confirm your decision.

Good luck!

Key messages

1. Preparation

What is the post?

What does the job entail?

What would you need from the person?

What should they be like?

Who do you want?

Criteria

essential

desirable

technical

communication skill

personality

How do you find them?

Clear job description

date of closure

date of interview

Select the best applicable job pages

2. Shortlisting

Match the candidates with the person specification

Keep equal opportunities in mind

3. The Interview

Information

Gathering

Interpreting and evaluating

Decision making

Confirm with references

4. Golden rules

Making a selection mistake can be costly

Choose in haste-repent at leisure

Don't take too long about it