Referee checks

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Referee checks provide independent information about a candidate's capabilities, knowledge and experience as well as their behaviours from managers, peers or other people who have observed their work performance in a relevant context.

Referee checks are used to confirm a candidate's suitability for a role. They also allow you to verify or gather additional insights about a candidate from their application, resume, interview and other capability-based assessments.

The information obtained from referees should be used to inform the final decision of a candidate's suitability for the role by all assessors.

Referee checks do not need to be standardised. They should be tailored for each candidate. You should probe into areas specific to the candidate, which you may have identified through the assessments and interviews.

After you have completed the referee checks, revisit the overall capability score for each candidate and consider their fit for the role. Check whether this changes your views about the preferred candidate.

When to do referee checks

Referee checks are best done in the final stage of the recruitment process for the preferred candidate or candidates. Referee checks can be done for more than one candidate where the assessors need more information to separate the leading candidates.

You should not do a referee check on candidates you are not seriously considering for the role.

Referees

Referees need to have known the candidate for a reasonable amount of time (e.g. six months) and have good knowledge of their performance in a relevant context (e.g. work or education) to provide an objective assessment of their capabilities, knowledge and experience.

You should only contact the referees supplied by the candidate. If you believe there is a more suitable referee, speak to the candidate to seek their permission before approaching this person.

It is ideal for at least one referee to have been a direct manager of the candidate in the past two years. If a candidate has not included a direct manager as a referee, you can ask why they have not nominated their manager to satisfy yourself that the reason is valid.

Types of referee checks

360-degree

A 360-degree referee check involves conducting referee checks with managers as well as with direct reports, peers, customers or other stakeholders who have regular contact with the candidate. Ideally this would involve contacting one or more people from each category. These checks are generally used for more senior roles where you are looking to understand how they respond in different work contexts.

Verbal

Verbal referee checks are tailored to each candidate so that you can find out specific information that was not clear or covered during the assessment process. Questions can be sent to referees in advance with a follow-up conversation. This approach gives you the ability to probe further on specific issues you and the other assessors have identified.

Service providers

If you engage a service provider to undertake referee checks, you must ensure they provide you with a comprehensive report that all assessors consider as part of their selection decision.

Preparing for the referee check

Always let candidates know in advance that you will contact their referees. This gives candidates the chance to let their referees know about the role and for the referee to prepare for your contact.

It is important to prepare properly for the referee checks so that you can obtain quality information about the candidate from independent observers. This includes reviewing the candidate's resume and assessment results and preparing tailored questions.

During the referee check

You are looking to obtain referees' observations and experience of working with the candidate.

Take notes of your discussion and share these with the other assessors. You will then share the evidence from the referee checks with the other assessors.

After the referee check

It is best to evaluate the evidence from all of the referee reports on a candidate together. This allows you to recognise patterns of behaviour rather than putting undue weight on isolated incidents.

The results from referee checks should be considered together with the application, resume, interview and other assessment results. Taking all of the information together helps you to take a holistic view of each candidate and make informed and balanced selection decisions.

Where discrepancies arise between what the candidate said and what the referee said, all assessors should:

- Consider the circumstances.
- Evaluate the significance of the discrepancy – for example, is it a minor exaggeration or blatant dishonesty?

If you are not comfortable to proceed further with a candidate, inform them of your decision and decide whether there is another suitable candidate to progress to referee checks.

You should attach the referee report to the final selection report.

Tips for getting the most out of referee checks

- Keep an open mind. Don't fall into the trap of using referee checks to confirm a decision you have already made regarding your preferred candidate.
- Prepare questions tailored for the role or candidate to get the most value out of the referee checks.

- Keep questions focused on the role and the candidate's suitability. Do not ask questions of a personal nature or that do not relate directly to the role.

Legal requirements

Referee checks are required for a **comparative assessment** and a **suitability assessment**.