



Australia's National Research Centre  
on AOD Workforce Development



# Workforce Development 'TIPS'

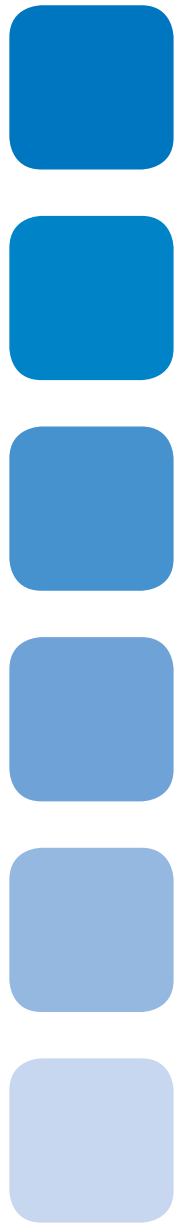
**T**heory **I**nto **P**ractice **S**trategies

A Resource Kit for the  
Alcohol and Other Drugs Field

# 10

RECRUITMENT  
AND SELECTION





# Workforce Development 'TIPS'

Theory Into Practice Strategies

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# 10

RECRUITMENT  
AND SELECTION

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# ABOUT THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TIPS RESOURCE KIT

This Resource Kit aims to provide straightforward and practical guidance, tools and resources to support workforce development activities and initiatives in the Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) field.

The Resource Kit comprises 14 chapters: an introduction to workforce development and 13 workforce development topics relevant to the AOD field. Each chapter contains evidence-based strategies to address a particular workforce development issue, as well as resources and tools that can be used to implement the strategies. Each chapter can be treated as a stand alone section, however, as workforce development topics are inherently interrelated, links between chapters are identified throughout the Kit.

Recruitment and Selection is the 10th chapter in the Resource Kit.

## CHAPTER

- 1 An Introduction to Workforce Development
- 2 Clinical Supervision
- 3 Developing Effective Teams
- 4 Evaluating AOD Projects and Programs
- 5 Goal Setting
- 6 Mentoring
- 7 Organisational Change
- 8 Performance Appraisal
- 9 Professional Development
- 10 Recruitment and Selection**
- 11 Retention
- 12 Worker Performance
- 13 Worker Wellbeing
- 14 Workplace Support



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# RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Vinita Duraisingam

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## Resources and Tools



**Checklist** for effective recruitment and selection strategies



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**Forms and Templates**

- Semi-structured Interview Assessment Form



**Recommended Readings**

# RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

## Overview

Recruitment of skilled and effective staff is a central workforce development issue for the AOD field. Recruitment and selection is not only about choosing the most suitable candidate. The recruitment and selection experience can also impact on the likelihood that a candidate will accept a job offer and on their subsequent commitment to remaining with the organisation.

### Undesirable consequences of poor recruitment

Poor recruitment choices (i.e., poor person-job fit) can have a range of undesirable consequences for the organisation and the worker including:

- Higher rates of turnover
- Reduced performance effectiveness
- Lowered job satisfaction
- Reduced work motivation.

### Effective recruitment steps

Three steps to develop an effective recruitment process are:

Step 1: Ensure an up-to-date job description which contains information related to:

- Specific tasks and activities required for a job
- The knowledge, skills and abilities required for effective performance by the job incumbent.

Step 2: Develop an effective recruitment strategy which considers:

- Appropriate sources of recruitment (i.e., advertisements, personal referrals, employment agencies, direct applications)
- Appropriate recruiters (e.g., supervisor or co-worker).

Step 3: Evaluate the recruitment strategy to determine its efficacy. For example:

- Conduct a cost-benefit analysis in terms of the number of applicants referred, interviewed, selected, and hired
- Compare the effectiveness of applicants hired from various sources.

### Overview of selection techniques

Evidence-based best practice for three of the most commonly used selection techniques is outlined below.



## 1. Curriculum vitae / résumés and written applications

A curriculum vitae (CV) / résumé provides valuable information relating to a person's professional qualifications and experience. All information in the CV should be verified where appropriate (e.g., asking applicants to explain gaps in employment history). Requesting job applicants to address specific selection criteria (i.e., essential and desirable) can improve the efficiency of reviewing CVs.

## 2. Conducting interviews

Structured interviews are recommended. A structured interview involves asking each candidate the same set of questions and assessing their responses on the basis of pre-determined criteria. Questions and assessment criteria should be based on accurate, updated job descriptions. It is also helpful to develop criteria to categorise responses (e.g., as excellent, good, average and unsatisfactory). An interview panel consisting of a representative selection of people may also be helpful.

Two common types of structured interview questions are:

- **Situational questions** which ask candidates about hypothetical scenarios that may be encountered in the job and how they would respond in that situation
- **Experienced-based questions** which focus on specific examples of the candidate's prior work experiences and their responses to past situations that are relevant to the job in question.

## 3. Reference checks

Referees are useful for identifying past employment problems and clarifying the accuracy of information presented in an interview or CV. Only a small percentage of all reference checks are negative, therefore, it is often difficult to differentiate between candidates on the basis of reference checks alone.

## Induction and orientation of new workers

An effective induction helps new workers understand their role and where they “fit” within the organisation. It also equips them with the tools they need to perform their work role. Two useful induction tools are:

1. Induction manual / kits which may contain:

- An induction checklist
- Organisational philosophy / ethics / history
- Strategic values of the organisation
- An organisational chart / structure
- An employment manual on policies and procedures
- An orientation to the workplace (including parking and safety issues)
- Information about episodes of care, the duty system, supervision, staff meetings, etc.

2. Mentoring / “buddy” system

New workers can be paired with experienced workers from a similar area to “show them the ropes”. Alternatively, a more formal / structured mentoring system can be a useful induction strategy in which new workers are paired with a mentor who can assist them with their ongoing professional development.

## Introduction

The techniques and strategies described in this chapter represent evidence-based best practice. Some of the information provided in this chapter will be familiar to many readers. However, it can serve as a resource to refresh knowledge, review current practice, and to identify useful new practices or techniques.

## Recruitment challenges in the AOD field

Recruitment of skilled and effective staff is a central workforce development issue for the AOD field.<sup>1-4</sup> Challenges to recruitment of effective staff include:<sup>1,5</sup>

- Lack of qualified applicants
- Inadequate salary packages
- Lack of resources (including funds)
- Limited scope for advancement and promotion
- Lack of job security
- Remoteness of services
- Stigma attached to working in the AOD field.

This chapter addresses three central issues for recruitment and selection in the AOD field:

1. Strategies for successful recruitment
2. An overview of best practice in selection techniques
3. Induction and orientation of new workers.

## Strategies for successful recruitment

Recruitment and selection is not only about choosing the most suitable candidate. The recruitment and selection experience can also impact on the likelihood that a candidate will accept a job offer and on their commitment to remaining with the organisation.<sup>6</sup>

Committing time and resources to develop a comprehensive recruitment strategy is a worthwhile investment. Poor recruitment choices (i.e., poor person-job fit) can have a range of undesirable consequences for the organisation and the worker including:<sup>7,8</sup>

- Higher rates of turnover
- Reduced performance effectiveness
- Lowered job satisfaction
- Reduced work motivation.

In this section we consider three steps in an effective recruitment process:

- Step 1: Ensure an up-to-date job description
- Step 2: Develop an effective recruitment strategy
- Step 3: Evaluate the recruitment strategy.

## Step 1: Ensure an up-to-date job description

A clear, accurate and up-to-date job description is crucial to ensuring a good person-job fit.<sup>9</sup> It is worthwhile spending some time making sure that the job description matches the everyday reality of the job.

A job description contains two types of information:<sup>10</sup>

- Specific tasks and activities required for a particular job (e.g., conduct counselling sessions, write client reports)
- The knowledge, skills and abilities required for effective performance by the job incumbent (e.g., good communication skills, capacity to establish good client rapport).

Most positions within the AOD field are complex, characterised by challenging work, multiple roles and changing work demands. In these circumstances, the best person-job fit may be achieved by focusing on the tasks and activities as well as the knowledge, skills and abilities of an effective performer.

The accuracy of a job description is likely to be improved by gathering information from different sources. Different perspectives on the knowledge, skills, responsibilities, challenges and demands of a position are likely to be provided by supervisors and workers in the same or similar roles.<sup>10</sup>

Useful information to gather from supervisors and coworkers includes:<sup>11</sup>

1. What knowledge, skills, abilities and other personal characteristics (KSAOs) are necessary for the position?
2. What KSAOs can be practically and reasonably expected?
3. What KSAOs are essential for effective job performance?
4. What KSAOs distinguish between good and poor performers on the job?

It may also be useful to consider whether the organisation is willing to take on less experienced workers and provide professional development activities (in-house or external) to build up their knowledge and skills.

## Step 2: Develop an effective recruitment strategy

Two important issues to consider when developing a recruitment strategy are:

- The source of recruitment (i.e., advertisements, personal referrals, employment agencies, direct applications)
- The recruiter (i.e., the “personal face” of the organisation).

### The source of recruitment

A range of strategies (e.g., newspaper advertisements, personal networks) can be used to recruit new workers. There is evidence that hiring new staff through referrals from existing staff or direct (unsolicited) applications is likely to result in lower turnover rates and higher job satisfaction compared to more traditional avenues of recruiting (e.g., newspaper advertisements).<sup>12</sup>



## Internal and external recruitment: Pros and cons

There are potential advantages and disadvantages of internal and external recruitment.<sup>13-15</sup>

	Potential advantages	Potential disadvantages
Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worker morale and motivation is enhanced</li> <li>• Organisation has a better opportunity to assess knowledge &amp; skills of the candidate</li> <li>• Candidate has existing knowledge about the organisation</li> <li>• Less orientation may be needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May generate unhealthy competitiveness for promotions</li> <li>• Additional training may be required</li> <li>• Pool of candidates may be restricted</li> <li>• Those not selected may feel rejected and discontented</li> </ul>
External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New ideas and insight</li> <li>• New knowledge and experience</li> <li>• Larger pool of talent to recruit from</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruiting and selecting may be more time-consuming</li> <li>• Longer adjustment period may be needed</li> <li>• Induction costs may be higher</li> <li>• Less opportunity to assess knowledge &amp; skills</li> </ul>

Please note that these pros and cons may or may not apply when recruiting for all positions. Weigh up possible pros and cons for each recruitment situation before making your decision regarding sources of recruitment.

### The recruiter

A range of people within an organisation may be called upon to act as recruiters (i.e., to answer telephone enquiries, conduct interviews, etc.). A recruiter can have a significant impact on job applicants, particularly their interest in a position and their intention to accept a job offer.<sup>16</sup>

The supervisor for the position and coworkers are likely to be the most effective recruiters as they will be viewed as trustworthy and credible sources of information about a position and the organisation.<sup>16</sup> There is also evidence to indicate that friendly and informative recruiters are associated with firmer intentions to accept job offers.<sup>16, 17</sup>

An experienced recruiter who is familiar with the organisation can also be an important source of realistic and accurate information for candidates (i.e., providing a realistic job preview). Emphasising the positive aspects of a position is important in order to attract desired candidates. However, an unrealistically optimistic job description may create problems in the longer term if a new employee's expectations are not met.<sup>18</sup>

### Step 3: Evaluate the recruitment strategy

Periodically evaluating the effectiveness of your recruitment strategy, such as the type of sources used for recruiting, can be a useful activity.<sup>14</sup>

For instance, a cost-benefit analysis can be done in terms of the number of applicants referred, interviewed, selected, and hired. Comparing the effectiveness of applicants hired from various sources in terms of job performance and absenteeism is also helpful. One could also examine the retention rates of workers who were hired from different sources.<sup>14</sup>

#### UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



### Realistic job previews

A realistic job preview involves providing candidates with an accurate and complete representation of the tasks and responsibilities of the job. It presents the pros and cons of the job to potential candidates.<sup>19</sup>

Realistic job previews may contain information such as:

- A description of a typical day on the job
- Aspects of the job that have been rewarding for others
- Aspects of the job that have been difficult for others
- Opportunities for advancement and professional development
- Remuneration and benefits
- Unique requirements: travel, physical demands, shift work, overtime.

Providing a realistic preview is likely to have a range of benefits including:

- Improved job satisfaction<sup>18, 20</sup>
- Increased job performance<sup>18</sup>
- Reduced voluntary turnover, particularly for complex jobs<sup>18, 20</sup>
- Enhanced communication through honesty and openness<sup>20</sup>
- Reduced risk of burnout due to unrealistic expectations.<sup>21</sup>

Realistic previews for a job applicant are of most benefit when they:<sup>18-20</sup>

- Are presented early in the recruitment process
- Contain only moderate amounts of negative information
- Are presented verbally.

## An overview of best practice in selection techniques

A wide selection of techniques are available which range from intensive (and expensive) activities (e.g., multi-day assessment centres), to the more commonly used interviews and reference checks.

Based on the evidence alone, best practice in selection requires a comprehensive program that includes realistic tests of work practice and the use of validated psychometric instruments. This is clearly an unrealistic expectation for most AOD organisations.

The next section describes evidence-based best practice for three of the most commonly used selection techniques:

- Curriculum vitae / résumés and written applications
- Conducting interviews
- Reference checks.

### Curriculum vitae / résumés and written applications

Information about a person's professional qualifications and experience can be obtained from their curriculum vitae (CV) / résumé and their written applications. This information needs to be verified as far as possible before the person is hired.

When reviewing the CV / résumé and written application, look for items that may need further clarification such as:

- Unexplained gaps in employment history
- Ambiguous wording
- Unanswered or partly answered questions
- Inconsistent information
- Frequent job changes.<sup>15</sup>

Consider requesting job applicants to address specific selection criteria (i.e., essential and desirable) for the job position. The onus is then on the applicant to summarise their work experience and qualifications and present it in an accessible manner. This makes for a more efficient and time-saving process to find relevant information about each applicant that matches the criteria for the job.<sup>22</sup>

### Conducting interviews

In order to obtain the best person-job fit (i.e., matching the right person for the right job), a structured interview format is recommended.<sup>23-26</sup> A structured interview involves asking each candidate the same set of questions and assessing their responses on the basis of pre-determined criteria. The questions and assessment criteria are based on an accurate, updated job description. The more common types of structured interview questions are situational and experience-based.

#### Situational questions

Situational questions ask candidates about hypothetical scenarios that may be encountered in the job and how they would respond in that situation.<sup>19, 23, 25-27</sup> The questions directly tap into the work-related experience and problem-solving style of the candidate.<sup>26</sup>

For example, situational interview questions may include:

- *Your case load has increased to the point of being unmanageable - how would you address this?*
- *What would you do if a client did not attend an appointment?*
- *You are the team leader and two team members have had an argument with one another about the way the work tasks should be assigned. How would you handle this?*
- *If you disagreed with the work practices of a coworker or team member, how would you deal with this situation?*
- *A client arrives to a session intoxicated. How would you manage this?*
- *A client complains to you that another staff member has acted inappropriately. What would you do?*
- *During a counselling session, it becomes apparent that a client has problems to manage that are beyond your skill level (e.g., mental health issues or abuse). How would you handle this?*

### **Experience-based questions**

Experience-based questions focus on specific examples of the candidate's prior work experiences and their responses to past situations that are relevant to the job in question.<sup>6, 19, 23</sup> One advantage of experience-based questions is the opportunity to tap into actual behaviour and feelings rather than hypothetical ones.<sup>28</sup>

Examples of experience-based questions include:

- *Please describe a situation where you had to deal with an aggressive client and outline how you dealt with this. What were some of the strengths and weaknesses in your approach?*
- *Can you give an example of when you had to manage a complex project and describe the strategies you used to do this?*

### **Developing criteria to assess candidates' responses**

To effectively distinguish between candidates, it is recommended that structured questions are accompanied by a pre-determined scoring key. The scoring key should contain examples of excellent, good, average, and unsatisfactory answers against which candidates' answers can be compared.<sup>23</sup>

Advantages of pre-determined scoring criteria include:

- Reduced reliance on interviewers' memory or written notes
- Increased clarity regarding the criteria against which candidates are assessed (i.e., what is a "good" answer?)
- Consistency of assessment across candidates and between interviewers (if a panel is used).

### **Interview panels**

It is recommended that an interview panel, rather than a single interviewer, is used. Using a panel of interviewers can help to minimise potential biases, as well as provide the opportunity to compare evaluations of the candidate before a final decision is made.<sup>29</sup> Where appropriate, the panel should be representative of gender and professions. Representation on an interview panel can provide frontline workers / team members with an opportunity to participate in the recruitment and selection process.



## Ground rules for effective interviews

Consider the following evidence-based guidelines for conducting effective interviews.<sup>6, 13, 19, 24-26, 30</sup>

- Prior to the interview, review applicant information (e.g., CV, test scores, etc.) and detailed job requirements
- Consider providing a copy of interview questions to candidates prior to the interview (e.g., allow 15-20 minutes prior to the interview for review of questions). This can help candidates prepare a response to questions that require an in-depth answer (e.g., problem-solving questions)
- Establish and maintain rapport – greet the applicant pleasantly, display genuine interest, and listen carefully
- Pay attention to body language – facial expressions, gestures, body positions, and movements usually provide clues to the person's attitudes and feelings
- Provide information honestly and freely to the applicant
- Devise objective questions which have no hints to a desired response
- Separate fact from inference – jot down factual information during the interview and inferences or interpretations later. Compare notes with other interviewers
- Avoid making evaluations about the candidate until the interview is complete
- Make judgements according to specific criteria based on the job description, rather than a global rating of suitability for the job
- Control the course of the interview – allow the applicant to talk freely but ensure that all objectives of the interview are met
- Ask standardised questions – i.e., ask the same questions for all applicants
- Adhere to Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) policies and procedures
- Give candidates the option of receiving feedback on their performance in the interview (strengths and potential areas for improvement) at a later date.

## Reference checks

It is recommended that only limited use is made of reference checks. The accuracy of reference checks has not been strongly supported in the research literature.

Reference checks may be useful for identifying applicants who should not be recruited because of past employment problems (i.e., asking whether the person would be willing to rehire the candidate).<sup>31</sup> Referees can also be used to check the accuracy of candidates' description of their educational and work histories (i.e., work roles, responsibilities and achievements).<sup>19</sup>

It is important to recognise that only a small percentage of all reference checks are negative.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, it is often difficult to differentiate between candidates on the basis of reference checks alone.

In most Australian states it is standard procedure for AOD organisations to conduct a criminal record check particularly when the position involves working with children or young adults.





## Equal opportunity for recruitment

Every worker has rights and obligations under various legislated acts. Key legislation relevant to recruitment practices involves equal opportunity and anti-discrimination in employment. Such legislation includes the:

- Human Rights Legislation and Equal Opportunity Commission Act (1986)
- Equal Employment Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act (1999)
- The Disability Discrimination Act (1992).

Organisations must be mindful of Australian Government legislation and related statutes and ensure that recruitment practices are not influenced by any irrelevant features of the candidate such as age, gender, physical impairment, marital status, medical record, nationality, cultural background, religion, sexual preference, social origin, or trade union activity.<sup>6, 13, 33, 34</sup>

Recruitment practices should be based on a candidate's knowledge, skills and abilities relevant to those specifically required for the duties of the position. Such practices should be free from discrimination (adhering to legislation) and patronage (such as employing friends or "jobs for the boys").

## Induction and orientation of new workers

An effective induction helps new workers understand their role and where they "fit" within the organisation. It also equips them with the tools they need to perform their work role. A comprehensive induction process can benefit workers' performance and retention.<sup>29</sup> Induction should be treated as an ongoing process to support new workers over the first few months of their position. Organising a mentoring or "buddy" system is a good strategy to ensure a comprehensive induction.

Two useful induction tools are:

1. Induction manual / kit
2. Mentoring program or "buddy" system.

An ideal induction program should include the what, why and how of the job.



## What to include in an induction program

Various types of information should be included in an induction program. In the AOD field it is recommended that induction programs include:

- A well written employment manual that includes relevant policies and procedures
- An introduction to a potential mentor or “buddy” that can show the candidate the ropes (if resources allow)
- Realistic information about typical challenges and adjustment problems that are to be expected, as well as what actions are effective in making a successful transition
- General support and reassurance
- An introduction to the sector, and the relevant AOD related issues and strategies
- An induction to the service or the program.

**This Practical Tip is based on the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) resource: *Hitting the ground running: Induction for new workers in the alcohol & drug sector. A VAADA discussion paper.***

**More information can be found at the VAADA website:**

**[www.vaada.org.au/Publications.htm](http://www.vaada.org.au/Publications.htm)**

### 1. Induction manual / kit

Most induction manuals or kits include the following information:

- Induction checklist
- Organisational philosophy / ethics / history
- Strategic values of the organisation
- Organisational chart / structure
- Employment manual on policies and procedures
- Administrative documents (e.g., timesheets, guides to databases, occupational health and safety legislation)
- Orientation to the workplace (including parking and safety issues)
- Information about episodes of care, the duty system, supervision, staff meetings, etc.

### 2. Mentoring program or “buddy” system

In many workplaces, new workers are paired with a “buddy” who works in a similar area who is responsible for “showing them the ropes”. Alternatively, new workers may be provided with a mentor. The latter is a more structured relationship where a senior worker takes the new worker “under their wing” for a period of time in order to oversee their professional development.<sup>35</sup>



**The *Mentoring* chapter outlines the benefits of mentoring in the AOD field and provides useful guidance on setting up a formal mentoring program.**

## Useful workforce development tools for recruitment and selection

Other chapters in this Kit that provide useful information and advice to support recruitment and selection in AOD organisations are:

- Chapter 2: Clinical Supervision
- Chapter 6: Mentoring
- Chapter 9: Professional Development.

### Summary

The recruitment of skilled and effective workers is a pivotal workforce development issue in the AOD field. Recruitment is more likely to be successful when it is based on a comprehensive and accurate job description; recruiters are familiar with the requirements of the position; and realistic job previews are provided. It is also important to ensure that selection techniques for screening applicants are also closely linked with an accurate job description. It is recommended that interviews are structured (i.e., standardised for all applicants) with a focus on assessing applicants' responses to realistic work scenarios.

On completion of the selection process, a comprehensive induction program is also likely to improve the retention and performance of new workers. Two useful induction strategies are providing new workers with a comprehensive induction kit, and pairing them up with a mentor or "buddy" to help orientate them in their position and to the organisation.

### Resources for implementing successful recruitment and selection

This chapter includes the following resources and tools to support recruitment and selection:

- Checklist for effective recruitment and selection strategies
- Case study on the development of a graduate recruitment program in an AOD treatment agency
- Forms and templates: Semi-structured Interview Assessment Form
- Recommended readings.

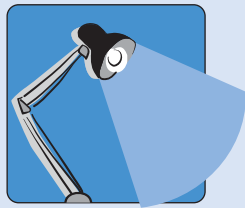
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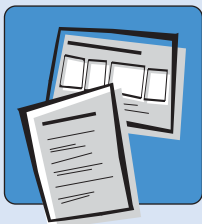
## Checklist

for effective recruitment and selection strategies



## Case Study

Development of a student recruitment strategy  
in an AOD treatment agency



## Forms and Templates

- Semi-structured Interview Assessment Form



## Recommended Readings



## Checklist for Effective Recruitment and Selection Practices

The following points are a basic guide outlining appropriate recruitment and selection practices for the workplace.

### Establishing key strategies for effective recruitment





1. Have applicants been provided with a clear, accurate and up-to-date job description prior to the interview? 
  - Have the job requirements (e.g., specific tasks, activities) been outlined?
  - Have applicant requirements (e.g., knowledge, skills and abilities) been spelt out?
  - Are the essential requirements of applicants (e.g., skills, knowledge and abilities) stated?
  - Does the job description contain realistic details on the pros and cons of the job?
2. Has the recruitment strategy (e.g., advertising) been carefully planned?
3. Has an appropriate recruiter (e.g., supervisor, coworker) been enlisted to help with recruitment? 

For example:


  - Does he / she have knowledge / experience of the role?
  - Is he / she familiar with the organisation?
  - Can he / she give candidates realistic and accurate information?
4. Is a procedure in place to evaluate the recruitment strategy?

### Ensuring evidence-based best practice techniques are employed in selection

5. Have curriculum vitae (CVs) and written applications been reviewed? 
  - Has all important information been verified (e.g., checked with referees)?
  - Have any unexplained gaps in the CV been clarified with the applicant?
6. Have appropriate procedures been adopted for the interview? 
  - Is a structured interview format employed?
  - Is each candidate asked the same set of questions?
  - Are all questions and assessment criteria based on accurate and up-to-date job descriptions?
  - Are questions structured appropriately (e.g., situation or experience-based questions)?

7. Are appropriate pre-determined criteria being used to score applicants' responses in the interview? 
  
8. Has an appropriate interview panel been selected?
  - Are there multiple interviewers?
  - Are genders represented equally on the panel?
  - Are professions represented equally on the panel?
  - Are frontline workers or team members included on the panel?
  
9. Has a reference check been conducted?  
These should be used as a secondary reference to confirm:
  - The applicant's educational history
  - The applicant's work history (e.g., work roles, responsibilities and achievements).
  
10. If the job involves working with children or young adults, has a criminal record check been conducted? 

### **Conducting induction and orientation procedures for new workers**

11. Has an induction process been developed to help new workers settle into your organisation? 
  - Has an induction manual been developed?
  - Has a mentoring or "buddy" system been organised for new workers?





## Development of a Student Recruitment Strategy in an AOD Treatment Agency

### Background

Uniting Care Moreland Hall (UCMH) is an alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment agency of the Uniting Church of Australia in Moreland, Victoria. Services provided by the organisation include counselling and support, withdrawal services and education and training. It houses a diverse staffing group of over 50 employees including nurses, social workers, youth workers, teachers and AOD support workers.

During 2002 a student unit within the organisation was piloted in collaboration with the School of Social Work at the University of Melbourne. The student strategy for recruitment was developed in response to difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified and experienced staff. The aim of the unit was to provide tertiary students with the opportunity to undertake professional practice placements in the AOD field of approximately six months. The objective of the strategy was to increase the number of new human service professionals trained and interested in working in the AOD treatment sector, thus improving the organisation's ability to continue to effectively meet the needs of the community.

A number of secondary benefits were expected, including:

- Increased capacity to provide students from a variety of disciplines with different placement experiences
- Development of student resources for the AOD area
- Support and development of staff wanting to act as supervisors / mentors to students
- Linkages with the University of Melbourne (by offering placements to social work students and other related disciplines in the longer term).

### Planning and implementation of the project

#### Step 1: Planning

A full-time staff member was appointed to establish the program and fulfil the role of coordinator between UCMH, the University of Melbourne and students participating in a placement. The coordinator met with management of both UCMH and the University and conducted a survey of prospective students to understand the needs of both the agency and potential student practitioners.

The following elements of the project were developed over a three-month period before implementation began:

- An orientation program for all students
- Two types of placement programs (60-day placement programs for first and final year social work students)
- A structured program across different areas of drug treatment within UCMH so that students could gain broad experience in various treatment modalities (e.g., withdrawal, counselling and support, forensic services)
- A protocol documenting the agreement between UCMH and University of Melbourne



- A brochure and application form for students
- An orientation program for placement supervisors
- A supervision model for final year students focused on orientation in the workplace
- A protocol for joint placement opportunities within key agencies (e.g., community health, mental health).



## Step 2: Implementation and consolidation of the program

The first six months of the program resulted in five social work students being placed in various services at UCMH, of which three completed their program placement and supervision. The organisation was able to provide students with a broad range of experiences through a structured program offering a range of placements (e.g., counselling, residential withdrawal, prison-based programs etc.). The first six months was also a time in which the coordinator consolidated the program with stakeholders.

## Outcomes

The success of the program was evaluated from the responses of five social work students monitored prior, during and following completion of the placement. Based on this evaluation the student placement program was judged to be a success. There was an increase in the number of students interested in pursuing a career in the AOD sector (gauged by the final survey and follow up of student's career paths). In addition, the project fulfilled the program's secondary aims (e.g., development of AOD resources for students), and links were developed between UCMH and the University of Melbourne. As stated below, a number of likely long-term benefits were also noted.

### 1. Students

- Broad student placement experience across a range of different treatment sites (e.g., prison, withdrawal unit)
- Exposure to co-ordinated multidisciplinary activities (e.g., counselling practice, residential withdrawal therapy).

### 2. UCMH and other AOD organisations

- Recruitment and retention rate increased at UMCH due to increased numbers of students exposed to the organisation and AOD field
- Increased pool of new graduates and students with higher degrees seeking employment in the AOD field
- Development of student AOD education resources.

## Conclusion

This case study provides an example of how an innovative recruitment strategy can be used to develop the skills and experiences of potential recruits, and to attract qualified employees to the AOD workforce. In particular, this strategy aimed to break down some of the barriers to recruiting graduates to the AOD field by providing them with supportive, diverse placements and an insight into a field that they may otherwise not have pursued.



## Fully and Semi-Structured Interview Assessment Form

An example interview assessment form is provided below. A brief explanation of a semi-structured interview is also provided. The form is provided as an example which can be modified to reflect the selection criteria of a particular position.

### Fully structured

A structured interview involves asking each candidate the same set of questions and assessing their responses on the basis of pre-determined criteria (see text box below for an example). The structured format allows each interviewer (it is generally recommended that a panel interview candidates) to score candidate's answers to questions with a pre-determined scoring key to effectively distinguish between candidates (i.e., clear, shared knowledge of excellent, good, average and unsatisfactory answers to questions). The purpose of using pre-determined scoring criteria is to reduce reliance on interviewers' memory or written notes, as well as providing consistency of assessment across candidates. The purpose is to try to get all interviewers "on the same page" – by defining a good answer / poor answer, so that everyone is assessing against the same criteria.

The following is an example of how one question / answer might be fully structured in an interview.

#### Question to candidate:

"The following is a situational question: A client arrives to a session intoxicated. How would you manage this?"

#### Answer:

A competent response should include at least two of the following points:

- Immediate notification of other staff to ensure necessary back-up and activation of emergency / safety protocols if required.
- A caring but firm approach (no unnecessary confrontation as escalation to aggression / violence must be avoided).
  - Explain to the client that a counselling session is not possible given their state of intoxication, but their reappearance (when sober) would be welcome.
  - Reschedule an appointment if possible, on a card.
- Duty of care to the client: ensure some holding / escorting arrangement if there is a high risk of harm (e.g., drink-driving; imminent confrontation of a partner etc.).
- Activate security measures without delay if the client becomes aggressive.

## Semi-structured

The following example Semi-structured Interview Assessment Form is for an Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) Counsellor position in a drug treatment agency. Questions from AOD counselling job descriptions, as well as a range of situational and experience-based questions, are included. The form contains a scoring key to rate candidates' answers. The scoring key levels are excellent, good, average, and unsatisfactory against which candidates' answers can be compared.

Should you wish to use this example as a template it is recommended that the position's main tasks, responsibilities, and skill requirements from the job description are incorporated into the assessment form. Similarly, if the position is not clinically based it would be necessary to delete or reword questions that focus on activities specifically involving clinical practice.

In addition to a job description, questions can be selected from nationally accredited AOD Competency elements. These elements can be used as a base for essential skills and knowledge that are required to work effectively in the AOD field (see the Professional Development chapter Resources and Tools section for a Competency Training and Development Needs Analysis template). The current structure of AOD courses, competencies and related elements can be found at [www.ntis.gov.au](http://www.ntis.gov.au) (National Training Information Service).



**Example: Semi-structured Interview Assessment Form****Alcohol and Other Drugs Counsellor**

Candidate's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Key: A = Excellent B = Good C = Average D = Unsatisfactory

	NOTES	A	B	C	D
<b>Introduction to the candidate</b>					
1.	Tell us a little about yourself and why you applied for this position with <Agency>.				
<b>Education and training</b>					
2.	Please talk about your academic qualifications, and how your academic background can contribute to your capacity to fulfil the AOD Counsellor position?				
<b>Specialist skills and knowledge (including situational questions)</b>					
3.	This position requires the provision of best practice client services to people with drug and alcohol issues. What is your experience dealing with this client group and what are the qualities, skills and knowledge that you can bring to this position?				
4.	During a counselling session, it becomes apparent that a client has problems to manage that are beyond your skill level (e.g., mental health issues or abuse). How would you handle this?				
5.	A client arrives to a session intoxicated. How would you manage this?				
<b>Experience</b>					
6.	The position would require you to work effectively as a team member, taking both initiative and direction as required. Can you describe your experiences working with teams. What have been the key ingredients to successful team effectiveness ?				



	NOTES	A	B	C	D
7.	As well as working in a team, you would also be required to work autonomously for some of the time. Briefly describe your experience working in autonomous roles with minimal supervision.				
<b>Communication</b>					
8.	A key aspect of this position is good oral and written communication of clinical information, as well as report writing. Please tell us about your experience and method of writing case notes and other reports.				
9.	Can you describe how you develop and maintain strong links with referral contacts and other relevant services?				
10.	Follow-up is an important component of treatment. How do you ensure that clients who have left a program are actively followed up?				
<b>Professional standards</b>					
11.	When do you feel it is appropriate to coordinate client care with other services and how do you approach this?				
12.	How do you go about keeping informed of developments in best practice in the AOD field?				

**Interviewer**

Name: .....

Signature: .....

Date: .....

*This form has been adapted from:*

Ted Noffs Foundation, Appraisal for Adolescent and Family Counsellor Template.

National Treatment Agency. (2003). *Staff development toolkit for drug and alcohol residential services*. National Treatment Agency, London.



**Braun, S.A. (1995). Helping managers become effective job interviewers. *Industrial Management*, 37, 5-8.**

This article focuses on strategies to conduct effective interviews. It provides a practical step-by-step guide for conducting job interviews. This paper is suitable for readers interested in tips on improving recruitment and selection procedures.

**Taylor, P. (1998). Seven staff selection myths. *New Zealand Management*, 45, 61-65.**

This article outlines seven commonly held misconceptions about recruitment and selection practices. Areas discussed include the validity of various recruitment and selection measures (e.g., interviewing, reference checks), the conditions necessary to maximise the effectiveness of these practices, and common mistaken perceptions of the interview process. This article is most useful for readers interested in workforce development theory and research.

**Breaugh, J.A., and M. Starke. (2000). Research on employee recruitment: So many studies, so many remaining questions. *Journal of Management*, 26, 405-434.**

This research paper offers a theoretical framework of recruitment. A model linking various stages of recruitment (e.g., recruitment objectives, strategy development, recruitment activities, intervening / process variables) is proposed. In addition, a comprehensive review of available literature examines sources of recruitment, recruiters and realistic job previews. This paper is most useful for readers interested in workforce development theory and research.

**Wanous, J.P., and Reichers, A.E. (2000). New employee orientation programs. *Human Resource Management Review*, 10, 435-451.**

This research paper discusses the nature of employee orientation programs and presents a new framework for a program designed to minimise employee stress (Realistic Orientation Programs for new Employee Stress (ROPES)). The key principles and steps necessary to successfully achieve this type of program are summarised. In addition, the "fit" of this program with current research is outlined. This paper is most useful for readers interested in workforce development theory and research.





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