

Key stages in talent acquisition

A practical guide



Fiona Wilson

Fiona Wilson, Managing Director of FJWilson, writes: Our guide to talent acquisition is divided into six sections:

- I: Writing a brief
- II: Attracting candidates
- III: Candidate experience
- IV: Dealing with counter-offers
- V: On-boarding
- VI: Induction

I: Writing a brief

1. Consider whether you need the agency to sign a non-disclosure agreement.
2. In any case, ensure the agency is clear which pieces of information should remain confidential.
3. Is this a new role or are you replacing an employee? If it is new, what is the rationale for creating the role? If you replacing someone, why has this vacancy arisen?
4. What type(s) of professional background would you like the candidate to have? If more than one applies, place them in order of preference.
5. What types of current or previous employers might make the candidate attractive to you?
6. What are the dynamics of the team that the successful candidate will be joining? If the role is managerial, what issues are outstanding?
7. Similarly, what are the personality types in the team and what personality type(s) would be desirable?
8. How does the team fit into the rest of the organisation? And how is the team viewed by the rest of the organisation?
9. At what pace does the employing organisation and the team typically work?
10. How much change may be expected?



11. Are there any key performance indicators (KPIs) beyond those provided in the job description?
12. Has this role been offered to the market before? If so, what has been learnt from that experience?
13. What strategic objectives – short or long term – are there that are relevant to this role?
14. What do you view as a good ‘cultural fit’? (This term frequently arises when candidates are rejected at interview stage, yet many employers fail to define it in the brief beforehand.)
15. Above all, ensure that you remain within the law. Please note that, though the above advice is given in good faith based on our professional experience, we are not lawyers and we do not know your circumstances. We don’t, therefore, recommend relying on our advice alone – we recommend that you also seek legal/professional HR advice.

II: Attracting candidates

1. Get your offer right. In particular, ensure that you benchmark the salary and benefits package for the role against the sector. If you wish to recruit from beyond your sector, you need to benchmark against the wider market.
2. In your recruitment material, present your employer brand to best advantage:
 - a) indicate positive employment practices – for example, an exceptional induction programme, effective performance management, learning and development provision;
 - b) present the general strengths of the organisation – for example, areas of growth or competitive advantage, key assets, financial health.
3. Anticipate candidates’ burning questions:
 - a) who would they be working for? It is helpful to provide a bio of the manager who the role reports to;
 - b) what prospects might there be? It may be helpful to provide two or three short case studies of employees who have progressed within your organisation from comparable roles.
4. If you engage a search agent, ensure that you provide them with the information they will need to match candidates effectively. A clear and detailed job description and information on the salary and benefit package are vital.



5. Give the search agent a thorough brief that enables them to sell the role and organisation effectively to matching candidates. Remember that these may be either active candidates (those already looking for a new role) or passive candidates (those not already looking). The latter are more likely to require strong drivers to prompt their next move.

6. Over the long term, your reputation as an employer will be crucial. Confront these questions:

a) does your organisation consistently provide a great candidate experience?

b) are interviews always well thought out and professional?

c) do you provide timely, constructive feedback?

III: Candidate experience

1. Avoid the risk of miscommunication about salary and benefits:

- Check the salary expectations of your shortlisted candidates before you interview. If this is left until offer stage, both parties' time may end up being wasted.
- Ensure that you spell out any entitlement criteria that apply to benefits (such as a car allowance). Do this via written candidate information or your brief to the agency.

2. Prepare thoughtful interview questions to ask all candidates for benchmarking.

3. Provide professional, detailed, interview invitations that inspire candidate confidence in the interview process and, by extension, your organisation. Include: interview timing(s) and duration; location and map; recommended attire; name and job title of interviewer(s) and link to LinkedIn profile; outline of interview structure; and recap of the entire recruitment process.

4. Depending on interview location, provide further information:

- The name of the person the interviewee should ask for upon arrival at your reception;
- For off-site interviews, make sure interviewers and interviewees have each other's contact numbers in case of problems on the day.

5. Make sure candidates have copies of the job description and information on the benefits package.



6. If candidates are required to make a presentation, ask them to send soft copy twenty-four hours before the interview. This enables you to have hard copy available in case of IT failure on the day.
7. Check that you are able to accommodate candidates' IT requirements.
8. On the day:
 - Brief reception staff to expect interviewees and welcome accordingly;
 - Ensure water is supplied to the interview room and that interviewees are offered it.
9. Afterwards:
 - Deliver on the feedback and decision timescales you've provided to candidates;
 - Send a thank you email or note to unsuccessful candidates. Showing that you appreciate their time helps leave a positive impression of your organisation.

IV: Dealing with counter-offers

1. The risk of a counter-offer is greatest where the candidate's current remuneration is close to the original offer – so review applications from candidates in this situation. Is there a strong enough motive to leave the current employer?
2. The risk of counter-offers is also large when the remuneration being offered is out of kilter with market rates. Ensure that you benchmark your proposed offer against other players in the market.
3. Where candidates are in short supply, seek to accelerate turnaround times (between interview and appointment) in order to narrow the window for any counter-offer.
4. You can assess the risk of a counter-offer better if you first establish:
 - why the candidate is interested in the role;
 - why the candidate is interested in moving between employers;
 - what the candidate's salary expectation is.
5. If you make a verbal offer to a candidate, send the formal, written, offer on the same day.
6. In the run-up to the start date, keep in regular contact with the recruitment agent and, via the agent, with the candidate. Start the process straightaway by sending a congratulations message.



7. Prioritise the business of getting paperwork signed and sealed. Ensure that the agent helps to monitor and chase.

V: On-boarding

1. Successful on-boarding of new appointments begins with the candidate's experience at interview (see section III). Where the recruit is working out a notice period with the previous employer, find ways to continue to engage with the recruit during that period – for example, send a link to some helpful online material...
2. ...or news from the organisation they are joining – for example, press releases about new ventures.
3. But if you have used a recruitment agent, do first agree with the agent the best way to communicate with the recruit in order to avoid duplication.
4. After the paperwork has been completed, consider offering the recruit a 'meet the team' opportunity before they start.
5. Once you have prepared an induction plan for the recruit (i.e. a plan for once they have started work at your organisation), share that plan before the recruit starts. If the induction plan is likely to involve travel or nights away from home, do this as early as possible.

VI: Induction

1. Facilitate a smooth start by ensuring that practical matters – for example, the provision of an email address, telephone line, and IT equipment – are in place before the recruit's first day.
2. Before the recruit starts, send an itinerary indicating, for example, any visits to other locations. This will help them plan their schedules around their work commitments.
3. When the recruit starts, introduce them to other members of the team and wider organisation. Wherever possible, do this in person rather than merely via email.
4. Arrange meetings for the recruit with key personnel to take place during the first fortnight.
5. Consider scheduling time to be spent by the recruit shadowing an experienced colleague in a comparable role – especially if external meetings are involved.
6. Provide the recruit with a buddy.
7. For customer-facing roles, introduce the recruit to clients by providing a bio.
8. Analyse the job specification and identify the recruit's learning needs. What do they need to know or understand? What do they need to be able to do – including operation of databases or IT systems?
9. Also invite the recruit to suggest what they would like to be covered in their induction.



10. Then schedule learning sessions and review sessions to assess learning.
11. Establish the key performance indicators (KPIs) to be used for reviewing the first 90 days.
12. Schedule regular meetings with the recruit's line manager to assess progress.
13. Ditto, meetings with HR. Use these to diagnose any areas of concern and if necessary develop an action plan.
14. Consider providing an external executive coach.