



REFERENCE CHECKING

Reference checking is a very important part of the selection process and provides a way of obtaining further information about an applicant in relation to the selection criteria for the position.

The Presiding Member of the Selection Committee will usually conduct referee checks. Reference checks are usually completed once the successful candidate has been selected however references can also be requested after shortlisting has been completed.

Any information obtained from referees is bound by the NSW Privacy and Personal Protection Act 1998 and only nominated referees may be contacted. Applicants should be consulted before approaching alternative or additional referees. If the candidate has not listed their current supervisor as a referee, you may request permission from the applicant to obtain a reference from them.

A written record of all relevant information provided by the referee must be retained and should be discussed with the other members of the Selection Committee to enable fully informed decisions to be made based on all available information

HOW TO OBTAIN REFEREE REPORTS

Only information specific to the requirements of the job may be requested and off the record comments should not be sought from referees. The reference should include questions that relate to the selection criteria and the applicant's work behaviour and performance, as well as any special qualifications and aptitude for the discharge of the duties.

While you may request references prior to interview it is important following the interviews to obtain one – two references for the **most competitive applicant(s)**. Verbal references are preferred as

written references submitted with an applicant's CV do not always relate to the selection criteria of the advertised position and provide insight into how the applicant performs the duties within the selection criteria.

Before commencing the reference checks, it is advisable to notify the candidate that you will be contacting their listed referees shortly.

It is fairly common for one person on the Selection Committee (normally the Presiding Member) to be responsible for conducting verbal reference checks. However, the other members of the Selection Committee should be fully briefed on the information obtained during the reference check, including the questions that were asked and a summary of the answers that were given by the referee.

It is insufficient for the Presiding Member to advise the Selection Committee that “the references were fine” or “everything checked out”. If the Selection Committee would like to be more actively involved, reference checks can be conducted by telephone conference with all members of the Selection Committee in attendance.

A written record of all relevant information provided by the referee **must** be retained and should be **discussed with the other members of the Selection Committee** to enable fully informed decisions to be made based on all available information

The minimum requirements for reference checks for positions at various levels are set out below. These apply to both internal and external applicants. Additional written references, either before or after the interview may be requested.

Position Type	Level	Minimum Requirement
Academic	A-C	2 references (can be either verbal or written)
	D-E	3 references (can be either verbal or written)
Professional	1-9	2 references (verbal)
	10-14	3 references (verbal)

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VERBAL REFEREE REPORTS

For a Verbal Referees report please use the template 'Verbal Reference Check'. **Prepare structured questions** to ask the referees which relate to the selection criteria. Include questions to clarify any areas of concern or confirm information provided by the applicant.

1. The Presiding Member should **take accurate notes** from the conversation and discuss these with the rest of the panel. In some cases, it may be appropriate that **all panel members participate**, such as through a conference call. Asking referees to provide written responses is also an option.
2. When calling the referees, **explain why you are calling**. Let them know that a decision has not yet been made and this referee check does not mean the applicant will be offered a job. If the applicant has not done so, offer to fax or email a copy of the position description and selection criteria.
3. **Say how long the call will take** and ask if it is an appropriate time.
4. Let them know that their responses will be **documented and used in the decision-making process**.
5. **Establish the referee's relationship to the applicant**. Ask how long the referee has known the applicant and in what capacity. Any conflicts of interest or relationships should be identified at this stage.
6. **Confirm the applicant's role, responsibilities and reporting structure**.
7. **Ask questions which relate directly to the selection criteria and which investigate further the applicant's capabilities** (knowledge, skills and abilities). Ask questions about how well the applicant performed, in ways that relate to the selection criteria. For example, *'This job requires "demonstrated experience in report writing", and I understand this is also part of the role of X with your organisation. Can you comment on the skills of X in writing reports?'* You can ask them for details, for example how well they met deadlines or agreed standards. Ask the referee to illustrate their comments with examples of actual behaviour and performance. Take detailed notes of the information offered.
8. **If checking the reference after interview**; refer to a specific example of skills raised by the applicant and ask the referee to give their perspective of the same thing.
9. **Determine the applicant's strengths**. These may be skills, specific knowledge or capabilities. You may also ask about areas they need to develop.

10. **Assess the applicant's performance in typical work environments**, for example, do they work well under pressure and with tight deadlines. Be sure to assess this only if it relates directly to the selection criteria, that is, if the role requires the ability to work well in a particular type of environment.
11. **Summarise the main points** of the referee's comments about the applicant to ensure you haven't misinterpreted anything. Ask the referee if they want to clarify or add any information.
12. **Thank them** for their time and ask them to **maintain confidentiality**.
13. Information from the referee check should then **be discussed with all the members of the selection panel**, allowing fully informed decisions to be made which are based on all available information.