

Recruitment and Selection - Managers Guidance

References in Safer Recruitment

This guidance is for posts covered by the Safer Recruitment measures i.e. teachers, teaching assistants and also any post working at a school e.g. cleaner, caretaker, maintenance staff etc. It applies equally to internal candidates. For full details see part 3 of the Department for Education document 'Keeping children safe in education'.

Please note that for recruitment to posts within Children's Residential establishments e.g. children's residential worker, processes which follow the Warner recommendations must be followed even for internal candidates. More detailed references are used and references are requested for at least a five year period excluding employment breaks. If a candidate has worked in a care setting but not within the last five years of employment history, then a reference should also be obtained from the last employment in the care setting.

References for teachers and teaching assistants should be taken up prior to interview. Adequate time needs to be allowed between shortlisting and interview in order for references not only to be received but also scrutinised. Only in exceptional circumstances should references be taken up after the offer of a job has been made. In such instances the selection panel must ensure that references are obtained, scrutinised and any concerns resolved before the appointment is confirmed.

References for catering, cleaning and maintenance/caretaking roles should not be taken up prior to interview. The references should only be taken up for the successful candidate.

Applicants should be asked to provide the name, address and telephone number of two referees. One referee should be the applicant's current or most recent employer. This must be from the head of the organisation not just a supervisor, department head etc. Where an applicant is working (or worked) in a school the reference must be provided, and signed by, the Headteacher.

The purpose of a reference is to obtain factual information to support appointment decisions. References should always be sought and obtained directly from the referee using their work base address. Open references or testimonials provided by the candidate should not be used, nor should references be accepted if they are from relatives or from people writing solely in the capacity of friends. References received via email, for reasons of timescale, must conform to policy on the secure

transfer of personal data. The source of the email must be verified as official and be sent from an official not a personal email address.

When seeking a reference it is important that objective verifiable information is requested and not subjective opinion. A copy of the job and person profile or job description and person specification for the post should be included with the request. A template is used for these references and asks

- About the referees relationship with the candidate eg how long has the referee known the candidate and in what capacity.
- Whether the referee is satisfied that the person has the ability and is suitable to undertake the post.
- How the candidate has demonstrated that they can meet the requirements of the person specification.
- If the referee is completely satisfied that the candidate is suitable to work with children and, if not, request specific details of the referee's concerns.

As well as the above the applicant's present employer will be asked.

- To confirm details of the applicant's current post and salary
- Specific verifiable comments about performance history and conduct.
- Details of any disciplinary procedures the candidate has been subject to where the sanction is current
- Details of allegations or concerns that have been raised about the applicant relating to the safety and welfare of children or young people or of unsuitable behaviour towards children or young people, along with the outcome. **It should be made clear that any allegations which were proven to be malicious, false, or unsubstantiated are not required.**
- Details of any disciplinary sanctions the applicant has received involving issues relating to the safety and welfare of children or young people (including any which have been expunged) along with the outcome

A reference taken up prior to interview will not ask for health related information on the candidate or for absence data. This information will be sought from the current or most recent employer of the preferred candidate only, when a conditional offer has been made.

Additionally all requests will state that.

- The referee has a responsibility to ensure the accuracy of the reference and that it does not contain any mis-statements or omissions related to the requirements of the job description/person specification and/or reference questions.
- Relevant factual content of the reference may be discussed with the applicant
- Discriminatory statements should be avoided

Before the interview takes place all references should be checked to ensure that all specific questions have been answered satisfactorily. If the reference does not

answer all the relevant questions or is vague or reveals any inconsistencies or doubts about the person's suitability, the referee should be telephoned and asked to provide a written response to the omission or clarification as appropriate and you should keep a written record of the conversation.

Information in references also needs to be compared with the application form to ensure there is consistency. The checking of references may be allocated to one member of the selection panel and it is important that adequate time is allowed for this to be undertaken.

Wherever possible for teaching and teaching assistant roles, obtain references on shortlisted candidates before interviewing so that if any concerns or issues are identified, or there are discrepancies with the application form, these can be explored with the candidate at interview. If issues arise after the interview, these should be explored thoroughly before an offer is confirmed.

Where information that fulfils the criteria for disclosure in a reference is provided about current, or relevant spent disciplinary sanction(s) or allegations this should be considered in the circumstances of each individual case. Cases where the issue was satisfactorily resolved some time ago or did not require formal disciplinary sanctions and where no further issues have arisen, are less likely to cause concern than more serious or recent concerns as well as those that were not resolved satisfactorily. A history of repeated issues or allegations over time is also likely to be a cause for concern. However, repeated unsubstantiated or malicious allegations should not be included on the reference.

In instances where there are frequent or inexplicable changes of employment or unexplained anomalies in the career path, references should be taken up from other previous employers.

The sections of the reference that are not related to issues of safeguarding should preferably not be considered until the panel has made its decision. Undue weight should not be given to references in the selection process.

It is recommended that only the chair of the panel looks at the references before the interviews and discusses any issues, and how to follow them up, with HR. School panels can choose to all see the references beforehand but the above approach is advised to both allow any arising issues to be incorporated into the interview process but also refrain from the whole panel's view of the candidate potentially being influenced before the process.