Guidelines on best practice in recruitment and selection

These guidelines are primarily designed to assist you in implementing effective and fair recruitment and selection processes, which will contribute to your success in appointing the best candidate to each post.

This is an information note only and it should not be regarded as a legal interpretation of legislation relating to the recruitment and selection process. Professional advice should always be sought from an appropriately qualified and experienced source in the interpretation and application of recruitment and selection practices.

The recruitment and selection process begins with either the creation of a new position or an existing vacant position arising. In relation to a new position, the first task to be performed should be a job analysis, which will identify the following:

- the key areas of responsibility and requirements of the post, including how the role may develop into the future
- the reporting and working relationships of the post
- the impact the new position will have on existing roles/posts
- the status/contract duration/grading of the post.

If it is an existing position the following issues need to be considered:

- whether the job has changed, and why
- whether the job description needs to be changed to accurately reflect the role and responsibilities of the post and how the role will develop into the future.

1. The job description/person specification

In addition to recruitment and selection, the job description can be used for a variety of purposes, including:

- identifying needs in respect of training and development
- ensuring a rational system of job grading exists
- ensuring mutual understanding between the employee, line manager and co-workers about the allocation of responsibilities, priorities and associated job accountabilities
- providing a reference point for reviewing performance and identifying development needs.

A clear job description/person specification will help you to select the most suitable candidate for the post and provide an opportunity for applicants to inform themselves about what your organisation can offer them.

Writing the job description

It is the responsibility of the Board/manager, in consultation with the appropriate staff, to draft the job description. This is essentially a summary of the tasks and responsibilities of the position and it should include the following information:

- the main purpose of the job and the context in which it exists
- the key areas of responsibility and accountabilities involved
- the reporting relationships
- the tasks and skills involved.

In writing a job description, the following broad principles should be borne in mind:

- the job description describes the job, not the person in it
- the job description must describe what the job will be and what the post holder will be required to do now and into the future
- the aim is to describe the principal tasks of the job
- specific conditions pertaining to the functions of the post should be clearly defined
- the job description should allow for flexibility in the allocation of new duties relevant to the core functions of the post. This will avoid potential issues such as demarcation and ensure the required level of flexibility amongst staff exists.
• the job description must not be discriminatory or make explicit or implicit reference to the age, gender or any other irrelevant characteristics of the position holder.

**Person specification**
Once the job description has been written, the person specification outlining the skills, qualifications, knowledge, behaviour, competencies and experiences required of the person being sought can be decided. The person specification contains the selection criteria against which applicants will be assessed. The more accurate the criteria, the more likely that the best candidate will be selected for the job. Selection criteria are critical to the recruitment and selection process as they provide:

- a consistent and objective set of standards for all applicants which can be observed and measured
- a structured and rational means for assessment of applicants
- selection criteria that can be divided into essential and desirable.

**Essential criteria** are those that are critical for the satisfactory performance of the job. All applicants must meet all essential criteria to be considered for the next stage of the recruitment and selection process.

**Desirable criteria** are those, which enhance a person's capacity to do the job. They are usually not listed as essential because it is expected that they can be acquired once in employment.

**Conditions of employment**
The job details should include the following:

- salary
- working hours
- location where the job will be based
- pension
- annual leave
- expenses
- duration of the contract

**Selection process**
Details of the selection process should be included in the job description e.g. short-listing and structured interviews.

**Final draft**
The Board/manager should ensure that the job description conforms to current HR policies and relevant legislation and the agreed format, as appropriate to the organisation.

2. **Application form**
You may decide to use an application form to aid the process. The application form should only contain questions relating to the requirements of the job i.e. questions on the skills and the experiences required for the position. Questions on marital status, numbers of children, date of birth, medical history or any other of the nine grounds listed in the Employment Equality Acts, 1998 - 2011 should not be included in the application form i.e. gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community.

3. **Advertising the position**
Having regard to the potential vacancy to be filled, a decision should be made on the most appropriate method of advertising which will result in sufficient levels of interest from suitable candidates. This might include advertising the vacancy internally within the workplace or externally using national press, local press, website, recruitment agencies, FAS etc.
Drafting the advertisement
The advertisement (internal or external) should be carefully drafted with specific regard to the job description and person specification. The advertisement should conform to current HR policies and relevant legislation, particularly equality legislation, and the agreed organisational format. The draft advertisement should include the following details:

- job title
- level of the position/remuneration
- key duties and responsibilities of the position
- location/base of the post
- essential and desirable selection criteria (taken from the job description)
- closing date for receipt of applications
- availability of full job details, tel/fax number, email and website address.

5. Selection procedure
It is vitally important to remember that all documentation throughout the selection process is submitted in confidence. All parties involved in the recruitment process must respect candidates' right to privacy and confidentiality. Discussions regarding individual candidates must not be engaged in by members of the interview board or staff involved in the management or administration of the process, outside the process. The names of candidates who have applied for a position(s) should never be disclosed to any party who is not involved in that process.

The most common method of selection is by means of a formal structured interview, supplemented in some cases by other assessment techniques such as presentations and second interview. In relation to the interview board it is recommended that every interview board will:

- in most cases comprise of a minimum of 3 persons (including chairperson). In the case of short term appointments or more junior positions, an interview board may comprise of a minimum of 2 persons
- be of a composition appropriate to the post being filled
- have gender representation where possible
- where appropriate, include a member of the Board
- be given a copy of the recruitment and selection guidelines
- receive appropriate interviewing training, including equality training.

Conflict of interest
There can be times when a member of an interview board has a family relationship, well-known friendship or other form of relationship, positive or negative, with one or more of the applicants for a position. In these circumstances, if a member of the interview board feels that he/she may have a conflict of interest, they can opt to withdraw from the selection process. Alternatively, he/she should inform the Chairperson and other interview board members prior to commencement of the shortlisting and interview processes. If the interview board member feels, that his/her participation may compromise the application of fair process, then the interview board should decide whether it is appropriate for him/her to be part of the selection process.

4a. The shortlisting process
Shortlisting is the process whereby candidates are assessed by at least two members of the interview board against agreed criteria, on the basis of information provided in the application documentation, in order to eliminate unsuitable candidates and identify those candidates who most closely meet the criteria for further assessment. At least two members of the interview board must assess the applications, to shortlist who will be invited to interview. This helps bring objectivity to the process and can minimise allegations of bias. Once the application deadline has closed, all members of the shortlisting board will be given a full and complete set of the following:

- job description
- person specification
- advertisement
- a list of all applicants and their complete application documentation.
The shortlisting board should agree the shortlist criteria in advance of the shortlist process. The shortlist criteria should be based on the specific requirements of the job as outlined in the job description and person specification. These criteria and a rating system should be agreed in advance of the shortlisting meeting and should be applied consistently in respect of all applicants. Each member of the shortlisting board should:

- agree on a set of criteria for shortlisting
- in the first instance, shortlist all applicants who possess the essential criteria stated in the advertisement or job description/person specification
- shortlist further by rating remaining applicants against the essential and desirable selection criteria only
- note briefly the reasons for not short-listing each unsuccessful applicant.

At the commencement of the process, a meeting of the shortlisting board should be arranged, and a Chairperson agreed. This person should be fully briefed and equipped to properly discharge this role. Ideally, all members of the shortlisting board should then attend a shortlisting meeting arranged by the Chairperson. Where this is not possible he/she should forward their draft shortlist, together with the applicant ratings to the Chairperson in advance of the shortlisting meeting. The Chairperson should consult with them before the final shortlist is agreed. Once this exercise has been completed they should:

- agree on and record a final shortlist of candidates that have been assessed as being competitive
- include in the shortlist those applicants about whom there is dispute if unanimity cannot be achieved
- consider re-advertising the position if no applicants meet all the essential criteria.

When shortlisting, board members should never:

- recommend for interview any applicant, whether internal or external, who does not meet the essential criteria
- make negative assumptions or decisions on the basis of perceived over-qualification
- exclude candidates from further consideration for reasons that are not related to the selection criteria such as personal bias, age, disability, gender, race or any other of the nine grounds listed in the Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2011.

At the end of the shortlisting process the Chairperson of the shortlisting board should return a copy of the shortlist report signed by all members of the shortlisting board together with a signed copy of the shortlist assessment sheet to a person nominated by the board. The shortlist assessment sheet should include a brief comment as to why a candidate has not been shortlisted.

A person nominated by the Board should be designated to notify unsuccessful candidates by letter as soon as possible after the shortlisting process has been completed. Unsuccessful candidates should be advised that written feedback on the shortlisting process is available by written request. This feedback will only relate to the individual applicant. No reference should be made to the performance of another individual applicant.

4b. Interviews and selection

Interview plan

The interview board should meet in good time prior to the interview and draft an interview plan with specific areas of questioning for each interview board member. In preparing questions, interview board members will need to:

- base the questions on selection criteria as specified in the job description/person specification
- focus on the knowledge, skills, attainments, competencies and behavior required for the job
- ensure questions are sufficiently rigorous and searching to assess ability and differentiate between candidates
- ensure that questions are well structured, relevant and probing.

The questions asked at selection interviews must be wholly relevant to the specific job. The Chairperson should ensure that questions asked are relevant to the position, are aimed at assessing the candidates in relation to the agreed criteria and will elicit information to assist in selecting the best candidate for the job.
interview boards should be mindful at all times of not asking questions which could be construed as potentially discriminatory under the nine areas covered by the *Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2011*.

**Other forms of assessment**
For some posts it may be necessary to supplement the interview with other forms of assessment. Shortlisted candidates should be advised in advance of any alternative forms of assessment. Such additional forms of assessment may include:

- giving a brief presentation on a particular subject
- completing an assessment of computing skills, for example word processing, spreadsheet or desktop publishing skills
- testing report writing.

**The interview process**
At the start of each interview, the Chairperson should introduce each applicant to the interview board and explain their roles. They should explain the purpose, expected duration and structure of the interview to the applicant and indicate that notes will be taken by interview board members. The applicant should be put at ease so that he/she can answer questions to the best of their ability. This may involve asking an early ‘ice-breaking’ question. The interview board should question all applicants against the same selection criteria and only questions relevant to evaluating an applicant's ability to fulfill the requirements of the job should be asked. The interview board should ask all applicants the same core questions to ensure a consistent and fair approach. Supplementary questions may be asked if required to clarify issues, obtain further information or to explore areas that arise in the interview. The interview board should:

- actively listen and actively seek clarification
- obtain sufficient information from applicants to make accurate decisions. Assumptions should not be made about an applicant's capabilities to perform various aspects of the position under consideration
- ask applicants if they wish to discuss matters that may not have emerged in response to questions raised during the interview, to add any information, or to ask any questions
- advised applicants about the timing of decision-making and notification of the outcome of the process.

All interview board members should be present for all interviews. If, in exceptional circumstances, a board member cannot be present for all interviews he/she should withdraw from the board. In exceptional circumstances where a board member has to withdraw, a substitute may be invited to participate on the board in order to cover a particular area of expertise. This substitute should receive all necessary documentation and should be properly briefed to satisfactorily complete their role. The substitution should be clearly noted in interview files/papers.

**Decision making**
When making a decision on the most suitable applicant candidates should be ranked suitable or unsuitable for appointment based on their performance at interview(s) and the quality of their written application. The Chairperson should seek to facilitate the interview board in jointly completing an interview assessment form. This will detail an assessment of the candidate against the core competencies, knowledge, skills, attainments and behaviour required to carry out the particular role. Effort should be made to reach a unanimous decision, however if this is not reached a majority decision is acceptable. Where the interview board vote is tied, the Chairperson has the casting vote.

The Chairperson should prepare a final report which will include the interview board's recommendation naming the candidate recommended for appointment, or in the case of multiple posts the recommended candidates in order of merit. Where possible, reserve candidates should be named by the interview board and should be listed on a panel in order of merit. It is imperative that only those candidates deemed suitable to perform the job should be placed on the panel. The Chairperson should ensure the following is completed and returned to a person assigned by the board:

- the interview board report is signed by all members of the interview board
- the assessment sheet is signed by all members of the interview board and includes a brief comment on the following:
  - the reasons why a candidate has not been found suitable for the appointment
  - the relative merit of the recommended applicant(s) on the basis of the selection criteria only.
Clear and detailed reporting will assist if post-interview feedback is requested, if an appeal is lodged or if a challenge is made by an unsuccessful candidate. Interview board members should be aware that any notes that they make about any of the candidates may be discoverable under Freedom of Information legislation. The Chairperson should collect all documents relating to the interview process and return them to a person designated by the board.

5. Record management
Recruitment and selection procedures may be subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, 1997 and 2003. It is therefore important that the decision making process is clearly documented and that all documents relating to the recruitment and selection process are returned to a person designated by the board. At the end of the interview process the Chairperson should ensure that all documentation held by all members of the interview board is returned to a person nominated to take responsibility for the recruitment process. One copy of the following documents relating to the process should be retained for a period of eighteen months in the event of challenge:

- job description/person specification
- advertisement
- application forms/curriculum vitae
- signed shortlist assessment form
- rating criteria
- signed shortlist board report
- signed interview assessment form
- rating criteria
- signed interview board report.

All other documentation should be destroyed. It is recommended that any rough notes made by interview board members should not be retained after the selection process but should be returned for disposal.

6. Referee reports/Garda vetting
Referee reports provide an additional source of information about the candidate(s). They should be seen as a further part of the selection process. In general, references should be requested in respect of the candidate recommended by the interview board. Oral references should be requested by the board, or an individual nominated by the board by phone, or in writing.

Referees should be provided with information about the position and be requested to address the selection criteria, whether in a written report or by phone. A note confirming that satisfactory references were received, should be placed on the interview file. If unsatisfactory references are received, the person giving the reference should be asked, if they are prepared to stand over the reference and if so, the reasons why the references were unsatisfactory should be documented and placed on the recruitment file. Referees, in fairness to them, should be made aware that the comments made by them may be assessable to the person under Freedom of Information legislation.

Garda vetting of applicants may be required for some positions e.g. those where the post holder may have unsupervised access to children and/or vulnerable adults. Garda vetting is an important part of staff recruitment but should be seen as one part of a comprehensive recruitment process. All organisations availing of Garda vetting should have a Garda vetting policy in place.

Making the job offer
Interview board members should never commit the organisation to an appointment or to a specified salary at the time of interview. Candidates should be told only that salary will be within the advertised range, although notation may be made on the report of any comment an applicant wishes to make in regard to salary. Interview board members should never contact the successful applicant until after an offer has been made by a person nominated by the Board.
Advising unsuccessful candidates
A person should be designated by the interview board to promptly advise unsuccessful applicants as soon as possible after receipt of the interview board's report. Interview board members should not contact the unsuccessful applicants after the interview process unless specifically agreed by the company board.

Post interview feedback
Post interview feedback in writing may be provided by a person nominated by the board on receipt of a written request by applicants. The feedback will only relate to the individual applicant. No reference should be made to the performance of any other individual candidates.
# SHORTLISTING ASSESSMENT

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<tr>
<th>Name of Applicant</th>
<th>Criterion 1</th>
<th>Criterion 2</th>
<th>Criterion 3</th>
<th>Criterion 4</th>
<th>Interview?</th>
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NB – Comments should be made in the case of all candidates, especially those not shortlisted for interview. Comments should explain why the candidate's application was/was not considered competitive compared to the criteria for the position.

Rating Guidelines: 1 = Poor  
2 = Adequate  
3 = Excellent
SHORTLIST BOARD REPORT

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<th>Post Information</th>
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<th>Advertising Information</th>
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<td>Locations advertised</td>
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<td>Closing date</td>
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<td>Number of applications received:</td>
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<th>Shortlist Board Information</th>
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The Shortlisting Board met on X to consider all applications of candidates for the position of X. A total of X applications were received from the following persons:

Based on the selection criteria the following applicants have been short listed for interview:

A signed copy of the shortlisting assessment sheet is attached.

Signed: ________________________________  Signed: ________________________________
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<tr>
<th>Name of Applicant</th>
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## Sample Knowledge/Experience Rating System

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<th>Education</th>
<th>Knowledge/Experience</th>
<th>Knowledge of people management and general management experience/skills</th>
<th>Communication/Interpersonal/motivation skills</th>
<th>Computer Literacy and Familiarity with IT systems</th>
<th>General Suitability</th>
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<td>Marks</td>
<td>15 (max)</td>
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<td>30 (max)</td>
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<td>Relevant training + education courses</td>
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<td>Relevant 3rd Level</td>
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<td>Staff appraisal</td>
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<td>Contribution to strategic management issues</td>
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<td>Tact and diplomacy</td>
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<td>Ability to listen &amp; understand</td>
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<td>Ability to motivate/gain respect and loyalty</td>
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<td>Ability to perform to a satisfactory standard a broad range of tasks which may arise in the role of xxxx.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>46-60</td>
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</tbody>
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**Marks :**
- **Poor :** 1-15
- **Fair :** 16-30
- **Good :** 31-45
- **Excellent :** 46-60
### INTERVIEW BOARD REPORT

#### Post Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post Title</th>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### Advertising Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates advertised</th>
<th>Locations advertised</th>
<th>Closing date</th>
<th>Number of applicants shortlisted:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### Selection Committee Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chair</th>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

An interview board was convened on X to interview for the position of X.

The following applicants were invited to interview:

The following applicants did not attend:

Following the completion of each interview the Assessment Board discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate, and reached a consensus on the scoring under each selection criteria, which are based on the job requirements. The attached Interview Assessment form outlines the scoring and final results. (A signed copy of the rating system is also attached.)

Based on the assessment of both application and interview performance, the interview board believes that the scores accurately reflect the relativities between the candidates. On that basis the interview board find the following candidates suitable for the position in order of merit:

Signed: ___________________________  Signed: ___________________________

Signed: ___________________________
Mr/Ms is being considered for the post of ..................... with ................. and has submitted your name as a referee. In the circumstances I would ask you to confirm the following:

What was her/his position with your organisation? : ____________________________

What dates was s/he employed? ____________________________

What was her/his attendance pattern like? ____________________________

Who did s/he report to? ____________________________

What were the nature of her/his duties? ____________________________

Did s/he have any staff reporting to her/him? ____________________________

How would you rate her/his working relationship with the following?

1. Her/his staff (if applicable) ____________________________
2. Her/his colleagues ____________________________
3. Her/his supervisor ____________________________

How would you rate her/his performance & achievements: ____________________________

What was her/his salary? ____________________________

Reason for leaving (if applicable): ____________________________

Would you re-employ her/him? ____________________________

Any obvious strengths and/or weaknesses

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Is there any other information of relevance you feel we ought to be aware of (please use a separate page if necessary):
________________________________________________________________________
If you wish to provide additional information, in the form of a covering letter, please do so.

[Name of Co] undertakes to use its best endeavours to hold confidential any information provided by you to [Name of Co] subject to our obligations under the law including the Freedom of Information Act, 1997 and 2004.

[Name of Co] will consult with you about the release of any information provided by you before making a decision on any Freedom of Information request.