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Recruitment: an introduction

Looks at the main stages of the recruitment and resourcing process, from defining the role to making the appointment

Introduction

Good recruitment is vital, especially when labour markets are tight. It ensures that the workforce has the relevant skills and abilities for the organisation's current and future needs. Effective resourcing is not just about filling an immediate vacancy but about impacting the long-term success of the business, using workforce planning data to understand the skills needed for organisational performance.

This factsheet looks at what recruitment and resourcing involves and outlines the UK law affecting recruitment activities.

See the [full A-Z list of all CIPD factsheets](#).

What is recruitment?

Recruitment and resourcing involve attracting and selecting individuals into a job role. Recruiting suitable candidates is a critical activity, not just for the HR team but increasingly for line managers. Everyone involved in recruitment must make effective and fair recruitment decisions.

The recruitment process will vary depending on an organisation's size and resources. However, each of the following stages should be followed:

- Defining the role.
- Attracting applicants.
- Managing the application and selection process.

- Making the appointment.

Key points for recruitment and resourcing professionals

It's important to be aware of the labour market trends that affect recruitment and resourcing. For the UK, our quarterly [Labour market outlook](#) surveys monitor UK economic and labour market indicators and recruitment outlook. Our 2022 [Resourcing and talent planning survey](#) provides data on UK recruitment and retention trends. For information about the implications of Brexit in recruitment and resourcing, visit our [Brexit hub](#) and our factsheet on [employing overseas workers in the UK](#).

The recruitment process is also about candidates finding out more about the organisation and considering if it's where they want to work. Flexibility and work-life balance are often important considerations. First impressions matter; the process should be transparent, timely and fair for all candidates. Candidates can share their experiences online, so inefficient, poorly designed recruitment processes can negatively impact the [employer brand](#) and the ability to attract candidates.

Another key part of resourcing is attracting a wide range of candidates. [Equality, diversity and inclusion](#) should be integral throughout the process, with practices and systems regularly reviewed to ensure resourcing methods are inclusive and hidden bias is removed. Everyone taking part in activities such as shortlisting and interviewing must be aware of relevant recruitment legislation and the need to avoid discrimination in recruitment and selection. CIPD members can see our [Recruitment and selection law Q&As](#) for more on the UK legal aspects of recruitment. Our guides on [inclusive recruitment](#) for organisations and managers provide evidence based actions on creating a fair and inclusive recruitment and selection process.

Defining the role

Job analysis

Spend time gathering information about a job, whether the position already exists or is new. When advertising for existing roles, assess the current needs of the role, rather than relying on previous adverts.

The job description and person specification should include:

- The job's purpose and the duties involved.
- How and where it could be carried out.
- What outputs would be expected of the jobholder.
- How it fits into the organisations' structure.

Job description

The job description provides an overview of the role, including responsibilities and objectives. It can also provide clarity during induction and later, on performance and objectives.

Person specification

The person specification states the criteria for selection. Make the role requirements clear, specific, and behaviour-based. Ensure the requirements included are absolutely necessary for the role.

Competence and competency frameworks are sometimes substituted for job or person specifications, but these should include an indication of roles and responsibilities. See our factsheet on [competence and competency frameworks](#).

Job advertisements

Job adverts should give clear, accurate information about the organisation and the role with bias free language. They should include:

- Job description and person specification.
- Job location.
- Type of employment offered - for example, is it a fixed-term role?
- The organisation's activities and values.
- [Reward and benefits](#) package.
- [Flexible working](#) practices, where available.
- Details of how to apply and the deadline.

Attracting applicants

There are many ways to generate interest from potential candidates.

Employee referral schemes

These schemes usually incentivise employees to assist in the recruiting friends or

contacts. Employers should not rely on such schemes at the expense of attracting a diverse workforce and they should complement other attraction methods. An alternative approach to support greater diversity and inclusion is to use targeted 'word of mouth' referrals to encourage current staff to share vacancies with underrepresented groups in their networks.

External recruitment

Common ways of attracting candidates include the employer's website, commercial job boards, recruitment agencies, and professional networking sites such as LinkedIn.

Other common approaches include links with local colleges/universities, working with the local jobcentre and using local networks. Using multiple and non-traditional outreach methods widens the talent pool. See our guides to [inclusive recruitment](#) for placing job adverts where they are more likely to be seen by marginalised applicants.

Most candidates expect to search and apply for jobs online, meaning employers need to pay attention to their corporate website and their online [employer brand](#).

External recruitment services

Recruitment agencies or consultants offer services such as attracting candidates, managing candidate responses, screening and shortlisting, or running assessment centres on the employer's behalf. They need a good understanding of the organisation and its requirements. These services might also be provided by an outsourcing provider - find out more in our [HR outsourcing](#) factsheet.

Internal recruitment

Providing opportunities for development and career progression can help retention and support succession planning. For more, see our [talent management](#) factsheet.

Managing the application and selection process

Application forms

Application forms allow for information to be presented in a consistent way. This makes it easier to collect information from job applicants systematically and objectively assess their suitability. Ensure that you offer application forms in different formats to support

accessibility.

CVs and LinkedIn profile

Using CVs or LinkedIn profiles means that candidates are not restricted to a standard application form. However, CVs and LinkedIn profiles may include surplus material and often vary in format which undermines their consistent assessment.

See our [inclusive recruitment guide](#) on how using CVs can get in the way of inclusive recruitment and the benefits of removing identifying information from CVs and application forms before hiring managers review them.

Managing applications

All applications should be treated confidentially and circulated only to those involved in the recruitment process. Prompt acknowledgment of an application is good practice and presents a positive image of the organisation.

Proactively ask applicants if they need reasonable adjustments during the recruitment process. For example, as well as helping those with a physical disability, recruitment processes might be adapted for [neurodivergent people](#).

Selecting candidates

Selecting candidates involves two main processes:

- **Shortlisting** those with the necessary skills to proceed to assessment stage.
- **Assessing** those candidates to find out who is most suitable for the role. See more on this stage in our [selection methods](#) factsheet

Making the appointment

UK employers are responsible for checking applicants have the right to work in the UK and the appropriate qualifications or credentials. See more in our guide to [pre-employment checks](#) and our factsheet on [employing overseas workers in the UK](#).

References

References are most frequently sought after the applicant has been given a 'provisional offer'.

Recruitment policies should clearly state how references will be used and what kind of references will be expected. These rules must be applied consistently, and candidates should always be informed of the procedure for taking up references.

CIPD members can find out more on the UK legal aspects in our [references Q&As](#).

Medical questionnaires and making reasonable adjustments

Physical or medical requirement should be made clear in the job advertisement or other recruitment literature.

In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to ask candidates to complete a medical questionnaire before being offered a job. Only essential medical issues should be discussed at this stage. The legal position on disability and employment must be observed. See more in our factsheet on [disability and employment](#).

Employers should also ask candidates if they need any adjustments or have specific access requirements to attend an interview or undertake a test.

Employment offer

Offers of employment should always be made in writing, but a verbal offer of employment made in an interview is as legally binding.

UK employers must also know what information must be given by law in contracts of employment. See more in our [contracts of employment](#) factsheet. CIPD members can use our [Terms and conditions of employment Q&As](#).

Unsuccessful candidates should be notified promptly in writing, ideally with feedback. If psychometric tests are used, feedback on the results, delivered by a qualified person, should also be offered.

Joining the organisation

A well-planned [induction](#) enables new employees to become fully operational quickly.

Documentation and evaluation

The recruitment process should be documented accurately, and access limited to recruitment staff for confidentiality reasons. Data protection and GDPR in the workplace needs to be carefully followed, as does retention of HR records. See more in our [data protection](#) factsheet.

Information should be kept for sufficient time to allow any complaints to be handled - our factsheet on [retaining HR records](#) has guidance on how long records should be kept.

Monitoring the diversity of applicants, from the initial stages through to a person being appointed, is good practice. Action should then be taken to address any issues.

Using metrics such as cost of hire, candidate experience ratings and time to hire can also provide insight into the effectiveness of recruitment processes. Our [HR and standards](#) factsheet has information on standards relating to recruitment, such as cost of hire and workforce planning.

Useful contacts and further reading

Contacts

[Acas - Hiring someone](#)

[GOV.UK - Equalities Office](#)

[GOV.UK - Recruiting and hiring](#)

[GOV.UK - Employers: preventing discrimination - recruitment](#)

[Recruitment & Employment Confederation](#)

[Safer Jobs](#)

[Voluntary code of conduct for executive search firms](#)

Books and reports

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE CARE AND RESETTLEMENT OF OFFENDERS (NACRO). (2015) *Recruiting fairly and safely: a practical guide to employing ex-offenders*. London: Nacro.

TAYLOR, S. (2018) *Resourcing and talent management*. 7th ed. London: CIPD and Kogan Page.

Visit the [CIPD and Kogan Page Bookshop](#) to see all our priced publications currently in print.

Journal articles

ACIKGOZ, Y. (2019) Employee recruitment and job search: towards a multi-level integration. *Human Resource Management Review*. Vol 29, No 1. pp1-13.

BROWN, P. (2018) It's time to put data at the heart of the recruitment process. *People Management* (online). 13 February.

CAPPELLI, P. (2019) Your approach to hiring is all wrong. *Harvard Business Review*. May-June. Reviewed in *In a Nutshell*, issue 89.

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW. (2021) Re-engineering the Recruitment Process. March-April.

INGOLD, J. and VALIZADE, D. (2017) Employers' recruitment of disadvantaged groups: exploring the effect of active labour market programme agencies as labour market intermediaries. *Human Resource Management Journal*. Vol 27, No 4. pp530-547. Reviewed in *In a Nutshell*, issue 73.

JEFFREY, R. (2017) Would you let AI recruit for you? *People Management* (online). 12 December.

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