



Reference Checks

WHAT ARE REFERENCE CHECKS?

Past behaviour is often the best predictor of future performance. Reference checking is one of the most effective methods of assessing past behaviour. Structured reference checking should be regarded as an integral part of the selection process and not seen as an 'add-on'. It must be done for all candidates that the selection committee recommends as suitable for appointment.

If possible, talk to a range of people who know the candidate's work, e.g. management committee and coordinator. You must seek the candidate's approval before contacting their referees.

These referees must be able to provide information about the applicant's work performance and good character. If the applicant is currently employed one referee should be the applicant's current supervisor, unless acceptable reasons are provided for not nominating that person. The applicant may give their previous employer as a referee if they do not wish for their current manager to be aware that they are seeking other employment. You will have to decide if you find this acceptable.

THE VALUE OF REFEREES

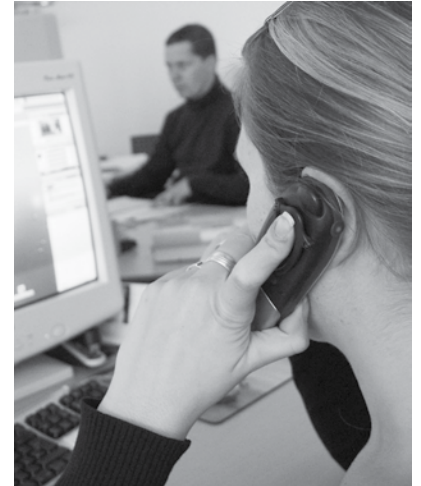
The use of referees is often an undervalued part of the employment process and can be sometimes overlooked however; a referee's comments can provide the selection committee with a lot of additional information about the potential employee and their suitability to do the job. This process when carried out well can be one of the most powerful tools in job selection. It can be the next best process to trying the person out for the job. It is also essential when employing people to work with children, that we check more than one reference.

Finding the right person for the job can be time consuming nevertheless, it can be a costly exercise to employ the wrong person for the job. To make sure you obtain the right information from referees certain procedures should be adhered to.

METHODS OF OBTAINING REFERENCE CHECKS

The most effective way is face to face, however this may not always be possible, so over the phone is the next best option. People are more likely to say things over the phone

than they are willing to put in writing. A conversation also allows the opportunity to explore issues, whereas written references can leave much unsaid. So call rather than write, if possible.



WHO SHOULD CARRY OUT THE CHECKS?

The most experienced and competent member of the selection committee should be chosen to contact the referees. The selection panel can develop a set of questions to be used. The same questions should be used for all referees and candidates.

STEPS IN CONDUCTING THE REFERENCE CHECK

The following steps are suggested for conducting reference checks:

- ★ Once interviews have been completed decide on the most likely candidates under consideration. Prepare structured questions to ask referees, use the information in this Factsheet and remember, this is an excellent opportunity to clarify any areas of concern.
- ★ It is a good idea for one member of the interview panel to take on this task. They will first need to clarify the following:- Who they are; the reason for the inquiry; the capacity in which the referee

is acting, in other words, the position the referee holds within the organisation; this is also a good time to establish the relationship between the referee and the applicant and if there have been any conflicts.

- ★ Questions should relate only to the selection criteria and the applicant's work performance/ good character. You can also ask the referee to clarify the applicant's qualifications and give their opinion on their ability to carry out the job they are applying for.
- ★ A written record of all information that the referee supplies should be retained. Information obtained from referees must be discussed with the other member of the selection panel to enable a fully informed decision to be made.

You should always seek permission from the applicant (at the interview is the best option) to contact their suggested referees. It might be a good idea to have a consent form so that you have their authorisation in writing.

■ SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO ASK A PROFESSIONAL REFEREE.

- ★ Would you please confirm that the applicant worked with you? (dates of employment, job title, etc.)
- ★ Explain the person's duties.
- ★ How did adults and children interact with the applicant?
- ★ Are there any concerns that you would like to raise regarding the applicant?
- ★ Why did the applicant leave?
- ★ Would you say the applicant is honest and trustworthy?
- ★ Would you re-appoint the applicant again?
- ★ Would you recommend the applicant for the position as (describe the vacancy you wish to fill)?

■ SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO ASK A PERSONAL REFEREE

- ★ How long have you known and how well do you know the applicant?
- ★ What is your relationship with the applicant?
- ★ Tell me about the applicant's personal interests?
- ★ What if any, community interests does the applicant have?

- ★ How would you describe the applicant's personality?
- ★ Tell us a bit about how the applicant interacts with adults and children?
- ★ What sort of discipline does the applicant use with children?
- ★ Would you recommend the applicant for the position you are trying to fill (give a description of the job)?
- ★ And finally, would you leave your own children (if you have any) in the care of the applicant?

As you can see, one referee may not be able to answer all the questions. To build a complete picture, it is important to speak to other referees who have observed the candidate in different environments.

■ THE WORKING WITH CHILDREN CHECK (WWCC)

The working with children check is a formal process of checks to help determine someone's suitability to work with children. This enables OOSH centres to have a potential employee screened for a criminal record check and several other relevant checks. Carrying out these checks is mandatory and goes some way in helping to create safe child-related workplaces. **For further information contact the Commission for Children and Young People on (02) 9286 7219.**

■ OTHER RELEVANT OOSH FACTSHEETS:

- ★ Employment Offer and Contracts



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