

Merit Instruction 7

Referees

In selection processes referees provide a valuable adjunct to other relevant information gathered from a range of sources, including confirmation and additional evidence of the capabilities of applicants.

Referee comments can be used to assist in shortlisting applicants, or as a means of verifying information provided by, and the skills of, applicants. Referees may be contacted at any point in the process, and may be contacted more than once.

Referee checks are mandatory for all applicants recommended by the panel.

Where applicants do not meet the essential minimum requirements, the panel is not required to contact referees. Similarly, the panel is not required to seek information from all referees for any one applicant.

Guidelines for obtaining referee reports

Guidelines for obtaining referee reports include the following:

- Panels may seek comment from any nominated referee regardless of the order in which the applicant nominated them.
- Where employees from the site at which the vacancy is advertised are shortlisted it is recommended that a referee other than and/or in addition to a panel member is contacted.
- Questions for the referee must be relevant to the vacancy description and the required capabilities/ criteria.
- Panels must seek comment from referees who can comment appropriately on an applicant's ability to carry out the minimum essential requirements of the role.
- Panels must seek information from appropriate referees regarding whether any areas of concern relating to unsatisfactory performance or conduct issues, relevant to the minimum essential requirements, have been formally raised with the applicant and remain unresolved. Panels may then consider this information further to determine an appropriate course of action prior to recommendation.
- Referees should be informed that a summary of their comments may be provided to the applicant at the conclusion of the selection process.
- While it is recommended that all panellists be present to hear all referee comments there may be circumstances where this is not possible. Where this is the case good practice recommends that at least two panel members should be present for each referee's comments. Comments may be made either in written form or verbally, and then reported back to the panel as a whole.
- Verbal comments from referees should be recorded and read back to the referee to ensure accuracy of content and emphasis.
- Referees should be contacted based on the needs of the panel to determine accurate information about an applicant.
- Where referees provide conflicting information, this should be further explored by the panel.
- The name and position of any referee contacted during the selection process, along with details of the questions asked of them and a summary of their responses should be clearly documented in the panel report.

Role of Manager and Referees

When contacted for a reference, or when negotiating an employee transfer, managers are obliged to disclose truthfully to potential managers any relevant information relating to an employee's unsatisfactory performance or an investigation into their conduct.

Similarly, employees who are contacted for referee reports in relation to a colleague are obliged to provide balanced and truthful information.

Shortlisted applicants and referee reports

A referee check is mandatory if an applicant is to be recommended.

Where the information in regard to a particular applicant is clear, and that applicant will definitely not be recommended, it may not be necessary to contact that applicant's referees. However, referee contact is strongly recommended for all shortlisted applicants. Panels must clearly document in the panel report any reasons for the decision not to contact referees for shortlisted applicants.

Persons not nominated as referees

Persons not nominated as referees by an applicant may be contacted in instances where a nominated referee is unable to provide the relevant information or does not have a comprehensive knowledge of an applicant's relevant work performance.

Where a panel identifies a potential referee not nominated by the applicant, the applicant must be informed of the panel's intention to contact that person prior to contact. However, the panel does not require an applicant's permission to make that contact. The panel must record, and appropriately consider, any concerns or objections on behalf of an applicant before contacting the referee, but should not be dissuaded from conducting the desired referee check if deemed necessary.

Ethical Conduct Unit

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