

# Recruitment and selection

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## THE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESS

The overall aim of the recruitment and selection process should be to obtain at minimum cost the number and quality of employees required to satisfy the human resource needs of the company. The three stages of recruitment and selection dealt with in this chapter are:

1. *defining requirements* – preparing job descriptions and specifications; deciding terms and conditions of employment;
2. *attracting candidates* – reviewing and evaluating alternative sources of applicants, inside and outside the company, advertising, using agencies and consultants;
3. *selecting candidates* – sifting applications, interviewing, testing, assessing candidates, assessment centres, offering employment, obtaining references; preparing contracts of employment.

Selection interviewing and selection testing are dealt with in Chapters 28 and 29.

## DEFINING REQUIREMENTS

The number and categories of people required should be specified in the recruitment

programme, which is derived from the human resource plan. In addition, there will be demands for replacements or for new jobs to be filled, and these demands should be checked to ensure that they are justified. It may be particularly necessary to check on the need for a replacement or the level or type of employee that is specified. Requirements for particular positions are set out in the form of role profiles and person specifications. These provide the basic information required to draft advertisements, brief agencies or recruitment consultants, and assess candidates. A role profile listing competence, skill, educational and experience requirements produces the job criteria against which candidates will be assessed at the interview or by means of psychological tests.

### *Role profiles for recruitment purposes*

Role profiles, as described in Chapter 13, define the overall purpose of the role, its reporting relationships and key result areas. They may also include a list of the competencies required. These will be technical competencies (knowledge and skills) and any specific behavioural competencies attached to the role. The latter would be selected from the organization's competency framework and modified as required to fit the demands made on role holders. For recruiting purposes, the profile is extended to include information on terms and conditions (pay, benefits, hours of work), special requirements such as mobility, travelling or unsocial hours, and training, development and career opportunities. The recruitment role profile provides the basis for a person specification.

### *Person specifications*

A person specification, also known as a recruitment, personnel or job specification, defines the education, training, qualifications and experience. The technical competencies as set out in the role profile may also be included.

A person specification can be set out under the following headings:

- *technical competencies* – what the individual needs to know and be able to do to carry out the role, including any special aptitudes or skills required;
- *behavioural and attitudinal requirements* – the types of behaviours required for successful performance in the role will be related to the core values and competency framework of the organization to ensure that cultural fit is achieved when selecting people. But role-specific information is also needed, which should be developed by analysing the characteristics of existing employees who are carrying out their roles effectively. By defining behavioural requirements it is

possible to elicit information about attitudinal requirements, ie what sort of attitudes are likely to result in appropriate behaviours and successful performance.

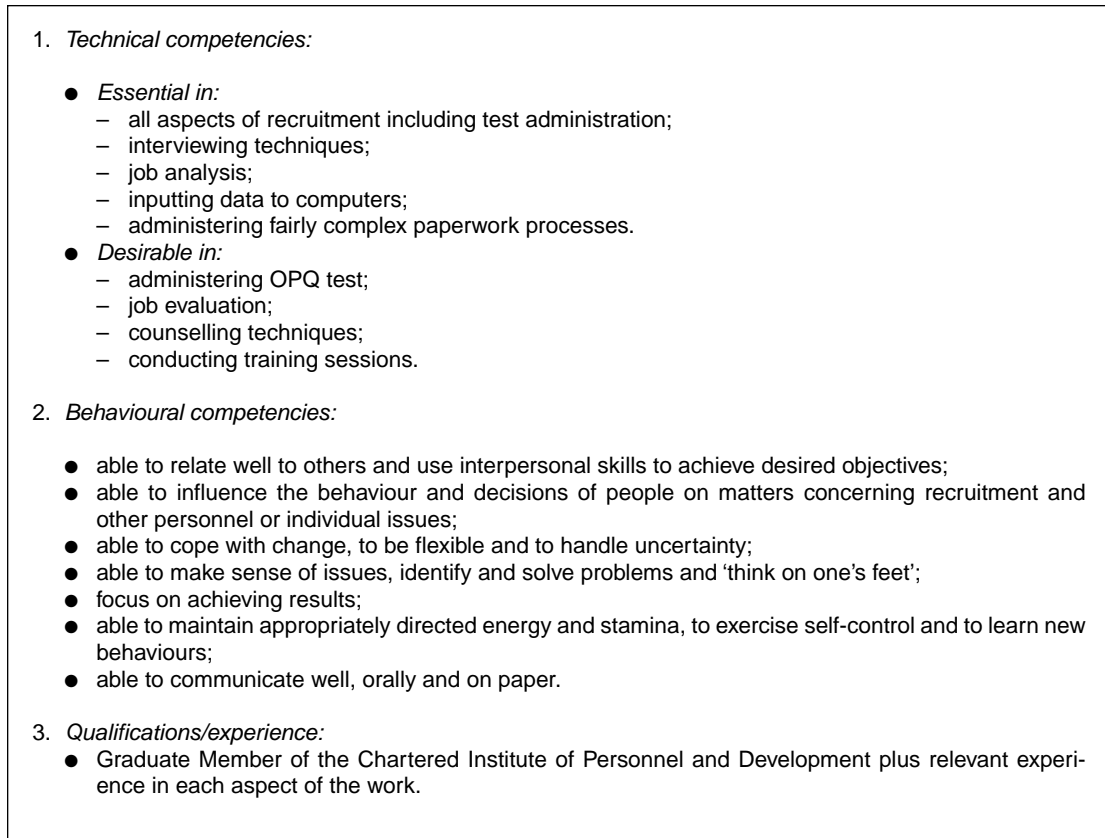
- *qualifications and training* – the professional, technical or academic qualifications required, or the training that the candidate should have undertaken;
- *experience* – in particular, categories of work or organizations; the types of achievements and activities that would be likely to predict success;
- *specific demands* – where the role holder will be expected to achieve in specified areas, eg develop new markets, improve sales, or introduce new systems;
- *organizational fit* – the corporate culture (eg formal or informal) and the need for candidates to be able to work within it;
- *special requirements* – travelling, unsocial hours, mobility, etc;
- *meeting candidate expectations* – the extent to which the organization can meet candidates' expectations in terms of career opportunities, training, security etc.

The behavioural and attitudinal parts of the person specification are used as the basis for structured interviews (see Chapter 28). As reported by *Competency and Emotional Intelligence* (2004), Britannia Building Society recruits on the basis of the candidates' attitudes first, and skills and abilities second. Developing the process involved mapping the Society's values to its core competencies, identifying the sort of competency-based questions that should be asked by interviewers, defining the typical types of responses that candidates might make, and tracking those back to the values.

A role profile (see Chapter 12) will set out output expectations and competency requirements for interviewing purposes (competency-based recruitment is considered in more detail below). But more information may be required to provide the complete picture for advertising and briefing candidates on terms and conditions and career prospects. An example of a person specification is given in Figure 27.1.

The biggest danger to be avoided at this stage is that of overstating the competencies and qualifications required. It is natural to go for the best, but setting an unrealistically high level for candidates increases the problems of attracting them, and results in dissatisfaction when they find their talents are not being used. Understating requirements can be equally dangerous, but it happens much less frequently. The best approach is to distinguish between essential and desirable requirements.

When the requirements have been agreed, they should be analysed under suitable headings. There are various ways of doing this. A basic approach is to set out and define the essential or desirable requirements under the key headings of competencies, qualifications and training and experience. Additional information can be provided on specific demands. It is necessary to spell out separately the terms and conditions of the job.



**Figure 27.1** Person specification for an HR officer

Alternatively, there are the traditional classification schemes although, these are no longer so popular. The most familiar are the seven-point plan developed by Rodger (1952) and the fivefold grading system produced by Munro Fraser (1954).

### *The seven-point plan*

The seven-point plan covers:

1. *physical make-up* – health, physique, appearance, bearing and speech;
2. *attainments* – education, qualifications, experience;
3. *general intelligence* – fundamental intellectual capacity;
4. *special aptitudes* – mechanical, manual dexterity, facility in the use of words or figures;

5. *interests* – intellectual, practical, constructional, physically active, social, artistic;
6. *disposition* – acceptability, influence over others, steadiness, dependability, self-reliance;
7. *circumstances* – domestic circumstances, occupations of family.

### *The fivefold grading system*

The fivefold grading system covers:

1. *impact on others* – physical make-up, appearance, speech and manner;
2. *acquired qualifications* – education, vocational training, work experience;
3. *innate abilities* – natural quickness of comprehension and aptitude for learning;
4. *motivation* – the kinds of goals set by the individual, his or her consistency and determination in following them up, and success in achieving them;
5. *adjustment* – emotional stability, ability to stand up to stress and ability to get on with people.

### *Choice of system*

Of these two systems, the seven-point plan has the longer pedigree. The fivefold grading scheme is simpler, in some ways, and places more emphasis on the dynamic aspects of the applicant's career. Both can provide a good framework for interviewing, but increasingly, interviewers are using a competency-based approach.

### *Using a competency-based approach*

A competency-based approach means that the competencies defined for a role are used as the framework for the selection process. As described by Taylor (2002): 'A competency approach is person-based rather than job-based. The starting point is thus not an analysis of jobs but an analysis of people and what attributes account for their effective and superior performance.' Roberts (1997) suggests that:

The benefit of taking a competencies approach is that people can identify and isolate the key characteristics which would be used as the basis for selection, and that those characteristics will be described in terms which both can understand and agree... . The competencies therefore become a fundamental part of the selection process.

A competencies approach can help to identify which selection techniques, such as psychological testing or assessment centres, are most likely to produce useful evidence. It provides the information required to conduct a structured interview in

which questions can focus on particular competency areas to establish the extent to which candidates meet the specification as set out in competency terms.

The advantages of a competency-based approach have been summarized by Wood and Payne (1998) as follows:

- It increases the accuracy of predictions about suitability.
- It facilitates a closer match between the person's attributes and the demands of the job.
- It helps to prevent interviewers making 'snap' judgements.
- It can underpin the whole range of recruitment techniques – application forms, interviews, tests and assessment centres.

The framework can be defined in terms of technical or work-based competencies, which refer to expectations of what people have to be able to do if they are going to achieve the results required in the job. It can also include definitions of required behavioural competencies, which refer to the personal characteristics and behaviour required for successful performance in such areas as interpersonal skills, leadership, personal drive, communication skills, team membership and analytical ability.

The competencies used for recruitment and selection purposes should meet the following criteria:

- They should focus on areas in which candidates will have demonstrated their competency in their working or academic life – eg leadership, teamwork, initiative.
- They are likely to predict successful job performance, eg achievement motivation.
- They can be assessed in a targeted behavioural event interview in which, for example, if team management is a key competence area, candidates can be asked to give examples of how they have successfully built a team and got it into action.
- They can be used as criteria in an assessment centre (see below).

A competency approach along these lines can provide the most effective means of identifying suitable candidates as part of a systematic selection process.

## ATTRACTING CANDIDATES

Attracting candidates is primarily a matter of identifying, evaluating and using the most appropriate sources of applicants. However, in cases where difficulties in attracting or retaining candidates are being met or anticipated, it may be necessary to

carry out a preliminary study of the factors that are likely to attract or repel candidates – the strengths and weaknesses of the organization as an employer.

### *Analysis of recruitment strengths and weaknesses*

The analysis of strengths and weaknesses should cover such matters as the national or local reputation of the organization, pay, employee benefits and working conditions, the intrinsic interest of the job, security of employment, opportunities for education and training, career prospects, and the location of the office or plant. These need to be compared with the competition in order that a list of what are, in effect, selling points can be drawn up as in a marketing exercise, in which the preferences of potential customers are compared with the features of the product in order that those aspects that are likely to provide the most appeal to the customers can be emphasized. Candidates are, in a sense, selling themselves, but they are also buying what the organization has to offer. If, in the latter sense, the labour market is a buyer's market, then the company that is selling itself to candidates must study their needs in relation to what it can provide.

The aim of the study might be to prepare a better image of the organization (the employer brand) for use in advertisements, brochures or interviews. Or it might have the more constructive aim of showing where the organization needs to improve as an employer if it is to attract more or better candidates *and* to retain those selected. The study could make use of an attitude survey to obtain the views of existing employees. One such survey mounted by the writer in an engineering company wishing to attract science graduates established that the main concern of the graduates was that they would be able to use and develop the knowledge they had gained at university. As a result, special brochures were written for each major discipline giving technical case histories of the sort of work graduates carried out. These avoided the purple passages used in some brochures (which the survey established were distinctly off-putting to most students) and proved to be a most useful recruitment aid. Strong measures were also taken to ensure that research managers made proper use of the graduates they recruited.

### *Sources of candidates*

First consideration should be given to internal candidates, although some organizations with powerful equal opportunity policies (often local authorities) insist that all internal candidates should apply for vacancies on the same footing as external candidates. If there are no people available within the organization the main sources of candidates, as described below, are advertising, the internet, and outsourcing to consultants or agencies.

## ADVERTISING

Advertising is the most obvious method of attracting candidates. Nevertheless, the first question to ask is whether an advertisement is really justified. This means looking at the alternative sources mentioned above and confirming, preferably on the basis of experience, that they will not do. Consideration should be given as to whether it might be better to use an agency or a selection consultant. When making the choice, refer to the three criteria of cost, speed and the likelihood of providing good candidates. The objectives of an advertisement should be to:

- *attract attention* – it must compete for the interest of potential candidates against other employers;
- *create and maintain interest* – it has to communicate in an attractive and interesting way information about the job, the company, the terms and conditions of employment and the qualifications required;
- *stimulate action* – the message needs to be conveyed in a manner that will not only focus people's eyes on the advertisement but also encourage them to read to the end, as well as prompt a sufficient number of replies from good candidates.

To achieve these aims, it is necessary to carry out the actions set out below.

### *Analyse the requirement, likely sources and job features*

First it is necessary to establish how many jobs have to be filled and by when. Then turn to the job description and person specification to obtain information on responsibilities, qualifications and experience required.

The next step is to consider where suitable candidates are likely to come from; the companies, jobs or education establishments they are in; and the parts of the country where they can be found.

Finally, define the terms and conditions of the job (pay and benefits) and think about what about the job or the organization is likely to attract good candidates so that the most can be made of these factors in the advertisement. Consider also what might put them off, for example the location of the job, in order that objections can be anticipated. Analyse previous successes or failures to establish what does or does not work.

### *Decide who does what*

When planning a campaign or recruiting key people, there is much to be said for using an advertising agency. An agency can provide expertise in producing



eye-catching headlines and writing good copy. It can devise an attractive house style and prepare layouts that make the most of the text, the logo and any 'white space' round the advertisement. Moreover, it can advise on ways of achieving visual impact by the use of illustrations and special typographical features. Finally, an agency can advise on media, help in response analysis and take up the burden of placing advertisements.

The following steps should be taken when choosing an advertising agency:

- Check its experience in handling recruitment advertising.
- See examples of its work.
- Check with clients on the level of service provided.
- Meet the staff who will work on the advertisements.
- Check the fee structure.
- Discuss methods of working.

### *Write the copy*

A recruitment advertisement should start with a compelling headline and then contain information on:

- the organization;
- the job;
- the person required – qualifications, experience etc;
- the pay and benefits offered;
- the location;
- the action to be taken.

The headline is all-important. The simplest and most obvious approach is to set out the job title in bold type. To gain attention, it is advisable to quote the salary (if it is worth quoting) and to put 'plus car' if a company car is provided. Salaries and cars are major attractions and should be stated clearly. Applicants are rightly suspicious of clauses such as 'salary will be commensurate with age and experience' or 'salary negotiable'. This usually means either that the salary is so low that the company is afraid to reveal it, or that salary policies are so incoherent that the company has no idea what to offer until someone tells them what he or she wants.

The name of the company should be given. Do not use box numbers – if you want to remain anonymous, use a consultant. Add any selling points, such as growth or diversification, and any other areas of interest to potential candidates, such as career

prospects. The essential features of the job should be conveyed by giving a brief description of what the job holder will do and, as far as space permits, the scope and scale of activities. Create interest in the job but do not oversell it.

The qualifications and experience required should be stated as factually as possible. There is no point in overstating requirements and seldom any point in specifying exactly how much experience is wanted. This will vary from candidate to candidate, and the other details about the job and the rate of pay should provide them with enough information about the sort of experience required. Be careful about including a string of personal qualities such as drive, determination and initiative. These have no real meaning to candidates. Phrases such as 'proven track record' and 'successful experience' are equally meaningless. No one will admit to not having either of them.

The advertisement should end with information on how the candidate should apply. 'Brief but comprehensive details' is a good phrase. Candidates can be asked to write, but useful alternatives are to ask them to telephone or to come along for an informal chat at a suitable venue.

Remember that the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 makes it unlawful to discriminate in an advertisement by favouring either sex, the only exceptions being a few jobs that can be done only by one sex. Advertisements must therefore avoid sexist job titles such as 'salesman' or 'stewardess'. They must refer to a neutral title such as 'sales representative', or amplify the description to cover both sexes by stating 'steward or stewardess'. It is accepted, however, that certain job titles are unisex and therefore non-discriminatory. These include director, manager, executive and officer. It is best to avoid any reference to the sex of the candidate by using neutral or unisex titles and referring only to the 'candidate' or the 'applicant'. Otherwise you must specify 'man or woman' or 'he or she'.

The Race Relations Act 1976 has similar provisions, making unlawful an advertisement that discriminates against any particular race. As long as race is never mentioned or even implied in an advertisement, you should have no problem in keeping within the law.

### *Choose type of advertisement*

The main types of advertisement are the following:

- Classified/run-on, in which copy is run on, with no white space in or around the advertisement and no paragraph spacing or indentation. They are cheap but suitable only for junior or routine jobs.

- Classified/semi-display, in which the headings can be set in capitals, paragraphs can be indented and white space is allowed round the advertisement. They are fairly cheap, and semi-display can be much more effective than run-on advertisements.
- Full display, which are bordered and in which any typeface and illustrations can be used. They can be expensive but obviously make the most impact for managerial, technical and professional jobs.

### *Plan the media*

An advertising agency can advise on the choice of media (press, radio, television) and its cost. *British Rates and Data* (BRAD) can be consulted to give the costs of advertising in particular media.

The so-called 'quality papers' are best for managerial, professional and technical jobs. The popular press, especially evening papers, can be used to reach staff such as sales representatives and technicians. Local papers are obviously best for recruiting office staff and manual workers. Professional and trade journals can reach your audience directly, but results can be erratic and it may be advisable to use them to supplement a national campaign.

Avoid Saturdays and be cautious about repeating advertisements in the same medium. Diminishing returns can set in rapidly.

### *Evaluate the response*

Measure response to provide guidance on the relative cost-effectiveness of different media. Cost per reply is the best ratio.

### *Successful recruitment advertisements*

To summarize, a panel of creative experts (IRS, 2004f) made the following suggestions on what makes a recruitment advertisement successful:

- Do the groundwork – consider and analyse the recruiter's potential audience and the perceptions of existing employees.
- Prepare a thorough brief for the advertising agency, which expresses clearly the employer's idea of what to feed into the creative process – get the views of the employing manager on what is the strong selling point for the post.
- Have 'a good idea' behind the advertisement that contains a promise of a potential benefit for a jobseeker – there has to be a unique selling proposition.

- Remember that self-selection on the part of potential candidates is an important aim that can be achieved through careful presentation of information about the job and the success criteria.
- Ensure that the core information about the vacancy is included – a specification of the qualifications, experience, skills and attributes required, who jobseekers will be working for, where they will be working, and how much they will be earning. Consider providing enough hard data about the role to attract interest and then direct them to the corporate website where more information can be obtained.
- Project a realistic picture of the job, otherwise the result might be retention problems.
- Develop and communicate an employer brand that conveys a clear and positive image of the organization to attract job seekers and, incidentally but importantly, retain existing members of staff. Do not rely on the strength of the consumer brand in the market place – it is necessary to develop an employer brand that will communicate the fact that the organization offers a positive and rewarding employment experience.
- Consider the online approach (job boards, corporate websites) but remember that there will be a lot of potential candidates, especially older ones, who may not use the web and can best be attracted by traditional media. A multimedia approach may therefore be necessary.
- Bear in mind the considerable costs of media advertising (up to £17,000 for a fairly modest advertisement in *The Guardian*).
- Select an agency that fits the organization's culture, goals and values.
- Take care to act in accordance with equal opportunities and anti-discrimination legislation (sex, race, religion, marital status, disability and age). The Equal Opportunities Commission (1994) recommends that: 'Each advertisement needs to be considered as a whole in terms of the job advertised, the words used in the job description and the message that the advertiser is attempting to portray through the addition of an illustration.'
- Monitor the effectiveness of advertisements to establish which approach produced the best results.

## E-RECRUITMENT

E-recruitment or online recruitment uses web-based tools such as a firm's public internet site or its own intranet to recruit staff. The processes of e-recruitment consist of attracting, screening and tracking applicants, selecting, and offering jobs or rejecting candidates. It has been estimated by Cappelli (2001) that it costs only about

one-twentieth as much to hire someone online, if that is the only method used, as it does to hire the same person through traditional methods.

### *Advantages*

E-recruitment not only saves costs but also enables organizations to provide much more information to applicants, which can easily be updated. There is more scope to present the 'employment proposition' in terms that increase the attractiveness of the company as a place in which to work.

The options available for online selection include self-assessments, online screening and psychometric testing online. Online tests can be standardized and scored easily.

### *Usage*

An IRS (2004a) survey established that 84 per cent of employers made some use of electronic recruitment. It was noted by IRS that the internet is now a fundamental part of the recruitment process. At the very least, employers are utilizing the internet and e-mail systems to communicate with candidates and support their existing hiring practices. Many organizations also use their corporate website.

The IRS survey found that organizations have made a strategic decision to cut the costs of their recruitment processes and get better value for money, and have turned to the internet to achieve this. However, a significant proportion of users still encounter problems with the use of e-recruitment, generally receiving too many unsuitable candidates. Some organizations address this through the use of self-selection tools such as a self-selection questionnaire to discourage unsuitable applicants. IRS comments that this approach means that: 'Subtly and sensitively, organizations can let candidates know that this may not be the role for them, while maintaining their goodwill and self-esteem.'

Some organizations use 'job boards' to advertise vacancies (a job board is an internet site that hosts recruitment advertisements from a range of employers), often as a portal to their corporate website. Most companies are prepared to communicate with candidates by e-mail about their applications.

The IRS survey established that almost all private sector firms using e-recruiting accepted CVs. Organizations in the public sector were more likely to despatch application forms by e-mail.

The National Online Recruitment Survey (2003) found that the average online job seeker is 33 years old with more than 11 years' work experience; he or she has been with the same employer for more than four years, and has visited more than five online sites in a quest for new employment.

An IRS (2004a) survey of recruitment methods for managers established that the top three methods of recruitment, based on the quality of the applications received, were the use of commercial employment agencies (32 per cent), advertising in specialist journals (23 per cent), and national newspaper advertising (22 per cent). Only 3 per cent rated e-recruiting as the best method, although 56 per cent used it. The favourite method of recruitment remains interviewing (53 per cent) followed by assessment centres (23 per cent).

### *Typical approach*

A typical approach is to advertise the vacancy on an online recruitment site. This will provide job details and information about the company together with an online application form. A job seeker returns the completed application electronically and computer software reviews the application forms for an initial match with the organisation's requirements. For example, a job offer for a business development manager in a computer firm might specify the following competencies as a basis for matching on the site against a CV, or by the employer against details provided by the candidate for each of the competence areas:

- Minimum 10 years' business and sales experience in the computer, networking or communications industry.
- Good exposure to the network consulting world, within UK.
- Formal sales training very desirable.
- Self-motivated to succeed in position.
- Ability to lead and manage small group of sales personnel.
- Strong organizational and prioritization skills.
- Ability to drive opportunities to closure.

### *Sites*

The main types of online recruitment sites are:

- *Job sites* – these are operated by specialized firms and can contain over 100,000 vacancies with 6 or 7 million 'hits' a month. Companies pay to have their jobs listed on the sites, which are not usually linked to agencies.
- *Agency sites* – are run by established recruitment agencies. Candidates register online but may be expected to discuss their details in person before their details are forwarded to a prospective employer.
- *Media sites* – which may simply contain a copy of an advertisement appearing in the press, but may include an external description of the vacancy and the company and provide a link to the company's website.

## OUTSOURCING RECRUITMENT

There is much to be said for outsourcing recruitment – getting agencies or consultants to carry out at least the preliminary work of submitting suitable candidates or drawing up a short list. It costs money, but it can save a lot of time and trouble.

### *Using agencies*

Most private agencies deal with secretarial and office staff. They are usually quick and effective but quite expensive. Agencies can charge a fee of 15 per cent or more of the first year's salary for finding someone. It can be cheaper to advertise, especially when the company is in a buyer's market. Shop around to find the agency that suits the organization's needs at a reasonable cost.

Agencies should be briefed carefully on what is wanted. They produce unsuitable candidates from time to time but the risk is reduced if they are clear about your requirements.

### *Using recruitment consultants*

Recruitment consultants generally advertise, interview and produce a short list. They provide expertise and reduce workload. The organization can be anonymous if it wishes. Most recruitment consultants charge a fee based on a percentage of the basic salary for the job, usually ranging from 15 to 20 per cent.

The following steps should be taken when choosing a recruitment consultant:

- Check reputation with other users.
- Look at the advertisements of the various firms in order to obtain an idea of the quality of a consultancy and the type and level of jobs with which it deals.
- Check on special expertise – the large accountancy firms, for example, are obviously skilled in recruiting accountants.
- Meet the consultant who will work on the assignment to assess his or her quality.
- Compare fees, although the differences are likely to be small, and the other considerations are usually more important.

When using recruitment consultants it is necessary to:

- agree terms of reference;
- brief them on the organization, where the job fits in, why the appointment is to be made, terms and conditions and any special requirements;

- give them every assistance in defining the job and the person specification, including any special demands that will be made on the successful candidate in the shape of what he or she will be expected to achieve – they will do much better if they have comprehensive knowledge of what is required and what type of person is most likely to fit well into the organization;
- check carefully the proposed programme and the draft text of the advertisement;
- clarify the arrangements for interviewing and short-listing;
- clarify the basis upon which fees and expenses will be charged;
- ensure that arrangements are made to deal directly with the consultant who will handle the assignment.

### *Using executive search consultants*

Use an executive search consultant, or 'head-hunter', for senior jobs where there are only a limited number of suitable people and a direct lead to them is wanted. They are not cheap. Head-hunters charge a fee of 30 to 50 per cent or so of the first year's salary, but they can be quite cost-effective.

Executive search consultants first approach their own contacts in the industry or profession concerned. The good ones have an extensive range of contacts and their own data bank. They will also have researchers who will identify suitable people who may fit the specification or can provide a lead to someone else who may be suitable. The more numerous the contacts, the better the executive search consultant.

When a number of potentially suitable and interested people have been assembled, a fairly relaxed and informal meeting takes place and the consultant forwards a short list with full reports on candidates to the client.

There are some good and some not-so-good executive search consultants. Do not use one unless a reliable recommendation is obtained.

## EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING ESTABLISHMENTS

Many jobs can, of course, be filled by school leavers. For some organizations the major source of recruits for training schemes will be universities and training establishments as well as schools. Graduate recruitment is a major annual exercise for some companies, which go to great efforts to produce glossy brochures, visit campuses on the 'milk run' and use elaborate sifting and selection procedures to vet candidates, including 'biodata' and assessment centres, as described later in this chapter, and the internet.



## APPLICATION FORMS

Application forms set out the information on a candidate in a standardized format. They provide a structured basis for drawing up short lists, the interview itself and for the subsequent actions in offering an appointment and in setting up personnel records. An example of a form is given in Figure 27.2.

The following suggestions have been made by Piore and Baum (2005) on how to use application forms more effectively:

- Decide what the criteria for selection are and how these will be assessed by use of the application form.
- Keep questions clear, relevant and non-discriminatory.
- Ask for only the bare minimum of personal details.
- Widen your pool of applicants by offering different options and guidance for completing and viewing application forms.
- Develop a consistent and effective sifting process.
- Use a team of sifters from a range of backgrounds to represent the diversity of your candidates.
- Review how effective you have been at the end of the process and once the successful candidates are in their roles.

## SIFTING APPLICATIONS

When the vacancy or vacancies have been advertised and a fair number of replies received, the typical sequence of steps required to process and sift applications is as follows:

1. List the applications on a control sheet, setting out name, date the application was received and the actions taken (reject, hold, interview, short list, offer).
2. Send a standard acknowledgement letter to each applicant unless an instant decision can be made to interview or reject.
3. The applicant may be asked to complete and return an application form to supplement a letter or CV which may be on paper or in electronic format. This ensures that all applicants are considered on the same basis – it can be very difficult to plough through a pile of letters, often ill-written and badly organized. Even CVs may be difficult to sift, although their quality is likely to be higher if the applicant has been receiving advice from an ‘outplacement’ consultant, ie one who specializes in finding people jobs. However, to save time, trouble, expense and irritation, many recruiters prefer to make a decision on the initial letter plus

APPLICATION FORM						
Surname:		First name:				
Address:						
Tel: (home)		Tel: (work)		e-mail (personal)		
Position applied for:						
Education						
Dates		Name of secondary school, college or university	Main subjects taken	Qualifications		
From	To					
Specialized training received						
Other qualifications and skills (including languages, keyboard skills, current driving licence etc)						
Employment history (give details of all positions held since completing full-time education, start with your present or most recent position and work back)						
Dates		Name of employer, address and nature of business including any service in the armed forces	Position and summary of main duties	Starting and leaving rate of pay	Reasons for leaving or wanting to leave	
From	To					

**Figure 27.2** Example of an application form (compressed)

Add any comments you wish to make to support your application	
<i>I confirm that the information given on this application form is correct</i>	
Signature of applicant .....	Date .....

**Figure 27.2** *continued*

- CV, where it is quite clear that an applicant meets or does not meet the specification, rather than ask for a form. It is generally advisable for more senior jobs to ask for a CV.
4. Compare the applications with the key criteria in the job specification and sort them initially into three categories: possible, marginal and unsuitable.
  5. Scrutinize the possibles again to draw up a short list for interview. This scrutiny could be carried out by the personnel or employment specialist and, preferably, the manager. The numbers on the short list should ideally be between four and eight. Fewer than four leaves relatively little choice (although such a limitation may be forced on you if an insufficient number of good applications have been received). More than eight will mean that too much time is spent on interviewing and there is a danger of diminishing returns setting in.
  6. Draw up an interviewing programme. The time you should allow for the interview will vary according to the complexity of the job. For a fairly routine job, 30 minutes or so should suffice. For a more senior job, 60 minutes or more is required. It is best not to schedule too many interviews in a day – if you try to carry out more than five or six exacting interviews you will quickly run out of steam and do neither the interviewee nor your company any justice. It is advisable to leave about 15 minutes between interviews to write up notes and prepare for the next one.
  7. Invite the candidates to interview, using a standard letter where large numbers are involved. At this stage, candidates should be asked to complete an

application form, if they have not already done so. There is much to be said at this stage for sending candidates some details of the organization and the job so that you do not have to spend too much time going through this information at the interview.

8. Review the remaining possibles and marginals and decide if any are to be held in reserve. Send reserves a standard 'holding' letter and send the others a standard rejection letter. The latter should thank candidates for the interest shown and inform them briefly, but not too brusquely, that they have not been successful. A typical reject letter might read as follows:

Since writing to you on... we have given careful consideration to your application for the above position. I regret to inform you, however, that we have decided not to ask you to attend for an interview. We should like to thank you for the interest you have shown.

The process described above should be controlled by an applicant tracking system (ATS) as part of a computerized recruitment control process.

### *Biodata*

A highly structured method of sifting applications is provided by the use of biodata. These are items of biographical data which are criterion based (ie they relate to established criteria in such terms as qualifications and experience which indicate that individuals are likely to be suitable). These are objectively scored and, by measurements of past achievements, predict future behaviour.

The items of biodata consist of demographic details (sex, age, family circumstances), education and professional qualifications, previous employment history and work experience, positions of responsibility outside work, leisure interests and career/job motivation. These items are weighted according to their relative importance as predictors, and a range of scores is allocated to each one. The biodata questionnaire (essentially a detailed application form) obtains information on each item, which is then scored.

Biodata are most useful when a large number of applicants are received for a limited number of posts. Cut-off scores can then be determined, based on previous experience. These scores would indicate who should be accepted for the next stage of the selection process and who should be rejected, but they would allow for some possible candidates to be held until the final cut-off score can be fixed after the first batch of applicants have been screened.

Biodata criteria and predictors are selected by job and functional analysis, which produces a list of competences. The validity of these items as predictors and the

weighting to be given to them are established by analysing the biodata of existing employees who are grouped into high or low performers. Weights are allocated to items according to the discriminating power of the response.

Biodata questionnaires and scoring keys are usually developed for specific jobs in an organization. Their validity compares reasonably well with other selection instruments, but they need to be developed and validated with great care and they are only applicable when large groups of applicants have to be screened.

### *Electronic CVs*

Electronic CVs are associated with internet recruiting. Computers can read CVs by means of high-grade, high-speed scanners using optical character recognition (OCR) software. CVs are scanned and converted into basic text format. The system's artificial intelligence reads the text and extracts key data such as personal details, skills, educational qualifications, previous employers and jobs, and relevant dates. Search criteria are created listing mandatory and preferred requirements such as qualifications, companies in which applicants have worked and jobs held. The system carries out an analysis of the CVs against these criteria, lists the candidates that satisfy all the mandatory requirements and ranks them by the number of these requirements each one meets. The recruiter can then use this ranking as a short list or can tighten the search criteria to produce a shorter list. Essentially, the computer is looking for the same key words as human recruiters, but it can carry out this task more systematically and faster, cross-referencing skills. Any recruiter knows the problem of dealing with a large number of applications and trying, often against the odds, to extract a sensible short list.

## SELECTION METHODS

The main selection methods are the interview, assessment centres and tests. The various types of interviews and assessment centres are described in the next two sections of this chapter. Interviewing techniques are dealt with separately in Chapter 28. Tests are described in Chapter 29. Another and much more dubious method, used by a few firms in the UK and more extensively in the rest of Europe, is graphology.

## TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

### *Individual interviews*

The individual interview is the most familiar method of selection. It involves face-to-face discussion and provides the best opportunity for the establishment of close contact – rapport – between the interviewer and the candidate. If only one interviewer is used, there is more scope for a biased or superficial decision, and this is one reason for using a second interviewer or an interviewing panel.

### *Interviewing panels*

Two or more people gathered together to interview one candidate may be described as an interviewing panel. The most typical situation is that in which a personnel manager and line managers see the candidate at the same time. This has the advantage of enabling information to be shared and reducing overlaps. The interviewers can discuss their joint impressions of the candidate's behaviour at the interview and modify or enlarge any superficial judgements.

### *Selection boards*

Selection boards are more formal and, usually, larger interviewing panels, convened by an official body because there are a number of parties interested in the selection decision. Their only advantage is that they enable a number of different people to have a look at the applicants and compare notes on the spot. The disadvantages are that the questions tend to be unplanned and delivered at random, the prejudices of a dominating member of the board can overwhelm the judgements of the other members, and the candidates are unable to do justice to themselves because they are seldom allowed to expand. Selection boards tend to favour the confident and articulate candidate, but in doing so they may miss the underlying weaknesses of a superficially impressive individual. They can also underestimate the qualities of those who happen to be less effective in front of a formidable board, although they would be fully competent in the less formal or less artificial situations that would face them in the job.

## ASSESSMENT CENTRES

A more comprehensive approach to selection is provided by the use of assessment centres. These incorporate a range of assessment techniques and typically have the following features:

- The focus of the centre is on behaviour.
- Exercises are used to capture and simulate the key dimensions of the job. These include one-to-one role-plays and group exercises. It is assumed that performance in these simulations predicts behaviour on the job.
- Interviews and tests will be used in addition to group exercises.
- Performance is measured in several dimensions in terms of the competencies required to achieve the target level of performance in a particular job or at a particular level in the organization.
- Several candidates or participants are assessed together to allow interaction and to make the experience more open and participative.
- Several assessors or observers are used in order to increase the objectivity of assessments. Involving senior managers is desirable to ensure that they 'own' the process. Assessors must be carefully trained.

Assessment centres provide good opportunities for indicating the extent to which candidates match the culture of the organization. This will be established by observation of their behaviour in different but typical situations, and by the range of the tests and structured interviews that are part of the proceedings. Assessment centres also give candidates a better feel for the organization and its values so that they can decide for themselves whether or not they are likely to fit.

A well-conducted assessment centre can achieve a better forecast of future performance and progress than judgements made by line or even personnel managers in the normal, unskilled way.

## GRAPHOLOGY

Graphology can be defined as the study of the social structure of a human being through his or her writing. Its use in selection is to draw conclusions about a candidate's personality from his or her handwriting as a basis for making predictions about future performance in a role. The use of graphology as a selection aid is extensive on the Continent but relatively uncommon in the UK – Fowler (1991a) quotes research findings that indicate that only between 0.5 and 1.0 per cent of employers use it in the UK. This very small proportion may be attributed to the suspicion the great majority of recruiters have that graphology is in some way spurious and using it as a predictor will be a waste of time and money. In an extensive review of the research literature, Fowler (1991a) established that some studies had indicated a predictive validity coefficient in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, although zero results have also been obtained. These are low figures, which achieve only a poor level of validity. Fowler's conclusion was that clues about personality characteristics

may be deduced by skilled graphologists but that the use of graphology as a single or standard predictor cannot be recommended. He also suspects that, for some people, the real attraction of graphology is that it can be used without the subject's knowledge.

## CHOICE OF SELECTION METHODS

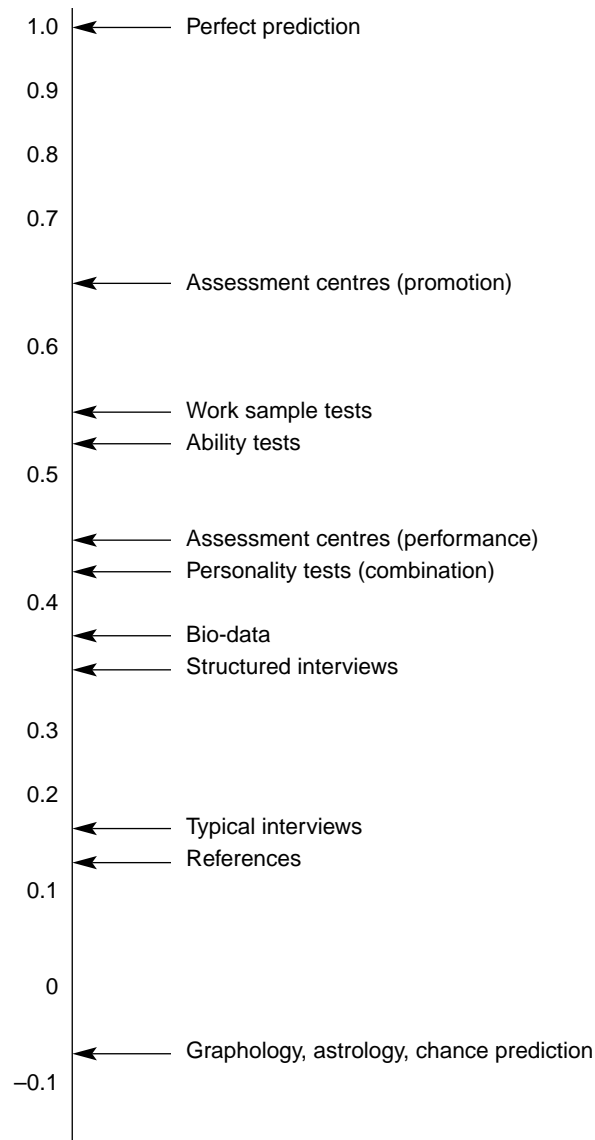
There is a choice between the main selection methods. What Cook (1993) refers to as the classic trio consists of application forms, interviews and references. These can be supplemented or replaced by biodata, assessment centres and, as described in Chapter 29, psychological tests. It has been demonstrated again and again that interviews are an inefficient method of predicting success in a job. Smart (1983), for example, claims that only 94 out of 1,000 interviewees respond honestly in conventional interviews. Validity studies such as those quoted by Taylor (1998), as illustrated in Figure 27.3, produce equally dubious figures for conventional interviews and indicate that assessment centres, psychometric tests, biodata and structured interviews are more accurate methods of selection. For good and not so good reasons, organizations will retain interviews as the main method of selection where assessment centres are inappropriate. But there is a very powerful case for structuring the interview and a strong case for supplementing it with tests. The more evidence that can be produced to help in making crucial selection decisions, the better.

## IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

An HRM approach can be adopted to recruitment, which involves taking much more care in matching people to the requirements of the organization as a whole as well as to the particular needs of the job. And these requirements will include commitment and ability to work effectively as a member of a team.

Examples of this approach in Japanese companies in the UK include the establishment of the Nissan plant in Washington and Kumatsu in Newcastle. As described by Townley (1989), both followed a conscious recruitment policy with rigorous selection procedures. Aptitude tests, personality questionnaires and group exercises were used and the initial pre-screening device was a detailed 'biodata'-type questionnaire, which enabled the qualifications and work history of candidates to be assessed and rated systematically. Subsequent testing of those who successfully completed the first stage was designed to assess individual attitudes as well as aptitude and ability. As





**Figure 27.3** Accuracy of some methods of selection

(Reproduced with permission from Stephen Taylor (1998) *Employee Resourcing*, Institute of Personnel and Development)

Wickens (1987) said of the steps taken at Nissan to achieve commitment and team working: 'It is something which develops because management genuinely believes in it and acts accordingly – and recruits or promotes people who have the same belief.'

The need for a more sophisticated approach to recruitment along these lines is characteristic of HRM. The first requirement is to take great care in specifying the competences and behavioural characteristics required of employees. The second is to use a wider range of methods to identify candidates who match the specification. As noted earlier in this chapter, the predictive quality of the traditional interview is very limited. At the very least, structured interviewing techniques should be adopted as described in Chapter 28. Wherever possible, psychological tests should be used to extend the data obtained from the interview. Well-planned and administered assessment centres are the best predictors of success in a job, but they are only practical for a limited number of more complex or demanding jobs or for selecting graduates and entrants to training programmes.

## REFERENCES, QUALIFICATIONS AND OFFERS

After the interviewing and testing procedure has been completed, a provisional decision to make an offer by telephone or in writing can be made. This is normally 'subject to satisfactory references' and the candidate should, of course, be told that these will be taken up. If there is more than one eligible candidate for a job it may be advisable to hold one or two people in reserve. Applicants often withdraw, especially those whose only purpose in applying for the job was to carry out a 'test marketing' operation, or to obtain a lever with which to persuade their present employers to value them more highly.

### *References – purpose and method*

The purpose of a reference is to obtain in confidence factual information about a prospective employee and opinions about his or her character and suitability for a job.

The factual information is straightforward and essential. It is simply necessary to confirm the nature of the previous job, the period of time in employment, the reason for leaving (if relevant), the salary or rate of pay and, possibly, the attendance record.

Opinions about character and suitability are less reliable and should be treated with caution. The reason is obvious. Previous or present employers who give references tend to avoid highly detrimental remarks either out of charity or because they think anything they say or write may be construed as slanderous or libellous

(references are, in fact, privileged as long as they are given without malice and are factually correct).

Personal referees are, of course, entirely useless. All they prove is that the applicant has at least one or two friends.

Written references save time, especially if they are standardized. They may take the form of an invitation to write a letter confirming the employment record and commenting on the applicant's character in general. If brief details about the job are included (these may be an extract from the advertisement – they should certainly not be an over-elaborate job description), previous employers can be asked to express their views about the suitability of the individual for the job. But this is asking a lot. Unless the job and companies are identical, how well can existing or ex-employers judge the suitability of someone they may not know particularly well for another job in a different environment?

More factual answers may be obtained if a standard form is provided for the employer to complete. The questions asked on this form could include:

- What was the period of employment?
- What was the job title?
- What work was carried out?
- What was the rate of pay or salary?
- How many days' absence over the last 12 months?
- Would you re-employ (if not, why not)?

Telephone references may be used as an alternative or in addition to written references. The great advantage of a telephone conversation is that people are more likely to give an honest opinion orally than if they have to commit themselves in writing. It may also save time to use the telephone.

Employer references are necessary to check on the facts given by the prospective employee. Opinions have to be treated with more caution. A very glowing reference may arouse suspicion, and it is worth comparing it with a reference from another employer (two employment references are desirable in any case). Poor or grudging references must create some alarm, if only because they are so infrequent. But allowance should be made for prejudice and a check should be made, by telephone if possible.

### *References – legal aspects*

The key legal points that should be considered when asking for or giving references are:

- Once the decision has been made to make an offer, the letter should state that 'this is a provisional offer subject to references satisfactory to the company being received'.
- It has been generally held that there is no common law duty on an employer to provide references for a serving or past employee unless there is a term to that effect in the employment contract. But it has been ruled (*Spring v Guardian Assurance* 1994) that there might be a 'contractual duty' to provide a reference where it is 'natural practice' to require a reference from a previous employer before offering employment, and where the employee could not expect to enter that type of employment without a reference.
- If a reference contains a false or unsubstantiated statement that damages the reputation of the individual, action for damages may result.
- It is possible to succeed in a claim for damages if it can be shown that the reference provided was negligent because, if the facts had been checked, they would have been found to be groundless.
- Referees have a legal liability to the prospective employer not to give a reference that contains 'material factors' which were known to be untrue. If an employer appointed someone on the basis of a reference and found that the employee was unsuitable in respect of a material factor given in that reference, the employer can initiate legal action alleging 'deceit'. Employers can try to protect themselves by adding the phrase 'without legal responsibility' to any references given, but this does not provide a certain defence.

### *Qualifications*

It has been estimated by the CIPD (2005c) that one in eight candidates exaggerate or falsify their qualifications. One in four companies had to withdraw a job offer because of CV fraud in 2004, and a similar number sacked someone for the same offence. If a qualification is a necessary requirement for the job, it is always worth checking with the university or college concerned, or asking the candidate to produce evidence in the shape of a certificate or diploma.

## FINAL STAGES

### *Confirming the offer*

The final stage in the selection procedure is to confirm the offer of employment after satisfactory references have been obtained, and the applicant has passed the medical examination required for pension and life assurance purposes or because a certain

standard of physical fitness is required for the work. The contract of employment should also be prepared at this stage.

### *Contracts of employment*

The basic information that should be included in a written contract of employment varies according to the level of job. Contracts of employment are dealt with in Chapter 57.

### *Follow-up*

It is essential to follow up newly engaged employees to ensure that they have settled in and to check on how well they are doing. If there are any problems, it is much better to identify them at an early stage rather than allowing them to fester.

Following up is also important as a means of checking on the selection procedure. If by any chance a mistake has been made, it is useful to find out how it happened so that the selection procedure can be improved. Misfits can be attributed to a number of causes; for example, inadequate job description or specification, poor sourcing of candidates, weak advertising, poor interviewing techniques, inappropriate or invalidated tests, or prejudice on the part of the selector. If any of these are identified, steps can be taken to prevent their recurrence.