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**Recruitment in a Volunteer-led Organisation:  
A Study Into Recruitment Practice at St John Ambulance**

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## ***Abstract***

The following research looks at just one area within St. John Ambulance in Shropshire and that is the commercial arm of the training department and the need and justification for employing the right kind of staff to provide the right level of training throughout Shropshire. It has been recognised that there is a need and this study justifies that need to enable the department to progress as desired.

The production of this study has highlighted quite a few issues that needed addressing and has enabled some of those issues to be resolved, with a view to resolving the majority by the time the research is complete. This research has used a review of recruitment best practice, consideration of current legislation and research using various sources such as books, the internet, magazines and internal policies and procedures.

## ***Introduction***

St. John Ambulance in Shropshire is part of a national voluntary organisation and provides volunteers in areas such as first aid and caring for the sick, it does this by providing first aid cover at various events across the county. It also provides first aid training both commercially and through the community to anyone who either needs or requires it. St. John Ambulance is a volunteer led organisation and this in some ways does have a major effect on how it is run today.

The commercial arm of St. John Ambulance provides first aid training, this supports the volunteers by providing much needed funds to enable them to carry out the organisations charitable objectives which are to provide first aid to those who need it, and to give as many people as possible skills in first aid.

The mission statement for St. John Ambulance is: “to provide first aid and medical support services, caring services in support of the community needs and education, training and personnel development to young people” (St John Ambulance, 2005). The commercial side of St. John provides the training to help achieve the mission statement.

St. John Ambulance is a volunteer led organisation which has over 43,000 volunteers nationwide committed to caring and saving lives, not only do all these members have to be trained in first aid but an income has to be generated to support their activities. Providing commercial training as above which supports the organisation and volunteers to meet their charitable objectives does this.

## ***The Importance of Good Recruitment and Selection***

Employers recognise the fact that their staff are their greatest asset, and the right recruitment and induction processes are vital in ensuring that the new employee becomes effective in the shortest time (ACAS, 2004). The success of an organisation depends on having the right number of staff, with the right skills and abilities (Bingham and Suff, 2002). Organisations may have a dedicated personnel/human resource function overseeing this process, or like St John Ambulance they may

devolve these responsibilities to line managers and supervisors (IDS, 2003). Many people may be involved, and all should be aware of the principles of good practice. Even in large organisations with a specialist personnel department it is essential to involve others in the task of recruitment and ensure that they have processes and procedures which reflect best practice (Fox and Taylor, 2000).

A good recruitment programme is the way to help a new employee settle into the organisation and become effective quickly. In this article we offer guidance on the implementation of a quality recruitment procedure, and a checklist of the sort of things such programmes should cover. This list may seem long but many things are not obvious and need to be pointed out (IRS, 2000b). This study will serve as an introduction for anyone, in a large or small organisation, who becomes involved in recruitment, selection and induction as part of their job (Grant, 2001).

Recruiting people who are wrong for the organisation can lead to increased labour turnover, increased costs for the organisation, and lowering of morale in the existing workforce. Such people are likely to be discontented, unlikely to give of their best, and end up leaving voluntarily or involuntarily when their unsuitability becomes evident. They will not offer the flexibility and commitment that many organisations seek. Managers and supervisors will have to spend extra time on further recruitment exercises, when what is needed in the first place is a systematic process to assess the role to be filled, and the type of skills and abilities needed to fill it (Leighton and Proctor, 2001). Most recruitment systems will be simple, with stages that can be followed as a routine whenever there is a vacancy to be filled, and which can be monitored and adapted in the light of experience.

### ***The importance of fairness in Recruitment***

The employer has the legal responsibility to ensure that no unlawful discrimination occurs in the recruitment and selection process on the grounds of sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, and religion or belief. By 2006 the UK also plans to provide minimum standards of legal protection from discrimination in respect of age (IRS, 2000). Equality of opportunity is an integral part of the recruitment and selection process, and to this end employers may offer training and encouragement to any under-represented groups. Employees and their representatives will also have an interest in fair, non-discriminatory recruitment and selection policies, and they should be fully consulted when new procedures are introduced or existing procedures reviewed (Chandler, 2002). The Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 set out the legal requirements for employers. Organisations should be aware that the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 not only make it unlawful to discriminate against disabled individuals without justifiable reason but also require employers to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace or working arrangements (*Code of Practice on the elimination of discrimination in employment*, 2000) (IRS, 2003b).

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) believes that effective recruitment is central and crucial to the successful functioning of any organisation, ensuring that it has people with the necessary skills, expertise and qualifications to deliver organisational objectives (CIPD, 2004). Recruitment policies and procedures need to be fully aware of equal opportunities legislation and understand how discrimination can occur both directly and indirectly in the recruitment process (ACAS, 2004). For example, untrained interviewers can make subjective judgements

based on non job-related criteria and some forms of advertising may discourage or fail to reach potential applicants from certain groups. A diverse workforce which reflects customer groups within the local community is to be encouraged. The CIPD suggests that all organisations should monitor their recruitment processes continuously to ensure their validity, and that they are non-discriminatory (Jackson and Osmond, 2003).

Recruitment and Selection plays a major part of St. John Ambulance in Shropshire, not only does the organisation rely on volunteers but it also needs to recruit personnel to perform in roles such as administration, supervisory, managerial, training, and training development advisors.

### ***Research Aims and Objectives***

#### **The aim of the research is to:**

Review the current recruitment and selection procedures, and to make recommendations for improvement to Senior Management for approval.

#### **The objectives of the research are to:**

Review the current St. John Ambulance procedures

Review any local policies previously put in place

Research recognised best practice

Arrange consultation with employees to seek views of the procedures

Design and produce draft procedures to include recommendations of improvement

Seek Senior Management Approval

Produce the St. John Ambulance Recruitment and Selection Procedures.

A telephone survey has also been carried out within St. John Ambulance to ascertain whether or not other counties had their own procedures/policies in place, whether they were using procedures/policies previously provided by National Headquarters, or whether they were actually using any at all. They were also asked if they had HR qualified personnel on their staff and whether or not they had a personnel department.

### ***Research Undertaken***

Information Obtained	How Was It Obtained?	Why Was It Obtained In This Way?
Current St. John National Procedures	Available to all Counties upon request from Personnel Department. Copies of which are held in the Shropshire County Office.	St. John Ambulance – Shrewsbury are a small part of a larger organisation and can benefit from the guidance given by HQ policies.
Local Procedures	Review each member of staff's file.	There is no formal written procedure

	Discussion with staff.	and a review of past practices will help identify weaknesses and areas of concern.
Staff Perceptions and Ideas	Discussion with staff	Due to there being a limited number of permanent staff it will be easier to hold face to face meetings to seek their views. A list of questions will be produced so that each employee will be asked the same or similar questions to obtain the right information.
Best Practice	Web sites such as CIPD Publications from both the CIPD Website or the College Library. Other organisations	The Website not only offers best practice but also suggests alternatives for information/research and also suggests publications for specific areas. I will also be using the College that provides a library although it may be a little limited. Obtain copies from other organisations to enable a comparison to take place, and provide alternatives.
Other Procedures	From other organisations	It is important to review what other organisations have achieved, and be able to learn from their mistakes and review and consider what worked well for them.
Survey of Other Counties	A telephone survey of other Counties within St. John Ambulance was undertaken to ascertain if they had made any changes/additions to HQ Policy.	A telephone survey would be quicker to conduct and it would be easier to supplement the standard questions where required. There would also be a higher chance of receiving the information (compared to a postal survey) provided the appropriate person was obtained on the phone.

### *Findings of the Research*

St. John Ambulance - Shropshire in the past has had little or no guidance in this field, and the previous procedures were written by someone in National Headquarters without the expertise or qualifications in personnel. This meant that the guidance offered to those who requested it may not have been correct, which left the organisation open to all kinds of problems; not only by not applying the correct legislative requirements to the procedures, but not even following best practice in most areas. This could have serious repercussions on the organisation in years to come.

## Job Analysis

A Job Analysis is the first stage of Recruitment and Selection, the aim is to answer the following questions:

- What is the job-holder expected to do?
- How is the job performed?
- What skills are required and at what level?
- Should the job be reorganised (e.g. change to level of responsibility, hours etc.)

In the past St. John – Shropshire has not really done a job analysis on any of the positions that have become vacant, they have just replaced the person leaving without any thought or change to the role or person specification. It has now been realised that it is just as important to review the current position as it is to employ someone to replace the person leaving.

To find out more about the job, research has shown that the following three job analysis techniques could be used in St. John – Shropshire, these seem more appropriate for a smaller workforce; interviews, group discussions and work diaries, the advantages and disadvantages of these techniques are shown below:

Technique	Advantages	Disadvantages
Interviews	Interviewers can probe areas that require clarification.	Interviewees may seek to impress the interviewer by 'talking up' the job.
Group Discussions	Provides more balanced information than an interview as exaggeration by job-holders will be discouraged.	Time-consuming and logistically complicated to arrange.
Work diaries	A systematic way of getting information.	Very time-consuming for the individual and, if not structured, may be difficult to analyse.

Martin & Jackson (2002: p.113)

Interviews with the current staff have recently taken place to ascertain what they think about the Recruitment and Selection procedures that were in place when they were employed. Group discussions now take place on a regular basis as well, these help with communication issues within St. John Ambulance as well as obtaining information on how the employees feel about certain roles/tasks, this has proved to be very useful and has also been used as a tool for obtaining information on other areas. Shropshire has just introduced the work diaries system, this is used mainly to help with time management issues. These techniques have incorporated Best Practice by way of Employee Partnerships which involves communication between employees and employers so that employees know and understand the business objectives and can contribute to it's growth and development. This is something that is currently being developed within Shropshire and will continue with the view of, if the employee can see the organisation growing then this should give them more pride and confidence in not only themselves but in the organisation.

Cook (2004) states that: "A good selection method is reliable; it gives a consistent account of the person being assessed. A good selection method is valid; it selects good applicants and rejects bad ones. A reliable measure gives consistent results. A valid selection method is one that accepts good applicants and rejects poor ones".

A form of Best Practice to be considered in the first stages of a Job Analysis is a SWOT Analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), this is a general technique to take account of internal resources and capabilities, as well as external factors, most helpful for the early stages of strategic and marketing planning, this would play quite a large role in the recruitment process, and should be done by all organisations before the recruitment process goes any further.

## *Job Description*

A job description is the main output from the job analysis process. It describes the scope, responsibilities and tasks of a job.

According to Billsberry (1996: p.79). Job Descriptions vary considerably, but good ones usually include most of the following:

- Job title
- The position to which the job holder reports
- Positions reporting to the job holder (if appropriate)
- Hours, grade and holidays
- Goals and objectives
- Tasks to be performed
- Roles to be filled
- Working conditions
- An indication of the organisation's culture

This listing can be tailored to suit almost any organisations circumstances so that you end up with a document that reflects the job.

Once a job description has been compiled it can be used in five specific ways:

- As a tool in recruitment
- As a tool in selection
- As the basis of employment contracts
- As defence against unfair discrimination claims
- To communicate the expectations, priorities and values of the organisation

The job description should be reviewed on a regular basis alongside the person specification. St. John – Shropshire currently uses the existing job descriptions, mainly because the aim and purpose of the roles have not changed much, apart from the addition of extra duties which have been included, but they do need to be reviewed and up-dated. A good example of Best Practice here is being able to draw on all available sources of knowledge and experience to deliver a sustainable advantage in achieving the organisation's goals. Research has shown that most companies have a standard format for their Job Descriptions, which include standard requirements', this is then enhanced by the person specification which is mostly reviewed/written at the same time. After obtaining staff perceptions in this area the outcome was that most of the staff did not realise that the job description and person specification were two different documents, all the staff assumed they were both part of the job description, in some companies this is the case. This has highlighted an area for training within St. John Ambulance.



## ***Person Specification***

A person specification identifies the ideal candidate for the job by listing the skills, attributes, knowledge and abilities required to fulfil the job description. There are various types of person specification, a Seven Point Plan which includes things such as Physical make-up, Attainments, General intelligence, Specific aptitudes, Interests, Disposition (personality), and Circumstances, the Five Point Plan that includes Impact, Acquired qualifications, Innate abilities, Motivation, Adjustment and also a variation of these that is more commonly used today which includes, Qualifications, Experience, Knowledge and Skills, Personal Qualities, and Motivation and Expectations. All three of these have similarities and in some ways haven't changed dramatically since Professor A Rodgers produced the Seven Point Plan in 1952 (CIPD, 2004).

It has been realised that it is very important to make sure that a detailed look at the job description and person specification takes place together, to enable employment of the right person for the right job, this is even more important for St. John Ambulance – Shropshire as the commercial arm supports the charitable side of the organisation, costs must be kept to a minimum. There are as many different specifications as there are jobs, but aim to cover the general structure given in the specimen when drawing one up. It gives the minimum criteria to be considered. Other criteria can be added, but exercise caution. Too many criteria could create the impossible task of trying to find a “super-person” (Cook, 2004).

It would also be good practice to find out what type of requirements other organisations may require for a similar position within their organisation, you can do this by checking advertisements in specialist magazines or the local press.

It is extremely important to get this right, this will form the requirements needed when advertising the vacancy, and also during the selection process, if the people applying for the position do not have the essential requirements or possibly the desirable requirements set out in the person specification then you will probably be wasting time and money interviewing them.

## ***Advert***

There are various forms of advertising available to companies now, press, radio, television, recruitment agencies etc. It is important to ascertain which method or methods are to be used, this may also help in the design of the advert by giving it direction, and by highlighting the type of person to be attracted.

St. John – Shropshire currently write their own adverts, one advert used previously was not very successful at all, it attracted applicants without the necessary qualifications and necessary requirements, this was then re-written and proved to be more successful, however there is still room for improvement.

Leighton, and Proctor, (2003) suggest that common sense is not necessarily common practice, and the wording of any job advertisement will clearly affect the range of applications received; the design of the application form will govern the information provided by candidates and influence interviewer questioning strategies. Later stages are thus chronologically dependent upon all earlier stages. This is very



true in most circumstances, some people assume that common sense prevails, but forget to investigate other areas such as best practice.

Once a decision has been made to recruit most companies would then be faced with the decision to either continue to process themselves or hand the task over to a recruitment agency, St. John Ambulance – Shropshire does not have this choice because the cost of the process must be kept to the minimum therefore they must go through the process themselves. Some of the advantages of recruiting yourself are that you have control and that you know your organisation better than an agency, but on the other hand it can be time-consuming therefore a disadvantage. If the option was open to St. John Ambulance to use an agency some of the advantages would be that, agency's do the preliminary work and administration work of finding suitable candidates, professional recruiters are trained to do the task and they rely on meeting your requirements to stay in business. It also gives you more time to prepare fully to interview the selected candidates. Some disadvantages are that they are sales-driven operations, and the consultants are usually paid on commission, and they are no longer required to be registered thereby anyone can set up as a recruitment consultant or agency which could mean that an untrained consultant is employed.

This is where the person specification is extremely useful, it points out the exact information required from the candidate hence it helps in writing the advert.

A Job Advert should include:

- Job Title
- Location of Job
- Salary
- Brief description of job
- Introduction to company
- Essential requirements (from person specification)
- Benefits and facilities
- Unique features
- Application procedure or contact details
- Closing date
- Reference Number
- Web page address (if applicable)
- Company logos or symbols
- Equal opportunities statement

It is always good practice to explore new ideas and initiatives when advertising for a position.

## ***Legislation***

It is the employer's responsibility to ensure current legislation is covered when applying any employment process, failure to do so could mean that the organisation is breaking the law. "It is unlawful for organisations to take into account a person's gender, marriage, colour, race nationality, ethnic or national origin or disability in employment decisions." (Martin and Jackson, 2002 p.110). St. John Ambulance are not only adhering to the legislation for its paid employees it also has to for the

organisations volunteers because they are also classed as employee's and therefore have employee status. Some areas of legislation to be considered are:

- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975 & 1986
- Race Relations Act 1976
- Working Time Regulations 1998

It is important when developing a job description and person specification that it must be undertaken thoroughly and objectively as the first step to ensure compliance with legislation.

### ***Other organisations***

Enclosed are examples of procedures used within other organisations, these have been taken into account in the production of the new procedures by way of best practice and also by review of the layouts used. These have been helpful because they have provided varying examples of procedures and forms whether good or bad to be reviewed alongside St. John Ambulance procedures and forms giving new ideas and also providing an insight into some bad ideas not to be used.

## *Conclusions*

There is much room for improvement; although some new processes have been put into place St. John Ambulance - Shropshire is still quite a way from being right. As with many things within an organisation there is always room for improvement. This area must be re-visited on a regular basis and not just when the requirement to recruit or select is upon the organisation. It is a vital part of Recruitment and Selection to ensure that Legislation, equal opportunities and best practice are constantly reviewed and updated, this is one area St. John in Shropshire has failed to recognise in the past, but procedures have now been put into place to ensure that it is not overlooked in the future. Also it is now understood that Best Practice plays a major role in the process and again will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

It has been found that previous policies and procedures were not adequate and that these need replacing as soon as possible to reflect the current organisational goals and any current changes in legislation. They also need to include best practice as highlighted in this report.

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