

Referee and other background checking

Referee checking is an essential process to find out more about the candidate, their attitudes, relationship with others and how they act in the workplace. This is an ideal opportunity to check and verify information you have gathered so far.

- At least 2 referees should be consulted.
- Should be in person, usually by telephone, if possible.
- At least one referee should be a person with a direct role supervising the candidate in their work place.
- The referees should be as relevant as possible to the role you are offering. They should not be family members or part of the candidate's extended family.
- Take steps to authenticate the referee e.g. contact them through a organisation phone number/email. Ask for a call back number that links them to their organisation.
- Be wary of written references, especially if they are not current, not specific to working with children and if it is not clear what the referees role/relationship to the candidate is. Any references given in writing should be followed up with specific questions you want answered. Where ever possible, follow up written responses with phone contact.
- Get consent from the candidate to approach other previous employers, other than those offered as referees. Ask the candidate why, if they are reluctant. Remind them that they can opt out of the job application process at any time.
- Can the immediate previous employer be contacted? As a last resort, can they be contacted once the job offer is ready to be made? If the candidate is reluctant, you should be given a good reason why.
- If there has been any disciplinary action taken by a previous employer, investigate fully. Give the candidate the opportunity to respond.
- Referees are entitled to ask that you don't share their comments with the candidate.

Referee questions

Have all relevant info on hand when contacting referees: CV, application form, interview notes, qualifications etc. Both open-ended and closed questions can be useful. (*Refer to the OSCN's interview guidelines for an explanation of these terms*)

Open questions could include:

- *Can you comment on suitability to work with children?*
- *How would you describe how..... acts around children?*
- *Can you comment on how approached disciplining children?*
- *What was the reason that..... left your workplace?*

Closed questions help with specific factual information. e.g.

- *Did you ever have a situation with....where disciplinary action was needed because of misconduct involving children?*
- *Was ever the subject of a complaint? What was the outcome of the complaint?*
- *Did you ever have any reason to think had mislead you or been dishonest?*
- *Would you describe as 'professional' in his/her work with children?*
- *Would you employ.....again?*

Sample verification questions

- *Can you confirm the period of employment for and his/her duties*
- *We understand that under went several courses while in your employment. Can you confirm....*
- *According to s/he was responsible for..... Can you comment on his/her effectiveness in this role?*

Background checking using on-line sources

It is becoming more common for on-line information, such as social media sources, to be checked. Be careful to see any information in context and be sure you have the correct person. Don't believe everything you read on-line.

Always allow the candidate to respond to information you obtain that is relevant to your employment decision. Keep records of what you discuss with the candidate and how you have reached your employment decision.

All candidates are entitled to fair and reasonable treatment during the recruitment process. Certain information such as family status, religious beliefs and health background is arguably private and discrimination on these grounds is like to be illegal under the Human Rights Act.