Recruitment and induction

Introduction

Most employers recognise the fact that their staff are their greatest asset, and the right recruitment and induction processes are vital in ensuring that the new employee becomes effective in the shortest time. The success of an organisation depends on having the right number of staff, with the right skills and abilities. Organisations may have a dedicated personnel/human resource function overseeing this process, or they may devolve these responsibilities to line managers and supervisors. Many people may be involved, and all should be aware of the principles of good practice. Even in large organisations with a specialist personnel department it is essential to involve others in the task of recruitment and induction.

After recruitment, a good induction programme is the way to help a new employee settle into the organisation and become effective quickly. In this booklet we offer guidance on the implementation of induction programmes, and a checklist of the sort of things such programmes should cover. This list may seem long but to the new recruit many things are not obvious and need to be pointed out.

The first section of the booklet deals with recruitment and selection. The second with the process of induction. This booklet will serve as an introduction for anyone, in a large or small organisation, who becomes involved in recruitment, selection and induction as part of their job.

Recruitment and selection

The importance of good recruitment and selection

Recruiting people who are wrong for the organisation can lead to increased labour turnover, increased costs for the organisation, and lowering of morale in the existing workforce. Such people are likely to be discontented, unlikely to give of their best, and end up leaving voluntarily or involuntarily when their unsuitability becomes evident. They will not offer the flexibility and commitment that many organisations seek. Managers and supervisors will have to spend extra time on further recruitment exercises, when what is needed in the first place is a systematic process to assess the role to be filled, and the type of skills and abilities needed to fill it.

Most recruitment systems will be simple, with stages that can be followed as a routine whenever there is a vacancy to be filled, and which can be monitored and adapted in the light of experience.

This booklet describes the main features of such systems, and other related issues. Systems should be:

- efficient - cost effective in methods and sources
- effective - producing enough suitable candidates without excess and ensuring the identification of the best fitted for the job and the organisation
- fair - ensuring that right through the process decisions are made on merit alone.

The importance of fairness

The employer has the legal responsibility to ensure that no unlawful discrimination occurs in the recruitment and selection process on the grounds of sex, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, and religion or belief. Equality of opportunity is an integral part of the recruitment and selection process, and to this end employers may offer training and encouragement to any under-represented groups. Examples include pre-application assistance for those who do not have English as their first language, or management development training for women where they are under-represented in management grades (1).

Job advertisements may also state that the employer encourages applications from those groups that are under- represented in the organisation.

Employees and their representatives will also have an interest in fair, non-discriminatory recruitment and selection policies, and they should be fully consulted when new procedures are introduced or existing procedures reviewed. The Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Race Relations Act 1976, the Employment Equality Regulations (covering sexual orientation, religion or belief, and age) and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 set out the legal requirements for employers.

Organisations should be aware that the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 not only make it unlawful to discriminate against disabled individuals without justifiable reason but also require employers to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace or working arrangements. Detailed guidance is available in the Code of Practice on the elimination of discrimination in employment. This can be obtained from The Stationery Office (2).

The Acas Equality Direct helpline (tel: 08456 00 34 44) can give advice on the best ways of implementing an equal opportunities policy.

Advice is also offered to employers in small and medium sized organisations through the Business Link service (4) and through Acas training (5).

Human resource planning

Recruiters need to keep abreast of changes in the labour market to ensure that their recruitment efforts are not wasted or directed at too small a pool of labour. Skill shortages may occur unexpectedly and recruitment and training processes need to be kept flexible. It is a good idea for any organisation to plan its labour force requirements, matching available supply against forecast demand. A skills audit of existing staff will increase knowledge of the skills the organisation has available and those which are lacking, and thus help pinpoint areas for future development.

A human resource plan need not be highly complicated. A straightforward plan will help organisations to:

- assess future recruitment needs
- formulate training programmes
- develop promotion and career development policies
- anticipate and, where possible, avoid redundancies
- develop a flexible workforce to meet changing requirements
- control staff costs whilst ensuring salaries remain competitive
- assess future requirements for capital equipment, technology and premises.

Management is responsible for producing the human resource plan, senior management for supporting it. Implementation is likely to be most effective if it carries the support of the workforce, normally achieved through consultation with trade union or other employee representatives.

Producing a human resource plan involves:

- forecasting staffing requirements against business objectives
- assessing the available supply of people to meet those requirements
- matching available supply against forecast demand (6).

Information on current employees, labour turnover and the labour market will help in the formulation of the plan. The Learning and Skills Council (visit www.lsc.gov.uk)will be able to provide general information on the local labour market in England and on the skills balance available, as will the local Jobcentres. Local Education Authorities can assist with information on the numbers of school and college leavers.

Labour markets and the labour force

In times of changing labour markets, organisations need to adapt their recruitment and retention policies to allow them to compete more effectively for staff, particularly those with skills that are in short supply. The offer of training and development opportunities is often a strong attraction to potential recruits, and here again the Learning and Skills Council can offer advice and assistance. Jobcentres, which administer Government training schemes are another source of advice and potential recruits.

If recruitment is difficult in certain jobs or skills, consideration may need to be given to re-designing the job to make it a more attractive prospect - perhaps by offering a greater variety of tasks, or increased self-management. Employers also need to encourage a good 'work-life balance' within the organisation by giving consideration to more flexible ways of working. From April 2003 employees with young and disabled children have the right to request flexible working arrangements - including job-sharing, part-time working, flexi-time, working from home/teleworking and school time contracts - and employers must have a good business reason for rejecting any application. Another possibility is to introduce some more flexible working arrangements, perhaps job-sharing, part-time working, flexi-time, working from home/teleworking, and school term-time contracts. These variations on the 'standard' forms of working will open the vacancy to people who might otherwise be unable to consider it. Equally, the offer of assistance with domestic care arrangements and costs can prove highly attractive to people with these responsibilities. Many companies are now offering 'family-friendly' policies. These are often developed in conjunction with local Business Links and Chambers of Commerce, which can provide examples of good practice.

The balance of the labour force is changing, with some increase in the numbers of women, young people, and most particularly older workers available for work. Employers are beginning to give serious consideration to the employment of older workers, and a voluntary Code of Practice to counteract ageism in employment has been introduced by the Government (7). Jobcentres will not accept vacancies with age limits.

The value of labour market information is that it gives employers some forecasts from which they can decide how best to plan for future recruitment. Should the organisation make a positive move to attract older workers? What might best be done to counter any shortage of potential recruits with particular skills? Should training new and existing workers move higher up the priority list in the firm?

Should the organisation make the introduction of family-friendly policies a priority so as to attract the widest range of suitable staff? Looking at all the options means that recruitment will be better targeted and therefore more efficient and effective.

The recruitment process

A vacancy presents an opportunity to consider restructuring, or to reassess the requirements of the job. This assessment is valid whether it is to fill an existing job or a new one. Ask questions such as:

- has the function changed?
- have work patterns, new technology or new products altered the job?
- are there any changes anticipated which will require different, more flexible skills from the jobholder?

Answers to these questions should help to clarify the actual requirements of the job and how it fits into the rest of the organisation or department. Exit interviews, or consultation with the current job-holder and colleagues may well produce good ideas about useful changes.

Writing a good job description or job specification helps in the process of analysing the needs of the job.

Job description / job specification

This should detail the purpose, tasks and responsibilities of the job. A good job description should include:

- main purpose of the job - try to describe this in one sentence
- main tasks of the job - use active verbs, like 'writing', 'repairing', 'machining', 'calculating', instead of vaguer terms like 'dealing with', 'in charge of'
- scope of the job - expanding on the main tasks and the importance of the job. Job importance can be indicated by giving information such as the number of people to be supervised, the degree of precision required and the value of any materials and equipment used.

A good job description is useful for all jobs. It can help with induction and training. It provides the basis for drawing up a person specification - a profile of the skills and aptitudes considered essential and desirable in the job-holder. It enables prospective applicants to assess themselves for the job and provides a benchmark for judging achievements.

An example of a job description is given at Appendix 1.

Person specification

Drawing up the person specification allows the organisation to profile the ideal person to fill the job. It is very important that the skills, aptitudes and knowledge included in the specification are related precisely to the needs of the job; if they are inflated beyond those necessary for effective job performance, the risk is that someone will be employed on the basis of false hopes and aspirations, and both the employer and employee will end up disappointed in each other.

Another good reason not to set unnecessary requirements is to avoid any possibility of discrimination against particular groups of potential applicants. The very process of writing a job and person specification should help the employer to develop and implement a policy of equal opportunity in the recruitment and selection of employees.

Factors to consider when drawing up the specification include:

- skills, knowledge, aptitudes directly related to the job
- the type of experience necessary

- the competencies necessary

- education and training but only so far as is necessary for satisfactory job performance, unless the person is being recruited on the basis of future potential (eg graduate trainees), when a higher level of education may be specified

- any criteria relating to personal qualities or circumstances which must be essential and directly related to the job, and must be applied equally to all groups irrespective of age, sex, race, age, nationality, creed, disability, membership or non-membership of a trade union. To do otherwise is potentially discriminatory (9).

For instance, a clause requiring the successful candidate to move their place of work should be included only when absolutely necessary, as it is likely to discourage applicants with family care commitments.

The person specification helps the selection and subsequent interview to operate in a systematic way, as bias-free as possible. The use of competency-based approaches can help by focusing on the 'match' between candidate and role, but they are best used where they are an integral part of the continuing assessment and development of staff (10).

An example of a person specification pro-forma is at Appendix 1, 2 & 3.

Pay

After setting the job and the person specifications, consideration should be given to pay rates. Factors such as scales, grades and negotiated agreements, as well as market rates and skills shortages, may affect the wage or salary, and organisations should be aware of the requirements of equal pay (11) and discrimination legislation (12). Unless there is a formal system for increments or length of service, paying the new employee a different rate from that paid to the preceding postholder may contravene the relevant legislation. Employers must also comply with the provisions of the National Minimum Wage Act 1998. The Agricultural Wages Board sets the minimum rates for workers in agriculture.

Attracting applicants

The search for suitable candidates now begins. The process of marketing needs to be undertaken carefully so as to ensure the best response at the least cost. The object is to get a good selection of good quality candidates. Possible methods to consider are:

- internal recruitment - this method can have the advantage of building on existing staff's skills and training, and provides opportunities for development and promotion. It is a good way to retain valuable employees whose skills can be further enhanced. Other advantages include the opportunity for staff to extend their competencies and skills to the benefit of both the organisation and the individual, and the enhancement of individual motivation. Use of a consistent, clear, procedure, agreed jointly between employer and employees, has many advantages and avoids suspicion of favouritism

- JobCentres of the Department for Work and Pensions - will display employers' vacancies and refer potential recruits. They also administer some of the Government training programmes. The Disability Service Team staff at JobCentres can help address the specific requirements of attracting disabled people

- Learning and Skills Council - may well have trained workers available through their recruitment service, and can tailor training to an employer's requirements

- commercial recruitment agencies - often specialise in particular types of work, eg secretarial, office work, industrial, computing, and may already have potential applicants registered with them

- executive search organisations - usually working in the higher management/specialist fields, will seek out suitable candidates working in other companies by direct approach, or via specialist advertising

- national newspapers - advertising in the national press is expensive, but likely to produce a good response for particular, specialist vacancies. Remember too there are national ethnic group newspapers which will reach a wide audience

- specialist and professional journals - less expensive than the national press, these journals can guarantee to reach the precise group of potential applicants for specialist and professional vacancies

- internet - is beginning to emerge as a recruitment medium. It is mainly used for graduate-level and technical jobs because it tends to target a self-selected group who are computer literate and have access to the web at their place of study or work. Its use is likely to grow

- local newspapers, radio - for less specialised jobs, or to target groups in a particular local area, advertisements in the local media may produce a good response

- local schools, colleges and the Careers Service - maintaining contact with schools, colleges and careers advisers will ensure that the organisation's needs for school/college leavers with particular skills and abilities are known. It can be particularly useful to offer students the opportunity to spend some time at the company, on work experience, or 'shadowing'

- word of mouth - introduction via existing employees or through an employers' network. Whilst this may be economical, it is likely to lead to a much smaller pool of suitable applicants and does not normally satisfy equal opportunities requirements because any imbalance in the workforce may be perpetuated. The Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission both warn against such practices where the workforce is predominantly one sex or racial group.

Once the recruitment channel or channels are decided, the next step is to consider:

- the design and content of any advertisement used

- how applicants are to respond - by application form, fax, telephone, in person at the organisation or agency, by letter, by email on the internet, by tape or braille

- who is to be responsible for sifting the applications? What is the selection process going to be?

- if interviews are to be held, when will they be and will everyone who needs to be involved be available?

- are selection tests to be used? Is there the expertise to administer them and ensure they are non-discriminatory and appropriate?

- are references/medicals to be requested?

- are arrangements in hand to give prompt acknowledgement of applications received?

The advertisement

Any advertisement needs to be designed and presented effectively to ensure the right candidates are attracted. Look through national, local or professional papers and see what advertisements catch the eye. The newspaper office will often advise on suitable formats. Advertisements must be tailored to the level of the target audience, and should always be clear and easily understood. They must be non-discriminatory, and should avoid any gender or culturally specific language. To support this, the organisation should include in the advert its statement of commitment to equal opportunities, which will underline the organisation as one that will welcome applications from all sections of the community.

Consider the following factors in the advertisement:

- if the organisation is well known, does it have a logo that could feature prominently in the advertisement? Make the advertisement consistent with the company image

- should the job title be the most prominent feature?

- keep the text short and simple while giving the main aspects of the job, pay, career prospects, location, contract length

- can specific details - such as pay, qualifications and experience required - be given in a way which will reduce the number of unsuitable applications?

- is it possible to avoid generalisations such as 'attractive salary', or 'appropriate qualifications' which may discourage valid applications?

- can you provide job details on tape or in braille and accept applications in a similar format?

- is the form of reply and the closing date for applications clear? Is there a contact name and phone number for further information and enquiries?

All advertisements should carry the same information, whether for internal or external use.

Application forms

Application forms can help the recruitment process by providing necessary and relevant information about the applicant and their skills (13). The design of the form needs to be realistic and straightforward, appropriate to the level of the job. Using application forms has the following advantages:

- comparing like with like is easier. CVs can be time-consuming and may not provide the information required

- they provide the basis for an initial sift, and then for the interview

- the standard of completion can be a guide to the candidate's suitability, if writing and presentation skills are essential to the job; however, be aware of the possibility of disability discrimination

- they provide a record of qualifications, abilities and experience as stated by the applicant.

Care also needs to be taken over some less positive aspects of application forms:

- there is a temptation to use application forms to try to extract too much information, eg motives, values and personality characteristics. The form should concentrate on the experience, knowledge and competencies needed for the job (14)

- some people may dislike filling in forms and so be put off applying for the job. Some very experienced people may find the form inadequate, whilst those with little in the way of qualifications or experience may be intimidated by large empty spaces on the form

- application forms add another stage, and therefore more time, to the recruitment process. Some candidates may be lost if they can obtain work elsewhere more quickly

- application forms may inadvertently be discriminatory. For instance, to require a form to be filled out 'in your own handwriting', where written English is not relevant to the job, may discriminate against those for whom English is not their first language, or who may not have well-developed literacy skills.

Any information such as title (marital status), ethnic origin or date of birth requested for monitoring purposes (eg for compliance with the legal requirements and codes of practice on race, sex, disability and age discrimination) should be clearly shown to be for this purpose only, and should be on a separate sheet or tear-off section. Such information need only be provided on a voluntary basis. Medical information should also be obtained separately and kept separate from the application form.

Additionally, the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and subsequent Codes of Practice on recruitment and selection, employment records, monitoring at work and information on workers' health need to be noted - if any recruitment records are to be held on computer or in a manual system, the applicant should be advised of this and for what purposes and duration the information is to be held (15).

All applications should be promptly acknowledged.

Asylum and Immigration Act 1996

The Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 makes it a criminal offence for an employer to employ those who do not have permission to live or to work in the United Kingdom. This applies only in relation to employees who started work for the employer on or after 27 January 1997. For further information visit the Home Office website at www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk

Police Act 1997

The Police Act provides a statutory basis for certain criminal record checks which may be used by employers. These checks can be made via the Criminal Records Bureau which came into being in 2001. Three types of certificate are available. They are intended to provide information on applicants for jobs which are exceptions to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (for instance, those occupations including work with children or vulnerable adults, work in medicine, the courts and other sensitive areas). In most cases employers in these areas are required to register with the Criminal Records Agency and to follow a code of practice.

Selecting the best candidate

Whatever form the applications take, there may be a need to sift them before moving on to the interview stage. Such a sift serves to match the applicants as closely as possible to the job and person specification and to produce a shortlist of people to interview. To avoid any possibility of bias, such sifting should be undertaken by two or more people, and it should involve the direct line manager/supervisor as well as personnel. The sifting stage can also help the organisation by providing feedback on the advertising process and the suitability of the application form. It can also identify people who might be useful elsewhere in the organisation. If references or medicals are to be taken up before the invitation to interview stage, it should be made clear on the application form/information pack sent to the applicant. See References and checking for further information.

Some jobs require medicals to be given at the commencement of employment, and employers may seek preliminary information on a separate medical questionnaire at the time of recruitment. This applies mainly in driving work and industries where there is an exposure to certain chemicals. Any employer who needs advice should contact the Employment Medical Advisory Service (part of the Health and Safety Executive) in their area (16) or visit www.guide-information.org.uk.

If your organisation believes that pre-employment health screening is necessary, you must make sure it is carried out in a non-discriminatory way: for instance, do not single out disabled people for medical assessment. If a report from any individual's doctor is sought, then permission must be given by the individual, and they have the right to see the report (Access to Medical Reports Act 1988).

The candidates who best match the specifications may then be invited for interview. The invitation letter should tell candidates that they should advise the organisation in advance if any particular arrangements need to be made to accommodate them on arrival or during the interview; for instance, ramp access or lighting levels. The invitation letter should also clearly state whether the organisation will pay the candidate's reasonable travel expenses for the interview.

Who makes the decision?

In some companies there will be a personnel or human resource specialist who will undertake most of the sifting and shortlisting. It is very important that the line manager/supervisor for the job also be involved, both at the job and person specification stage and at the interview stage. The final selection will thus normally be a joint decision, except in those very small companies where only a line manager/supervisor is available to do the recruitment of staff.

Gaining the commitment of the immediate manager/supervisor by involving them in the selection process can be vital to ensuring that the new employee is settled successfully into the organisation. It may be useful both for the candidates to see the environment in which they would be working, and, if they are to be part of a team, for the current team members to meet the candidate.

Selection techniques

There is a variety of methods available to help in the selection process - including interviews, tests (practical or psychometric), assessment centres, role plays and team exercises, to name a few. Usually a range of methods will be used by the organisation depending on the type of job to be filled, the skills of the recruiter and the budget for recruitment.

Interviews

Most jobs are filled through interviews. The interview has two main purposes - to find out if the candidate is suitable for the job, and to give the candidate information about the job and the organisation. Every candidate should be offered the same opportunities to give the best presentation of themselves, to demonstrate their suitability and to ask questions of the interviewer.

A structured interview designed to discover all relevant information and assess the competencies of the applicant is an efficient method of focusing on the match between job and candidate. It also means that there is a consistent form to the interviews, particularly important if there are a number of candidates to be seen.

Unstructured interviews are very poor for recruiting the right person. The structured interview is most likely to be effective in obtaining specific information against a set of clearly defined criteria. However, not every manager is skilled at interviewing, and may not be able to judge efficiently the applicant's skills and competencies. Ideally all interviewers should receive training, including the equal opportunities aspects of recruitment and the relevant legislation.

Interviews need not be formal. The length and style of the interview will relate to the job and the organisation. Some vacancies may call for a formal interview panel, some for a less formal, one-to-one interview. The interviewer(s) should consider the job and the candidates when deciding on the nature of the interview.

All interviews, whether formal or informal, need careful preparation if they are to be successful. Each candidate should leave with a sense of being treated well and fairly and having had the opportunity to give of their best.

Preparing the interview

The interviewer should prepare by:

- reading the application form, job and person specifications to identify areas which need further exploration or clarification

- planning the questions. In some interviews it is appropriate to ask only one or two questions to encourage the candidate to talk at length on certain subjects. In others it may be better to ask a series of short questions on several different areas. If there is more than one interviewer, different people can cover different topics, eg job knowledge, training, qualifications. Do not ask for personal information or views irrelevant to the job. Do not ask potentially discriminatory questions such as 'Are you planning to have children in the next few years?'

- being ready for the candidates' questions, and trying to anticipate what additional information they may seek.

Conducting the interview

Conduct the interview in an environment that will allow candidates to give of their best. Arrange for there to be no interruptions, divert telephone calls, welcome the candidate(s), and show them cloakroom facilities, etc.

If possible, let the candidate have a brief tour of the place of work. This is particularly useful in the case of people new to the job market (school-leavers, returning men and women), who may have little or no experience of what to expect in a workplace. It may also prove valuable in offering an additional opportunity to assess the candidate's interaction with possible colleagues.

Consider whether any adjustments need to be made to accommodate an interviewee who has indicated a disability on the application form - it is easy to overlook simple adjustments that may be reasonable to make:

- candidates with hearing impairment may not only need to be able to clearly see the interviewer as they are talking, but may need communication support if they are not to be placed at a disadvantage

- is there an alternative to steps for access to the building? Can the interview take place elsewhere, where access might be easier for someone with a physical disability?

It is common that both interviewer and candidate are nervous. Thorough preparation will help both of you. Be careful not to fill silences by talking too much - the aim of the interview is to draw information from the candidate to decide if they would suit the job. The candidate should do most of the talking.

Nevertheless, the interviewer will want to encourage candidates to relax and give of their best in what is, after all, a somewhat unnatural setting. It is important to keep the conversation flowing, and the introductions and initial 'scene-setting' can help all parties settle to the interview.

The following pointers may be helpful in conducting the interview:

- introduce yourself (and other interviewers if present); this also gives the candidate time to settle down

- give some background information about the organisation and the job - this helps everyone to focus on the objective

- structure the questions to cover all the relevant areas, and don't ask too many 'closed' questions. Open-ended questions (ie ones that can't be answered just by a yes or no answer) will encourage the candidate to speak freely - they often begin 'what', 'why', 'when' or 'how'

- avoid leading questions

- listen, and make brief notes as necessary on salient points

- have a time frame and keep to it, allowing sufficient time for candidates to ask any questions they might have

- make sure the candidate is familiar with the terms and conditions of the job, and they are acceptable. If not, and the candidate is the best one for the job, then some negotiation may be necessary - be careful to avoid inadvertent discrimination

- tell the candidate what will happen next and when to expect to hear from the organisation.

Practical tests

If the job involves practical skills, it may be appropriate to test for ability before or at the time of interview. This is generally acceptable for manual and word processing skills, but less useful for clerical and administrative posts. Telephone skills are increasingly in demand, and candidates for telesales/call centre work will almost invariably be asked to undertake a practical test. Any tests must, however, be free of bias and related to the necessary requirements of the job (17). Consideration in giving any tests must include the objectives of such a test, the efficiency of the method selected, the numbers of candidates (and vacancies), the costs and benefits of such a method.

Psychometric and psychological tests, including biodata

There are numerous tests commercially available which can assist in measuring aspects of personality and intelligence such as reasoning, problem solving, decision making, interpersonal skills and confidence. Although many large organisations have used them for a number of years, they are not widely used, and some tests are considered controversial - for instance, those that assess personality. Any organisation considering the use of psychometric or psychological tests should refer to the guides available, and make sure they have the need, skills and resources necessary (18).

Tests should never be used in isolation, or as the sole selection technique. Where a decision is made solely on the automatic processing of personal data, an applicant may require, under the Data Protection Act 1998, that the organisation reconsider any rejection or make a new decision on another basis.

Biodata (short for biographical data), is a questionnaire format with multiple choice answers. The questions are of a biographical nature and answers are scored according to the scoring key developed by the employer. In general biodata is successfully used only by really large employers, who have a large throughput of applicants (19). Use of biodata, like other tests, needs careful control to avoid any possibility of discrimination or invasion of privacy.

Think carefully before using any test - is it actually necessary for the requirements of the job? Is the test relevant to the person/job specification? What is the company policy about using tests, storing results and giving feedback to the candidate? Marking criteria must be objective, and the record sheets should be retained in accordance with the Data Protection legislation.

Assessment centres, role plays and team exercises

Assessment centres are often used by large organisations making senior management or 'fast-stream' graduate appointments. Exercises, sole and group, may take place over a few days, normally in a residential setting. The individual may also be required to make presentations and to take part in role-plays or team events.

Making the decision

Decide whom to employ as soon as possible after the interview/test/assessment. Use of a structured scoring system helps here, particularly one that is based on the applicants' competencies, and helps avoid the pitfalls of stereotyping, making snap judgements, and 'mirror-image' effects (that is, a subconscious subjectivity - looking for similarities to oneself in the candidate). Structured scoring allows the organisation to weight some elements or competencies if desired, and to compare a candidate's score with the job specification 'ideal' score - although care must be taken when considering the results that a high overall score doesn't mask a low score in a crucial area.

Write up notes immediately after the interview - recording relevant answers and detail. This is not only for the decision-making process but also to provide feedback to the candidate if requested. Bear in mind the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998, which will enable the candidate to ask to see interview notes (20) where they form part of a 'set' of information about the candidate - for instance, the application form, references received and so on, or the full personnel file if the candidate is already working for the organisation. Be aware also that your reasons for appointing or not appointing a particular candidate may be challenged under discrimination legislation.

Inform all the applicants of the outcome as soon as possible, whether successful or unsuccessful. Keep in touch if the decision is delayed.

Try to give positive feedback to unsuccessful candidates on any aspects they could reasonably improve for future success. It is sensible to maintain a favourable view of the organisation among the applicants - there may be future job vacancies for which they would be suitable and for which you would wish them to apply. Failure to get one job does not necessarily mean unsuitability for other jobs with the organisation. You may want to keep CVs or applications on file for future matching. Also bear in mind that applicants and their families may be your customers as well as potential employees, so it makes business sense to treat them fairly and courteously.

References and checking

State on the application form when any references will be sought, and do not approach a current employer unless the candidate has given express permission. If references are sought, they will be most effective if you include a job description with the request, with structured, relevant questions that will enable you to gain accurate further information about the candidate's abilities. Do not ask for personal information or for conjecture about the applicant. Remember too that completing a reference takes time and proper consideration, so only seek such references if you believe they are necessary and appropriate. A simple form confirming dates of employment, capacity and particular skills may be satisfactory.

The holding of particular qualifications, training or licences may be important to the job, and it is reasonable to ask candidates for proof. If checks on such qualifications are to be made, it is good employment practice to make sure the applicant knows, and that copies of any relevant documents will be held on their personnel file.

The timing of reference and qualification checks is variable. It is often the case that references are taken up at shortlist or offer stage, and the candidate may be asked to bring documentary evidence of qualifications to the interview. Job offers are sometimes made 'subject to satisfactory references being received', but this is not advisable. The referee may simply fail to provide any kind of reference. There is no legal requirement to do so. Or a referee may wrongly indicate the applicant is unsuitable, in which case if the offer is withdrawn on those grounds, the organisation could face legal action by the applicant. The organisation needs a policy of what to do in circumstances such as the non-supply of a reference - an initial 'probationary' period might be an acceptable way of proceeding.

Detailed guidance on confidentiality when giving and receiving references may be found in the Employment Records section of the "Employment Practices Data Protection Code" available on the website of the Information Commissioner's Office website at http://www.ico.gov.uk. The Code has guidance on what to do when a worker asks to see his or her own reference. This includes guidelines on what information it is reasonable to withhold if the reference enables a third party (eg the author of the reference) to be identified.

The offer

Once the successful candidate is identified, and any necessary references and checks completed, send out an offer letter. This is preferable to telephoning the candidate, as a letter enables the specifics of the job to be re-stated, with the terms and conditions, any pre-conditions (eg subject to exam success), or post-conditions (eg subject to a satisfactory probation period).

Remember that the employment contract is a legal one, and exists even before the candidate has commenced employment. The offer letter should set out the following points:

- the job title and the offer of that job
- any conditions (pre or post) that apply to the offer
- the terms of the offer - salary, hours, benefits, pension arrangements, holiday entitlement, place of employment, etc
- the date of starting, and any probationary period
- what action the candidate needs to take, eg returning a signed acceptance of the offer, agreement to references, any date constraints on acceptance
- if the letter is to form part of the contract of employment, it should say so. Alternatively it could form the main terms and conditions of employment - a written statement required by law to be issued to employees within two months of them starting work.

Preparing for the new employee

Once the candidate has accepted the job, the organisation must then prepare for the new employee's arrival and induction. Failure to attend to this can create a poor impression and undo much of the positive view the candidate has gained throughout the recruitment and selection process. A good induction programme reinforces positive first impressions and makes new employees feel welcome and ready to contribute fully.

Induction

The second part of this booklet is about induction - the process of familiarisation with the organisation and settling into the job. It is easy to forget that the selection process is only the beginning of the employment relationship, and the future of that relationship depends to a considerable extent on how the new employee is settled into the job. Most labour turnover is among new employees, and work efficiency is reached only after a period of learning and adjusting to the new environment.

By planning an induction programme, in consultation with trade union or other employee representatives if available, the organisation can quickly build on the positive attitude of the successful candidate. However keen new recruits may be, they may have anxieties about how well they will:

- get on with their co-workers
- understand the standards and rules (written and unwritten) of the organisation
- make a good impression on their new manager or supervisor
- be able to do the job.

A good induction programme makes business sense, whatever the size of the organisation, and whatever the job. It introduces the newcomer not only to their immediate colleagues, but to other workers with whom they may have less day-to-day contact, including trade union representatives (if they are recognised in the organisation) or employee representatives on any staff committee or council.

The induction timetable

Induction often begins before the person has actually started, in that the organisation will supply material as part of an initial 'information pack', or with the invitation to interview, or with the letter of job offer. This may be particularly important in jobs of a technical nature, where it is helpful for the new starter to be as well informed as possible about that side of the work. Clearly, learning the particular projects and initiatives will have to be done in the workplace but much 'mental preparedness' can be undertaken in advance. The Company Handbook, and the Written Statement of Employment Particulars, can also provide essential information about the organisation and the job.

A good reception, with the line or personnel manager spending time with the new employee, is important on the first day. There may be further documentation to complete, perhaps a preliminary discussion about training either immediately or in the future, an explanation of the development opportunities that are available, and of course enough information to give the new starter a good grasp of the working practices of the organisation. Any particular health and safety requirements should be made known, together with details of whom to go to for help and advice during the course of their employment. Many companies use a 'buddy' system, where an experienced worker is nominated to assist the new recruit in all the day-to-day questions that may arise.

It is useful to have a written checklist of the items that need to be covered in the induction programme; and an example of such a list is at Appendix 1, 2 & 3. Not only does this give some structure to the induction but it also ensures that both the new starter and the manager know what has or has not been covered at any given time. Such a checklist is normally drawn up by the personnel section in consultation with other involved staff, such as safety officers, line manager/supervisors, employee representatives (if appropriate), and training officers.

The induction programme may be spread over several days or weeks, and may incorporate specific job training, but the following points should be borne in mind:

- all employees need to be able to work in a safe and healthy manner. Recruitment and placement procedures should ensure that employees (including managers) have the necessary physical and mental abilities to do their jobs, or can acquire them through training and experience. Employers should have systems in place to identify health and safety training needs arising from recruitment

- people can take in only so much information at any given time, and should not be overloaded. It is important that health and safety is introduced in a structured way

- if there are special health and safety requirements, make sure the new starter fully understands their importance - otherwise there is the risk of being exposed to unnecessary danger or endangering their co-workers. All employees must know what to do in the event of a fire or other emergency

- setting out the plan of induction at the beginning avoids the problems that can arise in trying to arrange time in the future, when the employee is established in the job

- don't forget induction needs for shift workers or night workers. They may need some time on days, or modified shifts, to cover the induction period

- even if the induction period covers job training, try to let new starters do some practical work, as this will assist their learning and enable them to relate what they are being taught to what they will be doing.

The outcome of all this is that the new starter should have a good feel for the organisation, and should continue to feel that they made the right decision in joining the firm.

The induction process

Induction need not be a very formal process but it needs to be properly managed. In many organisations it will be carried out informally by the new starter's manager or supervisor on a day-to-day basis. Nevertheless, having a structured checklist to follow is useful for both parties. Most induction will consist of meeting and talking with new colleagues, watching activities and asking questions. It may be appropriate to provide certain information in written form; and if the organisation has a company handbook, this can often act as an aide memoire covering important aspects of the company organisation and how it functions.

If a group of new employees is recruited at the same time, it may make sense to hold group induction sessions on the common topics to be covered - discussion, videos, slide presentations can all add to the effectiveness of the programme.

Even people transferring from one part of the organisation to another need induction into their new area. Don't assume that they will know the relevant people or the skills they will need in the new job. However, they may need a more individually tailored induction programme to meet their particular needs.

Employees who may need special attention

The new starter who has considerable recent work experience and is a confident, out-going individual may have a different induction need from the person with little or no experience, and who may be shy or reserved in this new work setting.

School and college leavers

For school or college leavers, who may be nervous but excited at their first job, it is particularly important for the employer to encourage a positive attitude to work, and to allay any fears the new recruit may have. They need to be sure of their position in the company, and of the opportunities they will have to train and develop their skills.

Health and safety is a particularly important area to stress. Young people often have no feel for workplace hazards, and may be vulnerable to accidents. A group of young people together may get high spirited and, without proper guidance on safety, be unaware of the potential dangers. Young workers are seen as being particularly at risk, and employers are required to:

- assess risks to young people under 18, before they start work (21)
- take into account their inexperience, lack of awareness of existing or potential risks, and immaturity
- address specific factors in the risk assessment (22). Employers are required to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks to the health and safety of employees and identify groups of workers who might be particularly at risk.

People returning to work after a break in employment, or changing their work situation

Men or women returning to work after some years caring for children or other relatives may feel apprehensive about the new job - even when they may have worked for the company in the past. They may feel out of touch with developments, and in need of re-establishing themselves. Their induction programme needs to take this into account, offering training and extra help to settle in and become valuable members of the organisation.

This is also true of those who might have been living/working abroad, or who are changing their career focus.

Employees with disabilities

Careful pre-planning can reduce the problems which may arise for employees with disabilities, whether in terms of access, equipment or dealing with colleagues. Specialist advice is available from the Disability Employment Adviser and the Disability Service Teams of the Department for Work and Pensions. The Department for Work and Pensions also operates the Access to Work Scheme, whereby assistance may be available in meeting the cost of any aids and adaptations required. These services can be contacted via the JobCentre network.

Management / professional trainees

Commonly, management and professional trainees are not recruited for specific jobs but undergo further education and training after their employment commences. This may mean they are less able to be involved with practical work, and without care this can lead to a loss of interest and motivation. Their induction period should attempt to include them in appropriate work in the organisation if at all possible.

Minorities

They should have the same induction programme as any other new starter, but attention should be paid to any sensitivities. Employers may need to be aware and take account of any particular cultural or religious customs of new employees who are part of an ethnic or religious minority so that misunderstandings do not occur.

Acas' Equality Service can assist employers with free advice on the development and implementation of policies and practices for greater equality among the workforce (23).

Who is responsible for the induction process?

There may well be several people involved in the planning and delivery of the induction programme. In a small company it may be the personnel officer, the manager or supervisor, and perhaps a 'buddy'. A larger organisation may call on the abilities and skills of many people. These could include:

- the personnel or human resource manager. Their likely involvement would be to go over the terms and conditions, complete any necessary paperwork, and perhaps give an overview of the company organisation

- a competent health and safety adviser, particularly if there is a need for specific safety procedures or protective clothing, etc. This person assists an employer in applying the provisions of health and safety law (24)

- the training officer

- the line or department manager. This person will normally provide the more local welcome to the organisation, explaining where that particular department or section fits with the whole, and providing the first round of introductions to the department

- the supervisor, who will have the greatest responsibility and interest in getting the new starter settled in and effective as soon as possible. This is generally where the use of a checklist can best be made, with the supervisor able to check easily what has been covered, what needs to be done, and any particular points that may need further explanation

- the trade union or employee representative, and safety representative, to explain their role.

It is often useful to have a co-worker to act as a guide and adviser to the new recruit, even if the organisation does not have a formal 'buddy' system. This person can help in those everyday questions such as canteen facilities, introducing other co-workers, explaining the layout of the building, etc in an informal way as they occur. This process can also be a good way of providing a development opportunity to the person who acts as guide and mentor.

Try to follow up the new employee after a suitable period, perhaps six months, to check that the induction went well. This could be part of a general review for the individual.

Monitoring effectiveness

As with any work activity it is recommended that the recruitment and induction process be reviewed for its effectiveness. If any stage of the recruitment process failed to produce the expected result, eg if the advertising method has produced too many candidates, you may want to examine what happened and why in order to make it more efficient in the future. Future recruitment exercises may require modifications to the methods used - a successful recruitment for one job does not automatically mean the same method will be as successful again. This is particularly true if the labour market changes, with, for instance, fewer school leavers but more mature workers being available.

Recruitment and induction may be a continuous process in your organisation, necessitating more or less constant monitoring.

Monitoring regularly will also ensure equal opportunity policies are being actively pursued, and that internal candidates are receiving the same consideration as external candidates.

Conclusion

Recruiting people with the right skills and qualities is essential for any organisation if it is to maintain and improve its efficiency. Not only the personnel manager but also the line manager/supervisor has a part to play in the selection process. It is crucial that both these people have training to enable them to carry out their roles effectively.

Careful analysis of the job to be done, and of the competencies required to do it, is necessary if the right people are to be fitted into the right job.

Having selected the best candidate for the job, the next stage is to ensure that the new recruit is successfully integrated into the organisation through a well planned induction programme.

Induction need not be an elaborate exercise, but it must be thought out in advance, carried out in a timely and careful manner, and evaluated to ensure that it meets the needs of the employee.

The benefits of a good induction programme are a more settled employee, a more effective response to training, lower labour turnover, and improved industrial relations.

Appendix 1, 2 & 3

A framework for a job description (Appendix 1), Person specification (Appendix 2) and Induction checklist (Appendix 3) can be downloaded as Word files from here: Recruitment and induction forms

Notes

1. See S 47 and 48 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, and S 6,35,36,37 and 38 of the Race Relations Act 1976.

2. Free leaflets about various aspects of the Act may be obtained by telephoning The Stationery Office on 0870 600 5522.

3. For further information see the Acas Advisory booklet - Tackling discrimination and promoting equality - good practice guide for employers.

4. The Directory of Business Link operators can be contacted on 0845 6009006.

5. The local Regional Acas offices can give details of availability.

6. Further information on the formation of a human resource plan is available from the J Bramham and P Reilly books listed in the Suggested Further Reading list.

7. *Age Diversity at Work: a practical guide for business* is available from the Department for Work and Pensions tel 08457 330360 or visit www.agepositive.gov.uk

8. Competencies is a term used to describe 'all the work-related personal attributes, knowledge, experience, skills and values that a person draws on to perform their work well' (Gareth Roberts, Recruitment and Selection: a competency approach, IPD 1997).

9. Further advice and Codes of Practice can be obtained from the Equal Opportunities Commission (tel: 0845 601 5901), the Disability Rights Commission (tel: 08457 622 633) and the Commission for Racial Equality (tel: 020 7939 0000).

10. For a good definition and examples of competency-based person specifications see Gareth Roberts, Recruitment and Selection: a competency approach IPD 1997.

11. The Code of Practice on Equal Pay is available from the Equal Opportunities Commission, address as above.

12. See Acas Advisory booklet - Pay systems for further information on avoiding discrimination in pay rates.

13. The Acas Advisory booklet - Personnel data and record keeping gives two examples of application forms, one suitable for management or specialist jobs, the other suitable for junior clerical or manual jobs. These can provide a basis for adaptation to suit your organisation.

14. An ex-offender may withhold details of criminal convictions when applying for a job - depending on the job, the offence and the time since conviction. For further information see A Guide to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, available from the Stationery Office. The Police Act 1997 allows for employers to check applicants for certain types of work.

15. For full information on the Data Protection Act 1998 write to Publications, Information Commissioner's Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF Information line 01625 545745.

16. The Health and Safety Executive Infoline is on 01787 881165.

17. The Codes of Practice published by the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality both contain guidance on selection testing.

18. For further information see the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development Key Facts *on Psychological testing* and the IPD Guide on psychological testing.

19. This definition, and a good description of Biodata, is to be found in Personnel Selection: adding value through people by Mark Cook (see Suggested Further Reading).

20. A Guide to the 1998 Data Protection Act is available from the Office of the Information Commissioner, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF Information line 01625 545745.

21. The Health and Safety (Young Persons) Regulations 1997.

22. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992.

23. Acas' Equality can be contacted via your local Acas office or by calling 08457 47 47 47.

24. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992. The appointment of health and safety assistants, advisers or departments does not absolve an employer from responsibilities for health and safety law. These health and safety advisers are (usually) different from TU or employee representatives or safety representatives.

25. The risk assessment will help identify information which has to be provided to employees under specific health and safety regulations, as well as any further information relevant to risks to employees' health and safety. Relevant information on risks and on prevention and protective measures will be limited to what employees need to know to ensure their health and safety. Information on emergency arrangements (eg fire, bomb, evacuation) must be provided to employees, along with the identity of staff nominated to assist in the event of an evacuation.

Suggested further reading

Acas Getting it right factsheet - Induction training [54kb]

Acas Getting it right factsheet - Recruitment and selection [58kb]

Cook, Mark
Personnel selection: adding value through people (4th ed)
Chichester, Wiley, 2003

Fowler, Alan
Writing job descriptions
London, CIPD, 2000

Hackett, Penny
The selection interview
London, CIPD, 1998

Incomes Data Services
Assessment centres
London, IDS, 2002
(IDS Study 735)

Incomes Data Services
Competency frameworks
London, IDS, 2001
(IDS Study 706)
Industrial Relations Services
Recruitment and retention
London, IDS, 2001
(IRS Management Review 23)

Proctor, Giles and Leighton, Patricia
Recruiting within the law (3rd ed)
London, CIPD, 2003

Taylor, Stephen
People resourcing (3rd ed)
London, CIPD, 2005

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