

Interviewing, Recruiting and Probation Healthy Practices

APNA has produced a suite of resources to help general practices employ nurses and optimise their role in the general practice setting. Fulfilling these aims will help build Healthy Practices that deliver positive outcomes for their communities through nursing skills and expertise.

This resource outlines steps for interviewing and recruiting a nurse to work in your general practice.

Step 1: Review all applications

Read all applications thoroughly and determine whether all requested information has been supplied.

Using the position description and the *Selection Criteria Checklist*, review:

- experience relevant to the position
- experience matching the position description
- evidence of professional and relevant personal achievements
- tone, style and construction of the letter and CV/resume
- inclusion of referee names and contact details.

Step 2: Create a shortlist

Identify applicants who meet the selection criteria, have an appropriate and demonstrable work history, and have other attributes that may add to their application (for example, fluency in a language other than English).

Reduce the number of applicants to be interviewed by rating each application. Be consistent, unbiased and fair when shortlisting applicants. It is best to keep notes of reasons for all decisions made during the recruitment process in the event any dispute arises or constructive feedback is requested.

Step 3: Develop the interview agenda

An interview agenda is for the interview panel and outlines the sequence of the interviews and interview questions. The agenda may also include a welcome and introduction to each of the panel members (name and role) and to the general practice.

Interview questions are normally assigned to each panel member. It is helpful to place each panel member's name against their questions on the interview agenda.

Panel members will also need to document and rate each applicant's responses to the set of interview questions. The questions should relate to the position description and the essential and desirable selection criteria and should not be discriminatory.

To enable applicants to introduce themselves, plan to start with general questions about their interest in the position. 'Tell us what attracted you to apply for this position,' is a common starting point.

Develop questions that:

- allow them to demonstrate their experience in applying skills or knowledge (for example, 'Give us an example of a time when you...')
- allow them to tell you of specific experience, skills or training
- focus on the requirements of the position
- are not discriminatory, invasive or irrelevant (for example, 'Do you have a family?').

Ensure consistency and fairness in the questioning of all applicants. It may also be useful to have some questions on a case scenario that is based on the type of problem solving required at your practice.

Interviewing, Recruiting and Probation



Sample interview agenda

Welcome and introduction: [insert panel member's name and role and general practice summary].							
Interview process explained: Each panel member will ask several questions. Any questions you have during your response will be addressed at that time; otherwise, questions will be taken at the end of the interview.							
Applicant name			Confirm current registration				
Question 1			[Panel member's name]				
[Insert question here]			Score: 1 (lowest) – 5 (highest)				
			1	2	3	4	5
			Comment:				
Question 2			[Panel member's name]				
[Insert question here]			Score: 1 (lowest) – 5 (highest)				
			1	2	3	4	5
			Comment:				
Question 3			[Panel member's name]				
[Insert question here]			Score: 1 (lowest) – 5 (highest)				
			1	2	3	4	5
			Comment:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other matters [insert questions or information you wish to relay to all applicants here]. - Do you have any questions you would like to ask? - Are you aware of any pre-existing injuries or illnesses that would prevent you from undertaking the requirements of this position, as stated in the position description? - Should you be successful, a probationary period applies for the [insert time frame here, e.g. first three months of employment]. - Should you be successful, could you outline your potential commencement date and/or notice requirements to your existing employer? - In closing, we anticipate we will complete the interview process for all applicants by [timeframe] and will notify you of our decision by [method of contact] by [timeframe]. - Check the applicant has provided the contact details of referees within their application. - Have information available that candidates may ask questions about, including conditions, pay structure and professional development. 							

Interviewing, Recruiting and Probation

Step 4: Prepare for the interview

The interview provides an opportunity to demonstrate the professionalism of your practice. It is important to prepare for it.

Convene an interview panel

The interview panel should have two or three members: the practice manager, a GP and, ideally, a nurse. Some professional organisations or primary health organisations may be able to assist with a nurse representative.

Provide all members with a copy of the position description, selection criteria and the interviewees' applications ahead of time. If you have prepared your interview questions prior to convening the interview panel, you should provide panel members with a copy of the interview agenda and questions so they come prepared.

Schedule the interview

Identify an appropriate location for the interviews, preferably at the practice, so that the applicants can understand the work environment where they might be employed. Check whether there is a need for special physical access, interpreters or other requirements.

Allocate enough time to interview each applicant and for possible questions. Leave a short period between interviews so that panel members can discuss each applicant and complete the documentation.

Step 5: Conduct the interview

A well-structured interview will proceed as follows:

- make all applicants aware of the date, time and location of the interview
- ensure all members of the interview panel are well informed and have the interview agenda
- welcome the applicant, introduce the panel, outline how the interview will proceed, including when the applicant can ask questions about the position, and ensure the applicant is comfortable
- ask the prepared questions, including any further questions where clarification is needed ('Give us an example...'; 'Can you tell us more about...'; 'How would you go about...')
- invite questions from the applicant
- advise the applicant of the process that will follow the interview: timelines, notification of successful and unsuccessful applicants, and referee and police checks (if required)
- confirm current registration.

Have information at hand that candidates may ask questions about, including conditions, pay structure and professional development.

After each interview, the panel members can briefly discuss the applicant and complete the documentation. They should keep detailed written notes on each applicant. It is good practice to keep recruitment records, including interview notes, for up to 12 months, as the candidate has the right to contest a decision during this period. Under the Privacy Act, a candidate may also ask to see any information you hold on them, including any interview panel documentation.

Sample interview questions

Adapt this list. Choose suitable questions and make these available to the interview panel members.

Interest in position:

- What attracted you to this position?
- Tell us what you can bring to the position.
- Tell us about experience you have that is relevant to this position.

Personal attributes:

- What is your greatest strength/greatest weakness?
- Describe a work situation in which there was conflict between staff and your role in resolving the situation.
- What did you learn from that experience?
- How do you approach change?
- Tell us about the most difficult situation you have been in at work.
- How do you adapt to working both independently and in a team?

Position experience:

- What aspects of your current/last position do/did you like the least/best?
- How would your current manager describe you as an employee?
- In what areas do you feel under-skilled/competent with your skills and knowledge?
- How have you updated your skills in the past?
- What are your plans for further education?
- What approach to problem solving works best for you?
- Describe any innovative projects that you been involved in or have initiated.
- What kind of challenges do you enjoy/dislike in your work?
- What defines an enjoyable position for you?
- How do you deal with non-compliant patients?
- How would you describe your work style?

Interviewing, Recruiting and Probation



Step 6: Making a decision and carrying out checks

The interview panel should decide on the most suitable applicant. The preferred candidate’s employment history and experience should be checked before they are offered the position.

Police check

Suitability checks for staff and volunteers working with children and young people vary significantly across Australia. Contact your state or territory police or family services department for information on obtaining checks. Further information on the mandatory pre-employment screening is also available on the Child Family Community Australia website: aifs.gov.au/cfca

Referee check questions template

Adapt this list of questions, print it out, and use it to question referees. Leave spaces for notes.

Reference check

Referee input is an important part of the recruitment process and referees should always be contacted before a position is offered to a candidate. Develop questions for referees that are related to the selection criteria and the professional attributes required for the position. Include questions that will establish when the referee employed or worked with the applicant, for how long, and the level of skills required and demonstrated in that position. Outline the position on offer to the referee and then evaluate the referee’s ability to provide accurate and relevant information by asking the list of referee questions (see Referee check questions template). Note the responses.

Applicant	Role Registered Nurse <input type="checkbox"/> Enrolled Nurse <input type="checkbox"/>
Referee	Referee title e.g. Practice Manager
Business name	Phone number

Sample script

- Hi, my name is [name] and I’m calling on behalf of [business name].
- I’m calling in regard to [applicant name], who has been interviewed for a position at our practice and has listed you as his/her referee.
- Do you have a moment now to conduct a reference check? I’ll need around 20 minutes of your time.
- *If answer is no, ask them for a suitable time to phone back. Schedule a time and date. If answer is yes, continue.*
- I also need to let you know that the information you provide today may be shared with [applicant name] should they request this. Are you happy to continue?

Potential questions – Edit as required	Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In what capacity do you know the applicant? - How long has it been since you worked with the applicant? - Can you confirm the dates of employment and title or position held? - Did that position require the same level of skills and behaviour as the position at our practice? - What were the applicant’s strengths and weaknesses in the position and areas for improvement? - What skills did they possess that were key competencies of the position? - Could you give me four or five single words that best describe the applicant? - Were there any unsatisfactory aspects of their performance that could be relevant to the position at our practice? - How did they work in team and individual situations? - Are there any reasons we should not employ this person? - Would you re-employ this person? 	

Thank the referee for their time and co-operation in the reference checking process

Reference check conducted by	Comments/Notes
Date of reference check	

Interviewing, Recruiting and Probation



Step 7: Informing candidates

Appointment process

Advise the preferred candidate by phone and tell them that you will forward a letter of offer (see Sample letter of offer) outlining the employment conditions. If your practice does not apply an award, you will need to supply an individual contract setting out remuneration and conditions. Include the position description with the letter of offer for their agreement and signature.

Discuss the purpose of the staff details form, which you will provide. This form collects information such as bank account details for salary payments and emergency contacts, and is kept on the staff file at your practice.

Probation period

Information about managing performance and probation can be found on the Fair Work Ombudsman website: www.fairwork.gov.au

Employers can utilise a probation period to assess if employees are suitable for the role and business. The employer decides the period of probation and this timeframe can vary in duration.

If a nurse is to be employed with a probationary period, they should be notified of that period in their position description, interview, and employment contract. The probation period is usually three months, but can be longer. A longer period may be determined by written agreement between the nurse and the practice before the nurse begins employment. If you want to have the option to extend the period, that should also be specified in the employment contract.

During the probationary period, regular documented meetings should be held between the nurse and their manager to review how the nurse is performing in the position. The nurse must be given the opportunity to ask questions and to express any concerns they have about the workplace. If either party has problems, these must be addressed.

If an employee is unsuccessful in their probation, they are still entitled to receive notice and have their unused accumulated annual leave hours paid out.

Informing unsuccessful candidates

It is advisable to defer sending letters to unsuccessful candidates (see Sample letter of decline) until you have received an acceptance of your offer from the preferred candidate.

Unsuccessful applicants may ask for feedback, in which case you should provide constructive information based on the advertised selection criteria and the notes taken during the interview.

If interviews identified other suitable candidates for the position in addition to the successful applicant, you could ask them if they would like to be on an eligibility list for other positions that may become available over the next six months

Sample letter of offer

[Date] [Letterhead]
 [Name]
 [Address]

Dear [applicant's name],

I have great pleasure in extending to you an offer of employment as [job title] at [practice name] under the terms and conditions described below.

All conditions of employment are as per the enclosed [contract/certified agreement]. Your role will be as described in the enclosed position description.

All members of the practice are required to comply with the practice policy for maintaining privacy, in accordance with the Privacy Act and the National Privacy Principles.

Please read this letter and the enclosed documents carefully. If you have any questions or queries, please do not hesitate to call on [phone number].

If the terms and conditions, including those set out in the enclosed documents, are acceptable to you and you wish to accept the offered position, please sign the copy of this letter, initial each page and return it to me by [date]. Please also complete, sign and return the enclosed staff details form and position description.

Please retain the original documents for your own reference.

We look forward to commencement of your employment and would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to the team. You will be supported in your new role with an induction that will begin on your first day of employment.

Yours sincerely,
 [Practice manager's signature]
 [Practice manager's name]

Interviewing, Recruiting and Probation



Sample letter of decline

[Date] [Letterhead]
[Name]
[Address]

Dear [applicant's name],

Thank you for your application for the position of general practice nurse, as advertised in the [name newspaper or website] on [date of advertisement].

The quality of applications was very high, and on this occasion we regret to inform you that your application was unsuccessful.

In accordance with the Privacy Act and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, the information you provided will be held by [practice name] for a period of 12 months. At the end of that time, it will be treated as a confidential document and disposed of accordingly.

Yours sincerely,
[Practice manager's signature]
[Practice manager's name]

www.apna.asn.au www.healthypractices.apna.asn.au

Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA)
Level 17/350 Queens Street
Melbourne 3000

APNA acknowledges and thanks the Australian Primary Health Network for use of this material.

This resource is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.