

Shaw Trust Direct Payments Support Services

Information Sheet 6: Recruiting a Personal Assistant

Sheet Outline:

- Drafting a Job Description and Person Specification
- Advertising your vacancy
- Interviewing candidates
- Selecting an employee and conducting background checks
- Developing a Contract of Employment

Outcome:

- To develop the skills and knowledge required to recruit staff

Introduction to Recruiting a Personal Assistant

With Direct Payments you get to choose the people who provide care for you. This can be complicated but the Shaw Trust Direct Payments Support Service can give you support.

We can:

- Help you to draft a Job Description and Person Specification for your new Personal Assistant worker;
- Advertise your job and send details about your vacancy out to people who may be interested in applying;
- Arrange interviews and support you in the interview to find the person who is right for you;
- Check people's backgrounds when you have decided who you want to employ; and
- Support you with preparing a Contract of Employment.

Drafting a Job Description and Person Specification

Finding the right staff to work for you is likely to be the most crucial aspect of making Direct Payments successful for you.

Why have a Job Description for your Employees?

A Job Description sets out clearly what is required in the job and can be used both when recruiting and once your employee has started work and it is strongly recommended that you have one for each of your employees.

A Job Description is very important because:

- It lets the applicant know exactly what the job involves; and
- When you do employ someone it becomes part of the employment contract.

Although it might seem like a lot of work to compile a Job Description you should only need to do it once. When it is finished you might need to change it occasionally as your needs may change.

What do you use a Job Description and Person Specification for?

You can use a Job Description to give to people who apply to work for you; they will then know exactly what is expected and whether they want the job.

You can use a Job Description as a training aid, ticking off each item as your employee learns it.

Sometimes difficulties arise with an employee – e.g. they do not do what they are supposed to. If this happens you can refer them back to the Job Description which clearly details the Personal Assistant's responsibilities.

How do you create a Job Description and Person Specification?

A Job Description is a list of all the tasks that you need to be done.

A Person Specification is a list of the skills and personal qualities you are looking for in your Personal Assistant.

If you wish you can also put in some information about your circumstances and the importance of the job to your quality of life.

Ask your Support Officer for a Job Description and Person Specification Template or go to www.shaw-trust.org.uk/dp. This template is as full as possible to give you the best idea of the kinds of tasks and qualities you may

want to include in your Job Description and Person Specification and you can adapt it to suit your situation.

What should you include in your Job Description?

Job Descriptions generally include the following elements:

- 1. A summary of the job role, for example:**
 - an overview of the job and what you expect from your Personal Assistant;
 - some background about yourself, your lifestyle and what you do and how you expect your Personal Assistant to fit in with this.

- 2. The employer/employee relationship, for example:**
 - a clear description of the nature of the relationship i.e. that the Personal Assistant will take directions from you and be accountable to you;
 - what relationship you expect them to have with your friends, family, other employees etc.;
 - a statement that they respect your privacy and keep all information about you and your family and friends etc. confidential; and
 - an agreement about use of your facilities when they are in your home.

- 3. The main tasks in the job, for example:**
 - based on your care assessment and any other duties you wish to include;
 - a statement about any training you are going to give in any areas.

- 4. The Person Specification, for example:**
 - the qualities you are looking for;
 - the abilities you are looking for;
 - the experience you are looking for (if any); and
 - the specific requirements you are looking for (if gender/race you should quote the relevant Acts – see **Information Sheet 7**).

- 5. The hours of work and rates of pay, for example:**
 - details of hours/shifts and days of work - if not set, describe the broadest range; and
 - rates of pay (include details of different rates for different times).

- 6. Any other conditions of service, for example:**
 - details of financial arrangements in the event of hospitalisation, respite care periods or annual holidays;
 - the employee's responsibilities for Health and Safety;
 - a sentence indicating how the Job Description can be changed or amended.

Advertising your Vacancy

Once you have drafted your Job Description and Person Specification you will need to decide how you are going to find the right staff. There are many ways of doing this; some are more successful than others and some cost more than others.

Word of mouth: Knowing someone you would like to work for you is obviously the best way, but another similar way is to ask people you trust if they know anyone who would be interested.

Advertising in your local Post Office, shop or college: This has the advantage of reaching people who live near you. This can be helpful in that arrangements with people can often be more flexible and, if they are not relying on transport to reach you, they are less likely to let you down through travelling difficulties. It is also very inexpensive to put a small advertisement in the shop window. Remember to find out how much it costs and put down a closing date.

Newspaper advertising: The Support Service can give you prices for a variety of publications and may be able to support you with placing the advert.

Job Centre: Job Centres will advertise for you free of charge, and will often give you help with writing up an advertisement and in giving you a room to hold the interviews in. Feedback from clients about the quality of candidates has been mixed. Some have been, good others not. One problem is that the Job Centre has targets to meet in finding people work and they may well put people your way whom they have had difficulty placing. Also, if you rely on this method alone you will not include people already in work.

Specialist Recruitment Websites: There are several recruitment websites which provide services to support people in recruiting and employing people. For a fee, you can register with on-line recruitment services and your vacancy will be advertised on the web.

Drafting an Advertisement

Most of the above ways of finding staff require you to draw up an advertisement.

Ask your Support Officer for a Job Advert Template which you can adapt to suit your vacancy or go to www.shaw-trust.org.uk/dp.

Adverts should be as simple as possible with just the basic information but always remember to include:

- what the job is;

- what the hours are;
- what the pay is;
- how to contact you/get an Application Form;
- the closing date; and
- anything else you think you need to specify at this point.

Once you have advertised your vacancy you will need to ask potential candidates who contact you for a name and address so you can send out the Job Description and the Person Specification to people who are interested.

You will need to decide how you want to get the information you want from your applicants. There are two main ways:

- you could ask them to write to you saying why they are interested in the position, sending you their Curriculum Vitae; or
- you could ask them to complete an Application Form. **Ask your Support Officer for a Job Application Template which you can adapt to suit your vacancy or go to www.shaw-trust.org.uk/dp.**

Your Shaw Trust Direct Payments Support Service may also be able to support you with responding to your advertising campaign by:

- receiving the initial telephone calls on your behalf;
- sending out Job Descriptions, Person Specifications and Job Applications to your candidates with a covering letter drafted by you;
- receiving all applications at a secure and independent address;
- forwarding all applications to you for you to shortlist;
- setting up interviews for you with your potential candidates.

Caution: For safety reasons it is important not to give out your address to people at this stage. The Direct Payments Support Service can make arrangements to receive your recruitment mail and to provide office facilities so that you can interview away from your home.

Interviewing Candidates

Generally, it is not a good idea to interview people in your own home. Many Job Centres have rooms where you can interview applicants but you will need to book the room in advance. The Direct Payments Support Service can also assist you in finding a room to interview in.

It is a good idea to ask someone to assist you with interviewing. There are several reasons for doing this:

- It is good to have someone who you can discuss your impressions of applicants with.
- You may need someone to assist you with taking notes.
- It can also help you to remain in control of the situation.

The Direct Payments Support Service can offer advice on suitable places to hold interviews and will also be available to assist with interviewing if required.

The interview is the only time you have to determine the suitability of the applicant. It might be useful to conduct the interview in an informal way, maybe over a cup of coffee, as a good way of judging if you like the applicant. The main thing is that you feel comfortable with the whole process.

Interviews generally take between 20-30 minutes. You should leave some time between them to have a break and discuss your impressions.

Remember that at the interview you want to:

- find out if the person is suitable for the job;
- get extra information about their skills and experience;
- find out more about them, what they think, and how they will cope with new situations; and
- find out why they want to do this job for you.

At the interview, you should also explain what the job is about: its terms, rules and what you expect. Explain to applicants about the hours you want them to work, and find out if they are able to work unsociable hours e.g. Bank Holidays, weekends, evenings. Do not offer the job to any candidate until you have interviewed everyone, as there may be a better applicant later on.

Ask your Support Officer for an Interview Checklist and Sample Questions Template which you can adapt to suit your needs or go to www.shaw-trust.org.uk/dp.

General Interviewing Tips

- Try and give as positive an impression as you can at all times.
- Using an applicant's name throughout the interview is a good technique. If you address them simply as 'you' all the time, they may well feel that you haven't got their name and this may discourage them from opening up.
- Be prepared to go into detail about your personal requirements at the interview stage and to answer any questions they have. Forwarding applicants the Job Description will help to make it clear what is expected.
- Explain your disability – outline a “typical day” and the type of work that they would be expected to do as detailed in your Job Description.
- Before the interview you should prepare a set of questions to ask each applicant. You should ask all the applicants the same questions in roughly the same order and devise a way of scoring the answers you get (maybe 0-5 depending on how well they answer). Interviewing like this will give everyone an equal chance, and enable you to select the best person for the job.
- Check your list of questions to make sure that you have all the information you want before you let the applicant go. There is no reason why you should not look at the list of points that you made before the interview. Do this openly, explaining what you are doing to the applicant. You may then ask them if there are any questions they want to ask.
- Thank the person for their time and explain when they are likely to hear from you and whether you will write to them or inform them verbally.
- Explain if you have more people to interview.

You should also explain the following:

- Pay and conditions and any rota system you have worked out in advance.
- That you will take up references for the applicant prior to appointment (assuming you have not done so prior to interview).
- Advise that if successful, relevant Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Police checks may be carried out prior to commencement.

Selecting an Employee and Conducting Background Checks

Having interviewed all your applicants how do you select the best candidate? It is best to check two points:

- Can they actually do the job or will they be able to with a bit of guidance from you? Are you sure about this? – check the evidence from the Application Form and the interview.
- Are they the kind of person you want, are you going to be able to get along with them? This will form the basis of a good working relationship.

In other words does your candidate match up to the Job Description and Person Specification? Ideally the best match should be the best candidate.

Checking References

Checking the references an applicant has given is very important because it is the only way you can be sure that the information they have provided is correct. It is also valuable to have the opinion of another person who already knows the applicant and about their suitability for the job.

Each applicant should have given the name and address of two people who are prepared to give him or her a reference on their Application Form. It is important that the first reference they give you is their last employer. They should also have stated whether you can take up the references before the interview.

The usual time to take up references is after you have interviewed because then you should know who you would prefer to offer the job to. Taking up references before interview is not normally a good idea because of the effort and time involved in getting references for everyone.

Asking for a written reference is the best way of getting the most information. You can ask specific questions and also send a copy of the Job Description so you are sure that the referee (the person giving the reference) understands what the job involves.

The drawbacks are that it may take longer for the referee to reply, so you may have to wait longer before the person can start if they are suitable.

Do not accept written references given to you by the applicant on behalf of someone else without verifying that they were indeed written by a past employer.

Simply contacting the referee by telephone may seem like a quicker way of checking if someone is suitable. Referees may also be prepared to say things over the telephone, which they would not write down. On the other hand, a quick telephone call may not allow the referee to think about what the job involves.

The best advice that can be given is to have the best of both worlds by requesting a reference by letter and then following it up with a telephone call.

Criminal Records Bureau Checks

Direct Payments Support Services advise that you carry out an Enhanced Disclosure check completed by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). It is a good idea to tell all prospective employees that their employment will be subject to a satisfactory check.

CRB checks can take several weeks so it is a good idea to get this process moving as quickly as possible.

Ask your Support Officer for a Criminal Records Bureau Application Form.

Immigration Status

The Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 makes it a criminal offence for an employer to employ those who do not have permission to live or to work in the United Kingdom. This applies only in relation to employees who started work for the employer on or after 27 January 1997. For further information visit the Home Office website at www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk

To prevent illegal working you will need to check and copy one of the original documents included in List 1, or by copying a combination of two original documents specified in List 2 on the Home Office Website at: <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/lawandpolicy/preventingillegalworking/>

You should do this before the person starts working for you, and you should keep a record of it.

This check is not compulsory but it is advisable, otherwise you may be convicted of a criminal offence under section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Act if it turns out that any of your employees are not legally entitled to work here. You must be careful however that checking does not lead you to break the law on discrimination – it is best to treat all people who apply in the same way. Ask all applicants for a document, or combination of documents from the lists, and ask everybody if they need permission to work.

Developing a Contract of Employment

A Contract of Employment is a legally binding agreement between employer and employee which is formed when an employee agrees to work for an employer in return for pay. It may be made orally, but should be in writing to avoid dispute. You are legally required to put some of the main particulars of employment in writing.

Employers must give employees a written statement of the main particulars of employment within two months of the beginning of the employment. Incomplete or inaccurate written particulars of employment can result in increased compensation being awarded at an employment tribunal in the event of a successful separate claim. It helps to avoid misunderstanding and disputes about employees' particulars of employment. Written statements should be given to all employees.

(Source: ACAS www.acas.org.uk)

Ask your Support Officer for a Contract of Employment Template which you can adapt to suit your needs or go to www.shaw-trust.org.uk/dp.

Probationary Period

However good your interviewing skills are, the only way you really find out what someone is really like is when they start working for you. For this reason, it's a good idea to say at interview or in the contract, that the PA will initially be employed for a trial or probationary period. You should also say how long the probationary period is and the amount of notice required, if either of you wish to terminate the contract. If you are both happy at the end of the trial period, the contract can be made permanent. If there are problems, discuss any concerns you have well before the probationary period ends. It is easier to end the contract during the probationary period than once the contract has become permanent. If you decide to extend the probationary period put your reasons and the time period in writing.

Speak to your Support Officer for further information and support with recruiting staff.