

RECRUITING A PERSONAL ASSISTANT

Contents of This Factsheet:

1	Introduction	7	Short listing
2	Job description	8	Interviews
3	Person specification	9	Taking up references
4	Application form	10	Immigration & entitlement to work in the UK
5	Interview venue	11	Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) check
6	Job advert & places to advertise	12	Making a job offer

1 Introduction

Before starting the recruitment process you should be clear about:

- how long it takes to perform certain tasks
- how much assistance you need
- what you need assistance with

Your self-assessment will help you with this (see Factsheets 3a & 3b).

Once you have established how you want to organise your assistance and what kind of routine would meet your needs, you are ready to begin the recruitment process. You could use the same information you gathered when you were working out your self assessment to help you.

The first step is to decide how you will go about finding your PA. You may already know someone you could appoint. If you need to advertise, however, you need to have:

- information to send to applicants e.g. Job Description, Application Form, Person Specification
- chosen and booked a venue for the interviews
- planned the time scale for the process

The following guidelines may help you to put together the necessary documents.

2 Job Description

A Job Description is written information about what you expect your PA to do. It is a useful document to have for the following reasons:

- when you are recruiting, it can be sent out along with the Application Form to let applicants know exactly what the job involves
- it forms part of the employment contract and provides you with a basis for measuring whether your PAs are carrying out their work for you effectively. It is also useful for sorting out disagreements or misunderstandings between you and your employees

Your Job Description does not need to be long or complicated but should clearly state the major tasks you expect your PAs to carry out. It should also state what qualities and attitudes you expect them to have when working for you.

The Job Description should contain information about:

- a) the purpose of the job
- b) supervision
- c) main duties
- d) hours
- e) rates of pay

a) The Purpose of the Job

In this section, you can introduce yourself and say who you are, the type of activities you like to do and set the tone for the kind of relationship you want with your PA. Emphasise that you are in control, that they will work for you directly and that their purpose is to enable you to do what you want to do.

b) Supervision

In this section, you can explain what you expect the relationship to be like between yourself, as the employer, and your PA as the employee.

You can make it clear that they will be directed by you and accountable to you for their work. You may also like to say what sort of relationship you would like them to have with your friends and family.

c) Main Duties

In this section you will need to give a detailed description of the tasks you want your PA to perform. It may be useful to refer to your Self Assessment Form (if you used one – see Factsheet 3b) so you are clear about what assistance you need. You may like to list these tasks according to whether they need to be done frequently or occasionally. You can also say if training will be given.

In order that all eventualities are covered, you may like to use a phrase such as:

‘enabling me to carry out any chosen activity, whether inside or outside my home, by carrying out any other requests which I may reasonably make’

d) Hours

In this section, you can describe the hours you expect your PA to work and how the hours will be made up e.g. shifts, weekday, weekend, nights etc., and if possible you should set out the range of time e.g. 7am to 11pm and night sits. If you are unable to specify the exact hours, you can say that the hours are negotiable.

e) Rates of Pay

In this section, you can state clearly the rates of pay for each period e.g. will you be paying enhanced rates for weekends and night work? An example of a Job Description is included with this pack.

3 Person Specification

Once you have written the Job Description you will need to decide what are the minimum experience and skills someone would need in order to be your Personal Assistant. You should also consider what other qualities would be desirable.

This information should be written in the 'Person Specification' which should be sent, along with the Job Description, to anyone who is interested in the job. It will tell them quickly whether they have the skills and qualities you require from a PA.

Be careful not to discriminate against someone because of their age, gender, race or disability. You may need to specify a minimum age for insurance purposes, but you should not have a maximum age limit. If your PA will be assisting you with your personal needs in your own home, it may be legal under the Sex Discrimination Act to specify whether you want a man or woman, but make sure that you have genuine reasons for doing so. You may request a copy of a Factsheet produced by the DPSS on Equal Opportunities if you wish to know more about any anti-discrimination laws.

4 Application Forms

Application Forms are a very good way for you to get as much information about potential employees before you decide whether you would like to interview them.

The Application Form should make provision for information such as:

- name, address, telephone number, date of birth
- understanding of a PA's role
- education and training
- experience
- employment history
- availability for work
- reasons for applying
- any criminal convictions
- entitlement to work in the UK (please refer to our Factsheet "Employing Personal Assistants and Immigration Status")

Application Forms also allow you to keep a record of applicants' answers and enable you to sift out the most suitable when you are shortlisting.

5 Interview Plans

The next point to consider is where you will hold the interviews. For personal safety you may decide to hold them somewhere other than your home, but make sure that the place you choose meets your needs. For example:

- is the venue big enough?
- will you be able to get in?
- are you likely to be interrupted during the interview?
- is there an accessible toilet?

It is important when planning your interviews, to work out a time scale to ensure that you leave plenty of time for each applicant. Not only will this relieve any pressure on both you and the person you are interviewing but will also allow you time to go over each interview, and check your notes if you have made any, before moving on to the next applicant.

When you feel you are well prepared, you should be ready to move to the next stage.

6 Job Advert and Places to Advertise

When you have all your information ready, the next step is to advertise the fact that you are looking for a PA.

You need to decide two things:

- 1 What do I want to say in the advert?
- 2 Where will I advertise the job vacancy?

Your advertisement does not have to say everything. You just need to say enough to attract the type of person you are looking for.

It should mention:

- what the job is
- how many hours you are offering and when

- how much you will pay
- how to contact you

You may want to mention specific requirements such as ‘non-smoker essential’ or ‘must have a clean driving licence’.

You may use any of the following methods to advertise:

Word of Mouth – ask friends, family or other PAs to spread the word that you are looking for staff. They may know just the right person for the job.

Job Centres – they will display your advert free of charge and they will contact you by phone or in writing when someone is interested.

Local Newspapers – the Croydon Advertiser and the free newspapers all carry job adverts. You will have to pay for each word of your advert, so keep it as concise as possible.

Croydon College – you can advertise on notice boards in the college. Many students, from a wide age range, attending full-time and part-time courses, will be keen to earn money and they are often willing to learn new skills.

Notice Boards – all the large supermarkets (Tesco, Sainsbury’s, Safeway etc.) have notice boards where you can advertise free of charge. Local shops and Post Offices will often display for a small fee.

7 Short Listing

Once the closing date arrives, you need to decide which applicant you wish to add to your shortlist to invite for interview.

The interview allows you to find out if they can do the job and see whether or not you can get on well with them. It also allows them to find out more about what the job involves and whether they can work for you.

Don’t waste time inviting people for interview if you can tell from their application that they are obviously unsuitable for the job. If you are not sure who to include on your shortlist, you should consider the following points:

- applicant's understanding that you are the employer
- employment history
- availability for work

- suitability for the job
- declaration of criminal conviction

When you have drawn up your shortlist, contact those you have chosen to interview. You can telephone or write to them, or both, if you wish. You need to tell them:

- that they have been selected for interview
- the date, time and venue for the interview
- how they may contact you if they are unable to attend

You may wish to write to unsuccessful applicants as a courtesy.

8 Interviewing

Allow yourself plenty of time and invite a friend or relative to be with you during the interviews if you think this would be helpful. They could take notes or just be there for support.

The main purpose of an interview is:

- gaining information about the applicant
- giving information to the applicant

Before the interview, write up a list of questions to put to all candidates. You could keep a separate sheet for each person, making brief notes about their answers, possibly giving them a score from 1 to 5 for their answers. This will make it easier, later, to compare candidates.

It is quite natural for you and the person you are interviewing to feel nervous, so begin with a general, easy question. Try to compose the questions so the applicant cannot simply answer 'yes' or 'no', but will need to give a fuller explanation. Allow time at the end of the interview for them to ask you questions.

During the interview, it may be useful to clarify terms and conditions such as:

- holiday entitlement
- sick pay
- pay period (weekly or monthly)
- period of notice

You also may like to stress certain aspects of their role such as:

- they are accountable to you as their employer
- they need to respect your privacy
- they need to be flexible

The following points should help to ensure that the interview goes well:

- try to give as positive an impression as you can at all times
- show an interest in what the applicant is saying – it will help them to ‘open up’
- expect positive replies to your questions
- use the applicant’s first name as much as possible

When the interview is finished, tell them when you will let them know whether or not they have been successful. When all the interviews are completed, you will need to make your decision as quickly as possible. If you are still unsure who to appoint, even using your notes and your friend or relative’s opinion, your instinct is often a good guide.

9 Taking Up References

It is usual to ask for 2 references and one should be someone who knows the applicant in an employment or similar capacity. You can either ask for references in writing or speak to people on the phone. If people are willing to do it, having both is probably best.

A reference in writing gives you something to refer back to and time to consider before making up your mind finally. Also writing to request a

reference allows you to enclose a Job Description and the referee to consider what the job involves when giving their reference.

On the other hand, people are sometimes willing to say things verbally which they will not put in writing, and this could be the sort of information you need to know.

When asking for a reference, stress that the process is entirely CONFIDENTIAL. Their answers will be kept entirely confidential and will not be shared with the candidate.

Some questions you might want to ask:

- ✓ How long have you known the applicant, and in what capacity?
- ✓ How would you describe them as a person?
- ✓ Do you view them as reliable? Can you give an example to explain your answer?
- ✓ Have you ever had occasion to ask them to handle money on your behalf? Or if not, would you be happy to do so?
- ✓ (If you are not the employer) would you employ them yourself to do a responsible job?

10 Immigration and Entitlement to Work in the UK

Before confirming your offer of work, you must check that the person is entitled to work in the UK. Details on how to do this are contained in a separate factsheet.

11 Making a Job Offer

As soon as someone accepts your job offer, a contract of employment is formed. This means you need to be careful that you are not committing yourself to employing someone too early. Even if you are sure you have found the right person after the interviews, you will need time to check their references and finalise their 'terms and conditions' e.g. rate of pay, hours, probationary period etc.

You will also need to check their entitlement to work in the UK and may need a CRB check. There is a separate Factsheet on Entitlement to Work in the UK. The DPSS can help you with getting a CRB check done.

Naturally, you will want to inform the successful applicant as soon as possible, to find out whether they will accept your offer, but make it clear that the offer depends on their references being satisfactory and that you will meet with them to agree the terms and conditions.

The best way to proceed is to:

- telephone the person and offer them the job
- say that the offer is subject to satisfactory references
- explain that the terms and conditions will be agreed and confirmed
- state that the offer will be confirmed in writing

Once the job offer is accepted and you receive the relevant satisfactory references and agree the terms and conditions relating to the employment, you can, if you wish, in agreement with your new PA, prepare a written contract for your new employee to sign.

You will find more information about Contracts of Employment or a Written Statement of Employment Particulars in the **Legal Obligations of Being an Employer** section.

If you need any help or advice on drawing up the contract you can contact the DPSS.