

## Reference Request

Experience shows that how a person has behaved in the past is one of the most reliable indicators of how they will behave in the future.

**It is vital therefore that references on people seeking work with vulnerable groups are seen and used as a tool to obtain relevant information to guide decisions about selection.**

References are just as important for voluntary posts as for paid employment. A similar process should be followed when seeking volunteers for the kinds of posts that require a formal recruitment process. However, prospective volunteers might not be employed or have previous experience of working with vulnerable groups. Consequently, organisations may have to be prepared to be flexible about the kinds of people from whom they will accept references and the nature of those references. Nevertheless, it is important to make background enquiries and checks on volunteers as well as on paid staff.

### When should references be obtained?

It is helpful if wherever possible that references should be obtained before interview. Relevant information can then be taken into account and, if necessary, issues explored further before or at the interview. This must be explained in the information sent to applicants and on the application form. Careful consideration will need to be given to any request by an applicant to delay seeking references until it is known whether he or she is to be offered the post.

### Scrutinising references

It is very important to read references carefully and thoroughly to make sure that:

- The referee has answered all the questions.
- There are no vague or ambiguous statements.

It is also vital to compare the information about the applicant provided by the referee with the information the applicant has given about him or herself and his or her experience and background.

If the references reveal any discrepancies or inconsistencies, or any doubts or concerns about the person's suitability, the issues should be followed up and explored with the referee. This is probably best done by telephone, but it is important to keep a written record of the conversation and if the issues are significant, to confirm your understanding in writing to the referee. This is particularly important if the information is such that you decide not to consider the person further, or that you need to explore the issues with the applicant.

## Example reference request: a person with no experience of working with vulnerable groups

Dear [name of referee]

[name of applicant] – application for post of [job title]

I am writing to seek a reference in respect of [name of applicant], who has applied for the post of [job title] at [name of organisation].

I am enclosing a copy of the job description and the person specification for the post. I shall be grateful for your views on [name of applicant]'s suitability for this position. Please indicate your knowledge of his or her qualifications and ability to carry out the duties specified in the job description and how he or she meets the requirements of the person specification.

(where appropriate) [Name] states that he or she is currently employed by [you/name of employing organisation] as a [...] with responsibility for [...] and during his or her employment with [you/name of organisation] has also gained experience in [...]. Please indicate whether those statements are accurate along with details of [name]'s current salary. Please also state whether [name]'s performance of his or her duties while in your employment has been satisfactory. If [name]'s performance has not been satisfactory in all respects please provide details of the areas needing improvement and any remedial action taken.

As [name] is applying for a post that involves working with adults at risk, please state whether you know of any reason why he or she might be considered unsuitable to work with vulnerable people or whether you have any concern about his or her suitability for such work. If you do know of any reason or concern, please give details.

Finally please say how long you have known [name] and in what capacity. I shall be grateful if you will let me have your reply by [date] to help us avoid delaying the selection process.

**NOTE** As a result of the Equality Act 2010, it is no longer appropriate to ask referees for information relating to absence or sickness record until after the preferred candidate has been selected unless the post has an exception.

