



# Employment Referencing A Quick Guide

Employment references are a vital component within any employment screening programme, enabling employers to build a picture of the candidate's reliability, integrity and skills. Implementing the advice in this quick guide will enable your organisation to complete the referencing task faster and more effectively.

### Employment References – are they worth the effort?

There is a perception held by some employers that employment references only contain limited information so it is not worth the time and effort to source them. Not only do our statistics show that the majority of references contain much more information than the basics of employment dates and a job title but a significant percentage highlight discrepancies therefore it is definitely worth investing the time to complete several references for all candidates.

**1 IN 3**  
references contain  
a discrepancy

**64%**  
of references contain additional  
information over and above  
employment dates and job title



#### DISCREPANCIES FOUND

- Employment dates (>1 month difference) (65%)
- Job title (significant difference) (24%)
- Disciplinary action (6%)
- Would not re-hire (3%)
- Reason for leaving (2%)

### Time Based Referencing

Obtaining references which cover a set time period e.g. 3-years or 5-years has several key advantages over the traditional approach of just requesting 2 references:



- Corroboration of employment dates becomes much easier
- Any gaps in the candidate's employment history are more likely to be revealed
- Makes it much more difficult for the candidate to omit or cover up employers which could produce a negative reference
- Easier to spot patterns in areas such as absence, reason for leaving, work performance etc.

### Written or Verbal References?

There are advantages to both methods of referencing. Our advice would be to gather written references where possible and use verbal references in scenarios where time is limited.

#### Written References

- + Provides robust audit trail
- Can be slower and require chasing up

#### Verbal References

- + Can be faster to complete
- Requires interview skills & accurate recording of the conversation
- The referee might not have had time to fully consider their answer to questions posed or might not have personnel files to hand therefore some answers could be vague or estimates e.g. employment dates

## Five Top Tips Proven to Improve Completion Rates and Response Times

In an ideal world all references would arrive promptly without having to chase up. Until then, implementing these tips gained from our experience in successfully obtaining 1000's of references will help your organisation improve completion rates and response times.

1

### **Independently confirm the existence of the employer and details of the referee**

Simply accepting contact information provided at face value and sending a request without prior verification could leave you open to receiving a fictitious reference. This could range from the candidate's friend / peer posing as line manager in a firm which they did actually work for or receiving a reference from a fictitious organisation. A quick internet search to verify the organisation exists and a phone call to reception to verify the referee actually works there and their job title is two minutes well spent.

2

### **Speak to the HR department directly**

Most organisations only permit the HR department to produce references. By sending your request to a line manager you've increased the contact chain by one link and almost certainly increased the timeframe for a reply - it could take several days before its forwarded. Calling the HR department directly not only ensures you submit your request to the correct contact first time but in many cases you'll end up talking to the person who will actually produce the reference. A quick friendly chat allows you to agree a response timeframe and means you're likely to receive a prompt response should you have to chase up.

3

### **Chase promptly**

Although obtaining a reference might be high on your agenda, your request is likely to be near to or at the very bottom of the referee's 'to-do' list. Chasing up promptly re-enforces a sense of urgency and many referees will return the reference earlier than they otherwise would normally have done just to get you off their back. We suggest chasing up no later than 48 hours after your initial request was sent.

4

### **Make it easy for the referee to reply**

Firstly, create a template that the referee can complete and return to you rather than having to construct some thing themselves. Typically the reference will arrive sooner; often containing more information than it would have in the referees chosen format (especially true for SME's). Secondly, don't forget to provide clear instructions regarding how you would like the reference returned including the email address or fax number it should be sent to.

5

### **Involve the candidate if the referee doesn't respond**

If the referee hasn't responded following your initial request and two follow-ups it's time to get the candidate involved by asking them to contact their previous employer / referee. The candidate may be able to expedite the reference by leveraging relationships with their former colleagues.

### **Just too busy? Outsource your referencing to Know Your Candidate**

Outsourcing your referencing to Know Your Candidate will enable your HR team to focus on other tasks safe in the knowledge that references for your new hires are being completed quickly and diligently. In 2015 we obtained 94% of all references we requested and received 64% in just 5 working days - why not try us to see how easy it can be?

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