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Recruiting a personal assistant

This section will guide you through the process of recruiting a personal assistant, and give you tips and ideas to help.

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Write a job description and person specification

A **job description** is a list of tasks that you would like your personal assistant to do.

A **person specification** is a list of the skills, experience and personal qualities that you would like your personal assistant to have.

If you have a care plan you may have specific requirements that you will need to think about when writing the job description and person specification.

Think about what makes your ideal personal assistant.

- List the skills that you would like your personal assistant to have, for example, do you want someone who can drive or has good communication skills.
- Think about their values, for example, a sense of humour, patience or being able to use their initiative.
- List the tasks that you would like your personal assistant to do, for example, support at work, with personal care, attending social events or making meals.
- You might also want to think about your own cultural and religious needs and whether you want to employ someone who understands them.

Download a sample job description and person specification from our website at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/templates.

More information

A workbook to help me plan my support (In Control)

This workbook will help you to think about how you want your life to be and where you can get the support to make this happen.

Download here

www.in-control.org.uk/media/20220/driving%20seat%20%20.pdf



Write your job advert

Your job advert should include the following information – remember this is about the type of person that you want to be your personal assistant.

Download a sample job advert from our website at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/templates.

Who you want to apply

Give a brief description about the type of person that you want to apply. Think about what values, skills, experience and qualifications they need. For example, your job advert could say ‘Are you caring, resilient and have a good sense of humour?’

Say if you want someone who has the experience or qualifications (or both) so that they can meet your needs.

Is it important if the person is a man or a woman? If so, you need to make sure that you say why, for example, you want them to do intimate personal care and you want someone of the same gender. You need to be careful here because of the Equalities Act which bans unfair treatment and helps achieve equal opportunities.

Hours, type of work and main duties

State the days and times that you need your personal assistant to work and a summary of the type of work that you want them to do.

Rate of pay

You will need to pay at least the national living wage (or the national minimum wage for workers aged 24 or under). Your direct payment or personal health budget adviser or local support organisation may have information about standard hourly rates.

General location

Tell people where they will be working but **do not** give out your home address at this stage.

Application form or curriculum vitae (CV)?

Tell people how you want them to apply, for example, by completing an application form or sending you a copy of their CV. This is your choice and you could ask them to do both. Download a template application form from our website at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/templates.

Closing date for applications

Choose a closing date that gives people enough time to see and apply for the job. A minimum of two weeks is usual.

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (previously CRB checks)

It is important that you are clear in the advertisement whether you want people to go through a DBS check before they start work. It is usually a good idea to do one so that you know whether people have a criminal conviction.

For more information, see the section called 'Do the right checks' in this booklet.

Other information

Use this section to give any other information about what is important to you, for example, if they must be a non-smoker or a driver for example.

References

Say that you will ask for references. It is usual to ask for two.

Contact details for further information

Tell people how they can contact you to find out more.

Do not give out your personal address, telephone number and email address on a job advert.

Your direct payment or personal health budget adviser, local support organisation or Jobcentre Plus may be able to accept applications on your behalf.

Or, you could set up a PO Box and have the applications sent there, but you will need to pay a fee for this service. Visit the Royal Mail website for more information at www.royalmail.com.

Advertise your job

Here are some of the ways that you can advertise for a personal assistant. Your direct payment or personal health budget adviser or local support organisation may have other helpful suggestions.

Personal assistant register

A personal assistant register is a list of personal assistants that are advertising that they are available for work. They can also be used by individual employers who are looking to hire a personal assistant.

Your local council or user led organisation might run a register. Find their details at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/localregisters.

Word of mouth

You may know someone who would be interested in being your personal assistant. Before you ask them, it is important to think about how an employer/employee relationship may affect your personal relationship.

Local newspaper

You could advertise in your local newspaper. This will reach a lot of people in your area and may mean that you get more applications; however, this can be quite an expensive option.

Jobcentre Plus

Your local Jobcentre Plus will advertise your job for free and will often help you to write the advert.

Online

You could advertise on the 'Advertise a job' website (www.gov.uk/advertise-job), which is a free online job advertising service. There may be other suitable websites – ask your direct payment or personal health budget adviser or local support organisation for advice.

Support organisations

Local support organisations may advertise jobs on their website. Contact them for more information.

Find your local support organisations on the 'In your area' section of our website at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/localregisters.

Local college or university

You could advertise for students through your local college or university.

Remember that some students go home when they are on a break from university, and you need to consider how this could impact you. You could ask them about this in the application process.

Claire's story



Claire uses a personal budget to employ personal assistants. Her family set up the CPS Trust to support her to recruit, manage and train a team of personal assistants. This gives Claire the choice and control over how she is supported, so that she can live a more independent and safe life.

They use a range of methods to attract potential candidates, including advertising through:

- Hampshire 'PA finder' (a website that the local council and clinical commissioning group (CCG) run)
- CPS Trust website at www.cpstrust.co.uk
- Indeed.com (an online jobs website)
- Portsmouth Council's PA noticeboard
- social media including Facebook and Twitter
- word of mouth
- leaflets in the community
- careers fairs.

They have written a clear job description and person specification that reflects the role and the type of person that she wants to employ.

Interested candidates can visit the CPS Trust website to watch videos and read more about Claire, so that they can really understand the role before they apply. They ask applicants to fill in an application form, outlining what would make them a good personal assistant.

Choose who to interview

This is often called ‘shortlisting’ because you are making a short list of all of the applications that you have received.

After the closing date, look through the application forms or CVs and decide who you want to interview.

You could use the job description and person specification to rate the applications and shortlist the ones that most closely fit the job and the type of person that you want.

You must make sure that this is fair and you do not discriminate against anyone on the grounds of protected characteristics, for example, their age, race, gender or sexual orientation.

ACAS has a useful booklet called ‘Delivering equality and diversity’ that can be downloaded from www.acas.org.uk - the section on recruitment and selection is particularly helpful. You can also call ACAS on **0300 123 1100** for free and confidential advice.

The people that you choose to interview are often called candidates. Once you have made your decision, you can contact the candidates and ask them to attend an interview.

Download a sample ‘Letter inviting people for an interview’ from our website at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/templates.

Do the interview

Interviewing can be as nervous for you as it is for the person that you are interviewing, so here is a step by step process to guide you through it.

Where should the interview take place?

It is better to do the interviews away from your home if possible.

Your direct payment or personal health budget adviser, local Jobcentre Plus, local library or a support organisation may be able to provide a room that you can use.

Prepare for the interview

Arrange a venue and, if required, arrange for someone to support you.

Prepare a list of questions that you want to ask each candidate, for example, about what they are like as a person, their work experience, their qualifications and why they want to work for you. It is also a good idea to think of a particular situation that is relevant to you and ask them how they would deal with it.

Here are some questions that you could ask.

What qualities and experience do you have that you think would make you a good personal assistant?

What are your hobbies and/or interests?

I see that you do not have direct experience of this kind of work, but people often have other experience. For example, some people have family members, friends or neighbours who are disabled. What experience of working with disabled people do you have?

If you were out with me and someone persisted in ignoring me and spoke only to you, how would you react?

I will need to tell you how to do things in the way that I want them done. How do you think that you would cope with this?

How would you react if you have done something and I want it done again in a different way?

What if I ask you to do something, and you think there is another way to do it that you would prefer – what would you do?

If we did have a difference of opinion, how do you think that you would deal with it?

Would you be interested if there is any training available?

What shifts would you prefer, for example, days, nights or a mixture?

Are there any questions that you would like to ask me?

Do not interview alone

It is a good idea to ask a friend, mediator or your direct payment or personal health budget adviser to do the interviewing with you. It is always good to have another opinion, but do not let the other person influence your decision making – you make the final decision.

Allow time between interviews

Take a break between interviews and make some notes of the answers to your questions. This will help you to remember each candidate and make your decision about who to offer the job to.

Do not rush a decision

If you are not sure who to offer the job to, sleep on it, ask for more information, or even re-interview. If you did not think that anyone was good enough, then you can re-advertise and interview different people.

More information

The Government also has practical advice to help you to employ people at www.gov.uk/browse/employing-people.

Charley's story



Charley employs a team of six personal assistants to support her with her everyday care needs.

Charley has worked with previous and current personal assistants to create her ideal job advert. She ensures that the job description is honest and detailed so that applicants know exactly what the role involves.

She highlights the values that people need for the role, including patience, a good sense of humour and flexibility. She also asks that people can drive her van, handle money, do housework, support her with childcare and likes animals – these are some of the most important aspects of the role.

Charley uses a range of websites to advertise vacancies including care-specific job sites, the local council's jobs page and job sites such as Totaljobs and Reed. She has found that advertising online has been the most effective way of recruiting personal assistants.

She asks people to fill in a short questionnaire before the interview, which asks questions about what they are like as a person. Charley lives with her mum and has shared custody of her nephew, so the application process involves questions to ensure that potential personal assistants are the right fit for the whole family.

After reading the application form, she invites candidates for a face to face interview. This is a two stage interview process – the first interview takes place in a local café and the second in the home/place of work.

She asks people the same questions so that everyone is given an equal opportunity and so she can easily compare their suitability – she asks questions to find out what they are like as a person and whether they would fit in well with her family life and existing team. This helps her to find the right people for the job, the first time.

Christina's Story



Christina has employed personal assistants for 18 years and is involved in the whole recruitment process.

She knows what she wants and writes this in her job descriptions and adverts so that people who apply have realistic expectations of the job role – this helps to reduce the number of ‘drop outs’ who realise that the role is not right for them once they have started.

She works closely with Surrey Independent Living Council (SILC) to advertise vacancies on their PA finder website, as well as advertising in local shops and online, such as on Gumtree.

Christina asks people to fill in an application form and does an initial phone interview to get to know them, before selecting suitable candidates for a face to face interview. With the support of another person, Christina asks all candidates to answer the same questions, but is flexible so that she can ask further questions to ‘dig deeper’ if she wants to know more.

A key part of the interview process is to find people with the right ‘values’ who can work within her agreed ways of working, for example, people who are reliable and honest.

She takes the time to make sure that people are right for the role, and says: “I have learnt that it is best not to take on a personal assistant just out of desperation, as they may not work to my values.”

This approach has been successful as all her current personal assistants have worked with her for over three years.

Offer the job

Once you have decided who you want to employ, contact them and offer them the job.

Download a sample 'Letter offering the job' from our website at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/templates.

Tell them that you will first need to check their references and carry out any other checks (for example, a DBS check). Make sure that you give enough time between offering the job and start date to enable you to carry out the checks.

Find out more in the 'Do the right checks' section of this booklet.

Tell the unsuccessful candidates

Once your preferred person has accepted the job, send a letter to the people that you interviewed who did not get the job (you do not need to phone them).

Download a sample 'Letter turning down an applicant' from our website at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/templates.

They may want to have some feedback on their performance during the interview. If you are asked this, use your notes from the interview to provide feedback – it is always useful to provide some positive feedback but also areas in which they could improve for their next interview.

Do the right checks

There are some checks that you need to do before someone starts working for you.

References

Candidates should supply references when they apply for the job. They are the name and contact details of someone that knows them, usually a previous employer. They help you to make sure that the information that people have told you is correct. It is also good to have the opinion of someone who already knows the person that you want to employ.

There are two ways that you can ask for a reference - in writing and by telephone.

Request a reference in writing



This is the best way to get the most information. You can ask specific questions and send a copy of the job description, so that you are sure that the referee (the person giving the reference) understands what the job involves.

Request a reference by phone



This is quicker than waiting for letters and referees may be prepared to say things over the phone that they would not write down. But a quick phone call may not allow the referee to think about what the job involves. It is a good idea to follow up a telephone reference with a written reference.

NOTE: If you are handed a reference by the person you interview or receive one by post before you have requested it, always follow it up with a phone call.

Download a template 'reference request form' from our website at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/templates.

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks

DBS checks help you to know whether people have a criminal conviction.

Remember:

- a DBS check should only be done for a successful job applicant
- your local authority, direct payment or personal health budget adviser or local support organisation may be able to help you to arrange a DBS check
- it costs £26.00 for a standard DBS check or £44.00 for an enhanced check (correct at May 2019); there may also be a small administration fee
- most applications for a DBS check take between two and four weeks to process.

Visit the Government website for more information about DBS checks at www.gov.uk/dbs.

You can also call them on 0300 0200 190 (Minicom: 0300 0200 192) or email customerservices@dbs.gsi.gov.uk.



More information

DBS checks: detailed guidance (Gov.co.uk)

This website has a collection of guidance documents and information about DBS checks and processes.

Visit www.gov.uk/dbs

Find a DBS umbrella body company (Gov.co.uk)

This online search will help you to find companies that can do DBS checks.

Visit www.gov.uk/find-dbs-umbrella-body

DBS checking personal assistants: advice note (Skills for Care)

This advice note explains who can request a DBS check, and who can make the decision on someone's suitability for employment using the results of a check.

Download from www.skillsforcare.org.uk/DBScheckPA

Right to work check

Before you offer someone the job you need to check that they have the legal right to work in the UK. You should check and keep copies of certain documents before your personal assistant starts.

The documents that you need to check will depend on the type of worker that you are employing, but usually include a:

- British or European passport
- birth certificate confirming that they were born in the UK or Republic of Ireland
- letter from the Home Office confirming that they have a legal right to work in the UK.

Visit the Government website for more information about right to work checks at www.gov.uk/legal-right-work-uk.

More information



Right to work (Home Office, 2016)

This poster gives a three step guide to checking and keeping a record of your employee's documents.

Download from www.gov.uk/government/publications/carry-out-a-right-to-work-check

You can also watch a video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKbxguqi4hM

An employer's guide to right to work checks (Home Office, 2017)

This guide explains what an employer needs to know about conducting right to work checks.

Download from www.gov.uk/government/publications/right-to-work-checks-employers-guide

Check if a document allows someone to work in the UK (Gov.co.uk)

This online service will help you to find out which types of document give someone the right to work in the UK, and what a right to work check involves.

Visit www.gov.uk/legal-right-work-uk

Keep a record

ACAS recommends that recruitment records should be kept for a period of time, such as six months, in case of any discrimination challenge. You should keep these records confidential and in a secure place.

Visit the ACAS website for more information about keeping records at www.acas.org.uk, or call their confidential helpline on 0300 123 1100 (Text Relay 18001 0300 123 1100).

