# Recruitment

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## Good Practice Guide

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F When you see this symbol in the Recruitment Good Practice Guide it means there is a more comprehensive information sheet available for download from <http://www.cpe.sa.gov.au>

This is one of a series of Guides developed by the Government Reform Commission to promote and support good practice in the South Australian public sector.

# Foreword

**The Hon. Jay Weatherill MP**
Minister Assisting the Premier in Cabinet
Business and Public Sector Management

The South Australian Government has an ambitious vision for a better South Australia. *South Australia's Strategic Plan* outlines the key areas for achieving this vision and sets definable, measurable and time-bound targets.

Our success in achieving them will depend on using all available resources. With a public sector of over 90,000 people, recruiting and retaining the best possible people will be critical to our success. A planned and well-resourced approach to recruitment and selection is required.

This Guide provides that approach.

The Guide is based on good practice procedures and is consistent with legislation that governs public sector employees. It provides recruiters with an understanding of their obligations and assists them in conducting high-quality and timely recruitment processes. It also dispels myths that have arisen as a result of misconceptions and long-standing recruitment practices.

Additionally, this guide will assist agencies to meet their obligations with regard to specific recruitment targets as set out in *South Australia's Strategic Plan.*

These targets include:

*Aborginal Unemployment*

T1.26 Aboriginal unemployment:
Reduce the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal unemployment rates each year.

*Diversity in the Public Sector*

T6.22 People with disabilities:
Double the number of people with disabilities employed by 2014.

T6.23 Women:
Have women comprising half of public sector employees in the executive levels (including chief executives) by 2014.

T6.24 Aboriginal employees:
Increase the participation of Aboriginal people in the South Australian Public Sector, spread across all classifications and agencies, to 2% by 2010 and maintain or better those levels through to 2014.

I encourage you to use this Guide to improve your recruitment and selection, to challenge outdated practices, and to ensure that government delivers the best possible service to the community.

*Jay Weatherill*

# Applying this Guide

As the public sector increasingly shifts to management based on principles, it is necessary for managers to understand the principles of good practice in recruitment. This Guide has specifically been written to be applicable to the South Australian public sector, regardless of the employment legislation.

The Guide outlines and describes good practice procedures that are intended to give managers the understanding and confidence to innovate and improve processes that will assist in the attraction and selection of the best candidates possible.

Although the principles of good practice are universal, there may be differences between specific implementation procedures adopted by agencies. For example, *Commissioner's Standard 2 - Quality Staffing* sets minimum standards, but an agency may set a higher standard, or, where the Standard requires a vacancy older than 12 months be advertised, an agency may decide that their vacancies over 6 months must be advertised.

In this Guide, the term 'recruitment' refers to the entire process of attracting candidates, conducting a selection process, making a decision, appointing the chosen candidate and engaging him/her to the point of job induction.

The intended emphasis is on the selection phase of recruitment. This is because procedures that have been applied to recruitment over many years have given rise to a number of myths about selection practice. Towards the end of this Guide we aim to dispel such misconceptions.

Most importantly, the Guide will help you to:

> understand how your selection process can better predict future job performance
> understand why some of the people chosen for jobs did not perform successfully
> fill advertised vacancies more quickly by better planning and scheduling your recruitment process
> use an employment pool
> save the costs of an unsatisfactory appointment.

This Guide is also available online with links to fact sheets that provide more information on some of the topics.

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# Good Practice Recruitment Principles

The public sector supports high standards of behaviour and service. The principles guiding employment are formalised in our legislation, for example, in the employment acts. Many of these employment principles are applicable to recruitment and selection practices.

## Merit

Choosing on merit means choosing the best person for the job, based both on candidates' abilities and their potential for development. The primary consideration in a selection decision must be based on an assessment of relative suitability, using a selection process that assesses qualities that are genuinely related to the work.

## Ethics

All behaviour must be honest, respectful and courteous. Decision making must be unbiased.

## Unlawful discrimination

Bias by unlawful discrimination occurs when a person or group of people is treated less favourably than others on the basis of a real or presumed characteristic specified in legislation (gender, sexuality, marital status, race, age, pregnancy or impairment).

## Respect

Respect means interactions are professional, responsive, reasonable and courteous.

## Diversity

Respect for diversity means providing opportunities to people from a broad range of backgrounds so that we benefit from a variety of skills, experience and knowledge.

## Patronage or nepotism

Patronage means granting favours to a person because of your position, or exercising influence because of your relationship with that person. Nepotism means patronage occurring due to family relationships. These behaviours are unacceptable in the public sector.

## Fairness

Fairness means treating candidates impartially, without subjecting them to whimsical decisions. Treating everyone the same does not necessarily make a process fair. You may need to account for individuals' circumstances to give them an equal chance to present their case.

## Fairness of access

An important application of the fairness principle is to make public sector jobs accessible to interested and suitable candidates.

## Natural justice

Natural justice relates to the fairness of processes. It includes confidentiality and transparent decision making, and is based on the premise that people are entitled to be informed about decisions affecting them.

## Procedural fairness

Procedural fairness is an aspect of natural justice and it requires that just processes be used in making decisions. Policy and practice need to be defensibly fair.

# Important Exceptions to a Standard Selection Process

When a vacancy arises there are a few exceptions to consider before conducting a recruitment process. Consult your human resources advisor about applying current policies.

## Injured or excess employees

Work-injured or excess employees (also known as redeployees) must be placed in a vacancy if they can reasonably achieve the required outcomes of the position.

## Special Employment Programs

You may also directly access Special Employment Program pools, including Equal Employment Opportunity Program pools, for example, the Aboriginal Employment or Disability Registers. If a suitable candidate can be found within these pools, an advertised selection process is not required. The current eligible programs are listed in the *Commissioner's Standard 1 - A Planned Workforce.* Your human resources advisor will advise you on how to use these pools.

## Short-term positions

The Chief Executive (or delegate) can assign an employee to a short-term position at a higher level.

## When a merit-based process is not required

There are a limited number of additional instances when a Chief Executive may decide not to follow a merit-based selection process. These include when:

> doing so would be an unnecessary administrative procedure because the candidate would be the best person for the job if it were advertised

> the position is of a critical or short-term nature

> the appointment was required to ensure that the whole of government workforce policies could be effectively implemented.

If you think any of these circumstances apply, you will need advice and assistance from your human resources department.

# How to Apply Good Practice in Recruitment

A new recruit is a valuable investment. Failing to identify the top candidate is a lost opportunity, and selecting an unsuitable candidate is a costly mistake. Investing in a new employee deserves a thorough selection process.

Managers have significant flexibility in conducting recruitment processes, as long as they are guided by the good practice principles. *Commissioner's Standards 1* and *2* provide the minimum requirements upon which agency recruitment policy is based. Your agency may set a higher standard than the Commissioner's Standards, but this should be consistent with good practice principles.

Become familiar with government-wide recruitment policies and those of your own agency.
The RecruitBetter Guide
<http://www.recruitbetter.sa.gov.au> also provides more detail for each step in recruitment.

Before commencing recruitment, consider your agency's workforce planning strategy. Your human resources or organisational development advisor will be able to assist you with your recruitment strategy in the context of broader agency needs.

The three stages of a selection process can be described as:

> defining, planning and attracting
> selecting from an advertised call or a candidate pool
> candidate management.

The most common recruitment practice managers undertake is advertising a vacancy. Your human resources advisor may recommend that it is more beneficial to undertake a pool recruitment process rather than advertising single vacancies as they arise.

An employment pool is a group of suitable candidates who meet the selection criteria.
The hiring manager may select from this pool as a vacancy arises without having to advertise the individual vacancy. This significantly shortens the recruitment time.

Note that a talent pool usually contains candidates who are not yet assessed and that a selection process will have to be implemented to select from a talent pool.

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# Elements of Good Practice in Recruitment

Getting the best candidate within an efficient time frame requires careful consideration of each phase of the recruitment process, especially the selection phase.

Manager-conducted selection based on advertised vacancies is usually organised in a step-by-step fashion. In 2006, the average recruitment time in the public sector was four months. However, careful planning and scheduling can reduce this time frame significantly towards a target of 14 days (for the selection phase, the time between advertisement closure and the appointment decision).
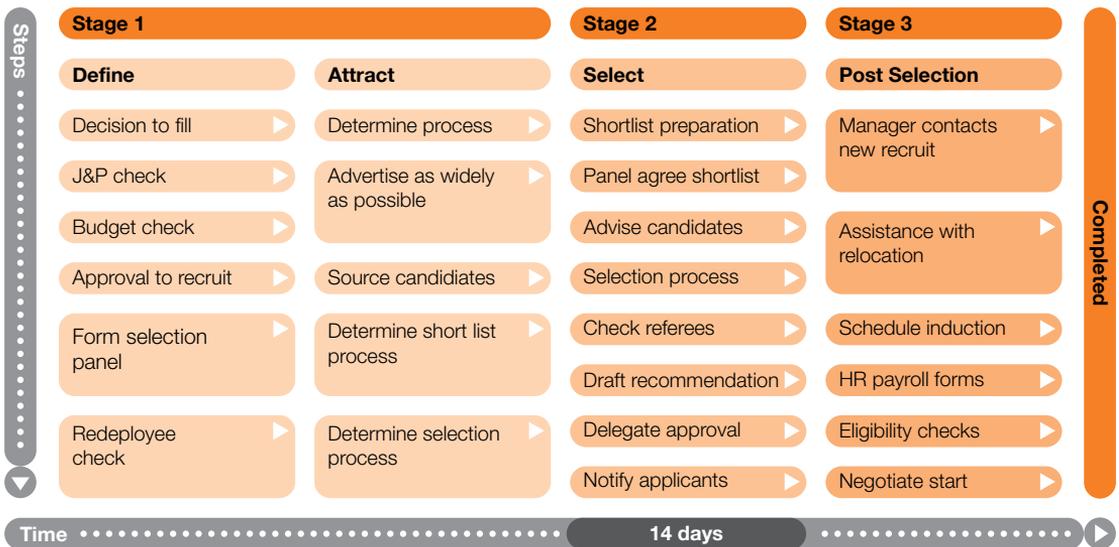
| Steps | Stage 1 | | Stage 2 | Stage 3 | Completed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Define** | **Attract** | **Select** | **Post Selection** | |
| | Decision to fill ▶ | Determine process ▶ | Shortlist preparation ▶ | Manager contacts new recruit ▶ | |
| | J&P check ▶ | Advertise as widely as possible ▶ | Panel agree shortlist ▶ | | |
| | Budget check ▶ | | Advise candidates ▶ | Assistance with relocation ▶ | |
| | Approval to recruit ▶ | Source candidiates ▶ | Selection process ▶ | | |
| | Form selection panel ▶ | Determine short list process ▶ | Check referees ▶ | Schedule induction ▶ | |
| | | | Draft recommendation ▶ | HR payroll forms ▶ | |
| | Redeployee check ▶ | Determine selection process ▶ | Delegate approval ▶ | Eligibility checks ▶ | |
| | | | Notify applicants ▶ | Negotiate start ▶ | |
| Time | | | 14 days | | ▶ |

*Diagram 1* – *The three phases of recruitment*

## Defining and planning

Take a long-term view of your workgroup. Have a workforce plan that covers both workforce logistics (numbers, roles, etc) and workforce management and development (succession planning, skills development, performance management, etc).

Firstly, review the vacant position to decide if it is still necessary. Determine the role characteristics and revise or develop the job description. Confirm the classification and conditions. Since the job description needs to attract candidates, think of it as your opportunity to market the position.

## Job description documentation

The job and person specification (J&P), also called a job description or competency-based role description, is a critical document because you use it to describe the job, to attract candidates and, most importantly, as the basis for selection. The job specification section of the J&P describes the tasks and outcomes. The person specification section includes selection criteria which attempt to capture the essence of the job requirements. The J&P converts characteristics that the individual needs to perform the role into criteria used for selection.

Public sector managers usually design job documents. Compiling a really useful job description, that is, one that will help to select the right candidate, requires expertise. Special skill is needed to identify

which characteristics will predict job success and to identify selection criteria to measure these characteristics. Expertise is also needed when deciding which selection tools will identify these required job skills. You may seek human resources or outside professional advice to get these elements right. This small investment will give you a better selection outcome.

When designing job descriptions, it is impossible and undesirable to list every specific skill or aspect of knowledge required to perform the role. Instead, it is better to choose high-level selection criteria. For example, instead of listing each piece of legislation the person is required to adhere to, a higher-level criterion such as 'manages compliance with legislation', would cover more information.
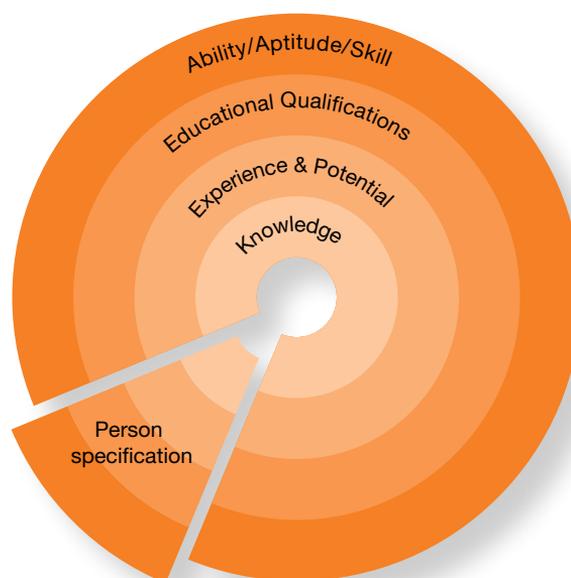


Ability/Aptitude/Skill
Educational Qualifications
Experience & Potential
Knowledge

Person specification

*Diagram 2* – *Job and Person Specification*

Using higher-level selection criteria makes it unnecessary to list every underlying skill. Accordingly, listing 'project management' as a selection criterion means that every project management skill, such as communication, time management or negotiation, does not need to be individually listed.

It is even better to make selections based on pre-defined competencies or capabilities, if your organisation uses them[1].

Competencies/capabilities formally incorporate certain skills, knowledge and abilities. Where competency

frameworks clearly identify the elements and required behaviour for each competency in detail, they do not need to be repeated in a competency job description. The diagram on the next page shows the elements and behaviours that make up an SAES Competency.

## Competencies

The South Australian Executive Service (SAES) executive competency framework has only five competencies. Each of these has between four and six elements.

[1]'Capabilities' are broad job requirements such as conceptual ability. 'Competencies' is a term used interchangeably with 'capabilities' and is sometimes used exclusively to refer to Industry-Accredited Competencies.

**Competency 3 – Drives Business Excellence**

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Builds an effective, sustainable and high-performing organisation through leadership.
Engages and aligns human, financial and information resources to achieve strategic targets.
Plans for future organisational needs to minimise risk and maximise opportunity.
Leads organisational change that maximises results.

| Elements | Behavioural Criteria |
|---|---|
| **Influences Organisational Performance** | 1. Sets clear performance standards, which are linked to outcomes.<br>2. Continually searches for ways to add value and to position the organisation for future success.<br>3. Encourages reasonable and strategic risk taking.<br>4. Recognises results and deals constructively with setbacks.<br>5. Champions new initiatives and stimulates change. |

*Diagram 3* – *SAES Example Competency*

How this works in selection practice is that the candidates must demonstrate how they meet a competency (such as 'creates vision') according to the specific role. For example, 'vision' as a competency will be applied differently to an engineering project director than to a Cabinet Office policy director.

A competency job description can be used for many jobs. Therefore, a level-5 project officer position can use one uniform job description for multiple jobs.

You may find that the SA Government Online Competency-Based Role Description Builder (refer to <http://www3.skillassess.com/saus/login.cfm>) can be used to design a competency job description. If your agency does not yet use competency job descriptions, approach your agency's human resources department about how to improve a traditional job description.

It is a myth that only the exact selection criteria listed on the job description may be used during selection. Although you must use the selection criteria to select the best person, you may use any part of the whole job and person description to make a selection. Any characteristic that can be defensibly demonstrated to impact on the performance of the job may be considered. For example, if a person was dishonest in an application or if a person's manner during interview was hostile, and this can be related to job requirements, then this may be considered in the assessment, even although 'honesty' was not a specifically listed criterion.

**Recruitment planning**

Plan the process from start to finish with a view to attracting the best possible candidates and subsequently treating them as such throughout.

When creating a timetable for recruitment, consider which steps can be run concurrently (refer to <http://www.recruitbetter.sa.gov.au>). If you plan the entire process from the beginning, you will speed its progression by identifying which steps can be done simultaneously. For example, preparatory planning at the start of the recruitment process will allow you to complete the process quickly once applications close. Waiting to plan the selection process only after the close of applications will delay

the process by weeks.

*Stage 1: Defining, planning, attracting*
The first stage is the planning one, where all steps that can be done prior to receiving the applications should be performed, even down to booking tentative interview diary time.

*Stage 2: Selecting*
This begins immediately once the applications are received.

*Stage 3: Candidate management*
This phase begins when the job offer is made and continues until the employee is inducted.

## Candidate sourcing

To source candidates, use options such as:

> maintaining the contact details of high-quality applicants

> advertising with other agencies to create a pool

> using talent pools (for example, running a recruitment process when you don't have positions vacant but expect some in the future allows you to pre-screen candidates ahead of a position crisis)

> using professional recruitment firm referrals.

Also use word-of-mouth and personal approaches. To find the largest field of potential candidates, don't rely only on 'active candidates', that is, those who are job searching. You may want to approach potential candidates and bring the vacancy to their attention, or use a recruitment firm to source suitable candidates.

Job information should be readily available to candidates. Good practice means that accessibility is considered, both in terms of language and information format (for example, the size of electronic files and fonts). Provide instructions on how to apply, especially for private sector candidates who may be unaware of public sector selection practices.

If you identify the type of referees required in the application phase (for example, by asking candidates to include the name and contact details of a recent supervisor), remember that candidates from the private sector may be unwilling to have a referee contacted without their approval as it may jeopardise their current employment.

Let the candidates know if you require an application consisting of a Curriculum Vitae (CV) and a letter or application, or whether you require a lengthy statement demonstrating conformity to the selection criteria. The number of applicants you are likely to attract may influence this decision. If you expect a large volume, then a CV and letter may suffice for the first cut. Further screening, such as a telephone pre-interview, invitation to submit more written information, or online testing, can follow this.

# Individual Vacancy Recruitment

**There are two significantly different ways to recruit. You may either advertise an individual vacancy when it arises or use an employment pool.**

**The following selection process may be used to fill advertised vacancies or also to select candidates from a pool.**

### Advertising  F

Advertising a vacancy will be more successful if you reach the right candidates. The selected media can include specialist publications and newspapers, Internet sites and even emails to candidates. Different employment groups will use different media to job hunt, and will even read different sections of a particular paper.

When constructing the job description and advertisement, consider elements that may make the job appealing to the types of candidates you want to attract.

### Selecting  F

The selection part of a recruitment process is critical in identifying the best candidate. Selection includes receiving and acknowledging applications, informing candidates of the selection process, screening out unsuitable candidates and identifying a list for further consideration. It also includes using the selection tools listed below, and activities such as analysing results, ranking candidates, preparing a selection report, obtaining approval and making the job offer.

### Screening  F

Beyond assessing applications (including the CV and an accompanying letter or statement), options for screening can include a series of steps such as telephone interviews, pre-interview reference checks and specific skill tests or exercises. These screening phases are more efficient and cost effective when using an electronic candidate management system.

### Structuring scored applications  F

It is helpful to screen and score applications using a structured format to assess valid criteria. This is more practical and rigorous than excluding an application that does not address each criterion according to a prescribed format. Telephone-based pre-interview screening can be undertaken by a recruitment firm, especially for senior roles where written application-based screening can inappropriately include or exclude candidates.

### Selection tools

A good selection process must provide sufficient evidence upon which to base a selection decision.

A candidate's current job performance is highly correlated with future performance; however, the more a new job differs from an existing job, the less it can be used to predict future performance. The performance of an engineer or accountant will be of limited use for predicting that person's ability to perform a managerial role.

Since most people may not already be performing the type of role you wish to fill, they cannot be assessed only on current performance. Essentially, selection tools are the means you use to predict future performance.

The predictive validity of a selection tool can be described as 0 for no correlation and 1.0 for total correlation.
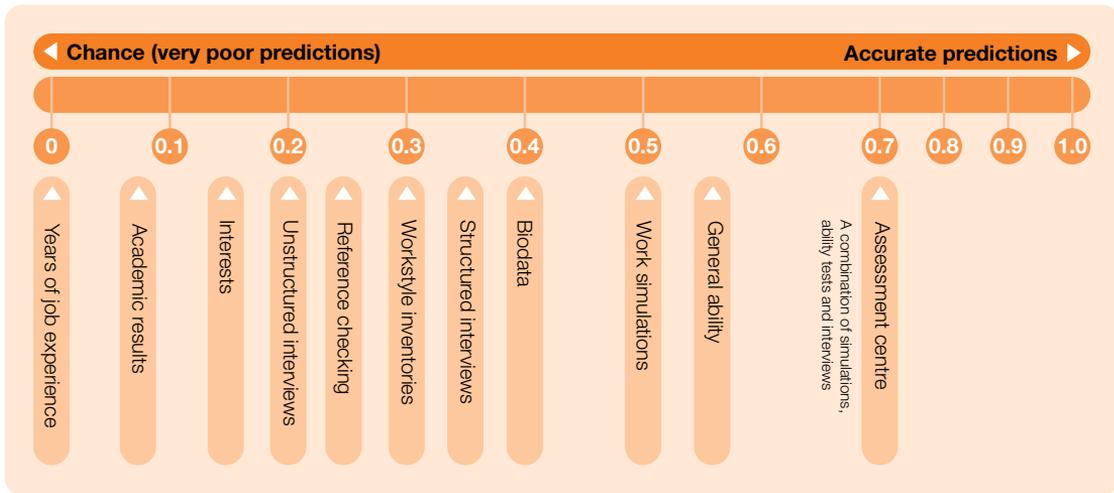
**Chance (very poor predictions)** ◀ ▶ **Accurate predictions**

| 0 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 0.6 | 0.7 | 0.8 | 0.9 | 1.0 |

- Years of job experience
- Academic results
- Interests
- Unstructured interviews
- Reference checking
- Workstyle inventories
- Structured interviews
- Biodata
- Work simulations
- General ability
- A combination of simulations, ability tests and interviews
- Assessment centre

*Diagram 4 – Predictive validity ratings for candidate assessment methods (where 1.0 is a perfect score)*

This diagram, based on the summary of many research articles, shows that the most common selection methods are least effective in predicting job success. Things like length of experience, interests, unstructured interviews or reference checks are not highly reliable. This intuitively matches what managers often experience. On reflection, ask yourself how many apparently promising candidates were not as effective as they appeared at selection, while others were disastrous choices and some became star performers.

Looking at the diagram, any score below 0.3 is considered a poor predictor of future job success. However, each selection method becomes more reliable when used together with others. Use a variety of selection assessment tools that are appropriate for the position being advertised. Cost, often used as an excuse, is a factor to be considered, but it is a minor investment in terms of the benefit or cost of the employee's contributions. Are you willing to select or reject a candidate based on a 45-minute interview? It's better to invest to select the right candidate.

## Interviews [F]

Interviews are the most commonly used selection tool. Unstructured interviews have poor predictive validity[2]. The unstructured interview (chat style) scores 0.2, just above interests (0.15) and just below reference checking (0.25). Structured interviews have a better predictive validity of 0.35. A structured interview allows multiple interviewers to rate candidates in a consistent, standardised manner. Most public sector interviews could be described as semi-structured.

Interviews provide certain types of information more effectively than others.

> Knowledge: Asking a candidate what s/he knows is a fairly reliable technique, providing it is knowledge that they can demonstrate. For example, asking, "What is one plus one?" allows you to test a person's arithmetical knowledge. However, if you ask, "Can you do addition?", the answer will be a claim, and not necessarily a fact.

[2]Tenopyr M, Erwin F, Dr Craig. Rigorous evaluation needed to cut staff selection risks, *Mt. Eliza Business Review,* 3(1), pp.47-56

> Experience: Claims about experience may require validation by a referee or hard evidence, for example, a document to prove previous critical employment experience.

> Values: Asking about values is highly unreliable. Values need corroboration by a person who knows how the candidate actually behaves.

> Behaviours: A question about behaviour will tell you what a candidate says s/he has done or thinks s/he would do, not necessarily what s/he actually does or has done.

## Behavioural question interviews  F

Interview questions can be improved significantly by using behavioural questions. Instead of asking hypothetical questions such as, "What would you do if...?", a behavioural question asks about a specific past event: what happened, how the candidate reacted and even how they learnt from the event. For example, "Tell us about an instance where you were in conflict with a customer - what happened, what you did and what you learnt about conflict."

## Testing - Skills/abilities  F

Skills, such as typing speed or computer literacy, can be tested with a skill test. Many job tests can be designed to assess more than one skill.

## Testing - Task simulations  F

Actual job tasks can be directly tested. Doing a verbal presentation simulates a job requirement. An exercise can be designed to test a number of skills. For example, a test that involves analysing a document and providing a summary of key issues will test conceptual ability, time management skills and language skills.

## Testing - Aptitude  F

Skill tests may identify whether a candidate can already perform a skill, but will not tell you whether a person without specific experience has the ability to learn it. Skill testing favours those who have previous experience, but not necessarily the most able person. If the skill may be learnt, it may be fairer to test the aptitude.

By testing underlying aptitudes, such as verbal and numerical reasoning and abstract thinking, you can predict aptitude to learn certain tasks or jobs; for example, numerical ability is required for accountancy. The advantage of this is that you can include a broader range of candidates who do not have the actual skill but show aptitude to learn it.

Aptitude testing is useful for measuring potential at all levels. Testing problem solving and analytical abilities can be used to separate two apparently equal candidates. Aptitude testing shows which person has the highest potential to develop and progress. For example, testing a group of candidates from the Aboriginal Employment Register means you can select the ones who can best be trained to learn the skill they have aptitude for. This is less discriminatory than restricting selection to those who have had the opportunity of previous experience.

## Psychological testing[3]  F

Intelligence has high correlation with job success. Tests of verbal, numerical and abstract thinking are good measures of job potential. Some personality characteristics correlate with all job types and others with specific job aspects. For example, being outgoing may be essential for a marketing/sales job. However, conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness correlate with overall performance in all job types.

General intelligence and specific job aptitudes in conjunction with suitable personality traits identify an employee that has good job adaptability, the capacity to learn and the right disposition for good performance.

Psychological tests are valid and reliable if used correctly and interpreted professionally. However, like all other selection information, they should form part of the suite of data gathered and not be used on their own.

[3]In 2003, 54% of recruiters at the Australian Association of Graduate Employers used psychological testing as part of the selection process.

### Biodata-based questionnaires  `F`

Used overseas, Biodata questionnaires ask about past work achievements, education and life experiences. They are easy to administer and have relatively high predictive validity.They are best used with other selection methods. In Australia they are often used for graduate assessment.

### References  `F`

A reference is used to provide evidence of past behaviour, knowledge, values and skills. It can be a standard means of comparing all candidates on certain criteria. References can also be part of the screening process, particularly if there is insufficient information in the application with which to make a decision. A reference can also be used as a source of information during the assessment process. Most commonly, references are used after other selection activities to verify information provided by the candidate.

A reference can be very reliable or unreliable, depending on the specificity of the information sought as well as the knowledge and honesty of the referee. A reliability concern about references is that candidates may nominate referees who will provide only positive information. To remedy this:

> request that the previous line manager is listed as a referee

> use very specific questions to ask for evidence of past behaviour

> seek information specific to the referee's knowledge of the person – not every referee can comment on all aspects of job performance

> probe referees' responses

> ask about job-relevant development needs of the candidate

> ask what job-relevant behavioural issues have been noted

> use more than one referee to corroborate information; if these differ, seek further information

> seek evidence about what the candidate did not provide

> use non-nominated referees, if required.

Reference checking can be conducted verbally or sent to the referee for a written response. If references are sought verbally, all information should be documented and shared with all members of the selection panel. Consider whether a professional may identify better information from a referee than a manager.

### Assessment centres  `F`

Assessment centre tests are based on the job competencies – the underlying skills and aptitudes that are needed for performance. An assessment centre usually includes several behavioural tasks, such as role-plays, interviews and optional personality and ability testing. In an assessment centre capabilities are tested multiple times and observed and scored in a structured way by several assessors. This is why they are proven to be the most reliable predictor of future job performance. Assessment centre testing can only be undertaken by qualified professionals generally found in recruitment firms. Nevertheless, the cost is easily outweighed by the better quality recruitment decision, especially if a pool of candidates is identified.

### Comparing sources of information

A selection decision based on multiple sources of information that provide consistent evidence is most likely to be a valid predictor of performance.

Whatever selection tools you use, assemble the information as you proceed to build a consistent picture. Where information is not consistent, find out what is accurate and gather more if necessary. Beware that even agreement between two referees may not be as reliable as independent evidence, for example, a skills test. Your responsibility is to make a recommendation on the best candidate, and you should keep gathering information until you are comfortably confident of your decision.

# Recruitment Using Pools

Instead of advertising a single vacancy you may be able to choose from candidate pools. Depending on the type of pool, you may be able to directly appoint from the pool without further assessment, or you may need to have a full selection process just as you would when advertising an individual vacancy.

You may select from an existing employment program pool or by having your human resources section assist in establishing a pool to suit your needs. Candidate pools that have been established for use across the public sector are called Special Employment Programs.

## Candidate pools  **F**

If the vacant role is:

> one of several similar jobs

> likely to be filled again in the next 12 months

> in a skills shortage area

then, instead of advertising individual vacancies, it is often better to recruit from a pool of candidates.

## Types of pools

Using a pool enables you to source a candidate without advertising each time a vacancy occurs, provided the pool is advertised when it's created and, in the case of most pools, re-advertised at least every 12 months. You save on time and costs that are otherwise needed for advertising, and by pre-assessing and including only eligible candidates you can make appointments more quickly.

A pool can be established for a specific period of time. Alternatively, it can operate on a continuous basis, accepting applicants at any time and being re-advertised as necessary.

You don't have to rely only on the pools established across government. You, your organisation or a group of managers across government with common interests can also create pools with the help of human resources staff. Both skills shortages and commonly recruited jobs can be better managed by using pools. If it is difficult to find accountants or if you often need

administrative officers, then you can create a pool and select from that pool as needed.

## Public Sector Special Employment Programs

Special Employment Programs include Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Programs. Only people who meet Equal Employment Opportunity criteria may be included in the EEO pools listed below:

> Government Youth Traineeship Program

> Trainee Employment Register

> Youth Cadetship Program

> Aboriginal Employment Register

> National Indigenous Cadetship Program

> Disability Employment Register.

Existing government-wide pools approved by the Commissioner are the:

> South Australian Graduate Register

> Government Apprenticeship Scheme

> South Australian Public Service Scholarship Scheme coordinated by government agencies.

Examples of specific pools you could use are:

> talent pools, where interested people register their interest even if they are not currently seeking employment

> professions, eg, engineers, accountants, nurses, doctors

> job roles, eg, policy officers, research officers, human resources consultants

> job roles and levels, eg, administrative officers

> order-of-merit pools.

## Using a Pool

### Talent pools

A talent pool is used to increase the size of the candidate group from which to select. The talent pool is a list of interested persons who have not yet been assessed. They may often include their CVs but not usually an application. Unlike employment pools, a candidate from a talent pool has to still undergo a selection process.

The remaining pools, listed below, may constitute employment pools, that is, pools from which an appointment can be made without further assessment, because the acceptability of the candidate has already been determined. Candidates in these pools are either ranked, or they are considered equally suitable. Talent pools can be established with human resources support.

### Qualified professional pools

In this kind of pool all members are equally meritorious, for example, they are all qualified nurses. The manager could therefore select any of the equally appropriate candidates. If the pool is large, the manager may choose to further differentiate between the candidates, for example, based on relevant criteria such as the type of qualification, experience, or references.

### Job role pools

Pools established from the outset for a particular position, for example, Administrative Services Officer positions, have had a selection process for admitting people into that pool so that the candidate is ready to be appointed by the manager.

### Re-selecting from a recent selection process

Often a position becomes vacant soon after it has been recently filled. Provided the manager is satisfied that it would be unlikely that advertising the current vacancy would attract a different pool of applicants, a further candidate from the original selection process may be appointed.

### Order-of-merit pools

An order-of-merit pool results from an advertised vacancy where assessed candidates are ranked in merit order. This creates a small pool. When a similar vacancy occurs elsewhere in the organisation, the manager may appoint from that pool for up to 12 months. As long as the delegate judges that the jobs are similar, that is, requiring similar qualifications and capabilities, an order-of-merit appointment may be made without advertising the subsequent job.

This is a very much under-used opportunity to speed up recruitment.

### Selection from a pool

The need for a further selection process is based upon the ability of the manager (or delegate) to recognise which people best meet the position requirements.

Some pools, such as the graduate pool, which requires only a generic form of application, may need a second screening and selection process to determine the most suitable person for a particular position.

If the pool contains people already qualified to do the job, then appointment from that pool can be direct, without further assessment.

In a large pool you may use a single or a number of assessments as filters. For example, to recruit payroll officers you can take names from the Aboriginal, Trainee and Graduate pools and then assess them, placing the suitable candidates into a new payroll officer pool. As a vacancy becomes available, a payroll officer can be directly appointed from the new pool.

*Recruitment firms and vacancies*

You may attract applicants to apply for an advertised vacancy or you may seek to have candidates entered into a pool. Candidates may be sourced from a recruitment firm, especially for those positions affected by skills shortages or where large numbers of candidates are required.

If an advertised vacancy does not yield a suitable candidate it is not necessary to re-advertise, as the opportunity has just been given by open advertisement. Re-advertising will only create a lengthy delay and is not likely to draw any new talent. Direct sourcing from a recruitment firm or a pool can attract passive candidates.

*Candidate management*

Recruitment does not end at the point of selection. You may need to certify qualifications, residency status, etc, or do pre-employment or integrity checks. Your agency's policy or a human resources advisor will indicate what is required.

*Selection reports*

The selection report recommends the preferred candidate to the delegate who has the authority to make the decision to appoint. The report summarises the process that was undertaken and ranks the comparative strengths of the candidate to support the recommendation. It is very useful to draw the line between acceptable candidates who can be ranked, and unacceptable candidates who fall below that line. Sufficient notes must be kept to allow for a review of the process.

Candidate management also includes effectively managing the new employee and completing the process for unsuccessful candidates.

Unsuccessful candidates need to be informed soon after the selection process has been completed, and an appropriate level of feedback should be provided. The selected candidate should be notified as soon as possible and actively engaged. Contact should be made not only by human resources personnel, but also by the candidate's new line manager.

*Probation*

If the candidate came from outside the public sector, use your departmental probation period to manage their performance. Probation is usually 12 months, but may vary. It is much easier to terminate the appointment during the probation, rather than after. Note that if you do not actively confirm the appointment during probation the person will be confirmed by default.

Documentation relating to the new employee's recruitment process should be finalised. This is an important record of how the process was managed and could be used if there is a grievance about the process.

Also, be sure to plan ahead for the new recruit by preparing programs for induction, performance management and development.

*Evaluating the process*

The selection process is not complete without an evaluation of it.

Once you've selected and appointed your candidate it is important to evaluate the selection process to ensure that it really did identify good candidates. This requires assessing the performance of successful candidates further down the track to see how well the selection processes predicted subsequent job performance. This will tell you which processes should be kept, modified or removed.

Salary costs make up the largest single component of general government expenditure. Budget pressures are constant; therefore every candidate employed should be the best possible choice for maximising productivity, minimising turnover costs, and ensuring the best fit between job and candidate.

# Myth Busters

Convention and common practice have led to the formation of myths about recruitment processes. Some of the most common myths perpetuated in the public sector are discussed below.

| No. | Myth | Good Practice |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Advertising individual vacancies and making a selection by means of interview is the only way a merit-based selection process can be undertaken. | You do not always have to advertise.<br><br>Short-term vacancies (as specified in your agency policy) can be filled by providing additional payment to a person who is acting in the position or by moving a person at the same level, either from within the agency or by agreement between agencies.<br><br>For long-term vacancies, you may draw from an existing Special Employment Program. Pools can be created to provide a group of potentially suitable candidates.<br><br>Merit-based processes do not necessarily require interviews.  Information upon which to base a decision can be sought from a number of sources, including written applications, references, aptitude tests, exercises and task simulations. |
| 2 | Calling for particular groups to apply is discriminatory. | Making a call for under-represented groups to apply can be good practice, especially where a candidate of a certain background will be likely to add depth and value to the workplace or job, and can fulfil the fairness principle.<br><br>Recruiting managers have a responsibility to implement government policy. For example, *South Australia's Strategic Plan* includes targets for increasing Aboriginal participation across all classifications to 2% by 2014, and aims to have women comprising half of the public sector executives by 2014.<br><br>While balancing fairness and merit, managers must also be aware of diversity and discrimination when recruiting. Guidance for culturally sensitive work processes can be found in *A Cultural Inclusion Framework for South Australia*, where a checklist and associated documents can be found. The excerpt below, from the Framework's checklist, suggests some things the recruiting manger can do.<br><br>*"When advertising staff vacancies, which newspapers and other media are used? Have you, or do you advertise in the Aboriginal media?  What is the nature and extent of any cultural competency criteria included in job descriptions within our agency? Where have you sourced the criteria? Does your agency include these criteria when advertising job vacancies? Does your agency actively seek individuals from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities when recruiting new staff?"* |

| 3 | Everyone must be treated exactly the same. It's discriminatory to treat people differently. | You may need to treat a person differently according to their needs, in order to give them an equal chance in comparison with others. You must consider aptitude and potential as well as demonstrated experience and knowledge. Allowance can be made where a person cannot reasonably be expected to know about or have experience in particular aspects of the vacancy. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | | Disabilities that do not affect the candidate's ability to perform the duties must be ignored, and allowances should also be made for physical impairments or work-life balance needs where these can be reasonably accommodated. |
| 4 | You must only use the person specification criteria as a selection standard. | Your duty is to select the best person for the job, not the person who best matches the person specification. Therefore, in addition to the person specification, use the rest of the job and person specification document to select against. |
| 5 | Candidates must have past experience. | Avoid over-emphasis on particularly specific types of job experience. Although all job criteria must be based on the real needs of the job, for example, previous experience in project management may be necessary for a senior project management role, but previous experience in government would not necessarily be essential. Ensure that the job and person criteria and job selection processes do not unfairly disadvantage potential candidates. Don't specify experience as essential if it could easily be obtained in the new job. |
| | | For candidates who have ongoing social or educational disadvantages, consideration should be given to their potential to develop with the right kind of support or training. |

| 6 | The application must address the selection criteria individually. If the candidate does not address each criterion separately their application should be excluded at short listing. | The format should not be so idiosyncratic as to disadvantage people. To exclude an applicant who has provided evidence, but not in a particular format, is neither fair nor is it a reasonable way of determining merit. Dismissing applications because each point in a person specification has not been separately responded to is discriminatory. If the candidate provided the required information anywhere in the application it should be assessed. Screening and scoring applications using a structured format to assess criteria will make this a more reliable and fair assessment as well as easier for the panel members.<br><br>You may ask applicants to submit as little as a CV and an application letter; however, applicants must provide sufficient information for their suitability to be assessed.<br><br>Because past practice has created an expectation that each selection criterion be individually addressed, it is wise to be very clear in the application advice that separate paragraphs DO NOT have to be provided on each selection criterion. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 7 | You must interview everyone who meets the essential criteria. | You do not have to interview any of the candidates. You need only shortlist and further assess those candidates that demonstrate the best match to the position. If there is a large number of candidates, you need a process to reduce the field to a manageable size. This can be done by means of references, phone screening, or any other preliminary step to identity those candidates who should progress to the next step of the selection process. You may be required to explain why candidates were not considered further. |
| 8 | A person at the same level as the advertised position must be included on the selection panel. | This is not required practice, but has been established by some agencies as convention. Your agency may have its own policy on the composition of a panel. A gender-balanced panel, consisting of the line manager and an independent member, is a reasonable, but not obligatory, panel composition. |
| 9 | In order not to discriminate, you must use a selection panel consisting of three persons – one from both genders and a representative of a diversity group. | While a panel that has some diversity of gender and culture, etc, may be an asset, this is not a legislative requirement. Selection of candidates must be based on sound assessment of candidates against the job requirements. Don't place more emphasis on the demographics of the panel rather than their capacity to effectively assess candidates' merits. |

| 10 | All applicants must be asked the same question(s) at interview. | Asking every candidate the same set of core questions is fair, as everyone then has an equal chance and it makes comparison easier. However, it is also necessary to ask different questions if you are seeking verification, clarification or further information to assist in deciding between candidates. Not doing this would make it hard for you to properly assess merit. |
|---|---|---|
| | | When designing interview questions, test them prior to interview to make sure they are understandable and elicit the information you are seeking. Make necessary adjustments prior to the actual interview. |
| | | It is useful to provide the candidate with the questions in written format, as it is very hard to retain the question while formulating an answer. |
| 11 | You must make the selection decision based on the interview, regardless of what else you know. | It is your responsibility to determine the best candidate. Information from an interview is only one source of information. An application statement and CV are part of the evidence (not just for short-listing), and can demonstrate experience or skills, eg, concise writing. |
| | | Continue to gather information until you are confident that you can make an accurate assessment. The more sources of information you have to assess your candidates, the more confident of your choice you will be. |
| 12 | Graduates must be appointed to ASO2 or equivalent level. | The classification of the position must match the duties. If you are appointing to a specific vacancy or level the classification will be predetermined. If you have a pool of graduates and several positions you can make the best fit between position and candidate. You may convert a graduate, who was initially appointed through a merit process, from a contract to ongoing employment. If it's outlined in the employment offer, this could also be to a higher level, pending satisfactory probation. |
| 13 | You can only appoint to the level advertised. | You may appoint at the level advertised or lower. You may reassess the job at any stage and withdraw the job, or not appoint. You may re-advertise at a different classification or with amended duties and selection criteria. |
| 14 | You cannot be part of a selection process if you know a candidate. | You should disclose your relationship with the candidate. If there is a conflict of interest, it would be wise to withdraw. A conflict of interest occurs when a private or personal interest could compromise judgment and appears to influence the objective implementation of selection decisions. |

| 15 | You can only do reference checking with referees provided by the candidate. | The decision to seek a reference from a particular person lies with the selection panel. It is appropriate to advise the candidate of the panel's intention, although you do not require the candidate's permission to do this. Be sensitive about approaching a referee if doing so may jeopardise their current employment. Non-nominated referees should also be advised that their comments might be provided to the candidate, should they request this. |
|---|---|---|
| 16 | You cannot ask line managers to be a referee if they are on the selection panel. | It would be unfair to candidates if they could not get their line manager to provide information on their performance. The manager on the panel would have to be open about a relationship with the candidate, preferably at the start of the selection process. |
| 17 | The employing manager should have the casting vote if the panel is tied. | If the panel cannot make a decision, they should seek further means of making distinctions between candidates. The delegate makes the decision and the panel should either reach consensus or indicate their differing views. |
| 18 | The application, interview and referee comments carry equal weight. | There is no rigid formula. Give due consideration to all evidence. It helps to decide what the critical selection criteria are and to give them more weight. All evidence can be flawed. For example, application statements may be written or edited by another person, the interview can be affected by anxiety and the referees' reports are prone to personal bias. Therefore, using various parts of evidence to corroborate and balance the other parts will help to minimise error. |
| 19 | External contractors may select the candidate. | The responsibility for the selection decision delegation rests with the employer, not a panel member or contractor. External contractors can provide information on candidates' interviews, assessments and on references. However, the public sector delegate makes the selection decision. |
| 20 | You must accommodate a candidate's needs if you offer them a job. | Once a preferred candidate is offered a role the candidate and the employer need to jointly agree on the job conditions (salary, work location, etc). If the parties do not agree and the candidate does not accept the terms and conditions this may result in the job being offered to the person rated second in the merit ranking. |

| 21 | The panel's notes can be thrown away after the process is complete. | The selection report must contain a comparison and ranking of the comparative strengths of candidates, and must make a recommendation. Sufficient notes must be kept during the process to make it accountable, to provide a basis for providing feedback to candidates who request it, and to be available for any grievance review. The *Government Disposal Schedule* specifies the minimum amount of time documentation must be kept. For Chief Executive positions, such documents must be kept permanently; for other positions the time period is 12 months after last action. For special recruitment schemes, that is, graduates, traineeships, etc, the time period is seven years. Refer to the *General Disposal Schedule No. 15*, which is located in <http://www.archives.sa.gov.au> |

# Conclusion

Having the right staff is critical to the future delivery of government services. With an impending skills shortage and a workforce with increased expectations, the public sector must reform its recruitment processes in order to attract high-quality candidates and compete in the market place.

By applying the principles of good practice you can design a well-managed recruitment process that will prevent costly mistakes and ensure a minimum amount of time spent in securing a suitable employee.

Public sector managers are encouraged to see recruitment as a core part of their role and to manage it accordingly.

# Appendix A

There are a number of sources that provide further detail about recruitment processes. These include:

Various public sector employment acts, which include the legislative mechanisms and requirements for recruiting and managing employees.

The *Code of Conduct* for public sector employees, which establishes the framework for ethics and values within the public sector, and which should be included in the design of job descriptions.

Commissioner's Standards issued by the Commissioner for Public Employment, which are binding directions that provide a framework for agencies to develop their own policies and procedures (*Commissioner's Standard 1 - A Planned Workforce* and *Commissioner's Standard 2 - Quality Staffing* outline public sector policy requirements for recruitment practice).

Commissioner's Guidelines, which are not binding but which provide agencies with principles to assist them in developing policy and procedures according to good practice. These Guidelines describe the principles underpinning the eight key result areas of the *Strategic Human Resource Management Framework for the South Australian Public Sector.*

Individual agency policies and procedures, which are commonly developed and are usually available on the agency intranet or from the human resources section.

RecruitBetter <http://www.recruitbetter.sa.gov.au>, which is a tool that has been developed to provide detailed information about recruitment good practice.

The Online Competency-Based Role Description Builder, which is an online resource site intended to assist managers develop competency-based role descriptions.
<http://www3.skillassess.com/saus/login.cfm>

*General Disposal Schedule No. 15* in the State Records of South Australia - Disposal Schedules. <http://www.archives.sa.gov.au>

Cultural Inclusion Framework <http://www.cpe.sa.gov.au/home/events/cultural_inclusion_framework/>

Other relevant legislation such as:

*Public Sector Management Act (SA)* 1995

*Equal Opportunity Act* 1984 (SA)

*Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act* 1992

*Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act* 1986

*Freedom of Information Act* 1991 (SA)

*The Fair Work Act* 2005

# Appendix B

| Glossary | |
|---|---|
| **Term** | **Definition** |
| Abstract thinking | A style of thinking in which concepts and ideas are understood and later applied in problem solving. Thinking is characterised by the ability to use concepts and to make and understand generalisations of things such as the properties or patterns shared by a variety of specific items or events. |
| Acceptable/preferred candidate | The candidates who are deemed to be able to perform the duties of the job are termed 'suitable' or 'acceptable'. The most meritorious, that is, the best candidate, is usually called the preferred candidate. |
| Assessment centre | An assessment centre consists of a structured series of simulations of various job activities. Typically, they are realistic job-like tasks that are rated by three assessors according to the job competencies. Because of the multiple scorers and the multiple measures of each characteristic, assessment centres are the most reliable predictor of job success. |
| Behavioural questions | Also called behavioural event questions. A style of questioning that seeks specific examples of real past behaviour. |
| Candidate management system/e-recruitment | Various terms are used to describe a web-based system that electronically manages recruitment. The system could include everything from the employment branding to the induction material, including selection screening and employment pools. |
| Competency | Competency is sometimes used exclusively to refer to Industry-Accredited Competencies, and sometimes used interchangeably with 'capabilities' to refer to broad job requirements. |
| Employment pools | An employment pool consists of a group of candidates. The pool could simply be a list of potential candidates or could be a group of pre-selected candidates who are ready for appointment once a vacancy is identified. |
| Excess employee/ redeployee | This is an employee who has been declared by the Chief Executive as excess to requirements. |
| Grievance | A grievance is a complaint against a process or person by an individual that has been upset by one of these. An administrative grievance is one arising from an administrative decision or from the failure to make a decision – this is the most common type of grievance in recruitment. |
| Merit | In selection, merit is determined by the relative ability and potential of the candidate in comparison to other candidates. |

| Probation | Under common law, a probationary employee is one who has been hired for a limited period on the understanding that the continuation of the contract will be decided at the end of that period. This generally enables the employer to decide whether the employee is suitable for the position. All new employees are required to serve a period of probationary employment. This does not apply if the employee has already served a probationary period elsewhere within the public service. |
|---|---|
| | The duration of the probationary period will differ depending on the nature and tenure of the employment contract: For ongoing appointment, 12 months probation is common (can be confirmed after 6 months). |
| Psychological testing/ psychometric testing | Psychometric tests are tests which have been standardised over a large population so that an individual's scores can be placed within the distribution of the larger population's scores. Psychological tests are grouped into tests of intelligence, personality or ability. They both report how reliable and valid the results are. |
| Recruitment | Recruitment consists of the entire process of attracting candidates, conducting a selection process, making a decision, appointing the chosen candidate and engaging him or her. |
| Selection | Selection is the process of seeking applications and choosing suitable candidate/s. |
| Short-term position | This term is used to describe a non-ongoing position, generally lasting less than 12 months. Such positions are identified in *Commissioner's Standard 2 - Quality Staffing* and have different rules concerning the need to advertise externally. |
| Work-injured | Refers to an employee who has a recognised, compensable injury. |