

Safer recruitment

Protecting children and young people from harm begins before a post is even advertised, says **Dianne Leyland**, NAVCA's Children's Workforce Development Adviser.

Circulation readers will be familiar with the concept of safeguarding and may already be preparing for the Vetting and Barring scheme in their organisation (see article 412.7 in this issue). However, it is all too easy to forget that protecting children and young people from harm begins before a post is even advertised. 'Safer recruitment' means ensuring that all stages in the process of appointing staff and volunteers are designed to ensure that inappropriate candidates are screened out at the earliest possible stage.

Safer recruitment is important for two reasons. Firstly, it sends a clear message to candidates that the protection of children and young people is central to an organisation's work and that all staff and volunteers will be expected to play their part. Secondly, it provides a structured opportunity to identify candidates who may present a risk that may not be picked up by formal Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and Vetting and Barring procedures, perhaps because they have not been subject to criminal proceedings or formal exclusion from working with children and young people.

There are four key stages to safer recruitment:

Before advertising a post

At this point, you should be ensuring that there is a clear recruitment and selection process and safeguarding policy. The job description, person specification and job advertisement should include references to your organisation's commitment to safeguarding.

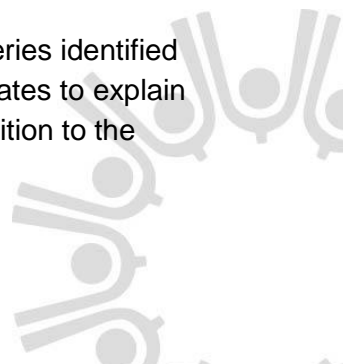
Before interviewing

At shortlisting, the panel should identify any gaps, discrepancies or unexplained changes in the candidate's employment or volunteering record, and decide whether these are significant enough to reject the candidate or can be explored further at interview. It may also be appropriate at this stage to verify any professional qualifications or registrations, and to request references so that any concerns raised in these can be discussed with the candidate at interview.

Before selecting a preferred candidate

The interview process should allow for full discussion of any queries identified at the shortlisting stage. It is acceptable to ask individual candidates to explain discrepancies in their employment or volunteering history in addition to the

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competency-based questions directed to all interviewees. Paperwork relating to qualifications and professional registration should be verified at interview if this was not done at shortlisting, but it is important to also check that registration is still current, because a certificate may no longer be valid. The interviewee's identity and right to work in the UK should also be verified.

Before formally appointing

This will be the final opportunity to check references, qualifications and registration. It is at this stage that CRB and Vetting and Barring procedures will usually be instigated.

These stages, alongside more general good practice in recruitment and selection, should apply to all staff and volunteers, but of course an organisation may have limited capacity to conduct a full selection process, particularly for casual volunteers. The organisation should seek to strike a balance between managing resources and its responsibility to protect children and young people from harm. Bear in mind that it is usually more resource-intensive to correct problems later on that arise from poor recruitment practice. Some of the elements mentioned above, such as CRB and Vetting and Barring procedures, are legally required for volunteers as well as staff.

Organisations that use agency staff or volunteers should discuss with their referring agencies who will be responsible for the elements outlined above.

Help and support

Fortunately help is available to guide organisations through the maze of legal requirements and good practice. The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) has launched guidance documents and a resources toolkit aimed at all organisations recruiting staff and volunteers to work with children and young people. The guidance expands on the stages outlined above and also covers wider good practice in recruitment and selection. The toolkit includes sample policies, job description and person specifications, as well as links to key documents and further sources of information. The materials are available online and in CD format, and are free of charge.

CWDC will also shortly be launching a free online training package for everyone involved with recruiting to the children and young people's workforce. It is intended to run a series of face-to-face workshops to complement this package, but dates for this are yet to be announced.

Further information

www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/safeguarding/safer-recruitment

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