

18 Feb 2019

Recruitment: an introduction

Looks at the main stages of the resourcing and recruitment process, from defining the role to making the appointment

Introduction

Good recruitment is vital for every organisation - finding the right people for the right roles at the right time. It ensures that the workforce has the relevant skills and abilities for the organisation's current and future needs. Effective resourcing is not just about filling an immediate vacancy but about having an impact on the long-term success of the business, using workforce planning data to understand what skills are needed for organisational performance.

This factsheet looks at what recruitment and resourcing entails and outlines the UK law affecting recruitment activities. It describes the stages of the recruitment process: defining the role, including job analysis and job description; attracting the applicants using both internal and external methods; managing the selection process; and, finally, making the appointment and employment offer.

What is recruitment?

Recruitment and resourcing involve attracting and selecting individuals into a job role. Recruiting the right individuals is crucial to organisational performance, and is a critical activity, not just for the HR team but also for line managers who are increasingly involved in the selection process. All those involved in recruitment activities should be equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills required to make effective and fair recruitment decisions.

The length and complexity of the recruitment process will vary depending on an organisation's size and resources. However, the following stages should be present and are explored later in this factsheet:

- defining the role
- attracting applicants
- managing the application and selection process
- making the appointment.

Key considerations for recruitment and resourcing professionals

A variety of factors influence the recruitment market. Our quarterly [Labour market outlook](#) monitors UK economic and labour market indicators and recruitment outlook. Our [Resourcing and talent planning survey](#) provides data on UK recruitment trends and employers' practices, including the expected impact of Brexit on resourcing. Although there's considerable uncertainty about what the UK's EU immigration policy will be following Brexit, potential changes to UK organisations' ability to recruit EU migrants is a key consideration for resourcing professionals. Our factsheet on [employing overseas workers in the UK](#) has more, and our [Brexit hub](#) has resources and details of our activities to support the HR profession.

Another key part of resourcing is attracting a diverse range of candidates. [Diversity and inclusion](#) should be considered at each stage of the process, with practices and systems regularly reviewed to ensure hidden bias is removed and resourcing methods are inclusive. Everyone taking part in activities such as shortlisting and interviewing should be aware of relevant legislation and the importance of avoiding discrimination. CIPD members can see our [Recruitment and selection law Q&As](#) for more on the UK legal aspects of recruitment. Our report [Diversity and inclusion at work: facing up to the business case](#) also highlights potential pitfalls to avoid in recruitment, and ways to tackle these.

Candidate experience is also important. The recruitment process is not just about employers identifying suitable employees, but candidates finding out more about the business and considering whether the organisation is one they would like to work for. First impressions matter, so effort should be made to ensure the process is transparent, timely and creates a good impression of the organisation, regardless of whether the candidate is successful or not. And, in a digital age where candidates can share their experiences online, inefficient, poorly designed recruitment processes have the potential to negatively impact on your employer brand and the ability to attract candidates.

Our new [Profession Map](#) sets out the specialist knowledge that resourcing professionals need to identify, attract and assess to get the right people for the organisation.

Defining the role

Job analysis

For both new and existing roles, it's important to invest time in gathering information about the job from a variety of sources. This means thinking not only about the duties involved, but also the job's purpose, how and where it can be carried out, the outputs required by the job holder and how it fits into the organisation's structure. This analysis should form the basis of a job description and person specification/job profile.

Job description

The job analysis provides the information needed for the job description. This explains the requirements of the job to potential candidates and aids the recruitment process by providing a clear overview of the role for all involved. It can also be used to provide clarity during induction and later, on performance and objectives.

Person specification/job profile

A person specification or job profile states the necessary and desirable criteria for selection. The characteristics specified must be clear, demonstrable and avoid bias in wording.

Competency frameworks are sometimes substituted for job or person specifications, but these should include an indication of roles and responsibilities. See our factsheet on competence and competency frameworks.

Attracting applicants

There are many ways to generate interest from potential candidates.

Employee referral schemes

Some organisations operate an employee referral scheme. These schemes usually offer an incentive to existing employees to assist in the recruitment of friends or contacts. But employers should not rely on such schemes at the expense of attracting a diverse workforce and they should complement other attraction methods.

External recruitment

Our Resourcing and talent planning surveys identify common ways of attracting

candidates including employer's website, commercial job boards, recruitment agencies, and professional networking sites such as LinkedIn (although this will vary by sector and seniority).

Other common ways to attract applications include building links with local colleges/universities, working with the local jobcentre and using local networks. Using multiple and non-traditional outreach methods widens the talent pool.

Most candidates expect able to search and apply for jobs online, meaning employers need to pay attention to their corporate website and their online employer brand. Many organisations also use social media to identify candidates, but employers need to exercise caution - see more in our report Putting social media to work: lessons from employers.

Candidates and organisations should also be aware of the increase in fraudulent online job adverts, where fraudsters post a false role on job boards, posing as a legitimate organisation in order to ask applicants to pay for online checks or training. Safer Jobs can provide advice and support.

Advertisements should be contain clear, accurate information and the organisation and the role. They should also indicate:

- the organisation's activities and values
- job requirements and other criteria
- job location
- reward and benefits package
- flexible working opportunities, where available
- type of employment offered. For example, is it a fixed-term role?
- details of how to apply and the deadline.

External recruitment services

Some organisations use external providers to help with their resourcing and recruitment. Recruitment agencies or consultants offer a range of services such as attracting candidates, managing candidate responses, screening and shortlisting, or running assessment centres on the employer's behalf. They need to have a good understanding of the organisations and its requirements. These services might also be provided by an outsourcing provider - find out more in our HR outsourcing factsheet.

Internal recruitment

It's important not to forget the internal talent pool when recruiting. Providing opportunities for development and career progression can aid retention and supports succession planning. For more, see our talent management factsheet.

Managing the application and selection process

There are two main formats in which paper or online applications are likely to be received: a curriculum vitae (CV) and covering letter or an application form. Some organisations allow candidates to apply with their LinkedIn profile.

Throughout the application and selection process, reasonable adjustments may need to be made for candidates.

Application forms

Application forms allow for information to be presented in a consistent format. This makes it easier to collect information from job applicants in a systematic way and assess objectively the candidate's suitability for the job.

However, an unnecessarily long or poorly-designed application form can mean applications from good candidates are overlooked, or that candidates are put off applying, so the design and language used is important. It may be necessary to offer application forms in different formats to comply with discrimination law.

CVs and LinkedIn profiles

The advantage of CVs or LinkedIn profiles is that candidates are not restricted to a standard application form. However, CVs and LinkedIn profiles may include surplus material and vary in format which undermines their consistent assessment.

Managing applications

All applications should be treated confidentially and circulated only to those individuals involved in the recruitment process.

Prompt acknowledgment of an application - whether successful or unsuccessful - is good practice and presents a positive image of the organisation.

Selecting candidates

Selecting candidates involves two main processes: shortlisting those who have the necessary skills to proceed to assessment stage, and assessing those candidates to ascertain who is most suitable for the role. See more on this stage in our [selection methods](#) factsheet which covers the various techniques and tools available to employers,

and the importance of using valid and reliable selection methods.

Making the appointment

Before making an offer of employment, employers have responsibility for checking that applicants have the right to work in the UK and have the appropriate qualifications or credentials. See more in our factsheet on [employing overseas workers in the UK](#) and our guide to [pre-employment checks](#).

References

References are most frequently sought after the applicant has been given a 'provisional offer'. Any recruitment policy should state clearly how references will be used, when in the recruitment process they will be taken up and what kind of references will be necessary (for example, from former employers).

These rules should be applied consistently, and candidates should always be informed of the procedure for taking up references.

CIPD members can find out more on the UK legal aspects in our [References law Q&As](#).

Medical questionnaires and making reasonable adjustments

In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to ask candidates to complete a medical questionnaire before being offered a job. Only essential medical issues should be discussed at this stage. See more in our factsheet on [disability and employment](#).

However, any necessary physical or medical requirement should be made clear in the job advertisement or other recruitment literature.

Employers need to think creatively and innovatively about where they can make reasonable adjustments, such as flexible working arrangements or providing specialist equipment, where someone has a disability.

Employment offer

Offers of employment should always be made in writing. But it is important to be aware that a verbal offer of employment made in an interview is as legally binding as a letter to the candidate. See more in our [contracts of employment](#) factsheet. CIPD members can use our [Terms and conditions of employment law Q&As](#).

Unsuccessful candidates should be notified promptly in writing and every effort should be made to provide feedback. If psychometric tests are used, feedback on the results,

delivered by a qualified person, should also be offered.

Joining the organisation

Well-planned induction enables new employees to become fully operational quickly and should be integrated into the recruitment process. See more in our [induction](#) factsheet.

Documentation and evaluation

The recruitment process should be documented accurately, and access limited to recruitment staff for confidentiality reasons. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) means that recruitment process and applicant tracking systems may need review - see our [data protection](#) factsheet.

Information should be kept for sufficient time to allow any complaints to be handled - our factsheet on [retaining HR records](#) has guidance on how long records should be kept.

It's good practice to monitor applications and recruitment decisions to ensure that equality of opportunity is being allowed. Where issues are highlighted in the process, action should be taken.

Using metrics such as cost of hire, candidate experience ratings and time to hire can also provide insight into the effectiveness of recruitment processes. Our [HR and standards](#) factsheet has information on standards relating to recruitment, such as cost of hire and workforce planning.

Useful contacts and further reading

Contacts

[Acas - Recruitment](#)

[GOV.UK - Recruiting and hiring](#)

[GOV.UK - Employers: preventing discrimination - recruitment](#)

[Recruitment & Employment Confederation](#)

[Safer Jobs](#)

[Voluntary code of conduct for executive search firms](#)

Books and reports

ACAS. (2018) *Recruiting staff*. London: Acas.

GOVERNMENT EQUALITIES OFFICE. (2011) *Equality Act 2010: What do I need to know? A quick start guide to using positive action in recruitment and promotion*. London: GEO.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE CARE AND RESETTLEMENT OF OFFENDERS (NACRO). (2015) *Recruiting fairly and safely: a practical guide to employing ex-offenders*. London: Nacro.

NEWELL-BROWN, J. (2014) *The professional recruiter's handbook: delivering excellence in recruitment practice*. 2nd ed. London: Kogan Page.

TAYLOR, S. (2014) *Resourcing and talent management*. 6th ed. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

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Journal articles

ACIKGOZ, Y. (2019) Employee recruitment and job search: towards a multi-level integration. *Human Resource Management Review*. Vol 29, No 1. pp1-13.

BROWN, P. (2018) *It's time to put data at the heart of the recruitment process*. *People Management* (online). 13 February.

INGOLD, J. and VALIZADE, D. (2017) Employers' recruitment of disadvantaged groups: exploring the effect of active labour market programme agencies as labour market intermediaries. *Human Resource Management Journal*. Vol 27, No 4. pp530-547. Reviewed in *In a Nutshell*, issue 73.

JEFFREY, R. (2017) *Would you let AI recruit for you?* *People Management* (online). 12 December.

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This factsheet was last updated by Melanie Green.