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# **Members of Parliament Best Practice Guide Recruitment and Selection**

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**House of Commons  
Members' HR Service**



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## Introduction

This document forms part of a collection of best practice guides created by the Members' HR Service Team which sits within the Members' Services Team. The guides are designed to support Members in their roles as employers and give practical, step by step advice on employment practices. You are invited to follow this guidance, in conjunction with Acas's guidance and the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) standards and rules.

We understand that there is a lot of information to go through, and whilst we encourage all Members and staff to refer to this document first, further support on any aspect of this document can be obtained from the Members' HR Advice Service on 0207 219 2080 or **membershr@parliament.uk**.

*Whilst every attempt has been made to ensure its accuracy, this document is for guidance purposes only in order to provide Members with general information and an understanding of recruitment best practices. This document should not be construed as legal advice or used as a replacement for advice from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas).*

## Summary

The Best Practice Recruitment and Selection Guide provides practical advice on efficient and effective recruitment practices. The guide aims to support Members (and their Office Managers) with the tools to attract and recruit people with diverse backgrounds, skills and abilities.

Recruiting staff can be a rewarding experience, unfortunately, there are some common pitfalls if the process is rushed or not well thought through. There is also a legal requirement placed on all employers to ensure that recruitment practices meet the requirements of the Equality Act (2010). It is therefore important to ensure that your recruitment practices are not only deemed to be fair, consistent and transparent but that this is also the experience of the individuals going through your recruitment process.

The guide looks at the different stages of a recruitment process, which would normally include:

- Identifying the role you need and how it will support the function of your office.
- How to write a job description in line with the [Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority](#) (IPSA) requirements.
- Guidance on writing a person specification.
- Putting an advert together and exploring various options to advertise your vacancy.
- Best practice on selection methods.
- Making the job offer, and the following checks that need to be carried out e.g. security vetting, employment references etc.

## Defining what you need

As an MP, you are provided with a staffing budget by IPSA to staff your office. The budget provides for approximately four full-time equivalent employees. The objective is that you recruit the right resources to enable your administration to be taken care of, both within the constituency and Westminster so that you can concentrate on your Parliamentary responsibilities.

Before starting your recruitment campaign, you may want to take some time to consider the duties and responsibilities which need to be undertaken, and decide if there are any changes to the role required.

Questions you may wish to consider include:

- Is there enough money in the staffing budget to cover the cost of the role?



- Do I need this role to be permanent, fixed-term, term time, full time or part-time?
- What will be the potential demands on my office in the next 6 months to a year?
- Can the tasks undertaken by the former employee be shared amongst existing staff, without there being a detrimental impact on staff wellbeing or their existing workload?
- Are there duties that would need to be added or taken away from this role?
- Is the role based within Westminster or the constituency?

## Job Descriptions

Once you are clear on the role you need, it is advisable to review the existing job description in place or create one if the role is new. The job description sets out the main purpose and duties/tasks of the role.

The IPSA website [job description generation tool](#) allows you to produce and print the required job description, with the accompanying salary range by simply filling in the required fields.

The tool provides a list of job titles, which are then grouped into Administrative, Executive and Research job families. Within each job family, IPSA provides a pay range and you decide the salary range you deem appropriate for your role. This will be dependent on the level of experience and skill needed for the role. Please also consider the local market rate for similar roles in the area.

The tool also generates a list of appropriate duties for the role depending on the job title however, there is the opportunity to add more responsibilities to the list. When listing additional responsibilities, it is important to be mindful of any language used which may lead to direct or indirect discrimination of people with a [protected characteristic](#) (further information on protected characteristics can be found in appendix 1).

The purpose of the job description is to:

- Clarify the expectations of the role.
- Serve as a tool for measuring job performance.
- Help applicants at an early stage in the recruitment process decide whether the role is a match to their skills, knowledge and experience.
- Form the basis of the person specification.
- Determine the salary range based on the complexity of the tasks assigned to the role.

- Identify areas of underperformance of the employee once appointed, and what support can be put in place to address this if necessary.

**New staff employed on or after 1 April 2020 must use the new job titles, descriptions and salary bands set by IPSA.**

## Person Specification

The person specification sets out the knowledge, skills, qualifications, experience and abilities needed to fulfil the role. The person specification needs to be accurate and explicit, as this document will be used as the basis for attracting applicants, shortlisting, identifying selection methods, and making the final selection decision.

A person specification is not provided by IPSA, however, we strongly recommend you have one for each job role in your employment.

Points to bear in mind when putting together a person specification:

- The criteria should be justifiable, unbiased and capable of being tested objectively.
- The criteria should relate directly to the duties detailed in the job description and contain the minimum requirements necessary to do the job effectively.
- Criteria that exclude people because of a protected characteristic could be seen as discriminatory unless the reason is in connection to a genuine occupational requirement (more information on occupational requirements can be found in appendix 1).
- When listing formal qualifications, where possible add 'or equivalent' to recognise similar level qualifications from other awarding bodies to avoid excluding different age groups or nationalities.
- When outlining experience needed, avoid giving a required number of years. Instead, think about what experience you would like the candidate to specifically have e.g. 'demonstrable experience' in good customer service, etc.
- The criteria can be listed as 'essential' and 'desirable'.

Further guidance on how to create a person specification can be found in appendix 2 (Putting together a person specification).

## Salary range

The salary range assigned to a job is dependent on whether the constituency office is classed as "London" or "outside-London based" by IPSA. The salary is also dependent on the job family (Administrative, Executive or Research) the role falls into and the complexity of the role. It is best practice to put the salary range on the job description



and advert, however, you do not need to decide the pay rate you will pay until you offer the job to the successful candidate.

When deciding on the salary range to assign a job role, you should consider the following:

- Can the cost of the salary be covered by the staffing budget? This should include any staff pay rises in the future, employers' National Insurance and pension costs.
- What is the current market rate for similar roles within the local area?
- Does the pay range assigned to the job title fall in line with IPSA guidelines?
- How specialised is the role and will the salary attract the right calibre of candidates?
- Placing a newly appointed employee closer to the top or at the top of the salary range creates less of an incentive for the new employee to stay with the employer, as there is limited or no room for pay progression.

## Advertise

Advertising your vacancy creates an opportunity to reach a wide range of people from all backgrounds. This allows for all the benefits of having a diverse workforce and for open and fair competition.

There are several ways to advertise your vacancy. However, before doing so, you may wish to think about:

- The most cost-effective way to do so, e.g. it is cheaper and faster to place your advert in the window of your constituency office or on the jobcentre website.
- Your target audience.
- How to ensure that people absent from work (staff on maternity leave, career break and sick leave) are informed about the vacancy.

## Where to advertise?

It is advisable not to rely on 'word of mouth' as a singular way of advertising a vacancy within your office. A few other ideas of where to advertise your role may include:

- Locally e.g. local newspapers, newsletters, constituency window etc.
- In-house newsletters and vacancy bulletins
- Specialist journals
- You could advertise your job on the ['find a job' service](#) which has now replaced Universal job match and is completely free.

- To encourage a more diverse pool of applicants, you may consider placing your role with agencies, colleges/universities or papers who have a reach to certain target audiences.

## Working for an MP Jobs (W4MP)

[Working for an MP](#) is an online site supported by the House of Commons. The website provides career development opportunities for those working for MPs and those who are looking for a job with an MP or in other areas of political activity. Advertising your vacancy on the website is free. There is a wealth of other information connected to working for an MP on the website and it is constantly being updated.

Tapping into a pool of individuals who may have already had the experience of working for an MP has its benefits. However, we would encourage you to widen this pool to attract a diverse range of candidates.

## Application forms or CVs?

It is important to be clear to prospective applicants on how you would like them to apply for the role. This is usually done with an application form or a CV.

The table below illustrates some of the benefits of using either one.

Application Forms	CVs
It allows the employer to capture in-depth information on how the applicant meets the essential criteria.	CVs capture the pertinent points of the applicant's work experience and achievements. This is particularly useful when you are expecting a high response rate to your advert.
It can be customised to include information about the organisation, and guidance on how the employer would like the application form to be completed.	Requesting CVs may open you up to a larger pool of candidates, as it is easier and less time consuming to submit a CV.
It is easier to capture diversity and inclusion information which can be used to make reasonable adjustments during the recruitment process if required.	It is easier to work with a recruitment agency when accepting CVs as this is their preferred option when putting candidates forward for a job.
It is easy to compare the skills and experience of the different applicants as they are being asked to provide the same information. This creates a level playing field.	The CV may provide some insight into the personality and skills set of the applicant based on how the CV is designed. This is particularly important for job roles which require artistic and creative abilities.

**Keynote!**

Privacy Notices are a way of telling people what you intend to do with their personal data once you obtain it. They have the right to know why you need it, what you'll do with it and who you're going to share it with. You should provide this information in a clear, open and honest way at the time the information is being obtained.

Information on how you can create your own privacy notice can be found from the [Information Commissioner's Office website](#).

## Putting together your advert

Your job advert should ideally be made up of the following parts:

- Employer name, job title, location, salary (pro-rata, if applicable), hours, contract type and length, if fixed term. The reason for the fixed term role should be made clear e.g. to set up the office in the first place; to cover maternity, or to complete a particular work project. Fixed-term contracts should not be used as a matter of course or as an alternative to a probation period.
- Summarise the key duties listed within the job description to describe the role and what it will entail.
- List the key essential criteria from the person specification within the advert, as this will enable prospective applicants to determine if they are suitable for the role.
- When writing your job advert, your wording should be inclusive and not exclusive. This is to ensure that people who have a protected characteristic do not feel prevented from applying.
- You should state how you want applicants to apply e.g. send in their CV, telephone for an application form, send a cover letter telling you why they are suitable for the position, etc.
- Include links or contact details to gain access to the application form (if applicable), job description and person specification.
- You may decide to include the interview date and details of any other selection methods to be used - this can save time.
- Closing date. This is usually a minimum of 7 calendar days.

**Keynote!**

The Equality Act (2010) places restrictions on the sort of health and disability-related questions asked before the point at which you offer a person a job. However, you can ask if reasonable adjustments are required to assist a person with a disability to apply for your vacancy. Adjustments may include allowing the applicant to apply using a different format or using an alternative method. More information on reasonable adjustments can be found in appendix 1 (The Equality Act and Recruitment). Further support on implementing reasonable adjustments can be found at [Access to Work](#)

**Shortlisting**

Once the advert is closed, you will need to draw up a shortlist of those you wish to take through to the next stage of the recruitment process.

When drawing up the shortlist, it is important to take note of the following points:

- You must not exclude a candidate from the shortlist on the grounds of a protected characteristic. Less favourable treatment on this basis is unlawful.
- It is advisable to have more than one person involved in shortlisting applicants. This reduces the chance of one individual's bias (conscious or unconscious) impacting on an applicant's chances of being selected.
- Where possible, nominate a person within the team to remove all personal identifying information. Where this is not possible, take no account of a candidate's name, address or place of education etc, as these details generally lead to unconscious bias.
- Shortlist candidates consistently against the person specification criteria drawn up at the start of the process. This means that no part of the original person specification should be changed at a later stage in the recruitment process.
- Measure the attributes of each candidate methodically against each requirement in the person specification, and not against other candidates.
- Check back on your shortlist to see if there are patterns in who you have and haven't shortlisted that might be highlighting bias and excluding potentially great candidates.
- Record reasons for accepting or rejecting an applicant in writing and ensure that all original material used in creating a shortlist is filed with the recruitment records.

- Where possible, it is always prudent for those involved in the shortlisting and assessment stage to have received training on fair recruitment practices.
- You should write to any unsuccessful candidates as soon as reasonably possible to let them know the outcome of their interview and to thank them for their application.
- For record purposes, keep all paperwork related to the recruitment process for one full year.

## Selection methods

It is best practice to have more than one selection method for identifying the best candidate for the role. Additional selection methods further increase the objectivity and fairness of the selection process and minimises the risk of subjective bias. Any selection method used should effectively test the candidate against the person specification.

You should notify candidates in advance if they are going to be asked to take a test or give a presentation and ask them to let you know if they require reasonable adjustments to perform their best at the interview.

Examples of additional selection methods can include:

- Formal Panel interviews (must comprise of at least two people and can be in person or done virtually via video link)
- On-the-job assessments
- Written Tests
- Presentations
- Computer literacy-based tests.

## Invite the candidates for interview

Once you have completed the shortlisting, you will need to invite the shortlisted candidates to the next stage of your selection process. In most cases, this is usually a face to face interview. For some employers, this is usually carried out in conjunction with a written/computer-based test etc. Members are encouraged to use virtual interviews via video link where it is not possible to hold the interview face to face. You may also wish to offer to cover the travel expenses for those applicants who may be suffering financial hardship (this cost can be claimed back through IPSA).

An invitation letter will normally include the following information:

- Venue (include a map with directions if hard to find), time of the interview, with an estimate of how long the interview is due to last.

- If being held as a virtual interview, guidance on how to connect to the interview and get the best out of the virtual interview.
- What documents they are required to bring along.
- Details of the person to ask for upon their arrival at the venue.
- Names of the people on the interview panel.
- Details of the selection process, including any tests or presentations involved.
- The opportunity for the candidate to identify if reasonable adjustments are required.
- A date by which the candidate must confirm their attendance to the interview, and with whom they need to confirm this.

### Reasonable adjustments

Just as you would enquire about reasonable adjustments at the application stage, you should also ask candidates to let you know if they require any reasonable adjustments at the interview stage.

A few examples of adjustments that might be needed for an interview may include:

- Making the venue accessible to people with all physical abilities.
- Changing the time of day or the date on which they were due for an interview.
- Providing alternative formats of the selection test and interview. For example, a candidate may need the text in large print versions.
- Allowing the candidate additional time to complete selection tests, particularly individuals who are neurodivergent (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia etc).

### Documents to bring to the interview

Candidates should be asked to bring evidence of their identity, right to work in the UK and the original copies of qualifications, certifications or memberships etc, listed as essential to carry out the role. You may decide to make copies of the documents only after a job offer has been made. A list of documents deemed as 'acceptable evidence' to work in the UK can be found further on in the guidance.

### Interview Preparation

Interview preparation not only increases your probability of a successful recruitment campaign, but it also demonstrates to the candidate how professional you are as an



employer. You should use the person specification as a guide to developing your interview questions in advance.

Other key things to remember when preparing for an interview include:

- Make sure you and everyone who is involved in the interview process is familiar with the job description, person specification and knows the agreed selection criteria candidates will be judged against.
- Familiarize yourself with the candidate's application form or CV.
- Think about arrangements for meeting and greeting the candidates, room layout and ensuring there will be no interruptions during the interviews.
- You should also think about questions that reflect the preferred behaviour and culture of your office. Each candidate should be asked the same questions and their answers should be scored to help you make an objective assessment.
- The scoring sheets should be the same template for each candidate and each assessor or interviewer should sign and date the sheets as they go.
- It is advisable to use competency-based questions, as these are designed to assess the candidate's skills set and experience against the selection criteria e.g. 'tell me about a time you...' or 'give me an example of when you...' etc.

## The interview

You should aim to make the interview meeting as comfortable as possible for the candidate to get the best out of them. A typical interview format might include:

- Introductions and the opportunity to put the candidate at ease. Ensure water is available. Set the scene and explain the process, let the candidate know you will be taking notes.
- Questioning to gain information on how well the candidate matches the agreed selection criteria. Questions are usually asked in turn by the panel members.
- Allowing the candidate to ask questions.
- Explaining to the candidate what happens next, e.g. how long it will be before they can expect a decision, whether there will be a second interview etc.

You may wish to ask questions on whether the candidate is undertaking any roles (paid or voluntary) and explore if this may be a conflict of interest or impede their ability to carry out the role if successful.

## Making a record of the interview

Each panel member should write-up, sign and date their own interview notes. This ensures there is a robust record of the interview.

During the interview, focus on gathering information and set some time after each interview to evaluate and score the responses.

A record of the interview assessments should be retained for one year. In the event of an Employment Tribunal claim, you would be required to prove that you had been objective in determining the best candidate.

### Keynote!

It is important to remember that under the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR candidates have the right to see their own interview notes from each panel member, if requested. The notes should therefore be a fair and accurate record of the interview and comply with all relevant recruitment and selection legislation.

## What to avoid during an interview

- Employers should be aware that, except in specified circumstances, it is unlawful to ask questions about health or disability before the offer of a job is made.
- Panel members should not comment on the personal appearance of the interviewee.
- You must not ask questions which are unrelated to the selection criteria, for example, personal questions about marital status or childcare arrangements.
- It is not uncommon to probe where further questioning is needed following a response. However, this should be done within reason and all candidates should be afforded the same opportunity in the event more information is needed from the candidate.

## Evaluating candidates

After each interview, you should set aside enough time for the panel to review the notes taken at the interview and objectively assess the information gathered against the agreed selection criteria. Assessing against the agreed selection criteria will allow the panel to objectively discuss the candidates' performance.

When evaluating candidates, it is important to keep the following points in mind:

- As mentioned at the application stage, ensure that candidates are assessed against the person specification and not against each other.
- Assessment should be made on the information gathered during the selection process and not on information gleaned from 'off the record' conversations or on prior knowledge of the candidate outside of the process.
- Be conscious of your bias (we all tend to have them!) to ensure this does not impact on your decision-making process. Once you realise what these are, you will be in a better position to identify when they start to cloud your judgement.
- Once a decision has been made, reasons for the appointment and non-appointment should be kept and feedback provided to the candidates.
- Refer to the notes and scores taken and reach a consensus with the rest of the panel members to identify a clear appointee for the role, and those you may wish to keep as reserves.
- This is the stage to get it right! A probation period should not be used to make up for poor recruitment practices. Don't feel the pressure to recruit someone if they do not meet the criteria. It is better to start a new recruitment campaign if you are unsuccessful the first time around.

## Making the Offer

Once you have concluded your selection process, you should hopefully be in a position to offer the successful candidate the role. Once the offer of employment has been accepted, you will need to let all the other candidates know that they have not been successful. You should normally do this in writing.

Template offer letters can be found on the Members' Services Team intranet page.

### Keynote!

Verbal offers of employment are legally binding and so you must take care in what you say in any telephone conversation. It is important to highlight that the offer of employment is conditional, subject to the receipt of satisfactory references and security clearance after which a start date will be agreed. Follow up the conditional offer in writing, confirming the details which you have offered verbally.

## Giving interview feedback

Members should remember that they are also being assessed by the candidates who will form an opinion as to the type of employer they are based on a good or bad recruitment experience. Some candidates may ask you for feedback following an unsuccessful interview. When providing feedback, do so promptly and thoughtfully. You can provide a summary of key points taken from your notes from the interview. You must ensure this feedback is objective and related to the selection criteria. Be conscious of your wording to ensure it is not perceived as discriminatory.

Interview feedback template letters can be found on the Members' Services Team intranet page.

## Pre-employment Checks

The offer of employment should be conditional, subject to the right to work in the UK, passing security clearance and the receipt of satisfactory references. New employees must not commence employment or be given a Parliamentary email account until references, security clearance and evidence of the right to work in the UK have been received. Contact the Members' HR Advice Service for further information about this.

## Right to work in the UK

All staff employed must demonstrate that they have the right to work in the UK. As the employer, the responsibility of ensuring that all staff meet this criterion rests with you. The [Employer's right to work checklist](#) provides a list of approved documents and how long they are valid for.

When a staff member leaves your employment their right to work documents should be kept securely on file for up to 2 years from their last day of employment.

EU, EEA or Swiss citizens can apply to the [EU Settlement Scheme](#) to continue living in the UK after 30 June 2021.

## Security Vetting

All staff working for an MP must have a valid Parliamentary pass issued by the Pass Office. This may only be used by the person to whom it was issued and must be issued before a person can work either on the Parliamentary estate, constituency office, or have access to the Parliamentary digital network.

Reasons why security vetting is mandated includes:

- 'Insider threat' to Parliament. This is the risk that individuals who have not been security cleared may exploit their legitimate access to the Parliamentary estate and/or its data for unauthorised purposes.
- To provide a level of assurance as to the trustworthiness, integrity, reliability and resilience of an individual to handle sensitive information or assets.
- The assurance that those working in close proximity to public figures and who have access to information or material assessed to be of value to terrorists are not deemed to be a threat.

If for any reason the security clearance is not granted, the offer of employment must be withdrawn.

The [Security clearance and pre-employment check questionnaire form](#) for MP staff should be sent to the successful candidate as soon as the offer of employment has been accepted and evidence of their right to work in the UK confirmed.

## References

You should only take up references once the candidate has given you their permission to contact their referee. This would normally take place after you have made the offer of employment. Reference request forms can be found on the Members' Services Team intranet page.

Whilst the new employer may request detailed information about the potential new employee, the outgoing employer is only required to provide information in response to the reference request.

An employment reference will normally include the following information:

- Most recent post held.
- A summary of the employee's duties.
- Start and end date of the employee's role with the organisation.
- Some employers may offer up additional information such as whether they would re-employ the individual, sickness absence information, details of any live sanction or whether they were dismissed from their previous employer.

Please do not accept references handed to you by the candidate – they may have composed them themselves.

Employment references usually contain personal information and should be kept confidential. If you do receive a reference which you would like further advice about, then do contact the HR Members' Service Team.

## Appointment and Contracts of Employment

Once all pre-employment checks have been received and are satisfactory, a start date can be agreed with the new employee and a contract of employment can be issued. IPSA provides model contracts which MPs must use for all new staff they employ. The 'contracts of employment' tool should be used to generate contracts by entering the required information into the specified fields.

It is important to note that standard terms within contracts for MPs' employees cannot be amended or deleted.

## Next steps

Ask your employee to sign the contract and also ask them to complete and sign the [Employee New Starter Form](#).

To ensure your new employee is placed on the payroll, in the correct payroll cycle, you need to send the following information to IPSA:

- The original version of the contract (signed by you and your employee in blue ink)
- The job description for the role
- The Employee New Starter Form (signed by your employee), with a P45 or HMRC New Starter Checklist, enclosed as appropriate.
- The documentation needs to be received by the 15th of the month to ensure the employee is paid at the end of the month.

## Induction

Once your successful candidate has accepted the job offer, and all pre-employment checks have been carried out, you need to prepare for your new team member's first few months at work with an induction plan. The purpose of an induction is to ensure the effective integration of the new employee into the MP's office and the Parliamentary community. An induction plan will normally consist of:

- Actions that need to be taken before the staff member's first day e.g. setting up their workstation, IT equipment, email account (email accounts can only be set up once the staff member has received their security pass) etc.
- On their first day, they should be given a tour of the office, where the fire exits are, who the first aider is and where the facilities are located. If working at Westminster, then show them around the Parliamentary Estate [This is subject to current COVID-19 restrictions].
- They should be introduced to the rest of the team and time set up to have 1-1 meetings with them.



- Time set aside to go through their terms and conditions of employment, a clear outline of the role and its requirements and what the probation procedure entails.

Details on how to register for the House of Commons induction day can be found on [ACT](#).

#### Keynote!

Evidence shows that employees who are taken through a detailed induction plan are less likely to leave their employer within the first six months, more likely to be fully effective sooner with less time needed by the employer to deal with performance issues.

## Probation

All staff employed are subject to the satisfactory completion of a probationary period. This period must be used to establish the standards and requirements of the role and to discuss any potential problems. Monthly probation meetings should be held with the new staff member where development and training needs are identified and concerns around attendance, performance or conduct are discussed promptly.

Further guidance can be found within the Probation and Induction Best Practice Guides on the Members' Services intranet page.



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# Appendices

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## Appendix 1: The Equality Act and Recruitment

As an employer, if you are recruiting someone to work for you, the Equality Act applies to you. The [Equality Act 2010](#) bans unfair treatment and helps achieve equal opportunities in the workplace and the wider society. The Act prohibits unfair treatment regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. More information about the act is available in the [‘Equality Act 2010: guidance’](#)

The diagram below illustrates the nine protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act (2010).



### Types of Discrimination

Unlawful discrimination can take on different forms.

<b>Direct Discrimination</b>	You must not treat a job applicant less favourably than another job applicant because of a protected characteristic.
<b>Indirect Discrimination</b>	You must not put in place a measure or apply a practice within your recruitment process which would put a person or a group of people with a shared protected characteristic in a worse situation than those who do not have that protected characteristic.

<b>Association</b>	You must not treat a job applicant worse than another job applicant because they are associated with a person who has a protected characteristic.
<b>Perception</b>	You must not treat a job applicant worse than another job applicant because you incorrectly think they have a protected characteristic.
<b>Victimisation</b>	You must not treat a job applicant badly or victimise them because they have complained about discrimination or helped someone else complain or have done anything to uphold their own or someone else's equality law rights.

### How does the Equality Act relate to my recruitment practices?

The guidance below tells you more about how you can avoid all the different types of unlawful discrimination in the following situations:

- Job description and Person Specification
- Job adverts
- Application forms and CVs
- Shortlisting applicants to meet or interview
- Interviews, meetings and tests

#### Job description and person specification

When thinking about what the job entails, and the skills, qualities, and experience needed to do the role, be mindful of the wording used. Discriminatory wording may deter people with protected characteristics from applying for the role.

##### Example

The person specification states that the applicant should be energetic, full of life and exude charisma. Whilst these may not constitute direct discrimination, neurodivergent individuals (e.g. people with dyslexia, autism etc) may struggle to demonstrate these requirements. This does not mean they are unable to carry out the core function of the role and such wording could be seen as indirect discrimination unless objectively justified.

#### Job adverts

Whilst there is no one way in which employers are required to advertise their vacancies, if the role is advertised in a way that doesn't reach people with a particular protected characteristic, then this may lead to indirect discrimination unless you objectively justify your approach.

**Example**

A vacancy arises within your office and you advertise the role internally. However, you have a staff member currently on maternity leave who is not contacted about the vacancy and only finds out about it when the vacancy is filled. The employee is upset as they would have been interested in applying for the role. Failing to inform the employee could amount to direct (or indirect) discrimination as it could be perceived that they were excluded due to their protected characteristic (pregnancy and maternity) or because they were not at work at a particular time.

**Application forms and CVs**

Regardless of how you want applicants applying for your vacancy, if you reject an application then you must be able to objectively justify this.

**Example**

Rather than having a separate diversity monitoring form, the employer has a section within the body of the application form asking for health-related information. In this event, if you reject any applicant who has declared a disability, it would be hard to argue that the rejection was not connected to this and maybe perceived as direct discrimination. One exception to this is where you wish to find out if the person needs a reasonable adjustment during the recruitment process, but ask for this information separately.

**Shortlisting applicants**

You should only shortlist applicants against the criteria set within the person specification to avoid any biases during the selection process. You should also have a system in place to record the reasons why an applicant was or wasn't shortlisted.

**Example**

An applicant has stated on their application form how they meet the essential criteria and provide relevant examples to support this. The employer rejects the application, however, the applicant is not convinced that the rejection was made on fair grounds. If an applicant believes they were rejected on the grounds of discrimination, the applicant has the right to request the paperwork used in the shortlisting process which pertains to them. This could be used as evidence to make a legal claim against the employer.

**Interviews and selection tests**

It is advisable to use the criteria within the person specification as the basis for your interview questions and selection methods. Ensure your questions are prepared in advance, make records and avoid asking questions which cannot be objectively justified.



**Example**

In 2018, a Judge ruled that a 67-year-old man who did not get a job as a park keeper was discriminated against because of his age. The employment tribunal heard an interviewer had said, "I've just noticed your age" and asked about his health. The council denied age discrimination, but the Judge backed the complainant.

**The duty to make reasonable adjustments for people with a disability**

Members must make reasonable adjustments to remove barriers in place to make sure that a person with a disability has the same access to everything that is involved in getting and doing a job as a non-disabled person. The duty to make reasonable adjustments fall under three categories:

- **Changes to policies and the way your office usually does things**, e.g. using the practice of shortlisting applicants who declare their disability against the essential criteria only.
- **Dealing with physical barriers**, e.g. having interview meetings in wheelchair-accessible buildings or holding them on the ground floor where the building has no lift.
- **Providing extra equipment or aids**, e.g. a reader, a sign language interpreter or a support worker.

**Occupational requirements**

Employers can only require job applicants to have a particular protected characteristic in very limited circumstances. This might be where having that protected characteristic is necessary for the specific role (is an 'occupational requirement'), e.g. it may be lawful for an advertisement for a public changing room attendant to require candidates of the same sex as those using the facilities for reasons of privacy and decency. If an employer asserts that an 'occupational requirement' applies, the burden of proof rests on the employer to objectively justify this point.

## Appendix 2: Putting together a Person Specification

The person specification is a description of the qualifications, skills and aptitudes, experience, knowledge and other personal attributes (selection criteria) which a candidate must possess to perform the job duties. The specification should be derived from the job description and forms the foundation for the recruitment process. You will use the person specification as a basis for your advertisement, shortlisting, presentation/test and interview stages.

The person specification is usually broken into the following categories:

### **Experience**

Experience is usually required as most roles will require individuals who have worked in similar roles in the past or have had the experience of carrying out the duties listed within the job description. When outlining experience needed, avoid giving a required number of years as this could constitute age discrimination. Instead, think about what you would specifically like people to have had the experience of e.g. 'demonstrable experience in... etc.

### **Qualifications/Certifications/Affiliations to Membership bodies**

Some posts will require the post holder to possess a certain degree or be affiliated to a professional body. Avoid setting qualification levels higher than required by the nature of the post, as this could be discriminatory. Consider if relevant experience could be a substitute for a qualification – for example, could an applicant carry out an administrative role with a substantial amount of experience but not a Bachelor's degree?

### **Skills and Aptitudes**

This could include such things as customer service skills, presentation skills, report-writing skills. Ensure that the skills required are essential to carry out the role and are broken down into specific skills sets within the person specification e.g. instead of asking for communication skills, you should break this requirement down into – “ability to converse with a wide range of people, report-writing skills”.

### **Knowledge**

Specify any knowledge the candidate is required to bring to the role such as knowledge of a sector or line of work, knowledge of Parliamentary proceedings or working alongside a financial regulatory body. Determine how essential your knowledge criteria is. This could be listed under the desirable category, as not possessing the required knowledge may not necessarily mean that the applicant is unable to carry out the role. Knowledge can be developed within the role during an induction/probation period.

## Personal Qualities

Describe the personal qualities needed to perform the role effectively such as the ability to work independently with minimal supervision or the ability to use initiative and be pro-active. You may also wish to include the qualities and behaviours you wish for your employees to exhibit within the workplace to fit in with your organisation's culture e.g. "the candidate will be expected to work in line with our values and treat 'colleagues and customers with dignity and respect'. Personal qualities can be tricky to assess during the selection stage, so think about whether you want to use a scenario-based test to see how the candidate reacts in a specific/hypothetical situation.

## How to transfer duties from a job description to a person specification

The table below provides some examples of person specification criteria based on duties taken from the IPSA job descriptions. Each selection criterion must be specific, justifiable, measurable and non-discriminatory. You should also identify which criterion is essential or desirable. Job qualifications are specific for each role and judgement should be made as to what level of qualification is necessary when drafting the person specification.

### Caseworker

Duties	Assist surgeries and other meetings and follow up as appropriate	Ensure that each case is dealt with promptly, sensitively, confidentially and accurately.	Draft responses to constituents
Experience	Experience of meeting and assisting individuals from diverse backgrounds with their concerns. Experience of sending out high volumes of correspondence.	Experience in a customer-facing role, using casework management software and dealing with a high volume of personal, sensitive data.	Experience of drafting and sending out written correspondence.
Knowledge	Knowledge of current political issues which may be of concern to constituents.	Knowledge of case management and handling such information in line with data protection regulations.	Knowledge of local authority regulations and government legislation to ensure correspondence falls in line with these.
Skills and Aptitudes	Ability to converse with a wide-ranging audience.	Ability to prioritise a demanding workload.	Excellent written and IT Skills (Microsoft Office)
Personal Qualities	A willingness to help constituents in a confident, friendly, professional manner.	Hardworking, flexible, pro-active team player, with the ability to work to tight deadlines	A commitment to responding to constituents in a timely fashion.

**Office Manager**

<b>Tasks</b>	Lead and maintain a highly professional administrative support function for the MP's office	Manage the office team, ensuring accurate personnel records are kept and notifying IPSA of contractual changes as necessary	Liaise with groups/personnel including at Westminster, within the constituency and the general public on the MP's behalf as necessary
<b>Experience</b>	Experience of leading a highly-functioning team.	Experience of managing a team and dealing with employment and payroll processes.	Experience of stakeholder management.
<b>Knowledge</b>	A degree of knowledge about the role of an MP within the constituency and how this dictates the work of the MP's office.	Knowledge of working closely with a financial regulatory body e.g. IPSA is desirable but training is available.	An understanding of the demands of an MP and the constituency office.
<b>Skills and Aptitudes</b>	Good IT skills, including the use of email, the Internet, Microsoft Office suite, data management tools and websites	The ability to manage a budget effectively. Good records management skills.	Ability to converse with a wide-ranging audience.
<b>Personal attributes</b>	Is committed to staff engagement and development whilst ensuring the smooth running of the office.	Can meet various and sometimes conflicting deadlines.	Ability to work collectively as a team

**Parliamentary Assistant**

<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Analyse, evaluate and interpret data to ensure the Member is accurately informed on key issues</b>	<b>Assist in writing external communications including speeches for the MP</b>	<b>Compilation of briefing packs for MPs, take notes of meetings and draft appropriate submissions</b>
<b>Experience</b>	Experience of analysing, interpreting and writing reports based on data received from various sources.	Experience of writing communications for a large readership group.	Experience of extracting and compiling information to use as the basis for briefing packs, experience of summarising key

			information into concise readable documents.
<b>Knowledge</b>	Knowledge of data management systems.	Knowledge of the political environment, current affairs and Government legislation.	Knowledge of key meetings and events an MP is usually required to attend
<b>Skills and Aptitudes</b>	Ability to use tools to collect, classify and analyse data, including the ability to present findings clearly and concisely.	Outstanding written and verbal skills with an ability to tailor correspondence to different audiences.	Excellent note-taking and report writing skills.
<b>Personal Qualities</b>	Excellent attention to detail and ability to produce information promptly.	Should be able to work independently and proactively when the MP is not immediately available.	Must have excellent attention to detail.

## Appendix 3: Interview Questions

### Writing interview questions

One of the main ways to test the experience, skills, knowledge, behaviours and attributes of the candidates is through a structured interview. Failing to ask the right set of questions will most likely result in getting the wrong person for the job.

It is best practice to ask 'behavioural/competency-based' questions. These questions are designed to test how the candidate used their knowledge, skills and experience in a real-life situation.

### Things to avoid when writing interview questions

- Close Questions - these require a yes/no response however the information these questions provide are limited.
- Hypothetical Questions – these are scenario-based questions which ask the candidate how they would behave in a made-up situation. Responses usually tend to be 'textbook' in nature.
- Multi-barrelled questions - Having 2-3 questions merged into one lengthy question can be confusing for the candidate and there is usually a risk that they only capture the first half of the question, thereby missing out on some valuable interview points.
- Leading questions – These are questions which prompt or encourage the candidate to give the answer wanted.
- Discriminatory questions – Questions which are unrelated to testing the candidate against the person specification such as personal questions pertaining to a protected characteristic could be seen as discriminatory.

### Sample Interview Questions

<b>Introductory questions</b>
➤ What made you want to apply for the role?
➤ What is your knowledge about the role of a Member of Parliament?
➤ Thinking about your experience, knowledge and skills set, how do these make you a suitable match for the role?
<b>Administrative questions</b>
➤ Can you tell us of a time you've had to manage the diary for a senior person in your organisation where there have been conflicting priorities?
➤ Can you share what challenges you've faced from being responsible for the administration of a team?
➤ What experience do you have managing record management systems?
➤ Describe any systems you have been responsible for initiating and setting up yourself.
➤ What MS Office packages are you familiar with and how do you use these to carry out your day to day duties?



<b>Team Working</b>
➤ From your experience of working within a team, what would you consider are the important components for successful team working.
➤ How have you dealt with a difficult team member you were required to work closely with?
➤ Tell me about a time you have taken the lead on a team project and challenges this posed?
➤ Being the new member of a team, how would you go about integrating yourself within the team?
➤ Being based in Westminster, you may spend a considerable time away from your team based within the constituency. How would you ensure you stay connected with colleagues?
<b>Interpersonal Skills</b>
➤ How have you dealt with a particularly difficult customer/client?
➤ Can you give an example of when you've had to develop and maintain excellent external relationships?
➤ How have you used a working relationship you've developed to support the execution of the duties of your role?
➤ How have you dealt with an emotional customer/client/constituent and what did you do to calm them down?
<b>Communication</b>
➤ (a) Can you share your experience of sending out large volumes of correspondence? (b) How did you ensure these were sent out in a timely manner?
➤ Can you give an example of when you have had to compose a press briefing and what were the key components?
➤ You will at times be required to respond to queries both written and verbally on behalf of the MP. Can you demonstrate when you have had to act on behalf of your manager within minimal supervision?
➤ Describe a time when you have turned a complex set of rules/legislation/regulations into an easy to read format to ensure this can be understood by a wide range of people?
<b>Management</b>
➤ Leading a small team, how would you ensure the workload was effectively managed and fulfilled
➤ How would you ensure your team's health and wellbeing was regularly prioritised?
➤ How would you ensure your office operates in the spirit of equal opportunities and is an inclusive place to work?
➤ From your experience of managing a team, what would you consider to be the main challenges and how have you overcome these?
➤ What personal attributes have you relied upon which has made you a good manager?
<b>Problem Solving</b>
➤ Give some examples of casework you have dealt with and how you have brought matters to a resolution
➤ How have you dealt with a difficult situation in the absence of your manager and what was the outcome, both positive and what could have been done better?
<b>Field Knowledge</b>
➤ Can you give some examples of a local issue or campaign suitable for the MP to take up in the community/constituency?

➤ What prominent issues are currently being debated within Parliament and what impact do you envisage they are having on the constituency?
<b>Organisational Skills</b>
➤ Looking at this role, how do you envisage planning your work to ensure that conflicting deadlines are met, and the workload is fulfilled?
➤ What has been your experience of working in a work-place environment with pressure pinch points and how have you managed to ensure this does not impact on you fulfilling your duties?
➤ There may be times you suddenly have a change of plans. How would re-prioritise your workload?
➤ This job requires excellent record keeping. How can we exploit technology to streamline this process whilst ensuring quality and easy access?

## Appendix 4: Useful Links

<b>Equality and Human Rights Commission</b>	<a href="https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-guidance">https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-guidance</a>
<b>IPSA Job Description Generator</b>	<a href="http://parliamentarystandards.org.uk/Job%20Description/Pages/default.aspx">http://parliamentarystandards.org.uk/Job%20Description/Pages/default.aspx</a>
<b>MPs' Staff Job Description and Pay bands</b>	<a href="https://www.ipsaonline.org.uk/guidance/new-starters#document-downloads">https://www.ipsaonline.org.uk/guidance/new-starters#document-downloads</a>
<b>Working for an MP Jobs</b>	<a href="http://www.w4mpjobs.org/SearchJobs.aspx?search=alljobs">http://www.w4mpjobs.org/SearchJobs.aspx?search=alljobs</a>
<b>STEP (Paid Student and Graduate Internships and Placements)</b>	<a href="https://www.step.org.uk/">https://www.step.org.uk/</a>
<b>Access to Work</b>	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work">https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work</a>
<b>Data Protection Guidance for Employers</b>	<a href="https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1064/the_employment_practices_code.pdf">https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1064/the_employment_practices_code.pdf</a>
<b>Right to work in the UK checklist</b>	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/right-to-work-checklist">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/right-to-work-checklist</a>
<b>EU Settlement Scheme</b>	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families">https://www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families</a>
<b>Security clearance and pre-employment check questionnaire form</b>	<a href="https://intranet.parliament.uk/Documents/Security/New%20Pass%20Forms%202019/Members-Staff-and-Security-Clearance-and-Pre-Employment-Check-Questionnaire-November-2019.pdf">https://intranet.parliament.uk/Documents/Security/New%20Pass%20Forms%202019/Members-Staff-and-Security-Clearance-and-Pre-Employment-Check-Questionnaire-November-2019.pdf</a>
<b>IPSA New Starter Documents</b>	<a href="https://www.ipsaonline.org.uk/guidance/new-starters#document-downloads">https://www.ipsaonline.org.uk/guidance/new-starters#document-downloads</a>
<b>Members Services Team</b>	<a href="https://intranet.parliament.uk/people-offices/offices-departments/commons-departments/hr-finance/member-services-team-mst/">https://intranet.parliament.uk/people-offices/offices-departments/commons-departments/hr-finance/member-services-team-mst/</a>

<b>Recruitment Templates</b>  These can be found on the House of Commons Members <a href="#">A-Z of essential forms, factsheets and checklists</a> web page.
Acas guide on recruitment
Recruitment Flowchart
Office Models

IPSA Job description generator
Person Specification Form
Acas Application Form
Shortlisting record Form
Sample interview questions
Interview assessment form
Employment Offer Letter
Confidentiality Agreement
Induction checklist
Authorisation Letter to contact referees
Employer Reference request
Invitation to a first interview
Interview to the second interview
Interview to testing
New starter form
Offer of employment letter - Fixed term
Offer of employment letter - Permanent
Personal reference form
Regret Letter – Not progressing to interview
Regret – Not progressing to the second interview
Regret Letter – Not shortlisted
Regret Letter – Not successful after the second interview