

Recruitment and Selection of General Staff

S U P P L E M E N T A R Y H A N D B O O K

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INTRODUCTION

This Handbook is a supplement to *Recruitment and Selection of General Staff: Guidelines* and *Recruitment and Selection of Academic Staff: Guidelines*. It provides more detailed advice and information for those who are inexperienced in appointment procedures.

1 JOB DESCRIPTIONS

The job description is the base document of the entire recruitment process and is made available to all applicants. A critical factor in the writing of a job description is that you must describe the requirements of the position, not the characteristics of the incumbent. A good job description will tell applicants what the job requires and allow them to decide to what extent they meet the requirements of the position.

The University has a standard job description format. The components are set out here with comments under each heading.

TITLE

The heading should include the Job Title, the name of the Department and the name of the Division.

PRIME FUNCTION

Here you state the principal purpose/s of the position in one or two sentences. For example: "The prime function of this position is to provide administrative and secretarial services for the management team of the Division."

MAIN OBJECTIVES

This is a list of the measurable outcomes of the position. For example: "To ensure the efficient administration of the Department's laboratories."

KEY TASKS

This can be a longer list of more detailed duties and will give an accurate picture of what the incumbent in the position is actually required to do. Examples are: “To organise and maintain a record of all sick leave and annual for staff in the Department” and “To write press releases for the Vice-Chancellor as required.”

RELATIONSHIPS

There are three parts to this section, set out in this way:

Directly responsible to:

Here you state the title of the position to whom the appointee will report (not the name of the incumbent).

Supervision of:

Give the titles of the positions which are supervised by this position. You also need to state here any other details about the supervised positions, such as whether they are full-time or part-time and whether there is responsibility for casual or temporary staff. This section should also state if the appointee will assist in staff recruitment or will have some responsibility for staff performance or professional development matters.

Functional relationships with:

Here you state the names of the main positions and/or departments and organisations, both internal and external, with which this position regularly interacts. The key here is to list only the main, formal relationships. It is not necessary to be exhaustive in this section as some members of staff would interact with a great number of others in the course of a week's work.

BUDGETARY RESPONSIBILITY

In this section you set out the budgetary responsibility of the position. For example: “This position administers a budget of approximately \$5,000,000. The appointee has the delegated authority to make single purchases up to \$100,000 in value.”

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

This section is not always necessary, as the expected outcomes may be quite evident from the list of objectives and tasks above. Typical outcomes may be “Projects completed on schedule” or “Regular and comprehensive reports to the Head of the Department.”

PERSON SPECIFICATION

The person specification, sometimes called the “ideal appointee specification,” is a key part of the job description and plays a vital part in the process of selection and appointment. It sets the criteria against which you should assess the merit of the applicants for the position, and thus helps to ensure compliance with the Human Rights Act.

The specification normally comprises a point-by-point description of the types of qualifications, experience, knowledge and relevant personal qualities an ideal appointee would have. These are normally expressed as competencies. You have to be careful only to include factors that are really related to the position being described. You also have to be clear about which items are minimum criteria to perform the job and which items are desirable but not essential.

The test of whether this section is accurate is that the points listed should clearly relate to the job requirements and duties listed in the job description.

A few other suggestions about the job description:

- Attach an organisational structure chart
- Check for discriminatory and/or sexist language
- Make sure that abbreviations that might be commonly understood within the University are explained for the benefit of outsiders.

If you require further assistance with job descriptions, please contact the Administrator – Employee Relations. Human Resources also runs comprehensive training sessions on writing effective job descriptions.

2 SELECTION CRITERIA

An important stage of the selection process is to establish clear criteria. Without such a list the interview can easily become too subjective and not necessarily related to the needs of the position being filled.

Selection criteria should be derived from the job description and should relate to the minimum skills, qualifications, knowledge and achievements necessary to carry out the duties of the position.

A list of criteria is used by the appointment committee in its deliberations and to guide the direction of the interviews. It should never be provided to candidates – their guide to what is required is the job description (and often also the vacancy advertisement).

Here are some examples of selection criteria that may be relevant in particular cases.

- Ability to work under various or particular conditions
- Analysis and research skill level
- Demonstrated ability to deal with the public
- Decisiveness
- Ability to delegate effectively
- Impact or appropriate presentation
- Independence
- Initiative
- Ability to operate specific machines or equipment
- Oral communication and interpersonal skills
- Planning and organisational skills
- Problem solving
- Rapport building
- Record keeping
- Self organisation
- Teamwork
- Technical or professional knowledge
- Technical or professional competence
- Written communication skills

The test of the appropriateness of any particular criterion is always the content of the job description.

EXTERNAL TESTING

Not all selection criteria can be measured at interview. For example, an interview is not usually the best method of determining high-level numeracy or computer programming skills. More departments are moving towards external skills-based testing. Where a panel decides to use alternative testing methods, consultation with a Human Resources Adviser is urged.

3 SHORT LISTING

Short listing determines the best applicants for interview. If the job description and selection criteria are set appropriately from the start, the best applicants should come to the top.

The ideal number of candidates varies according to the position and the situation, but it should generally be possible to reduce the list to four.

Do not give too much credit for qualifications not needed for the position - ask yourself what minimum qualifications are required of the position and work upwards. Along with formal skills, measure applicants' life skills against the requirements for the position. For example, to have served as secretary of a voluntary group is probably evidence of particular skills and attitudes.

A common way to short list is to use a matrix that scores each applicant against the attributes being sought. If you are grading applicants numerically to maintain relativities and consistency, confirm as a committee what each number represents. Commonly the matrix will reveal that there is no ideal applicant, but it will also show clearly which applicants appear to come closest to the desired mix of skills and qualifications.

Interview committees are often surprised to discover during the interview that the person who appeared to be the front-runner on paper is not in fact able to demonstrate some of the human skills required for the position or reveals other characteristics that make him or her unsuitable for the position.

Here is an example (somewhat over-simplified) of a criterion grid established for an administrative and reception position:

Candidate score 1 – 5:	typing skills	ability in Excel	Macintosh experience	reception experience	score
Able	5	1	0	4	10
Beethoven	5	4	5	3	17
Charles	3	3	3	0	9
Dobermann	5	2	5	2	14
Esterhazy	1	5	3	5	14
Fox		?	5	4	?
George	4	5	0	0	9
Hohenzollern	4	4	1	3	12

Completing this grid with all applicants would give you a good start in short listing. It should not be used too rigidly, however, as sometimes one criterion is more important than all the others. In this example, you may decide that you must have the typing skills but that it would not be difficult to provide training in the Excel skills that you require of your appointee (in that case you would be more likely to interview Dobermann than Esterhazy).

This same matrix system can often be used effectively to measure outcomes of the interview – it often helps by keeping the decision focused on the requirements of the position and not allowing judgement to be overly swayed by personal impressions or by a halo effect from one strong characteristic.

WHAT TO DO WHEN AN INCUMBENT APPLIES FOR A POSITION?

A situation where an incumbent applies for the position he or she currently occupies would normally occur when a fixed term position is made permanent. Note that it is a legal requirement for these positions be advertised, but it is not a legal requirement to appoint or even to shortlist the incumbent.

However, there are some important factors to be considered in this situation. While the University does not provide formal direction on the treatment of internal applicants, it recognises the directives of the State Sector Act 1988 that it must act at all times as a good employer. This means that employment is based on the principle of merit and equal employment opportunities.

As a result of the University's commitment to best practice it is recommended that where incumbents meet the appropriate selection criteria they are included in the interview list. It is important that the internal applicant understands clearly that there is no guarantee of appointment, that all applicants will be measured against the same criteria and that the appointment will be made based on merit.

The recruitment process should not be used as a way of removing incumbents for reasons other than their non-suitability for the position. Other performance issues should be dealt with as they arise and through the proper channels.

4 THE INTERVIEW

Ideally interview panels should consist of not more than three or four people. However, given the complexity of many University positions, along with the fact that there are often multiple supervisors, there can be times when there is a need for greater representation. One way to address this is to have a larger group involved in the short-listing process and to form the interview panel from within this group.

ESTABLISHING THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The short-listing process will have already established that the applicants to be interviewed meet the basic selection criteria. The interview is used to determine how well the applicants meet each essential criterion, how well they are likely to handle the duties of the job and which applicant is the most suitable for appointment.

To do this the questions must seek examples of competencies in an applicant's work history, past behaviours and reasoning. It is easier to ask the right questions when you have appropriate selection criteria.

Each member of the interview panel can be allocated questions or an area of discussion relevant to the position's requirements. It is usual to employ the same generic questions for all applicants, but it is likely that they will lead to different discussions and exploration of issues with different applicants.

Do not make assumptions about applicants. If you feel information relevant to the position is missing or answers provided are ambiguous, you should seek clarification.

For example, you may ask "Have you worked in situations where you have had to prioritise work demands from several different people?" Your applicant may just say "Oh yes, I've experienced that." You would then want to say "Could you give us a specific example of such a situation?"

If there is no job-related purpose for gathering information the applicant could assume the information will be used to discriminate against them. This is particularly important where questions directly or indirectly touch on grounds that are referred to in the Human Rights Act (set out in Appendix 3 of the companion booklet *Recruitment and Selection of General Staff: Guidelines*).

Some prohibited questions are:

- Are you married?
- Have you any plans to get married?
- Have you ever been divorced?
- Do you have a family?
- Do you plan on having a family?
- What ages are your children?
- Do you plan on having more children?
- Who collects the children after school?
- How old are your parents?
- Can your parents care for themselves?
- What are your family commitments?
- Where were you born?

PREPARING THE PHYSICAL SETTING

Ensure the setting of the room is appropriate for the size of the group and those attending. It can, for example, be very intimidating to be ushered into a large room and be placed at the far end of a long table, with the interviewers at the other end.

Low chairs can be restrictive to people with mobility issues. Make sure there is suitable ventilation and offer water to the applicant and the interviewing panel.

Make sure the interview room is well signed and physically accessible to all applicants and committee members. It can make applicants very anxious if they can't find the location and they are running close to the time of the interview. There needs to be someone available to receive all interviewees as they arrive and direct them where to wait. It is preferable that this place is located so that applicants do not meet each other.

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

In the interview you will be undertaking a detailed analysis of the applicant's competencies. The objective is to focus on what the person did and said in past

situations. This is to enable the interview committee to build up a detailed picture of the applicant's likely performance in the job.

With initial questions having been prepared in advance, a widely used approach is as follows:

Starting the interview:

- Relax the applicant – a minute or two of chat, comment about the weather or whatever is topical
- Ask the members of the panel to introduce themselves
- Explain the format of the interview
- If applicants were asked to bring anything with them it may be appropriate to ask for this now.
- If appropriate explain the departmental structure
- Check the applicant has seen a copy of the job description and give an opportunity to ask any questions about it
- Clarify the purpose of the interview and timeframes
- Ask for clarification on any details on application papers
- Commence questions

A useful opening question, which can often put people more at ease, can be to invite them to give a brief informal summary of their working experience. You might, for example, say “Thank you very much for the detailed CV you gave us. We found it very interesting, which is of course why we've invited you here for interview. We wonder if you'd like to tell us a bit more, in a less formal way, about how you see this job as fitting into your employment plans?”

MAKING NOTES

It is reasonable to take notes during the interview, but care should be taken not to make this too conspicuous a process – it can be quite intimidating to have three or four people suddenly pick up their pens and write down the answer to a question. Brief notes to aid the memory should suffice.

At the end of the interview:

- Thank the candidate
- Ask them if they have any questions (this can come towards the end, but not necessarily last, as it may lead to further questions from the panel)
- Identify the relationship between the applicant and referees named, particularly where they do not appear to have named an individual in a supervisory role
- Reconfirm availability of referees and, if it is not already given, seek permission to contact the current employer
- Advise of next steps and timeframes
- Give a tour of the work area (if appropriate) – this may be better conducted by someone not on the interview panel.

CONTACTING REFEREES

If an applicant is reluctant to have you speak to their current or immediate past employer give them the opportunity to explain why. This will need to be considered when assessing the suitability of the referees provided. It is important that the applicant knows that referees will be contacted only if there is a possibility of employment, in order to allay any anxiety on their part. It is unusual to appoint an applicant without checking their possible suitability with the current supervisor.

5 TESTING

It may be appropriate to consider some sort of testing as part of the selection process. This can take many forms, such as undertaking a technical skills test (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, internet etc), using an assessment centre or submitting examples of work.

The principles of equity and fairness apply, and therefore it is important to ensure that applicants know ahead of time what will be required, and that in undergoing the testing all short-listed applicants face the same situation.

6 PITFALLS TO AVOID

Recruitment is an onerous task and while as many safeguards as possible are put in place to make the process equitable, there are pitfalls. Here are some obvious ones:

- (i) *Judging on first impressions* - It is human nature to judge an individual on how they impress us on their first meeting. Personal presentation can either positively or negatively affect an interviewer's opinion in relation to the actual requirements of the position.
- (ii) *Halo effect* - It is possible to be overly impressed by an applicant's skills or experience in one particular area to the extent that they improperly outweigh other criteria. Recording decisions on a matrix can help reduce this.
- (iii) *Extremes of view* - There may be members of the panel with a tendency to judge applicants either too harshly or with excessive leniency. This can make decisions hard to arrive at. Open discussion with recorded decisions can help alleviate this.
- (iv) *Primacy and Recency* - This is the tendency to recall the first few interviewees and the last few. Those in the middle can become blurred. Notes can reduce this risk, but the best solution is not to have too many on the short list.
- (v) *Outsiders* - Sometimes people who are not so commonly seen in some work groups are assessed less favorably. Having a panel made up with members from diverse backgrounds should reduce this tendency.

7 WHANAU – INTERVIEWS INVOLVING SUPPORT PEOPLE

Any applicant for a position is entitled to bring whanau or other support people to the interview. They will have indicated on their application forms whether they wish to do this. The presence of whanau/support people in the interview changes the dynamics.

If someone has requested a whanau interview contact them (either by telephone or mail) to discuss proceedings. Have a number of options available to them for the process; alternatively let them suggest what they would like. If someone has a Māori or other “non-English” name, find out how to pronounce it.

Establish how many people the applicant wishes to bring but do not overload the interview room. Talk to the applicant about what their expectations are and have an idea of what the committee is both comfortable with and able to offer. The candidate will not be treated fairly if a process is offered which cannot be followed through.

Do not assume that simply by having a person who is Māori on your selection panel you are covered for whanau interviews. If there is a Māori person on the panel who is not there as a “Māori consultant” do not assume they will organise the process.

If the process is discussed with all parties beforehand there is little possibility of offending. To be seen to be genuinely making an effort is what counts.

It is important to note that “support” interviews are not restricted to people of Māori origin but are open to anyone who wishes to bring support people with them to the interview. These should follow similar lines to whanau interviews, in that the applicant will have a greater role in establishing the process. The cultural component of the whanau interview may not be present, but during your discussion with the applicant you should elicit any additional needs for the interview.

It is also important to remember that, after the process is over, it is the applicant, not the support people, who will have to be able to perform the tasks of the position.

8 REFERENCE CHECKS

Reference checks should be made only when there is a real possibility of appointment of the applicant. They are made to validate perceptions, clarify areas of doubt about the applicant's suitability and occasionally to check facts such as claimed qualifications or experience.

The discussion you have is confidential to the interview panel and the referee. You should not pass on information obtained in discussion with the referee to the applicant. The privacy act does not permit the applicant to gain access to this information.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

As with all other parts of the recruitment process, ask the same base questions in each case when conducting reference checks. These will lead to individual follow-up questions. It may be helpful to use an assessment grid to record responses to the questions. Only ask questions that will provide you with information that is relevant to the job. Appropriate questions may include:

- What was the workplace relationship between the referee and the applicant?
- What were the applicant's responsibilities (in order of importance)?
- How would you rate the applicant's volume and quality of work?
- How would you describe the applicant's attitude to work?
- What were the applicant's main strengths, successes and weaknesses?
- How did you feel about the applicant's management practices?
- How would you describe the applicant's success in training, developing and motivating staff?
- What could the applicant have done to produce better results?
- What initial training should be focused on and what kind of support will the applicant need to successfully perform in this position?

AFTER THE REFERENCE CHECK

Consider the source – the information that you have received is limited by the perceptions of the person giving it. If you receive negative information about the applicant, weigh it with data received from other referees before using it to make a decision.

9 IMMIGRATION ISSUES

If the preferred applicant is not a New Zealand Citizen or holder of a permanent Resident's Visa, the New Zealand Immigration Service will expect the University to justify why none of the NZ-based applicants was suitable for appointment. In cases where there is a recognised shortage of specialist skills, this is easier to justify, though not guaranteed. The University will need to consult with the Immigration Service over appropriate processes regarding appointment procedure. In this case, talk with a Human Resources adviser first.

10 PRIVACY AND THE MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION

Here is a summary of key legal requirements in relation to the management of information.

(Please consult *Recruitment and Selection of General Staff: Guidelines* or *Recruitment and Selection of Academic Staff: Guidelines* for fuller details of the legal requirements relating to privacy and the management of information.

- (i) Personal information about potential employees must be collected only for a purpose connected with the organisation's activities.
- (ii) There are limitations on sourcing information about an employee or applicant from someone other than the person themselves.
- (iii) Employees (including a successful applicant who has not yet taken up the position) should be told that they have a right of access to, and correction of, personal information held by the employer. Evaluative information can be withheld.
- (iv) Organisations are obliged to store personal information in such a way that it is not accessed by anyone not entitled to the information.
- (v) Organisations are required to take "reasonable steps" to check the accuracy of personal employee data before acting or making a decision based on it.
- (vi) Personal information should not be held longer than necessary.
- (vii) Personal information about employees collected in connection with their employment should not be used without their consent for other purposes such as marketing or fundraising.
- (viii) Personal information about employees should not be disclosed to another person of the organisation without the employee's consent.
- (ix) Employee records should not assign unique identifiers, such as IRD numbers, to identify individuals.

If you have any questions or doubts about the process of recruitment, interview or appointment, please contact an Adviser in the Division of Human Resources.

Further copies of this booklet and its companion volumes, *Recruitment and Selection of General Staff: Guidelines* and *Recruitment and Selection of Academic Staff: Guidelines*, are available from the Division of Human Resources.