The Recruitment Process

Note: We have found it useful to follow best practice guidelines from, say, CIPD (http://www.cipd.co.uk/hr-topics/recruitment.aspx), especially to help ensure we develop an effective and fair recruitment process.

Administration

Before advertising, we appoint a three-person recruitment team (see below) and work backwards to decide upon convenient dates for interview, short-listing and application deadline, given that we aim to advertise for about 4 weeks, and then leave about a week between deadline/short-listing/interview.

You should ensure that those involved in recruitment and selection have adequate training and experience.

Do not under-estimate the time it may take to process application forms, to short-list and to carry out related administration, such as sending emails or arranging the assessment days, so leave enough time in your schedule. We also usually enlist the help one or two members to do the administration during the recruitment.

Develop a simple recruitment management system to keep track of applications, the results of short-listing, when various responses to applicants have been sent and so on. We currently use a combination of basic mail facilities (e.g. conversations and labels in googlemail) and spreadsheets; we may investigate using recruitment support software in the future.

Advertising

Unicorn's website provides one of the best tools for recruitment. We also advertise on www.environmentjob.co.uk, on the shop floor and among existing casual workers. Guardian print and on-line advertisements often receive a good response, although these are expensive. You also should ensure that adverts are placed so that they reach a broad range of people, to attract a diverse set of applicants.

An effective advert clearly contains all necessary information, including pertinent details from the job description and person specification, and pay and benefits. Publicising relatively low wages may eliminate a lot of people, but will save time in the long run.

Applications

The most useful questions on our application – why a person wants to work at Unicorn, or why s/he is suitable – give a consistent and better insight into skills, experience and expectations than a CV (although we also require an up-to-date CV to be submitted). Contact information allows the option to clarify any confusion or gather further information in advance of interview. We use monitoring forms to further our principle of Equal Opportunity, although these forms are not passed along to the recruitment team. Obviously, we do not include any irrelevant or discriminatory questions on the application, e.g., age, child-rearing plans, etc!

Most applications currently arrive via email. We send a standard acknowledgement to all applications received, informing applicants when they will hear about short-listing, and when interviews are scheduled.

Recruitment Team
A three-person recruitment team includes one member of Personnel, and at least one member from any specific teams for which we are recruiting.

Shortlisting
Each member of the recruitment team independently goes through the set of applications, and determines whether each application is a 'yes', 'no' or 'maybe', making notes to support each decision. The recruitment team then meets to discuss applications and to agree assessments, again sorting into ‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘maybe’ pile. Incorrectly-filled in applications go straight to the ‘no’ pile. The ‘maybe’ pile is tallest and most difficult to resolve, as it requires the team to discern where each applicant fits within the business. Referring to the job description and person specification, the team asks the following questions:

- Why does this person want to work with us?
- How closely does s/he match the requirements on the person specification?
- Does s/he have potential as a director and manager?
- Can s/he make tough decisions?
- Can s/he project manage?

It is often useful to produce an intermediate long-list, before deriving a final short-list. Maintain accurate records throughout, noting the reasons behind each decision, so that feedback can be given if necessary at a later stage.

Confidentiality
As mentioned above, monitoring forms (if used) must be separated from applications. All forms must be locked away, in respect of data protection regulations. Unless the form explicitly states that all members may see it, do not share responses on forms.

After short-listing we send a standard email to inform those applicants who have been unsuccessful and to thank them for applying.

We then arrange a timetable for the assessment days and interviews, and send invitations to short-listed applicants.

Interviewing and assessing
In order to gain a more holistic insight, short-listed applicants are invited to assessment days at Unicorn, which include an interview, a written test, and a chance to working alongside existing members. Not everyone interviews well, but someone who makes many mistakes while helping on the shop floor and does not show potential for improvement may not be a suitable candidate.

Arrange for a suitable space for conducting the interviews and other assessment activities; it is important to make a good impression on applicants and to reflect the kind of business you are.

The interview is structured, so the recruitment panel sticks to the same basic set of questions to keep the process fair; look online for question types and ideas; each question is designed to explore a specific aspect of the person specification. Discuss beforehand what the panel would like to learn from the individual candidates and how to discover the most useful information. During the interview, each recruitment team member should take notes and mark the candidate on individual questions.

If the candidates work alongside the members on the shop floor, that member receives a simple ‘scorecard’ to be completed immediately after the work trial.

The written test offers another means for expression for those uncomfortable in interview and especially helps to evaluate prioritising or problem-solving skills.
The tests should be marked against agreed criteria and results fed in to the selection process.

Generally, every business benefits from experimenting with different interview questions and types of assessment, to find which combination works most effectively.

It is useful to have additional members available to assist with the smooth running of the assessment days, meeting and welcoming applicants and escorting them to their various tasks.

Selection
This is perhaps the most difficult aspect of recruitment: the panel may want to keep most of the short-list by the selection stage. At Unicorn, the recruitment panel first looks at who scored the most points in interview, then to feedback from the other assessments. We aim to match assessment performance with the skills required so that we can find the perfect grocer!

The panel aims to recruit the number of staff or hours agreed by the membership. However, in case of exceptional candidates, and providing it is affordable to the business, we make the most of the recruitment process by offering more people slightly fewer hours each.

Selection Outcome
Once the selection process has compiled a list of those to be appointed, it is useful to consult with, say, another member of Personnel just to get a third party view on the list and to check that nothing has been overlooked, for example that the numbers of hours to be offered are acceptable.

Successful applicants are then offered probationary positions (subject to satisfactory references), and once they have all verbally accepted, the 'on-boarding' process can start: formally offering the position in writing and getting written acceptance; taking up references; agreeing hours and setting up the rota; providing starter information; welcoming the probationer on their first day and starting induction and probationer training.

Unsuccesful applicants should be notified as soon as possible as well; it is useful to be able more specific feedback at this stage.

Maintaining a good relationship

As a matter of courtesy, and to keep applicants informed, Unicorn sends an acknowledgement email to everyone who has made the effort to fill in an application form. We also then send an email to those applicants who were unsuccessful and did not meet our criteria or expectations, either at short-listing or after the assessment days (although we generally do not give individual feedback, simply because we do not have the resources). Aside from common decency, these candidates may be customers, or friends to customers or future employees. As discussed elsewhere in this toolkit, word of mouth is crucial to our reputation and negative experiences always travel faster and farther than positive ones.