EMPLOYERS – GUIDE TO RECRUITING

Advice for Employers

After receiving your shortlist from NEATO, you may decide to interview some or all of the applicants. As the interview is the most frequently used aid to making a selection decision, it is important to prepare and conduct the employment interview so that the process is valid and contributes successfully to the selection process.

Many people have difficulty with the interview process...not just the interviewee ...the interviewer themselves may be unused to dealing with prospective staff, or may not feel confident that they are going to ask the right questions that will enable them to make the right choice.

Menu

- Preparing for and conducting employment interviews
- Checking the references of applicants
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- Selecting your employee
- Introducing new employees to your business

CONDUCTING EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEWS

Prior preparation is important…

Thorough preparation ensures that the interview will flow smoothly. Call applicants and set a mutually convenient time to meet, making sure they have the correct details about time and place.

Asking questions is the main method of retrieving information from the applicant. The following guidelines will help your preparation of questions:

- Ask open questions, that is, questions that require more than 'yes' or 'no' answers. This allows the applicant opportunity to tell you about themselves, their skills and experience.

- Start with easy questions and gradually build to more difficult or searching questions.

- It may be beneficial to begin questions with 'what', 'why', 'where', 'when' or 'how' then, depending upon the response, ask more direct questions.

- Do not ask leading questions that imply the right answer – you will only hear what you want to hear!

- Ask only one question at a time.

- Some good interview questions are:

What do you know about our company/firm/business? – this shows if the applicant has researched your business, what you do and what the job is about.

Tell me about yourself – the information provided when answering this question may promote additional conversation and allows you to get to know the applicant a little better.

Why are you the best person for this job? – this question allows the opportunity for the applicant to describe their best points in relation to the position.

What areas will you need to improve in so that you can perform this position competently? – it is beneficial to see if the applicant realizes the areas they need to improve in and if they are still able to 'sell' themselves to you.

When can you start? – an easily overlooked question, there is no use employing an applicant that may not be able to start work for some time.

Ask questions about their skills and experience that relate to the position – to clarify their level of skills and determine if this level is suitable for the position.

Privacy and discrimination are two issues that will need to be considered when preparing interview questions. So that applicants do not 'get the wrong idea', only ask questions relevant to the assessment of the person's suitability for immediate and continued employment and ask all questions of all applicants being interviewed. It is also beneficial to phrase questions that can be perceived as being discriminatory or invading privacy differently. For example, instead of asking: 'Do you have reliable childcare?', ask: 'The hours of work for this position may involve shiftwork. Does this suit you?' Of course, if the answer is 'no' to the question, you probably would not consider the applicant for the position.

Before the interview, review the applicant's information and/or resume. This allows you to tailor the interview questions to the applicant and helps with establishing rapport.

How do you conduct the interview?

It is normal for the applicant to be nervous about their interview – try and put them at ease because you will then obtain a more representative sample of what they are really like.

Open the interview with an introduction of yourself and any other interviewers. Talking about something the applicant has an interest in (from their resume) will assist with easing any tension. Before beginning the questions/topics you have prepared, it may also be helpful to encourage the applicant to talk freely and not be too nervous.

There are mainly two ways in which you can conduct the interview. Some interviewers prefer to ask questions in a very structured, set format (called a guided interview), while others prefer to discuss topics flexibly or ask questions in any order (called an unpatterned interview) so that the interview is more like a conversation. While the first method is easier to perform, the second is often used by more experienced interviewers. If both types of interviews contain thorough preparation, however, they should elicit similar information and results.

It is important that, during the interview, you do tell the employee about the job and what it involves. It is recommended that this usually commence at the beginning of the interview. There are two reasons for this: firstly, the applicant has the opportunity to answer the interview questions with some knowledge of the position which may improve their answers; and secondly, it allows the applicant the opportunity to consider whether they are genuinely interested in the position. There is no use conducting the interview and deciding whom you would like your new employee to be if, when they are offered the position, they are unsure whether they would like to take the job.

Many interviewers take notes during the interview. These notes need only be keywords that will 'jog your memory' when you reflect upon the applicant's interview at a later time. Some interviewers may also write more detailed notes from these keywords to keep with the application.

At the completion of asking the interview questions, it is professional to offer the applicant the opportunity to ask questions. This allows them the opportunity to clarify any points about the position and employment conditions (hours, pay, etc). Answer their questions as frankly as possible to ensure they are left with a positive impression of you and your business.

Closing the interview can occur in a number of ways. A popular way to close will include acknowledgement that the interview is over (for example, putting down your pen or pushing back your chair), an indication as to when the selection decision will be made and when you envisage the position beginning. Of course, there are many variations on this process: find one that's right for you!

Hopefully, after the interviews, you will have obtained a lot of information about each applicant. It is now time to perform some reference checks…

CHECKING THE REFERENCES OF APPLICANTS

Most applicants for a position will include either written references with their resume or include names and contact details for verbal referees. It is often beneficial if a verbal reference check is conducted to accumulate and verify information about the applicant in terms of their personal characteristics, skills, experience and work ethic. So, how do you conduct a reference check to obtain the information you need to know? And how can you ensure the correctness of this information? These questions, and more, will be answered soon!

When do you conduct reference checks?

Reference checks can be performed prior to short listing (discuss this option with NEATO consultants) or after the employer has performed the applicant's interview. One way is not better than the other: it depends on whether the information is required for accumulating or verifying information. The latter is less time-consuming as it is only performed for those applicants who are suitable for the position and is a handy method of verifying information provided by the applicant during the interview. If a reference check is performed to assist short listing, the process is obviously more time-consuming and also needs to be performed for <u>every</u> applicant to ensure validity and equity of the short listing process.

Excuse me, don't forget your etiquette!

Whether the reference check is performed prior to or after the interview, there is some general etiquette involved:

- When you call, introduce yourself to the referee and explain that they have been listed as a referee for the applicant.
- Ask them if it is convenient to talk and whether they are willing to participate in the reference check.
- Provide them with a brief verbal description of the position the applicant has applied for. This will assist the referee with providing relevant information about the applicant.
- After completing the reference check, thank the referee for their time.

How do you increase the reliability of the information obtained from the reference check?
There is much debate as to the reliability of written references and verbal referees because applicants will usually only include people as referees who will describe the applicant's attributes, skills and personal characteristics in glowing terms. Additionally, people listed as referees feel obliged to say only positive things about the applicant. How do you overcome this?

The answer is simple:
- Prepare questions before conducting the reference check.
- Ask some 'open' questions that require more than a 'yes/no' answer.
- Be prepared to ask the difficult questions (such as: Was ____________ always punctual?) and clarify information that is being provided.

Some questions to ask…
Following are some suggested questions that you may consider the next time you complete a reference check. Note that there is a combination of open and closed questions. Some questions also verify information while others obtain information.

- (Applicant's name) resume says that he/she worked at (previous employer's name) from (date) to (date). Is this correct?
- (Applicant's name) resume says they were responsible for (list duties). Is this correct? Were they responsible for any additional duties?
- How would you rate (applicant's name) knowledge and performance of the job?
- How much supervision did (applicant's name) require?
- How efficiently and fast was (applicant's name) able to work?
- How would you describe (applicant's name) ability to work in a team?
- Describe if (applicant's name) showed initiative and problem solving abilities on the job.
- How would you describe (applicant's name) relationship with supervisors and peers?
- Was (applicant's name) always punctual?
- Did (applicant's name) have a good attendance record?
- How do you think (applicant's name) will perform in the position applied for?
- What areas of difficulty do you think (applicant's name) will encounter in the position?
- Would you re-employ (applicant's name)? If no, why not?

This is by no means a finite list of questions you could ask. The questions are also phrased quite generally, however, provide a basis for tailoring more industry- or occupation-specific questions.

'Employment' references are best…
The questions also assume you are performing a reference check with a previous employer or supervisor. This type of 'employment' information is always more

beneficial than just obtaining personal information. If the applicant does not list any referees of this nature, it may be beneficial to contact previous employers or supervisors seeking information about the applicant's history and performance of working with them. Please do not contact an employer who the applicant may be <u>currently</u> working for: it can create a difficult situation if the current employer is not aware the applicant is looking for other work!

As with all other aspects of hiring employees, the information obtained from reference checks should be accurate and kept confidential. It is also recommended that notes are free from terms of bias or discriminatory language, are as objective as possible and relevant to the job applied for. After all, if an unsuccessful applicant pursues a claim of discrimination in applying for a position, third parties, including the applicant, have access to this information.

As shown above, reference checks can become a valuable part of the recruitment process. If you require additional information on conducting reference checks, please contact your nearest NEATO centre.

APTITUDE TESTING

Aptitude testing is a recruitment technique that is often bypassed during the recruitment and selection process. But the results of aptitude testing can often reveal handy information about how an applicant may perform 'on-the-job'. While it is certainly not recommended that the results from aptitude tests be the <u>only</u> indicator of predicting on-the-job performance by applicants, results can definitely provide additional information to assist the selection decision.

When are aptitude tests performed?

Aptitude tests can be performed prior to short listing applicants or after selection interviews to provide additional information. The former is more administratively time-consuming, whereas the latter is easier to manage and, thus, less costly.

Why aptitude testing is not popular…

Possibly the main reasons why aptitude testing is not a predominant method of assessing applicants is the difficulty in initial setup and the dilemma of when to test. While it is not recommended that you test the applicants for <u>every</u> position you fill (for example, why test for a labouring position?), if your employees require specialised skills or personalised characteristics that are imperative in ensuring their successful performance of the job, then why not 'give it a go'? It just may prevent making an incorrect selection decision which will cost you more in the long-term.

The following advice will assist with setting up, conducting and monitoring your aptitude testing system.

Where do you obtain aptitude tests?

Tests are usually purchased from a recognised testing agency (such as ACER). These tests usually need to be purchased by a suitably-qualified individual in your business who can then correctly conduct and administer the tests (if you require assistance in this, please contact NEATO consultants).

You will need to purchase the number of tests you require along with the instructions on how to accurately assess the tests.

Just how reliable is the applicant information obtained from the test?
There is much debate regarding the reliability and validity of aptitude testing. The following are some handy points that can increase the accuracy of results obtained from aptitude testing.

- Make sure that you are using tests that test for the correct knowledge, skills and abilities you require the employee to have to perform the job. There are many tests available from recognised testing agencies, however, they normally fall into the categories of:
    - attainment – tests an individual's acquired knowledge or skill in a particular field
    - intelligence – tests an individual's general capacity to acquire abstract knowledge and to solve problems
    - aptitude – tests specific capacities or potential (for example, mechanical or musical ability)
    - interests – highlights areas of activity or thought which are particularly attractive to an individual
    - personality – qualitatively describe the individual's psychological characteristics

  The testing agency will be able to issue a catalogue that briefly describes the test, its uses, applicability and cost.

- Use a combination of tests so that meaningful data can be obtained. For example, you may use one of each of the attainment, intelligence and aptitude tests.

- Ensure that analysis of the tests is performed in accordance with recommended test guidelines (purchased with the tests). This is essential to obtain objective and unbiassed data that will be of assistance in the selection decision. The analysis should also be performed by a suitably-qualified individual as indicated by the testing agency. Please note that most personality tests can only be purchased, conducted and assessed by qualified psychologists. Appropriate notes should also be kept that are free from bias and discriminatory terms with all results only being used for the purposes for which they were obtained.

- The following guidelines ensure that all applicants undertaking the test are given the best opportunity to perform at their peak:
    - provide all relevant details regarding the testing to applicants prior to the date of testing (where, when, etc)
    - ensure the test is conducted as per test guidelines and by a suitably-qualified individual who acts in a professional manner at all times
    - conduct the test in a room free of distraction and with appropriate comforts (temperature, writing tools, etc)
    - ensure all applicants are provided with clear instructions on how to fill in answer-sheets, documentation, etc.
    - advise the applicants what their results from the tests will be used for

While you may not use aptitude testing for the recruitment of all of your new employees, the suggestions above ensure that aptitude testing could be included in your recruitment and selection system quite successfully. NEATO consultants will be able to provide additional advice on conducting and analysing aptitude tests. Please contact your nearest NEATO centre if you require additional information.

As an employer, selecting the right employee is one of the most important, yet sometimes difficult decisions to make: if your employees are suitable for the position they are in and perform at a competent or above-average level your business success and productivity is improved. Selecting the right employee can also reduce employee turnover rates which directly contributes to reducing the costs of re-employing and training new employees.

When and how to make the selection decision…

After you have accumulated all of the information about each shortlisted applicant via interviews, reference-checking (optional) and aptitude testing (optional), you are then in the position to consolidate this information to make an informed assessment of each applicant. Remember, you want to choose the applicant that will perform the most successfully in the position. To do this, you need to consider information that indicates each applicant's level of performance will be on-the-job. Also, by law, you need to choose the applicant that is the 'best person for the job'. So, how do you do this? Simply by considering the following guidelines:

- Complete an Applicant Assessment Sheet for each applicant. A generic form is shown. The characteristics listed can be tailored more specifically to the job.

APPLICANT ASSESSMENT SHEET

Name of applicant: ______________________________

Position: ______________________ **Date:** ______________________

CHARACTERISTICS AND RESULTS	QUALITY RATING				
	Superior	**Good**	**Average**	**Fair**	**Poor**
Education and Qualifications					
Work Experience and History					
Knowledge					
Skills and Experience					
Professional Attitude					
Interest and Enthusiasm					
Teamwork					
Initiative and Problem Solving Ability					
Ambition					
Maturity					
Professional Presentation					
Verbal Expression					
Overall Performance at Interview					
Results from Reference Check (if applicable)					
Results from Aptitude Testing (if applicable)					
Overall Rating					

Should other sections/divisions consider the applicant? Yes/No

Who? ______________________

Would you hire this person: Yes/No

Justifying Comments (including estimate of strengths, weaknesses and potential)

____

____

____

Recommendation ____

Signature of decision-maker: ____

- Rate each applicant for each characteristic and complete necessary comments. Remember to remain as objective as possible with no personal prejudices or attitudes influencing the rating process. You can also use a points scoring system for each characteristic, however, this does not ensure objectivity or reliability. After all, an applicant may have the highest score, yet possess an unsuitable characteristic that is unable to be reflected in the score. Additionally, the 'highest scorer' may be over-qualified for the position and perhaps will not remain it for very long.
- Compare the Applicant Assessment Sheets of each applicant.
- You are then in an informed position to make the selection decision.

The above suggestions should provide some assistance in consolidating each applicant's information so that it directly contributes to making the correct selection decision.

INTRODUCING NEW EMPLOYEES TO YOUR BUSINESS

Once your new employee has commenced work, it is important to introduce or induct them to your company. This assists with establishing the employment relationship between the business and the new employee and ensures all legislative requirements are met by the business.

While larger companies may have the new employee participate in a formal induction and training program over the initial weeks, many businesses opt for a less formal and time-consuming option. These businesses may organise for the line supervisor and/or personnel manager to spend some time with the new employee explaining relevant facets of the business and the position they are responsible for performing.

What should be discussed with the new employee?

Whatever method of presentation is chosen, it is important for the new employee, at a minimum, to be provided information in the following areas:

- Organisational objectives, purposes and mission: Advertising the direction and aims of the company helps the new employee to understand why the company exists and its main operations. A brief overview of the business' history may also be beneficial.
- Divisional, branch or section structures and targets: This ensures the employee knows where their position fits into the business's operations and any team or individual performance requirements that are expected.
- Terms of employment, including job title, pay and benefits, award/union coverage, hours of work, leave provisions and probationary period: Many employers convey this information in a formal employment contract, however, it should at least be discussed with the new employee.
- Organisational and workplace layout which may include a tour through the workplace to locate the positioning of amenities, infirmaries, parking, work areas and recreational areas.
- Tasks and responsibilities of job position: These are most easily conveyed in a job description. A job description should describe the objective of the position, whom the position reports to, the key duties and responsibilities of the position (including supervisory) and performance requirements.
- Dress requirements.
- Company policies and procedures: Many businesses have specific policies regarding administrative and operational procedures. These are most

easily communicated to the employee by having them read the business' procedures manual. If your business does not have a procedures manual, verbal discussion of these policies and requirements with the new employee should suffice.

- Workplace health and safety policy, procedures and requirements including emergency procedures and equipment, first aid facilities and individual responsibilities: Communication of this information is recommended under Workplace Health and Safety legislation. The above are only minimum requirements: in some industries, it should also include on-the-job training in specific workplace health and safety procedures (for example, machinery operation, signage, etc).
- Discrimination and sexual harassment policies, procedures and individual responsibilities: Once again, as an employer, you have an obligation to ensure all of your employees are aware of how to conduct themselves in the workplace to ensure that no employee is discriminated or harassed in any way.
- Introductions to other staff members.
- Commencement of on-the-job training: The period of time will vary from occupation to occupation. It should also include on-going support and a suitable length of time to monitor the performance of the new employee on-the-job.
- Completion of necessary documentation for the new employee (Employment Declaration, pay details, etc).
- Signing of a declaration by both the new employee and a business representative to acknowledge discussion and communication of the above topics: This provides proof that your business has met all obligations with employee induction if future employee relations issues occur.

Won't this take too much time?

While it will take some administrative time to devise the program and then ensure it is presented to each new employee, most businesses acknowledge that the benefits (refer below) far outweigh the cost of implementation and presentation of the program. There are, however, two cost-reducing strategies that may be of assistance:

- The program could be delivered to small groups of new employees (not just one-on-one).
- The majority of business information, procedures and policies could be in written form for the employee to read in their own time or prior to commencement of employment.

What are the benefits of having an induction program?

There are many short and long-term benefits, including:

- The new employee forms a positive impression of the business.
- The new employee adopts the culture of the business more quickly and enthusiasm, commitment and confidence is increased.
- The new employee adapts to the job and work environment more easily which increases productivity and reduces the risk of the new employee leaving the position in the early stages.
- Lower recruitment and selection costs of new employees may result, along with improvements in employee morale and productivity.
- Assists your business with meeting its obligations under legislation and reduces the risk of employment relations or Workcover issues in the future (which can cost your business a substantial amount of money!).

Obviously, introducing new employees to your business has many advantages: it's well worth taking the time to devise a program and ensure it is undertaken with each new employee as soon as possible after they commence employment.