

STAFFING MANAGEMENT

STUDENT WORKBOOK



Southwood School: A Case Study in Recruitment and Selection

By Fiona L. Robson

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Southwood School: A Case Study in Recruitment and Selection

Purpose

This case helps you understand the complexities involved in effective recruitment and selection.

This fictionalized case study is based on a real organization. The case is set in a school, but many of the issues are the same across different countries and sectors. The author of this case was the HR manager in the organization.

Setting

Industry: UK public sector, education (a mixed comprehensive secondary school).

Size: The annual revenue of the organization is more than £1 million, but it is a government-funded, nonprofit organization.

Staff Size: 120 employees (80 teaching and 40 non-teaching).

Student Body: More than 800 students aged 13-18.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this case, you will learn to:

- Articulate why recruitment and selection is important to organizations.
- Explain the importance of equal opportunity and how this should be emphasized throughout training for employees involved in recruitment and selection.
- Appreciate the need for appropriate selection activities and how to design programs accordingly.
- Recognize the importance of reviewing recruitment and selection processes.

Overview

Southwood School experienced increased employee turnover, and as a result, a higher level of recruitment activity. This case explores the recruitment and selection strategies used by the school. The first part of the case study introduces the system that was initially used and concludes by identifying some of the system's weaknesses.

The second part of the case study discusses the improvements that were made following a system review by the HR manager.

PART I

Recruitment

For many years, Southwood relied on a single recruitment method: to advertise all teaching positions in a specialist newspaper publication called *TES (Times Educational Supplement)*. Basic advertisements were placed in this publication one time, and interested candidates were instructed to contact the school to request an application package.

The application package included the following information:

- A letter detailing how to apply for the job.
- A brochure about the school.
- An application form.

Additional information was sometimes enclosed, but this depended on the department head advertising the vacancy. Additional information could include:

- Information about the current staff in the department.
- Examples of departmental projects (e.g., the head of the French department included information about student exchanges and visits to France that students and faculty had taken).
- A copy of the school development plan for the next three years.

Other schools in the area also used *TES* for recruitment, but in addition, they placed advertisements in a local newspaper and on a web site for teaching vacancies. Some schools even launched a page on their school web site to enable candidates to download all of the application information.

Selecting the Right Candidates

Candidates submitted an application form along with contact information for two people who could provide references, and returned the information to the appropriate department head. Once the closing date had passed, three staff members reviewed the applications independently and graded them A, B or C (where A is the highest mark and C is the lowest) based on the candidate's ability to meet the selection criteria. The panel would then convene to discuss the A-rated application forms and agree on a list of candidates who would be invited to attend a selection day. The staff members assessing the applications were usually teachers from the relevant subject area. Training was not offered to panel members to help them to select the best candidates.

Before selection day, references would be requested for all candidates (see the Reference Request Letter). Copies of the references would be provided to interview panel members; employment offers were contingent on the receipt of satisfactory references.

Selection days usually involved four to five candidates, depending on how many applications had been received. The days normally followed the following agenda:

9:00	Welcome from the principal.
9:30	Tour of the campus.
10:00	Informal interviews lasting approximately 20 minutes per candidate.
11:30	Lunch in the staff canteen.
12:30	Formal interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes per candidate.
2:30	Panel convenes to make decision.
3:00	Panel contacts the successful candidate and offers him or her the position.

The agenda shows that the organization relied on two selection methods for all of their teaching vacancies—an informal and formal interview. The first (informal) interview was led by the principal and an administrator; this was used to learn basic information about the candidate and to review the information on the application form. The second interview was more detailed and explored a wide range of issues with the candidates.

The panel consisted of the following staff members:

- Principal
- HR manager
- Department head
- Senior teacher

Due to time constraints, panel members were usually unable to meet in advance, so they developed their interview questions independently.

Although the principal chaired the interviews, they were rarely carried out in the same manner and there was not a high level of consistency with the questions. No formal scoring system was used. At the end of the interviews, there was a panel vote to see which candidate should be offered the job. This often led to a heated debate about candidate strengths and weaknesses.

Candidates usually remained at the school until a decision was reached so they could be informed personally of the outcome. If they were unable to wait for the outcome, they were phoned later that day with the decision. Unsuccessful candidates received some brief verbal feedback, but were not asked for comments on their interview experience. Unsuccessful candidates would sometimes contact the school and ask for further written feedback; this was usually provided by the principal.

HR Manager's Review of the School's Recruitment and Selection Methods

The HR manager reviewed the school's recruitment and selection methods because there was concern that best-practice methods were not being used. In addition, the principal thought that some inappropriate candidates had been hired which

could have been avoided if better methods had been used. A number of areas for improvement were identified:

- Using one recruitment method was insufficient and was not making the most out of the available recruitment resources (in particular, the Internet). The existing method may have resulted in some unsuitable hires who left the organization after a short time. A wider candidate search might attract different types of people.
- Other schools in the area were using more varied recruitment methods, which may mean they are accessing a larger (and potentially better) pool of candidates.
- The materials in the recruitment package were basic and not professionally designed, which may have failed to impress potential applicants.
- The selection methods used were limited, and had not kept up with trends used in other organizations.
- Candidates were being hired on the basis of a good interview. Their teaching style and ability was unknown.
- Staff on the interview panels had not been trained, and in the past had asked potentially discriminatory questions.
- There was little chance of internal promotions because career progression was not a focus within the school or encouraged within the recruitment and selection policy.
- Lack of an objective scoring system resulted in complaints from unsuccessful candidates who did not understand why they did not get the job.

PART II

Improving the Recruitment Methods

The HR manager continued to advertise teaching jobs in *TES* in line with local and national competitors, but re-designed the standard layout and content of advertisements to be more engaging and informative. In the future, advertisements for all teaching jobs will also be placed in the local newspaper which has a weekly jobs supplement and high readership in the area.

The school had a strong IT team, and they were consulted about the best ways to use technology as a recruitment method. They designed a simple web site that could be accessed through the school's home page. It contained relevant information about the organization and the actual vacancy. Candidates could complete and submit the application form online, or print and mail the completed application form. The page was being monitored to gauge the success of this method.

The HR manager agreed with the principal that a greater emphasis should be placed on internal recruitment, particularly for positions with management responsibilities. This would encourage talented staff to remain with the school as part of an overall retention strategy.

The HR manager also reviewed the quality of the information provided to prospective employees, so that candidates would have a more realistic picture of

what the job entailed and the character of the school (see “Information Provided to Candidates”).

The changes to the recruitment approach were evaluated after six months. Positive outcomes were identified:

- More candidates were accessing the information provided on the vacancies from the school’s web site and through e-mailed requests for application packages.
- Candidate diversity was higher than in previous recruitment campaigns.
- The number of people who applied for a job after requesting information had increased.
- There was positive feedback about the quality and quantity of the information provided to candidates.
- More than 75 percent of unsuccessful candidates said they would apply for another position at Southwood, indicating that the school had made a positive first impression. This also suggests that candidates thought that the selection methods were fair and transparent. Feedback also indicated that candidates enjoyed talking to both staff and students and that this, combined with the school’s plan for future development, had left positive impressions.

Enhancing Selection Methods

The school had relied on interviews as their sole selection method. The HR manager and principal did not think that this method was sufficient. It was decided that all candidates for teaching vacancies should deliver a brief teaching session while being observed by a senior teacher. Teaching observation sessions enabled the senior teacher to assess the following knowledge and skills:

- Relationship with students.
- Delivery style.
- Innovation in teaching methods.
- Communication skills.
- Subject knowledge.
- Ability to engage students.

Candidates were informed in advance to prepare a 20-minute teaching session. At the end of the sessions, the observer gave comments and ratings to the main interview panel. The ratings system involved the observer’s ratings in the six areas shown (1 being the minimum and 10 being the maximum number of points). Observers were also asked to give examples (where possible) to justify their score.

Following discussions with stakeholders (including the student council) it was decided that students should have input into the selection process. To achieve this, student interview panels were added to the selection process.

Students on the interview panels were selected by the relevant department head. After training to ensure they did not ask inflammatory or discriminatory questions,

they were asked to write their own questions to ask candidates. Student panel members provided feedback to the principal and main interview panel members. These methods sent a message to candidates that the role and opinions of the students were valued by the school and that it was an important part of the school's culture. An overview of the newly revised selection day is in this case study.

Southwood continued the use of both formal and informal interview panels, but adopted a more structured approach. Panel members now meet in advance to organize questions and identify any key issues to be highlighted. Training is also provided on an annual basis for staff members who may be involved in selection activities, though attendance is not mandatory. The approach to scoring candidates objectively does not yet take place consistently, but the quality of feedback to candidates is much improved and provides them with some constructive information.

Southwood has not adopted any of the more innovative selection methods such as psychometric testing, but the principal has promised to consider them in the future if a strong argument could be presented.

Anecdotal feedback was gathered from successful candidates, who offered the following comments:

- “It was good to get to meet the students to find out what they really thought about the school.”
- “I found the day quite intensive as there were lots of things to do, but it gave me a good idea about how the school is run.”
- “The informal interview panel was a bit nerve-wracking, as I was not sure exactly what the aim of it was—it seemed quite personal.”
- “The chance to meet lots of different people was good and I knew that this was the type of school that I wanted to work in.”

A limitation of this feedback is that it was gained from only successful candidates. It would have been interesting to hear the views of those who did not get the job.

There has been a 10 percent increase in the number of internal candidates applying for promotions and a small decline in the number of staff leaving the organization.

Recruitment Advertisement

**Southwood School
Eastwest Street
London
UK**

Hr.manager@southwood.school.uk

VACANCY FOR TEACHER OF FRENCH

Southwood School is seeking a French teacher to join us in September. You should be a dedicated and enthusiastic teacher who has previous experience teaching students aged 11-18 years old. You will be joining our hardworking and committed team at this successful school.

You should possess the following skills:

- Excellent computer skills.
- Ability to encourage students to achieve well.
- Ability to work as part of a team.

The successful candidate will:

- Be a qualified teacher.
- Speak fluent French.

Application can be obtained through an e-mail request to the school e-mail address shown above.

Information Provided to Candidates

Introduction to Southwood School

- History of the school.
- Age range of students and the type of school (mixed comprehensive).
- Number of staff and students.
- Management structure.
- The range of courses that are offered (and could be offered in the future).
- Any awards or recognition that the school has earned.

Introduction to the Department

- Organizational structure.
- Introduction to key staff with brief résumés.
- Departmental development plan for the next three years.
- Overview of the curriculum, including details of the key textbooks that are used.
- Exam results (and targets for future years).

Introduction to the Town of Southwood

- Geographical location.
- Famous landmarks.
- Employment levels.
- Other schools.
- Transport infrastructure (local and national).

Additional information would be provided to international candidates.

Selection Day Timetable

Time	Event	Location	Participants
9:00 a.m.	Welcome to the school	Principal's office	Principal, HR manager, department head
9:30 a.m.	Tour of the school		Students
10:00 – 11:30 a.m.	Teaching observations*	Classroom 101	Selected senior teachers
11:30 – 11:45 a.m.	Refreshments and opportunity to meet with potential colleagues	Staff room	All available staff
11:45 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.	Individual interviews with principal	Principal's office	Principal and HR manager
12:45 – 1:30 p.m.	Lunch	School cafeteria	
1:30 – 3:00 p.m.	Staff panel interviews	Office 201	Deputy principal, department head, teacher from department, and HR manager
3:00 – 4:30 p.m.	Student panel interviews	Classroom 104	Four students
4:30 – 5:00 p.m.	Q & A session	Principal's office	Principal and HR manager

*Candidates are required to deliver a 20-minute teaching session. Full details are provided to the candidate including the following information:

- The age of students.
- The number of students who will be in the class.
- The topic areas covered in the previous teaching session.
- The topic of the session they will teach and the learning objectives that should be met.
- List of resources that are available (e.g., computers, projector).
- The names (and positions) of the staff that will be observing the session.
- Details of any students with special educational needs.

Candidates can e-mail any other questions in advance of the session so they have all of the necessary information.

Interview Questions

This document provides examples of interview questions used in the past.

Questions asked by the principal and members of the management team:

- Why did you apply for this job?
- What do you know about this school?
- Why did you decide to pursue a career in teaching?
- How do you think you can contribute to the school development plan?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- How do you think your present colleagues and managers would describe you?

Questions asked by teachers on an interview panel:

- What innovative teaching methods have you used successfully in the past?
- Which subjects do you enjoy teaching a) the most and b) the least?
- How would you deal with disruptive students in the classroom?
- Give an example of how you use technology to enhance your teaching.

Questions asked by the HR manager:

- What contributions would you make to this school?
- What training and development opportunities have you taken part in to date?
- What are your career plans for the next a) five years and b) ten years?
- What support would you like Southwood to provide if your application is successful?

Questions asked by students:

- What do you think the most important characteristics of an effective teacher are?
- How would you support students who find your subject difficult?
- How would you create a fun learning environment in the classroom?
- How would you build a good relationship with a new group of students?
- Do you have any ideas for afterschool activities or clubs? What are they?

Reference Request Letter

Dear Sir/Madam:

Re: *Name of job applicant*

The person named above has applied to join Southwood School as a French teacher and has provided your name as a reference. I would be grateful if you could complete the attached form and return it to me as soon as possible.

If you have any concerns about this person's suitability to be a teacher, I would be grateful if you would contact me directly to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "D. Hart", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Dr. David Hart
Principal, Southwood School

Reference Details

Name of candidate:

1. Please rate the candidate by checking the appropriate boxes and add a brief rationale for your rating.

	1	2	3	4	5	Reason for rating
Teaching ability						
Relationship with colleagues						
Relationship with students						
Ability to meet deadlines						
Use of IT						
Professionalism						
Examination results						
Attendance and punctuality						

2. Would you re-employ this person in your organization in the future?
Yes ☐ No ☐ (If no, please provide details on a separate sheet.)

3. Do you have any doubts about this person's suitability for the job?
Yes ☐ No ☐ (If yes, please provide details on a separate sheet.)

4. Please confirm your contact information and relationship with the candidate:

Your name:

Your position:

Your organization:

How do you know the candidate? _____

Please return this completed form by e-mail to hr.manager@southwood.school.uk



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