



# Staff selection step-by-step

*From advertisement to interview*

**A17** Articles series: Management

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**So your church or mission has decided to appoint a new member of staff.**

**This might be a Youth or Children's Worker, an Office Manager, a Minister, a Receptionist, a Regional Co-ordinator or a CEO. It might be a brand new appointment so there is no history to fall back on or simply a replacement for someone who is leaving.**

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This article is written for those who have been asked to organise the selection process and who have no HR (Human Resources) Department to fall back on; also for those asked to be part of the interviewing panel. It assumes a specifically Christian context.

It cannot cover every aspect and, in particular, all the legal issues involved, so it would be wise to obtain professional advice. But it seeks to give enough background to help avoid some costly mistakes. At the very least it provides a checklist of the right questions to ask yourselves.

Nor can it cover some of the special issues associated with the appointment of Ministers in different denominations. The author has many years' experience of the Church of England patronage system and has written this up in Article A50, *The patronage process as drama*.

The stakes are high. Appoint the 'wrong' person and you could seriously damage someone's life and that of their family too. You might also do untold harm to the health of the church or mission concerned. Get it right, on the other hand, and God's blessing can flow.

It is written in RAQ format. Not come across those letters before? They stand for **Rarely Asked Questions**.

# A: The planning stage

FAQs concern short-listing and interview. RAQs, by contrast, first consider the vital planning stage and clarify the purpose of the whole exercise. FAQs are employer-centred, but RAQs consider the needs of the applicants first.

## RAQ1

### What is a selection process all about?

First, for any church or mission, this is a matter of divine guidance. You (the selectors) are trying to find God's chosen candidate for this post. The applicants are trying to determine whether this is God's place for them.

That is hardly overstating the case. This is a process concerning the careers of everyone who applies and the future health of the appointing body. True, the appointment of a full time leader moving to a new location has greater implications than that of a part-time member of staff looking to supplement the family income. But who knows where each appointment might lead?

Secondly, and consequently, this has to be a two-way process. You do well to keep both aspects in mind. You need the right person for the post. The candidates are looking for the right next step for their employment. So there can be no question of one party lording it over the other.

It is easy to give lip service to this point, but not so straightforward to work it out in practice. The odds seem to be stacked in the employer's favour. The home team's job is to make a choice from people who are in competition with each other. One (perhaps) will win; the others lose.

But if this is about finding God's will, how can you talk about 'competition'? Or 'winners' and 'losers'? If you make the 'right' appointment in God's sight everyone is a winner. The correct person is appointed. The others have been saved from a big mistake.

Seeing it in this light will mean that your attitude can be to serve the applicants. You will aim to be helpful to them (see RAQ3 for example), care for them, and let them interview you as much as you them.

Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13 to remind yourself that human wisdom alone does not necessarily produce God's choice. Hence the need for prayer throughout this process. Read 1 Timothy 3:1-13 to see the importance of Christian character for those appointed to leadership positions.

So, before any discussion of process, get your minds straight on what this is all about. That will then shape everything you do.

## RAQ2

### How long does it all take?

At the start you need to draw up a timetable so you can work out the dates for applications to be in and interviews held. Advertising takes time, especially if you involve monthly publications. You need to leave enough time at each stage in the process. So a timetable might go:

|                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| Decision to go ahead   | Month 1 Day 1          |
| All papers prepared    | Month 1 Day 15 or 22   |
| Ads appear in weeklies | Month 2 Days 1 and 8   |
| Applications returned  | Month 3 Day 8          |
| References sought*     | Month 3 Day 8          |
| Short-listing          | Month 3 Day 22         |
| Interview day          | Month 4 Day 8          |
| Proposed start of work | Month 5 Day 15 / later |

*\* or after short-listing or after interview*

This assumes no advertising in monthlies (which would delay matters some weeks), references requested before short-listing (more about that shortly), and the successful candidate only needs one month's notice. These dates will vary depending on the kind of appointment. Posts in a mission agency may be moved on more quickly than in a church where those involved are mostly 'volunteers' not available together every day. In particular, preparing the paperwork for a Minister appointment may take much longer than a fortnight and need wide consultation.

Some churches feel that they can skip much of this when someone offers to join the staff from within the congregation. Experience shows that this can be disastrous. Ensure that the post is justified and budgeted for; then carry out a proper selection procedure. If this person is so good, they will still be appointed and there will be no suspicions of favouritism.

For a part-time post it is in order to advertise internally and locally (whether through the press or just through local church networks). Full time posts normally need to be advertised through

appropriate national papers and magazines and, increasingly, on your and others' websites. Advertisements are expensive so keep the wording to a minimum, but enough to interest the kind of people you want to apply. In this respect the choice of job title may make a considerable difference.

### RAQ3

#### **What do applicants need to know about us?**

It is a humble but proper approach to start at this point. To answer the question you need to put yourself in their shoes. Ask yourself what you would like to be told to enable you to decide whether to apply or not. If you are in the know it is not easy to realise what others do *not* know! Here is what someone might want to know to help see whether they might fit.

- 1 What this church (or mission) is like: size, membership, programme, etc. What it believes in. Where it has come from, where it is going and the level of passion in this. How its culture might be described. Its style of worship. Whether the applicant's family (if applicable) might feel at home here. Plus something about the town or area and its schools.
- 2 The staff team in its widest sense. The leadership style. The management and care for staff. The level of teamwork and mutual support.
- 3 The expectations and scope of the job itself. The character, gifts and experience required (essential/desirable). Whether the post might challenge and develop the person or not. What has led to this post being established or how it is run now. How long a commitment is anticipated from both parties. Whether the post is completely fixed or whether it can be adapted.
- 4 The practical details of contract terms (including salary, holidays, flexibility of hours, workplace, housing, probationary period). The implications for family life. Any requirement to accept a statement of faith or equivalent. Any (G)OR or other equal opportunities or diversity statement.
- 5 Any hidden issues such as future plans that will affect this post or problems that have to be faced. Any need for DBS disclosure. Why the previous holder is leaving (if applicable). (It may be that some of these cannot be told until after short-listing.)

#### **Legal issues**

- Discrimination legislation means that it is unwise to ask for a candidate's age or marital status and family details for most jobs.
- If you ask for a Christian faith you need to explain that this post has an Occupational Requirement (OR) under the Equality Act 2010 to show that the post does in fact require a Christian (and be able to defend this – not easy for some posts). See Training Notes TN92, *How genuine are your GORs?*
- If the post requires DBS disclosure this must be clearly stated.
- There may be requirements to disclose information about criminal convictions under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. Such information needs to be kept confidential (separate sheet).
- You may need to advise candidates under the terms of the Data Protection Act / GDPR that, if appointed, the form they complete will be kept as part of their personnel file.

If in any doubt take professional legal advice.

- 6 How questions can be answered. How to apply, in what format, to whom, by when. At what rate expenses will be covered.

It is no bad idea to write out a list like this as a group exercise. It is a good example of the church serving the applicants, and it will quickly lead to the right kind of paperwork to produce. A pack of information for a post might then include:

- appropriate profile of the church or organisation;
- big picture issues of future developments, including for the post;
- job description (for advice on how to write this, see Article A6 on this website);
- person profile (see A6 again);
- contract details, noting any point that might not be regarded as standard;
- application form or information required and procedures to be followed;
- details of address, telephone, email, dates for selection procedure.

This might be available online but should also be in print for those who prefer this.

**RAQ4****What do we need to know about them?**

At application stage you need to know whether you want to short-list each applicant or not, so both parties are going to have to rely on print. If you fail to discover the right information about them, you might easily select people who clearly do not fit, or reject someone who might be right. To make it more difficult, some people come across rather differently in print from in person.

Here is a list for starters.

- 1 Obvious factual information: their name and communication details, education and qualifications, church information and Christian service, employment history including details of present post, health, car and driving licence if relevant.
- 2 Where they fit well and not so well with the job description and person profile.

3 Whether the way they view themselves matches the views of others who work with them or know them well.

- 4 The kind of person they are (interests, reading, etc.), why they are looking for a move, and how well they might fit into any team / your church or organisation (including their Christian beliefs if appropriate). When they could start.
- 5 How they present themselves in print and communicate the information you need.

Again, get a small group to sit down together and prepare such a list. Don't start writing out anything for the job until you have done this.

If, instead, you copy someone else's application form (perhaps a helpful member of your selection panel brings one home from their work) you end up asking for unnecessary information, and then forgetting to discover some key data for your post. Beware copying anything from a very different context. See also RAQ5 below.

## B: Application and short-listing

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FAQs tend to play down this part of the process or assume you copy what has been done before. RAQs, by contrast, appreciate how important a phase this is and consider alternatives.

**RAQ5****How do we discover the appropriate information?**

So the pack of materials is planned (it is worth presenting it well, rather than providing some poorly photocopied sheets) and will be sent promptly to each applicant (by post or email) on application. It is good to have a covering letter, personally addressed and signed. This can remind people of the closing date, when they will hear from you, interviews, etc.

But how to entice them to tell you the information about themselves (RAQ4) that will enable you to judge whether to take their application further or not? Here are a number of options to consider.

- 1 Ask for a CV. This not only gives you all the basic personal information, it also shows you something of how applicants express and present themselves. Much depends here on the post itself. For example, if you are looking for an Administrator or Office Manager pay particular attention to the way the CV has been laid out. If you are looking for a

Youth Worker then this may not be so important.

- 2 Give them a pro-forma application to complete. You might use a standard one, or you could design your own. If the latter, show a draft to people used to doing this in their work to ensure you don't miss key data or contravene any legislation. The advantage of this approach is that everyone fills in the same details in the same way and you can compare.
- or 3 List the information you need to know and ask them to present this to you themselves. Like the CV this means that the candidate not only gives the information but has to decide how to present it; this can often tell you much about them. See the sample on page 5.
- 4 Ask some questions about why they feel they may be right for this post and, perhaps, a question that will bring out their understanding of key issues.

Whatever format you use, promptly acknowledge all applications the moment you receive them. The applicant is nervously waiting.

### Sample request to applicants for information

*Here are some ideas to consider if not using an application form. For the purposes of illustration this is for a church's Children's Worker. Alternatively you might use a form with these questions included on it.*

Please send a CV. Ensure that you include: your present state of health (and any time off work in the past three years), a brief history of your Christian experience and service, your present church details and the notice required in your present employment.

You need to provide the names and addresses of three referees we can approach (*details to include present church Minister...*). Send to .... to arrive by ....

- What is your reaction to the person profile for this post? Briefly and honestly, how do you see yourself matching up to each of the requirements? Where would be the weakest matches?
- Consider the job description we have provided. Where do you feel you have most to contribute and in which areas would you be weakest or need training in some form?
- What excites you and what daunts you about this post? How did you hear about it?
- Would any points in the section about contract terms, or anything about the beliefs and culture of our church, cause you any concerns? Why if so?
- What evidence do you have that God is calling you (a) to leave your present work (if applicable), (b) to join our staff and/or (c) to move into paid Christian ministry of this kind?
- In what ways have you grown as a disciple of Christ over the past year? (*Or a question about what their faith is centred on and how it impacts on their life.*)
- From what you have read about our church and area, what would you seek to do in your first three months in post to enable you to propose a strategy for children's work? (*Or something equivalent.*)

### RAQ6

#### How do we short-list accurately?

The short-listing process is normally carried out by those who will form the interview panel, but may not be. It involves deciding who to call for interview from those who have applied (or calling no one at all, a valid option). There are some important features of this part of the process.

- 1 Your knowledge of each candidate is severely limited at this stage. You can only go on what you know.
- 2 But if some of the applicants are known personally to some of the panel (as would happen with internal applications for a post, and through national Christian networks especially for Minister posts) it is very difficult to be scrupulously fair.
- 3 For Christians, there is then the question of do you short-list on the basis of the written application alone, or are you looking for God's choice of person and so use every possible means including personal knowledge? In this case a poor application might still get short-listed. Is this a valid approach?
- 4 There is a growing trend to prove the fairness of the system (and avoid the danger of litigation) by means of a scoring scheme. The most important features of the job description and the person profile are scored for each application by each panel member. Short-listing is then done on the overall scores so it can be shown that the process has been fair. Keep all documentary evidence for a limited time in case you have to justify a decision on it.

For some posts you will be looking for appropriate skills and past experience; here any scoring scheme is reasonably straightforward. But for key leadership posts it may be more important to judge future potential. Here you need to see how candidates have understood the material they have been sent and whether they have perceived issues (reading between the lines) that need to be addressed. Does the application demonstrate leadership initiative? On the other hand, do they come across as being too sure of what they would do from the little they know?

The aim should be to provide a short-list of three or four candidates if you have had sufficient applications. Two is all right, but only one possible interviewee gives a problem. It is not uncommon for people short-listed then to drop out so it is worth holding reserves if possible.

Contact all applicants immediately you have short-listed in as personal a way as you can. They are anxiously awaiting the outcome. (See RAQ12 note 10 if any then contact you wanting to know why they were not short-listed.)



**RAQ7****When do we ask for references?**

The issue of references is not straightforward. You need to decide, first, whether you are going to take them up before you short-list, after this but before you interview, or only after you have selected at interview. Some people see references as inherently unreliable. Others fail to see that some references tell you more about the writer than the candidate.

You also need to think about what kind of referees you need and what kind of questions you should ask them. Does a telephone reference with its interactive dynamic offer a better result than a written one?

Here are some key points in what has to be a brief look at this topic.

- 1 Send each referee the same paperwork that you send out to enquirers so they know exactly what the person has applied for. You might ask them to comment on

strong and weak matches with job description and person profile.

- 2 For any Christian appointment ensure that at least one referee can talk about their present church involvement and Christian discipleship – preferably their current Minister.
- 3 Beware any referee who claims they know nothing negative about the candidate, especially if he or she is a friend. Ask about weaknesses.
- 4 Ask for an employer referee (although offer not to take this up until the post has been offered), but word your request to them appropriately, especially for a Christian post for someone coming out of secular employment. Watch the jargon!

Tip: It is courteous to send a personal acknowledgement to each referee to thank them the moment you receive their response and again after the process has been completed.

## C: The interview

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FAQs fail to appreciate that good interviews don't consist of just a few chosen questions. RAQs, in contrast, consider a range of possibilities and focus on turning interviews into lively encounters that provide the information you need to make a sound choice.

**RAQ8****What might we include in the interview period?**

A formal interview consists of one interviewer or, more likely, a panel asking questions of each candidate. This is an essential part of the interview process, but it is only one part.

This forced environment will allow some to shine, but will not show others in their true light. So to make this the only means of interview is both unfair and unhelpful. It also is very much a one-way process even if the question is asked towards the end: "Is there anything you would like to ask us?". If you view the process as two-way, with both parties seeking God's will, there must be a better means.

Here is a list of other possible elements for the interview 'period'. You would not necessarily use all of these for an appointment. But these are not side-shows: each one is just as much part of the 'interview' as the formal part. When you write to short-listed candidates tell them exactly what the programme will be, who they will be meeting, and what they will be asked to be

involved in. For example, if there is to be an informal gathering (3 below) the candidates must know that this is for them to ask questions, not be interviewed as such. Give them precise details about where to come (with map and public transport details) and when they will be free to leave. See RAQ9 point 10.

- 1 **Research present positions**  
It is sometimes possible for candidates to be observed in their present setting. For example, a group can visit a Minister's present church to observe worship and preaching. This needs to be carried out with great sensitivity and with the Minister's knowledge: no one at the present church may know about the possible move. Only do this if you can do it for all interviewees.
- 2 **The site visit or tour**  
For a church this might mean a tour of the area, the premises, office and any tied housing. It might include a Sunday service

or other activities that the person appointed would be dealing with (the open youth club for a Youth Worker, a mid-week luncheon club for the Community Worker, etc.). For an office post in a mission agency it would mean a tour of the building to meet the staff.

### 3 **The informal gathering**

A typical case would be the candidates meeting with a group from the church or mission over a buffet meal. The idea (which must be clearly spelled out to everyone) is not to pose formal interview questions to the candidates, but to get them to open up about themselves and possibly to ask their questions about the church/mission. One or two people will be carefully noting how each candidate reacts to a roomful of strangers.

Input from such a session should be fed in to the interview panel only after the formal interviews have taken place. There is a view that those who will serve on the panel should not take part in any informal gathering themselves so they do not form impressions which could colour their assessments.

### 4 **Candidates interviewing you**

This is a session with, perhaps, three or four people from the church or organisation to let the candidate ask their questions. So this is an interview (and it might even be quite formal) but the other way round from what is normally expected. This may work best as part of 2 or 3 above.

### 5 **Practical tests**

Some posts clearly need some indication of technical ability. A post requiring secretarial or organisational skills might have a limited-time keyboard or IT skills test of some sort within the process or an in-tray exercise (prioritising a list of tasks under a given situation).

Interviews for other posts might include some kind of problem-solving exercise or chairing a meeting, usually with the group all together. Youth Workers might be asked to join in with the weekly meeting of the young people's group to see how they perform.

If you want to discover knowledge of a subject or of the church or organisation in particular you can try a definitions exercise (this can be done within a formal

interview). The interviewer says a single phrase: the candidate has to define it or say 'Pass'.

So, for a post needing some knowledge of how a Baptist Church operates, you might try terms such as 'Diaconate', 'Church Meeting', 'Didcot', and so on. For one involving a major building project in a Church of England Church, 'DAC', 'Faculty', 'Gift Aid'.

### 6 **Presentation**

Candidates are asked to prepare something in advance and to present this to the interviewing panel (perhaps as part of the formal interview, perhaps separately).

For a church's Minister the presentation might be a five minute sermon at a mid-week service on, perhaps, a given Bible text or passage relevant for that week. After the presentation, which should be cut off soon after the five minutes if a candidate overruns, questions can then be asked about it.

For a Church Administrator you might ask for a presentation to a leadership body to justify £2,000 being spent on a new website.

For a Regional Co-ordinator for a mission agency the scene might be set for a church meeting where the society has had no previous links and the candidates are asked to explain the mission's purpose and vision.

The ultimate in presentations would be the system known in some church networks as 'preaching with a view'. Candidates are invited to the church to take a Sunday service or just to preach at one. In this way the presentation is for real and is before the whole congregation. But is this what preaching is all about?

### 7 **Role play**

This would normally be part of the formal interview – it needs to be done convincingly.

For the post of a manager of staff the interviewer can play the staff worker who has just arrived in the office 20 minutes late for the third time in three weeks. The candidate has called this person in to explain, and the interviewer has a long excuse about the buses being late again. The idea is to see how the candidate handles the answers given, and what

approaches they adopt to deal with the situation.

Other ideas: a time waster as a caller or on the phone for a post of Church Office Secretary; a member of the congregation upset at plans to change the style of the morning service, for a post of Minister.

## 8 Second interviews

It may be that an interview process with five candidates shows that two are clearly possible and three are not. But there may now be issues to explore in more depth with both the two. Or perhaps there is one possible candidate, but enough unknowns after interview to ask him or her to return for a further limited-scope meeting.

### RAQ9

#### How do we prepare a formal interview?

Take time to plan the detail.

- 1 The room needs to be free from all distractions (noise, people, intrusive sunshine, telephones, etc.). It needs to be secure so that candidates are not on show to everyone else in the building. There needs to be a waiting area with toilet facilities available and with someone to put people at ease, and to provide drinks and something to read.
- 2 The layout of the furniture needs to avoid unnecessary formality or threat. So a long table with six interviewers arrayed down one side is not a helpful setting (a panel of six is rather too big anyway). The candidates need to be in a comfortable chair but not one resembling Mastermind nor one so low down that everyone else looks down on them.
- 3 Dress codes are unpredictable these days. A few years ago a formal interview would have been dark suit or business clothes. Now it is more likely to be smart casual for many church posts.
- 4 It is vital these days to ask each candidate the same main questions and to keep documentary evidence that this has been carried out. The final details may well be sorted in a pre-interview meeting half an hour before the first candidate is due, but the main preparation and allocation need to have been decided before then. You can ask any supplementary questions which naturally arise out of replies given,

but discrimination legislation may catch you out if only one candidate is asked one particular primary question.

- 5 The panel needs to agree beforehand whether members can ask supplementaries to another person's first question (perhaps by catching the leader's eye). The leader needs to be alert to this all the time.
- 6 For any Christian interview the panel will want to pray together beforehand. They are seeking God's wisdom to know which candidate, if any (a vital point), is the right one. The obvious answer is not always the right one in God's work. You may also want a group praying elsewhere throughout all the interviews.
- 7 You also need to decide whether to discuss each candidate between interviews or, probably better, wait until all have been seen. But allow time for writing up notes and a comfort break.
- 8 An interview for what might be considered a significant post needs at least an hour with some leeway to avoid running late. So a programme might have interviews spaced at 75 minute intervals. For more straightforward posts reduce this to 45 minute interviews and 60 minutes between each.
- 9 If you are running a number of interviews one after the other, allow a coffee or meal break after two interviews. First, panel members need the break for interviewing is a concentrated activity. Secondly, it is better to drink coffee or eat without a candidate in the room.
- 10 Everyone involved needs a printed timetable so there is no confusion. Candidates need to be told clearly where they should come to and when, with practical details such as parking, when they will be free to leave, any meals provided, expenses, etc.

Training Notes TN65 on this website, *Sharp interview questions*, give more detail about ideas for the kind of questions and supplementaries to ask.

#### Check other material

Do look at other examples of paperwork for posts similar to yours (advertisements, application papers, etc.). Do not copy these (they may not be good examples!) but see what you can learn from them.



## RAQ10

**How should we structure a good interview?**

- 1 Try to keep to time. Candidates may be nervous. Having to wait an extra 15 minutes, not knowing when they will be called in, does not help. Ensure each candidate has a drink of water available for them where they are to sit in the interview.
- 2 Start with a 30-minute panel meeting to finalise questions, agree how everything will run, and pray.
- 3 The panel leader collects the next candidate from the waiting area. It is important at this stage to introduce yourself if the candidate has not already met you and to explain who else is on the panel if this is not already known. It is helpful not to rush this; sit down with the candidate and take your time with them before you bring them in.
- 4 The candidate is brought in and introduced to each member of the panel. Again, do not rush this. Few people can take in very much if they are suddenly presented with four faces and names in quick succession. Put yourself in their shoes as you plan.
- 5 The vital point is to put the candidate at ease, as far as is possible. You want to see them under normal conditions. No formal interview can match this, but get as close to it as you can. So either now, or at stage 2, thank them for coming and explain that everyone is concerned here for finding God's right place for both candidate and church or organisation. You want everyone to come out of this a winner. Many people are praying (if they are!).
- 6 Unless it is inappropriate now is the time for one member of the panel to lead in prayer for the interview.
- 7 It is appropriate for the leader of the panel to ask the first question. This

**Note on confidentiality**

Panel members and others need to be made constantly aware of the need for confidentiality at all stages. Huge damage can be done if sensitive information is leaked: who has been short-listed, why someone was not appointed, what went on at the interviews. Churches are especially bad at this as there is not the disciplined structure of a contractual workplace.

should be one that the candidates find straightforward, allows them to talk, and relaxes them. If they say very little the leader needs to help them to say more. So, one line of approach might be, "So Rachel, how have you found the whole process so far?". Another might be, "Jason, tell us a bit about why this post attracted you in the first place".

- 8 Each member of the panel in turn then asks their prearranged questions, and the normal procedure would be for anyone to ask supplementaries. In fact, anything that makes the interview a real engagement with the candidate rather than a wooden procedure is to be welcomed. The leader is keeping an eye on time and bringing people in when it is clear they would like to ask something.
- 9 Ten minutes or so from the end of the allotted time the leader checks that all the panel members have asked their questions, and then asks the candidate whether they have anything that they want to ask the panel. If there has been plenty of opportunity for candidates to 'interview' church or organisation members at other times, such questions now may be restricted to ones of process or clarification. If this has not happened there may be some quite deep questions that need time.
- 10 Before the end it is normal practice to ask whether the candidate is still interested in the post and would look favourably on any offer. It sometimes happens that a candidate by now is recognising that this post is not right for them. It is helpful to know this and discuss the reasons briefly.
- 11 The leader now needs to outline the process from this point. First, say when the leader will contact the candidate, so check on availability and the telephone number to ring. It may be safer to promise to be in touch by the end of the next day rather than that night, or even the day after that (but do not delay too long). That means the panel can sleep on any decision if necessary (sometimes this is helpful) or that the chosen candidate can have given their answer. Secondly, confirm arrangements for expenses to be paid.
- 12 You may like to close the session in prayer and then let each panel member say good-bye. The leader takes the candidate out of the room, and checks that they know the ongoing process.

Again, check out Training Notes TN65.

**RAQ11****How can we bring an interview to life?**

Good interviews depend on well-crafted questions asked with skill, with short supplementaries.

- 1 First, do not woodenly read your questions from a sheet in front of you so avoiding eye contact with the candidate. This feels so artificial and destroys any attempt to engage with the person you are interviewing. If you need a prompt have the sheet on the table or floor in front of you, but only glance at it from time to time.
- 2 Do not switch off once they start to answer. Sit on the edge of your chair and lean forward a little. Encourage them with your eyes, by smiling at them, and by nodding to show you have understood a point. Pick up on something they say rather than rushing on to your next question.
- 3 If they say very little, it is your job to help them to say more. You may be interviewing them but this is a two-way process and you have responsibilities too, one of which is to get the best out of each candidate. So ask helpful supplementaries: "That sounds interesting – what happened next?"; "But why do you think it turned out like that?"; "What lessons did you learn from the experience?".
- 4 If they talk too slowly or too much or ramble it is your job to move them on or keep them to the point. Never let a candidate talk for very long at a time. So be ready to interrupt at the end of a sentence (hand movements can help). Ideas include: "But, remember, my question was ...."; "You said there

were two points; what is the second?"; "How might that apply to this post?".

- 5 Challenge their answers, especially if you feel they are bluffing. "But if that post was working well, why did you leave so abruptly?"; "Your CV says you started an honours course at uni in 1995 but you make no mention of a qualification. So what happened?"; "What do you mean by that word?"; "Why?"; "But my question was more specific than that...".
- 6 If you need to understand their Christian beliefs do not let them hide behind standard labels. Ask questions such as: "If you had to explain your faith in one short sentence, what would you say?"; "How does the Bible impact on your daily work?"; "What ethical issues have you had to face in the past year or two?"; "How do you pray?"; "What have you been reading recently?".
- 7 Your aim is to engage with them, not to conduct an enquiry. Enquiries go: Question, Answer, Thank you; Question, Answer, Thank you. And so on. Real engagement becomes a lively discussion when the whole panel start to get involved. So be ready to interrupt them (even if you are not trying to shut them up) and keep it all moving.
- 8 No one is allowed to ask direct questions about age, marital status (spouse and family) or sexuality unless the candidate first introduces the point. Questions about pregnancy are forbidden. If you have an equal opportunities policy it must be fully respected at the interview.
- 9 Watch out for the sub-agenda at all times. What messages are they giving by the way they are dressed? How are they sitting? Are they making eye contact with everyone?

## D: The decision

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FAQs think it is all over now. RAQs, by contrast, appreciate that the real work is just starting.

**RAQ12****How do we come to a wise decision?**

So, you have interviewed three or four candidates, you all feel pretty exhilarated and/or weary, and now you meet to make your choice.

- 1 Ensure that no member of the panel has another engagement to hurry on to. It may be clear and you can finish this session off in an hour, but it could be tricky and you need two hours or even longer. So much is at stake.

- 2 Arrange for refreshments and perhaps a short break so everyone can be as fresh as possible. Even send everyone out for a 15 minute walk to clear their heads and do some hard thinking and praying.
- 3 You may well want to pray at the start of this session, at the end, and at points where things get stuck in the middle.
- 4 One method is to consider each candidate and list all the positive points about why they might be right for this post. A flipchart can be helpful – but do make sure you safely destroy the sheets afterwards or you could be in big trouble.
- 5 Then do the same for the points against appointing each of them.
- 6 At this point it can be helpful to see if everyone is agreed that any candidate should not be considered further, and if any candidate definitely merits consideration.
- 7 The leader now feeds in comments from those who met the candidates informally and the results of any tests. It is best not to consider these too early in the process. This input has much less weight than the formal interview.
- 8 It may now be necessary to go back through one or two candidates in more detail, and then ask if people find their positions on each shifting at all. It is important at this point to raise the possibility of making no appointment at all. Would it be better to do this than take the best candidate whose quality was not quite what you were looking for?
- 9 The aim should be to come to consensus, not majority vote. Sometimes it can be helpful to make the decision but allow everyone to consider it overnight with the leader contacting everyone the next day. This helps those who do not like to make snap decisions on tricky issues. But it is often impossible to reconvene the panel the next day, so if there is lack of full agreement by the next morning this can be a problem. So be very careful before you agree to this.
- 10 Once a decision is reached, the leader of the panel then contacts each candidate by phone.  
  
For those who are not being offered the post it can be helpful to offer a talkback (there and then, or later) to help them for future applications. But this can be a dangerous thing to do and it needs to be done with care.

Here are some suggestions.

- Ask them first how *they* felt it went. They may know they made certain mistakes.
  - See it and explain it as help for future applications rather than as a mark for performance at this one. For example, talk in terms of how they might improve how they come across at interview more than how they did this time.
  - Give plenty of positives about how they came across if you can.
  - Avoid giving reasons for non-selection that candidates can then challenge. For example, if you tell someone they had insufficient experience, they may point out that they had more experience than the candidate you selected.
  - Be very careful not to divulge any information that is rightly confidential to the panel.
- 11 The offer may be conditional on references (if not yet taken up, or if an employer's reference has yet to be requested), on something like a health or DBS check, or on a probationary period. Be very clear on such points.
  - 12 The panel should destroy application papers and references once the process is complete. One set of papers for the appointed candidate will however form part of their personnel file.
- Everyone needs to be reminded to keep their lips buttoned up until the announcement of a successful appointment can be made, even if everyone in the church or mission is longing to know what happened.
- So agree what can be said, such as, "We had an excellent interview and hope to be in a position to make an announcement within ten days". See the box on page 9.

### For further help

For further details, try the ACAS website, [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk). Click on 'Advice', then 'Job applications and hiring' and then 'Hiring someone'.

Or go to <https://www.gov.uk>, click on 'Employing people' then 'Recruiting and hiring' and see a range of items.

### ***Phew! Is it worth it?***

Yes. Take time, take trouble. Get it right and the benefits could be very positive over many years. And, for those applying, a good procedure will inspire confidence and make them take note of your post. Your ideal is for everyone, interviewers and candidates, to say afterwards, “That was a really good experience. I learned much from it. I thank God for it.”

Finally, a reminder to check out what you are doing with an HR professional. This article cannot cover all the issues, especially for specialised posts. But see the box below for other items on this website which give more detail on specific aspects of the process.

This article is available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index> then A17. See also Articles A6, *Job descriptions*, and A50, *The patronage process as drama*, plus Training Notes TN76, *How to prepare a job reference*, TN92, *How genuine are your GORs?*, TN114, *How to prepare a church profile*, and especially TN65, *Sharp interview questions*. For help for those being interviewed, see Articles A22 and A23, *Job applications in Christian ministry*.

Contact John if you would like to enquire about his helping you with a staff appointment, either at planning stage or for selection. He can advise throughout, or simply join your interview panel.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File A17 under Management (with a link to Structures).

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