

## COMMUNITY CHILD CARE

# RECRUITING STAFF:

## Referee checks

*When services recruit staff, it is important to establish 'effective, transparent and equitable recruitment processes ...' (ACECQA 2011, p. 111). These processes include writing position descriptions, advertising positions, developing interview processes and undertaking staff selection. As part of the interview process, members of the selection panel will need to contact referees of the final applicants.*

Contacting referees is an important part of the decision-making process as it can assist the selection panel in determining the most suitable applicant for a position. This may be particularly important if the panel members have different perspectives about the applicant's skills and are seeking further information to make a final decision. In instances when all panel members are satisfied that they have found a suitable applicant for the role, referee checks are still important to verify the experience and skills of the applicant and to check if there are any concerns about skill level or workplace performance that the panel has not yet considered.

All applicants should be informed during the interview that referees are contacted as part of the final selection process. The panel should confirm with the applicant that the referee details are current and, if necessary, seek additional referees. This can also be addressed by indicating the number and type of referees required when advertising the position. The panel should consider the validity of the referees by reflecting on the following questions:

- ▶ What is the relationship between the referee and the applicant?
- ▶ Has the referee known the applicant in a professional capacity, and if so, when and for how long?
- ▶ Is the referee able to provide relevant information about the applicant's work history and performance?
- ▶ Has the referee observed the applicant demonstrating the skills and knowledge required for the position?

While it is useful to have a current employer or supervisor as a referee, the applicant may have reasons as to why they have not specified their immediate manager as a referee. This should be discussed with the applicant during the interview and if necessary, alternative referees sought. If the panel believes that a referee is not suitable, it is important to ask the applicant for other referees and indicate the type of referee being sought. For example, the panel may ask for a person the applicant worked with in the last three to five years, their manager or supervisor. It is essential that the panel only contact the referees provided by the applicant. Contact three referees whenever possible, with two as

a minimum. Referees need to be professional referees and at least one of them should be a current or previous line manager. Some organisations only permit basic information about an employee's work history, such as position, dates of employment, salary, to be discussed. This should be considered when determining the validity of a referee.

Referees can be a valuable source of information about an applicant's professional skills and work performance, and give employers an opportunity to confirm details provided in the interview process. The service or selection panel should develop a pro forma with questions and space to record the referees' responses. This can be used as a record of the referee check. The panel should establish a list of questions that will be used consistently with each referee. However, the panel members may need to ask additional questions to ascertain certain details. Referee responses should be formally recorded using accurate and objective language, and, if possible, the specific wording used by the referee. Any additional questions or comments should also be recorded.

### Privacy

Referees should be made aware that information they provide will be recorded and discussed with other panel members in a confidential manner. The Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988 outlines the protection of individual privacy, including information recorded during recruitment processes such as reference checks. Equal opportunity legislation also applies to reference checks and should be used to develop non-discriminatory questions and records. As individuals may have access to these records under Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation, it is essential that all records are objective and stored confidentially in accordance with legislative or service requirements.

### What do we ask the referee?

Begin the discussion by stating your name, your role and the reason you are contacting the referee. Provide an explanation of the position or role that the applicant is being selected for and give the referee an indication of how long it will take to complete the process. If it is not a convenient time, you may need to contact the referee at a later time or date. It is important to ask questions that are open ended and solicit general comments about the applicant, however if the referee is providing limited responses you may need to ask additional questions or seek further clarification. The following topics should be covered when developing questions for referees, however the service may include other areas that are relevant to a specific role, address the selection criteria or take up issues raised during the interview.

Information sought from the referee can include:

- ▶ Professional experience — dates of employment, position, skills and abilities
- ▶ Specific roles and responsibilities
- ▶ Problem-solving skills
- ▶ Personal qualities
- ▶ Interpersonal relationships
- ▶ Strengths and challenges
- ▶ Performance appraisal results
- ▶ Punctuality, absenteeism
- ▶ Reasons for the applicant leaving
- ▶ Comments on re-employing the applicant
- ▶ Any other comments

On completion of the discussion, thank the referee for their time and assistance.

### **After the referee check has been completed**

The information recorded during this process should be shared and discussed with the other panel members to assist in determining the successful applicant. It is recommended that for unsuccessful applicants the record of referee checks along with their other recruitment documentation should be destroyed six months after the selection process is finalised (except with a candidate's permission, if you wish to retain their application to consider for future vacancies). The referee-check documentation for the successful applicant should form part of their employment records.

### **Sample referee check pro forma**

The attached pro forma can be adapted to create a referee check template specific to each service. Each service will need to decide on and include specific questions related to the key duties and skills required for each position.

### **References and further reading:**

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) 2011, *Guide to the National Framework*, viewed 20 December 2013,

<http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/National-Quality-Framework-Resources-Kit/NQF01-Guide-to-the-NQF-130902.pdf>

Department of Planning and Community Development – Office for the Community Sector 2012, *The Basics of Recruitment for NFP Community Organisations*, State of Victoria, Melbourne.

Department of Planning and Community Development 2010, *Best Practice Recruitment and Selection – a Tool Kit for the Community Sector*, State of Victoria, Melbourne.

Public Interest Law Clearinghouse (PILCH) 2011, *Discrimination in Recruiting Employees and Volunteers*, viewed 20 December 2013,

<http://www.pilch.org.au/Assets/Files/Discrimination%20in%20recruiting%20employees%20and%20volunteers%201%20August%202012.pdf>

### **Community Child Care resource sheets**

Position descriptions for centre-based education and care services  
Recruiting staff: The interview

#### **Useful contacts:**

#### **Community Child Care**

Phone: 1800 177 017  
email: [reception@cccinc.org.au](mailto:reception@cccinc.org.au)  
[www.cccinc.org.au](http://www.cccinc.org.au)

#### **Gowrie Victoria**

Phone: 1800 103 670 or (03) 9347 6388  
email: [psc@gowrievictoria.org.au](mailto:psc@gowrievictoria.org.au)  
[www.gowrievictoria.org.au](http://www.gowrievictoria.org.au)

#### **Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission**

[www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au](http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au)

#### **Department of Planning and Community Development**

[www.dpcd.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au)

#### **Justice Connect**

Provides free and low-cost legal information, training and legal advice to not-for-profit community organisations.

<http://www.justiceconnect.org.au/our-programs/not-for-profit-law>

Phone: 1800 706 220



## SAMPLE REFEREE CHECK PRO FORMA

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**Service name:**

**Name of applicant:**

**Position applied for:**

**Name of person completing referee check:**

**Date:**

**Name of referee:**

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Can you describe how long and in what capacity you have known the applicant?

*(Use this to confirm employment status, dates and role of applicant)*

What skills and knowledge do you think the applicant has that will equip them to do this role?

Can you describe the applicant's ability to \_\_\_\_\_ *(insert key duties of role applied for, e.g. plan for, document and assess children's learning or provide leadership and support to a team of educators)*

Can you give an example of when you have seen the applicant \_\_\_\_\_ *(insert key skills required in role applied for, e.g. communicate with a family about a sensitive matter, or work in a culturally competent way to include a child from a culturally and linguistically diverse background)*

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What do you see as the applicant's key strengths?

Can you outline how the applicant functioned as a member of the work team?

*(prompt for the following if the referee does not comment on reliability, punctuality, communication with other team members, flexibility and any other requirements relevant to workplace)*

What do you see as the applicant's key areas for growth? Is there any aspect of this role that you would think they need professional support or training in?

Would you employ them again or like to work with them again?

Any other comments?



*CCC provides leadership, advocacy and support to build the capacity of the children's services sector and promote public support for community owned, not for profit services.*

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