

# Merit and local selection panel processes for vacancies

Employees serving on a local selection (teaching vacancy) or merit selection (all other vacancies) panel must:

- be merit selection trained
- follow the recruitment procedure relevant to the vacancy.

Employees seeking a review of a selection process should see [resolving employee complaints and requesting reviews](#).

## Merit selection procedure taking effect on 1 January 2021

A revised [merit selection procedure](#) took effect on 1 January 2021. This single procedure replaced the merit selection policy and merit instructions.

Employees that require access to merit procedure and instructions that applied before 1 January 2021 can contact Employee Relations at [education.ecu@sa.gov.au](mailto:education.ecu@sa.gov.au)

## Merit selection training

All employees who participate in a selection panel must complete merit selection training. Employees who have previously completed training and participated on a selection panel within the last 5 years do not need to repeat the training.

The training is available online and takes approximately 2 hours to complete. Once completed, the training can be accessed at any time for employees wanting to refresh their knowledge.

Select the training relevant to your role (plink login required):

- [Merit selection training for Education and Children's Services Act 2019 vacancies](#)
- [Merit selection training for Public Sector Act 2009 \(corporate\) vacancies](#)

## Selection processes

### Merit selection – corporate vacancies

Corporate vacancies include:

- non-executive *Public Sector Act 2009* roles, for example administrative services officers (ASO) and allied health professionals (AHP)
- seconded teachers (STL)
- corporate appointments under section 121 of the *Education and Children's Services Act 2019*.

Panels for corporate vacancies must comply with the [merit selection procedure](#).

See [merit selection panel forms](#) for the templates you can use in the merit selection process.

## Merit selection – school and preschool leader vacancies

Panels for principals, preschool directors and band B leaders must comply with the [merit selection procedure](#).

See [vacancy, selection and placement system \(VSP\)](#) for information on managing the leadership vacancy selection process.

## Merit selection – ancillary vacancies

Panels for Aboriginal Education Worker (AEW), School Services Officer (SSO), Government Services Officer (GSE) and Early Childhood Worker (ECW) vacancies must comply with the:

- [merit selection procedure](#)
- [recruitment and selection of ancillary staff in schools and preschools policy \(PDF, 273.9 KB\)](#)
- [recruitment and selection of ancillary staff in schools and preschools procedure \(PDF, 597.0 KB\)](#).

See [vacancy, selection and placement system \(VSP\)](#) for information on managing the ancillary vacancy selection process.

## Local selection – school and preschool teacher vacancies

Panels for school and preschool teaching vacancies must comply with:

- [recruitment and selection for teaching staff in schools policy \(PDF, 281.7 KB\)](#)
- [recruitment and selection for teaching staff in schools procedure \(PDF, 403.7 KB\)](#)
- [recruitment and selection for teaching staff in preschools policy \(PDF, 279.1 KB\)](#)
- [recruitment and selection for teaching staff in preschools procedure \(PDF, 774.2 KB\)](#).

See [vacancy, selection and placement system \(VSP\)](#) for information on managing the teacher vacancy selection process.

## Panel compositions

Panels must contain the required number of panel members, which changes depending on the position and length of the vacancy.

See [merit and local selection panel composition requirements](#).

## Selection guidance notes

The relevant recruitment procedure (as referenced above) sets out the minimum procedural requirements that apply to a recruitment process. Merit and local selection panels should refer to the guidance notes throughout the selection process:

### Selection tools

A panel's assessment of applicants must be based on robust evidence. The panel must make sure sufficient evidence is collected during the process to enable the assessment and recommendation of applicants.

The selection tools you use will depend on the vacancy and role requirements, and is at the discretion of the panel. A panel should carefully choose their selection tools to make sure the evidence it provides matches the position requirements.

Interview is the most common selection tool but there are more available. If you're not sure which selection tools will best gather evidence from applicants, contact your HR Business Partner or Employee Relations at [education.ecu@sa.gov.au](mailto:education.ecu@sa.gov.au).

### Interview

Interviewing can be a sound and valid predictor of work performance. In some instances more than 1 interview may be needed.

An effective interview will provide relevant evidence about the applicant, and help the applicant learn more about the role to assess whether it's the right fit for them.

Interview questions should:

- focus on the most important aspects of the job and the required skills and abilities
- be relevant to the essential selection criteria
- be clear and unambiguous
- enable comparison between the applicants
- be open and behavioural to seek out examples of previous actual behaviours and experiences rather than enquiring about handling hypothetical situations.

### Presentation

Asking applicants to present on a topic provides the panel with evidence about an applicant's subject matter expertise as well as their oral communication and presentation skills. Choose this selection tool if public speaking or delivering presentations is a key part of the role. For example, it may be a good choice for a media officer or principal vacancy but not for a desk-based role.

## In-tray exercise

This selection tool is designed to simulate the administrative requirements of a role. The applicant is asked to prioritise and work through correspondence and other documents in an in-tray. This tool can be useful in assessing an applicant's ability to work through information, prioritise and delegate. Make sure the tasks provided do not require 'insider knowledge' that would disadvantage external applicants.

## Psychometric testing

Psychometric testing must be delivered by a qualified professional and organisation. This selection tool may be useful for roles that operate in extremely stressful environments.

## External recruitment agencies and consultants

For some senior level vacancies it may be beneficial to engage an external recruitment agency or consultant to assist in or coordinate the selection process. This may be done where specific knowledge or a specialised search will bring high quality candidates to the field of applicants.

## Unconscious bias and recruitment

[Unconscious bias](#) refers to a bias that we are unaware of, which happens outside of our control. It's a bias that happens automatically and is triggered by our brain making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations, influenced by our background, cultural environment and personal experiences.

Once we recognise that we're vulnerable to our decisions being swayed by unconscious bias, we're in a better position to tackle it. Try the following strategies:

### Take a test

Implicit association tests provide an insight into unconscious bias. Once you have this insight, you're better placed to be prepared for areas of potential bias. Try the [Harvard project implicit test](#).

### Panel discussion

At the start of the panel process, take the time to discuss unconscious bias with your fellow panellists and how each member will work to stop it from impacting their assessment of applicants.

### Hold each other to account

People tend to be better at recognising unconscious bias in others rather than themselves. If you sense an area of bias in another panel member, be prepared to respectfully call it out, and also be open to panel members doing the same to you.

### Slow down

The quicker the decision, the more susceptible we are to unconscious bias. Take the time for careful, critical analysis of the reasons behind your decisions. As you consider each of the applicants, pause, reflect, and challenge any unconscious bias that may be impacting your merit assessment.

# Conflicts of interest

In a selection process, the identity of applicants may be a source of potential or actual conflict of interest.

Applicants may be known to 1 or more panel members, generally through having worked together previously. When our professional duty intersects with a private concern, we have a conflict of interest. By itself, a conflict of interest is not a bad thing – it's almost inevitable that our private lives and public responsibilities collide at some point. What's important is that the conflict of interest is promptly recognised, disclosed, and managed appropriately.

You must disclose the nature of any relationship you have with applicants with the selection panel. Conflicts of interest may require a panellist to withdraw from the process and conflicts must be resolved before the start or continuation of the panel. Ask yourself:

- is there anything about my relationship with the applicant that would prevent me from being objective?
- could it be perceived that I may not be able to act objectively in the panel process?

If no conflict of interest exists, but an applicant is known to a panellist, then that panellist will probably have prior knowledge of that person, including possible views on their suitability for the vacancy.

Panellists who are not sure if their relationship with an applicant constitutes a conflict of interest should discuss the matter with their fellow panellists and may contact Employee Relations at [education.ecu@sa.gov.au](mailto:education.ecu@sa.gov.au) for advice.

For help identifying and managing workplace conflicts of interest, refer to [your responsibilities as a public sector employee](#).

## Family member

If an applicant is related to a panel member, this is an actual conflict of interest and the panel member must remove themselves from the panel. Family members include immediate and extended family. In this situation, a panellist would not be able to consider the applicant objectively, so stepping aside is the only available conflict of interest management strategy.

## Close personal friend

The same applies if an applicant is a close personal friend of a panel member. It can be difficult to assess if a relationship has crossed over from normal collegiate friendliness to close personal friendship. The panel member should exercise their judgement carefully, including considering whether there would be a reasonable perception that the relationship was a close personal friendship.

## Unfriendly relationship

There may be instances where a panel member has an unfriendly relationship with an applicant, for example a history of past workplace conflict. The panel member is responsible for assessing the relationship and determining whether a reasonable person would reach the view that the panellist's ability to be objective has been compromised. A useful question to ask is 'how would I feel if this person was on the panel for a position that I applied for?'

# Prior knowledge

There will often be instances when a panel member has previously met or has knowledge of an applicant, either in their working or personal lives. If there's no conflict of interest the panellist can remain on the panel. However, the panellist needs to be aware that they will have made observations and formed views on the applicant, and they will need to make sure this information is treated appropriately.

It's not possible for a panellist to magically erase all prior information they have absorbed but they must make sure this information is managed appropriately and it does not favour or disadvantage an applicant.

## Managing prior knowledge example

Let's think about a situation when panellist Jo worked with applicant Rae 5 years ago and the panel has determined that Rae should be shortlisted. Jo recalls that Rae was very poor at time management.

Jo's first step is to remind herself that what she thinks she knows about Rae may just be her subjective view or a flawed opinion, and even if it were true, it's possible that Rae has successfully improved her skills in this area over the intervening years. For these reasons, Jo does not share her concerns with her fellow panellists.

Next, Jo needs to think about whether this concern is relevant to the essential selection criteria for the role. If it is, Jo needs to think about how the assessment process may tease out this information, for example asking referees about time management ability.

Finally, Jo reminds herself that there are other applicants who she has no prior knowledge of, and could very well have shortcomings in this area. If the process is going to scrutinise Rae's time management skills, the same should apply to the other applicants.

By following this thinking process, Jo is making sure her prior knowledge can be appropriately tested in selection process, without compromising the process.

## Referee checks

Referee checks are an essential due diligence check used to gain information from someone who has direct personal knowledge of an applicant. They're a valuable tool for selection panels in assessing applications and they help in:

- verifying or evidencing past and current performance in employment, including conduct and behaviour
- verifying or evidencing knowledge, values and skills
- filling gaps in information
- expanding on an applicant's abilities, leadership and experience
- obtaining additional information
- exploring any concerns that might impact on the applicant's ability to undertake the role.

To check the reliability of referee statements, the panel should:

- ask specific questions that evidence an applicant's skills and experience
- ask questions specific to each applicant – panels are not required to ask all referees the same questions

- seek information specific to the referee’s knowledge of the applicant – not every referee can comment on all aspects of an applicant’s skills, experience or performance
- ask clarifying questions
- ask about areas of potential development that relate to the vacancy and are specific to the applicant
- ask about any performance or conduct issues
- use more than 1 referee to corroborate information
- seek evidence of skills and experience if not provided by the applicant
- ask clarifying questions about any areas of concern, including unsatisfactory performance or conduct issues
- where referees provide conflicting information, make further inquiry.

There’s no limit to the number of referees that can be contacted about any applicant.

The panel should be satisfied they have taken every reasonable step to seek the information required.

## Contact

### Employee Relations unit

Phone: 8226 1342

Email: [education.ecu@sa.gov.au](mailto:education.ecu@sa.gov.au)

## Related information

- [Traineeship selection panel forms](#)
- [Seconded teachers conditions policy](#)
- [Standardising public sector employment conditions](#)
- [Recruiting teachers](#)
- [Recruiting preschool staff](#)
- [Recruiting ancillary staff](#)
- [Workforce planning](#)
- [Personnel advisory committee](#)
- [Writing position descriptions for teaching positions](#)
- [Working with children check](#)

## Other websites

- [Recruitment Guidelines - Commissioner for public sector employment \(PDF 475KB\)](#)