

## **Appendix H: Obtaining the correct references guidance**

### **Prior to interview**

Recruiting officers must check the reference for each interview on the back of their application form.

If the prospective employee is in employment, one of the referees **must** be from their current employer. If they are unemployed, one of the referees should be their last employer; a person who knows them as a helper or volunteer; or their head teacher. Applicants cannot nominate a member of their family as a referee.

For restricted posts working with children and/or vulnerable adults - references **must** be taken up prior to interview. Two satisfactory references, including information about working with children are essential. Please bear in mind the amount of time references can take to be obtained and when you are planning to interview your candidate.

### **Interview**

During the interview is the best time to ask questions to validate that the referees nominated by the applicant are the most appropriate person to provide information to support your decision to employ this person in the role you are recruiting to.

It is entirely legitimate for an employer to seek to check that the information that an individual has supplied as part of his or her job application is accurate and complete. Part of that process will involve obtaining references from previous employers.

It is common practice for employers to request two written references in respect of each new person whom they recruit and to make offers of employment conditional upon those references being satisfactory to the organisation.

### **Reasons for seeking references.**

It can be very useful to obtain references from a successful job applicant's previous employers. This is because factual information about a job applicant's past experience and performance is usually a sound predictor of his or her future performance in a similar role. References from recent employers are the most useful.

Line managers should, when interviewing job applicants, inform them that, if a job offer is made, they will wish to seek written references, normally from recent previous employers. They should also make it clear that any offer of employment will be conditional on those references being satisfactory to the organisation.

### **Written or verbal references**

It is generally advisable to seek to obtain references in writing (by post), rather than rely on verbal statements given over the telephone. It can, however, be useful - and sometimes revealing - to follow up a written reference by telephoning its author to ask for further information or perhaps for clarification of particular points.

References should not be sought, or given, by e-mail, as this method of communication is not confidential.

### **Sufficiency of References**

For external candidates:

- A minimum of two references must be obtained.

- One referee must be the candidates current or last employer, however if they have never had an employer they must be a senior staff member from the candidates last place of study.
- Where a character reference is supplied the reference must be from a professional person. No appointment should be made based on two character references.
- Referees must not be relatives or partners

For internal candidates:

- One reference must be obtained
- The reference must be from their current line manager.
- Where an existing Council employee is appointed to a new internal position **and** they will remain in the same team **and** continue to have the same Line Manager, the Line Manager can document their reference on the “decision to appoint form” rather than writing a reference addressed to themselves.

### **Unsatisfactory references**

Generally, if a reference on a potential recruit appears unsatisfactory in some way, the line manager should adopt the following principles.

If the reference contains factual information that is adverse to the potential recruit, the manager should consider whether or not this information is relevant, and if so whether it is sufficient to render the individual unsuitable for the employment in question. The manager should bear in mind that the fact that someone had a problem in his or her previous employment does not necessarily mean that he or she will be unsuitable for a new or different post.

The manager reviewing the reference should consider if the job duties and responsibilities of the potential recruit's previous post are sufficiently similar to those of the post on offer, and if not, refrain from automatically judging the individual in a negative light on account of adverse comments in the reference.

If a reference contains negative or adverse comments about a prospective recruit that are based on opinion rather than fact, the line manager should not automatically assume that this information is accurate. The information may have been given as a result of bias or personal dislike, or may be based on a misunderstanding or something outside the individual's control.

If a reference is ambiguous or otherwise unclear, the manager should not draw negative conclusions about the job applicant. Instead he or she should take steps to check what the referee meant, perhaps by telephoning to ask for clarification.

Where the references obtained do not provide sufficient or satisfactory information, the line manager should consider seeking further information, for example by requesting additional references from alternative sources. The individual's consent to do this will be necessary.

If you need further help please contact People Services for guidance