

## **Personnel**

It is becoming increasingly common for business organisations to have a personnel development plan, building on a business plan, which is designed to ensure that the necessary skills and expertise are available or will become available in order to implement the forward plans of these organisations. It follows that practices may find it helpful to document the skills and expertise required of all personnel within the firm and the tasks they are required to perform, possibly in the shape of formal job descriptions. Steps should be taken to discuss with staff the range of development options open to them. Arrange private but informal regular meetings with employees and listen to what is said. Build relationships and benefit from their experiences. Replacing experienced and trained staff can be an expensive exercise.

## **Recruitment**

Having established the existing and required posts within the firm, consideration should be given to the appropriate method of recruitment eg. Press or journal advertisement, agency, head-hunting etc. The choice will depend on the type of job and the state of the labour market. Care should be taken to see that the approach to the market which is selected conforms with relevant anti-discrimination legislation. Procedures should be implemented to evaluate the skills, expertise and suitability of applicants for posts which are created or become vacant. This is likely to involve requesting applicants to consider the relevant job description and complete an application form. The latter will form the basis for assessing the applicants suitability for the post and thus feed both into the process of drawing up a short list and the interviews of the applicants. Some firms have begun to experiment with psychometric and other psychologically based tests in order to establish that the personality type of the short listed candidates falls within an acceptable range for the firm. This is likely to grow more common as firms become more aware of their existing organisational culture or even seek to change it through the pursuit of quality and client satisfaction. Some tests which have been used in this context, however, eg. Graphology (handwriting), are becoming increasingly discredited by psychologists.

It is good practice to obtain references for candidates even if it is not always practicable to obtain them in advance of interviews. Not infrequently a quick telephone call will produce more useful information than the coded content of some written references. It goes almost without saying that the interview should be focused on the requirements of the post and should avoid questions which might give the appearance of gender or racial bias on the part of the interviewing panel.

## **Interview**

Perhaps one of the biggest difficulties which many solicitors encounter is that they are not trained in human resource management and interviewing for future members of staff in a recruitment exercise poses many problems. This is perhaps surprising of professionals involved in the interview technique virtually on a daily basis, however, experience has shown that often the round peg in the square hole type of recruit has been, to a large extent, occasioned by a poor or limited interviewing technique which has been restricted simply to a review of the candidate's CV.

There follow some guidelines which could usefully be applied when considering new candidates for a position:

- aspirations - try to ascertain whether there is a suitable match between your firm's aspirations and those of your potential new recruit;
- ability - often abilities are taken for granted and rarely sufficient scrutiny by reference to external referees; good practice dictates that they should always be taken up and it is often accepted practice to offer a position subject to satisfactory references being obtained;
- aptitude - a major problem in identifying suitable staff is that concentration often focuses upon ability and attitude but not on the more subtle nuances of aptitude and suitability to the practice (as distinct from capability);
- affinity - perhaps the word which could act as an umbrella for all of the other aspects of the interview is left until the end; care should be taken to identify and obtain a feel for the affinity between employer and employee.

### **Induction**

Induction is often relegated to a list of internal extension numbers, staff list and reference to an office manual. Care should be taken, however, to introduce new colleagues to the office and there follows a list of areas which ought to be considered:

- Vision & Values (perhaps the single most important issue)
- Business Plan & Main Objectives
- Services & Markets
- Opening Standards & Client Care
- Conditions of Employment & Performance Review
- Individual Responsibilities
- Company Structure & Colleagues
- File Management & Financial Procedures e.g. credit control
- Computing Systems & Office Equipment
- Complaints & Discipline Procedures
- Key Health & Safety Points

Most of these issues could usefully be included in an Office Manual for future reference. It is helpful if the induction process can be tailored to the individual needs of the new employee. Ideally, newcomers should be introduced to the rest of the office staff, not merely those in the department in which they will initially be working. In larger firms this might involve an entry in a newsletter or even through a "mentor" as a guide.

### **Points to Remember**

- Define the personnel required at all levels within the firm. Prepare job descriptions and recruit to satisfy the identified requirement.
- Ensure job descriptions are kept up-to-date and relevant.
- Ask all applicants for employment to complete an application form prior to interview.
- Take steps to avoid the appearance or the actuality of discrimination at all stages in the recruitment process. Use a standard evaluation form to record in a standard manner for and against each candidate.
- Always follow up references and ensure professional qualifications claimed by the applicant are genuine. Ask applicants to display Practising Certificates and ensure they are current. Note also any current restrictions.
- Consider following up references by telephone.
- Implement a proper induction course for new employees.
- Implement performance review procedure and evaluate skills.