

Chapter 5 - Recruitment and Selection

Purpose

This chapter sets out our recruitment and promotion protocols. They provide clarity over the expectations our people should have of the NAO in relation to recruitment and promotion and are applicable to existing staff, those applying for promotion internally, and external candidates.

1. Policy statement

- The NAO is committed to recruiting and promoting the best quality candidates to meet its current and future needs. Our approach applies the principles of fair and open competition, from marketing vacancies through to appointment and onboarding, and seeks outcomes which ensure the NAO is a fully diverse employer, representative of the community it serves. Where groups are under-represented we will take positive action to create a level playing field for candidates, including specific actions aimed at addressing disadvantage for candidates with disabilities under the Disability Confident Scheme. This includes guaranteeing interviews for those disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a role.
- All recruitment and promotion decisions will ensure not only a fairness of process but also a fairness of outcome.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

Executive Team

The ET have corporate responsibility for ensuring that our recruitment and promotion practices support us in achieving our aims of a diverse workforce in which all employees can achieve their potential and help deliver our strategic objectives. They will:

- Approve the Office's resource requirements each year based on our annual strategy and sign off the initiation of all recruitment and promotion campaigns
- Ensure all campaigns at any level of the business are run in a way that follows the agreed protocols
- Support hiring managers to develop the detail of campaigns and ensure diversity in shortlisting and outcomes

HR Director

The HR Director leads the wider HR Team to deliver high quality campaigns which meet business need and support D&I objectives. They will:

- Uphold the agreed protocols by confirming all elements of approved campaigns are in place before they go 'live' in FF
- Work with the relevant Executive Director to review the diversity of shortlists and campaign outcomes before decisions are taken
- Act as hiring manager for our graduate and school leaver trainee campaigns, and keep an overview of the diversity profile of the candidate pipeline

Human Resources

The HR Team provide expert advice and guidance to hiring managers and are the key point of contact for candidates. They will:

- Advise hiring managers on the appropriate approach for individual campaigns to secure a high quality and diverse range of appointable candidates, including advice on marketing and the potential use of search agencies
- Ensure all candidates have a positive and engaging experience with the NAO
- Take direct responsibility for delivering our corporate campaigns for graduate and school leaver trainees
- Maintain comprehensive data on each campaign, including detailed diversity analyses
- Negotiate job offers with preferred candidates, and carry out pre-employment enquiries, including:
 - nationality checks;
 - security vetting; and
 - employer references

Hiring Managers

Hiring managers, supported by HR, are responsible for running campaigns in line with our agreed practices, enabling us to attract a diverse range of talented candidates. They will:

- Ensure job descriptions and candidate information are sufficiently detailed to attract appointable candidates and written in inclusive and accessible language
- Work with Human Resources to ensure shortlisting, interview and assessment panels are diverse and appropriately trained

Interviewers/Assessors

A fair and balanced assessment process is crucial to ensure the office delivers its commitments to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace. To support this, everyone involved in assessing candidates will:

- Ensure they have recently received appropriate assessment skills and unconscious bias training before undertaking assessments
- Assess candidates fairly and objectively, reviewing the fairness of outcomes at all assessment stages

3. Promoting diversity

- The NAO is committed to building a diverse and inclusive organisation, which embraces and values difference, supporting our people to bring a breath of thinking, experience and skill to our work. Our approach to recruitment and promotion is the primary enabler in achieving our aim of being an exemplar employer in relation to D&I as it provides us with our pipeline of talent for the future and supports us in developing our people to realise their full potential. Addressing the under-representation of specific groups can only be achieved if we ensure that our protocols and approaches are fair, unbiased and focused on achieving diverse outcomes.
- We recognise the challenges we face in ensuring that we represent the wider population we serve, at all levels of our business. We are, therefore, committed to building diversity into all aspects of our approach to recruitment and promotion and to taking positive action where any groups are under-represented. Diversity will be a key consideration at all stages of our campaigns, from the way in which our roles are described and marketed through to the representation of assessors on interview and selection panels. We will also be active in monitoring diversity data throughout our campaigns and will not hesitate to make adjustments or to re-start campaigns where we have concerns over the balance of candidates progressing through each stage.
- Our Executive Team will be directly involved in ensuring that all the actions we carry out support our commitment to redressing historic inequities in outcomes from our recruitment and promotion processes. But all who have a role in making decisions on the futures of those wishing to develop their careers with us carry the responsibility of ensuring that they feel welcomed by an organisation which embraces diversity and difference.

4. Agreeing campaigns

- All recruitment and promotion campaigns require the approval of the Executive Team. Any campaigns at Executive Director level will require the agreement of Remco, on the advice of the C&AG.
- Once campaigns are agreed, HR will work with the Executive Director of the relevant workstream and other appropriate colleagues to agree: a named hiring manager; the composition of shortlisting and assessment panels; and the proposed timelines for the campaign.
- It is expected that, wherever possible, shortlisting and assessment panels will be diverse, particularly in respect of gender and ethnicity. This may require the inclusion of colleagues from areas of the business not directly related to the role.
- Any colleague who participates in shortlisting and interview panels must have completed the Unconscious Bias e-learning module and received assessment principles training prior to undertaking any assessments.
- The hiring manager will agree with HR the shortlisting and assessment stages for the campaign, including the use of assessment exercises and/or psychometric tests where appropriate.
- Once all aspects of the campaign have been agreed it will be set up in Financial Force and formally signed-off by the HR Director as a live campaign.

5. Role descriptions and candidate information

- A role profile will be created for each post summarising the key responsibilities of the role. This will be accompanied by a description of the skills and capabilities required. If a particular qualification is specified it will be made clear that equivalent qualifications, including those gained overseas, will be acceptable.
- Information on the background and context of the role will also be provided, in addition to information on the application process. This will include information on nationality restrictions.
- HR will ensure that the candidate pack displays the appropriate corporate branding and includes a clear statement on our commitment to diversity and inclusion. This statement will be tailored depending on the role. An example is given below:

The NAO has an active commitment to diversity and inclusion. Whilst we welcome applications from all candidates who can meet the role requirements, we would particularly encourage applications from individuals from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and from women who are currently under-represented at senior levels.

- The candidate pack will also make reference to the Disability Confident Scheme, including guaranteeing interviews to candidates with a disability who meet the minimum criteria for the role. If recruitment information is requested by a candidate in an alternative format (e.g. large print), this should be provided, as far as is reasonably practicable. Candidates will have the opportunity to request any adjustments or support needed for the assessment process if they are shortlisted for interview.
- It will be assumed that roles can be filled on a flexible or part-time basis, and will not be location specific (London v Newcastle), unless there is a clear reason why this would not be appropriate.
- Advertised salaries will be within the agreed salary range for the role, although the Executive Team may agree flexibility for exceptional candidates. Flexibility is likely to be restricted to senior roles.
- Newly created roles, particularly specialist roles in the Corporate Group, may be subject to external evaluation to determine an appropriate salary range.

6. Selection and assessment criteria

- Before a campaign becomes 'live' the hiring manager will agree with HR the assessment process for the role and any specific exercises or tests which will form part of the assessment.
- HR will be responsible for ensuring that any proposed tests have been reviewed for potential adverse impacts on particular diverse groups.
- The hiring manager, with the advice of HR, will create a selection grid setting out the key criteria against which candidates will be assessed. This grid will be used for the shortlisting process and subsequent assessment stages.
- The hiring manager will also agree the minimum criteria which need to be met so that candidates with a disability who meet these criteria can be invited for the first stage of the assessment process under the Disability Confident Scheme.
- In addition to the technical requirements for the role, the agreed criteria will consider how the candidate evidences their alignment to our corporate values, including their active support for, and experience of delivering against, diversity and inclusion objectives.

7. Marketing

- HR will advise hiring managers on the appropriate route to market, including the potential use of agencies and the use of specialist job boards targeted at under-represented groups.
- All adverts and other marketing materials will be reviewed to ensure the language used is inclusive and the information is accessible to candidates with visual and other impairments.
- The timing of campaigns will consider potential adverse impacts on diverse groups, such as the potential disadvantage to parents where campaigns are advertised during school holidays, or the impact on Muslim candidates during Ramadan.
- All external campaigns will be actively marketed to internal colleagues and care will be taken to ensure that potential candidates who are pregnant or are on maternity leave are not put at a disadvantage in making an application. We will also ensure that staff on secondment, career-break or long-term sickness absence are made aware of the opportunity
- NAO colleagues will be encouraged to use social media to highlight job postings and share their own experience of working at the NAO.
- Candidates from under-represented groups who indicate interest but don't complete the application process will be contacted and encouraged to submit an application.
- The pool of candidates attracted to each campaign will be kept under review as the campaign progresses, and additional marketing will be brought into play if the applicant pool is not sufficiently diverse.

8. Applications and shortlisting

- Other than for specific vacancies, for example where the campaign is outsourced to an executive search firm, all applications will be made through the NAO recruitment portal. This ensures that full diversity data can be captured.
- Where campaigns are expected to attract large numbers of applications, HR may agree to conduct an initial sift to create a longlist for the panel to consider.
- Shortlisting will be conducted using the selection grid agreed at the outset of the campaign. Ratings for both internal and external candidates will be against the same standard.
- The anonymised diversity profile of the proposed shortlist will be reviewed by the Executive Director from the relevant workstream and the HR Director. Their review will consider whether the profile is appropriately diverse, taking into account the pool of applicants and the external market for the post in question.

- If the shortlist is approved then the campaign can move to the assessment stage. If, however, the review concludes that the shortlist is not appropriately diverse the shortlisting panel may be asked to reconsider candidates discounted at the shortlisting stage or to consider additional marketing for the role. In some circumstances the campaign may have to be reconsidered and relaunched.

9. Assessments

- All assessment processes to be used in a campaign will be agreed prior to the campaign being approved. These will be adjusted to take into account reasonable adjustments required by any candidate.
- Assessments will be conducted in a fair, structured and consistent manner, giving candidates the best opportunity to evidence their suitability for the role.
- Assessments and write-ups will be appropriately recorded in FF (or any alternative system in use at the time).
- Interview questions will be directly applicable to the requirements of the role. They will also provide an opportunity for candidates to evidence their alignment to our corporate values and their active support for diversity and inclusion.
- For assessments involving a group of candidates, for example graduate assessment centres, every effort will be made to ensure that the pool of candidates is representative and diverse.
- Once all assessments have been completed the assessment panel will meet to review the ratings for each candidate and agree a recommendation(s) for appointment.
- Where multiple offers are being made, the anonymised recommendations will be reviewed by the Executive Director from the relevant workstream and the HR Director before offers are approved. For trainee and school leaver assessments this review will be conducted by the lead HR manager on the assessment day who will consult with the HR Director before offers are made.

10. Employment offers

- Once recommendations have been agreed, HR will take responsibility for advising candidates of the outcome of their application and liaising with the preferred candidate(s) over the detail of the offer.
- Salaries can be subject to negotiation within the agreed salary range, taking into account the skills and experience of the individual. Offers above the agreed salary range for an exceptional candidate can only be

endorsed by the Executive Director, Strategy & Resources (or the C&AG for senior level roles).

- Research indicates that male candidates are more likely to enter into negotiations for a higher starting salary than female candidates, so HR will be alive to this risk during the negotiation process. All salary negotiations will set out clearly the wider benefits to candidates of joining the NAO, and bear in mind the principle of ensuring effective and appropriate use of taxpayers' money.
- Where a search agency has been used in the campaign they will act as a liaison point between HR and the preferred candidate.
- If a second or further candidate(s) is deemed suitable for the role they may be kept 'on hold' pending the progress of negotiations with the preferred candidate. If agreement cannot be reached with the preferred candidate, negotiations will commence with the 'on hold' candidate(s).

11. Onboarding

- Following acceptance of an offer, HR will maintain regular contact with the appointed candidate and be in a position to discuss with them arrangements for their onboarding and any support (eg workplace adjustments) which may need to be put in place in advance of them joining the NAO.
- The recruiting manager and the future line manager of the new entrant should also maintain regular contact. This will provide an opportunity to share information on our values and ways of working and make the new colleague feel engaged and supported before they arrive.
- HR will carry out pre-employment checks on the new entrant including reference checks, health questionnaires and baseline security checks. Where appropriate, higher level security checks, principally SC, will be carried out.
- Where any of these checks prove unsatisfactory the NAO may consider withdrawing the employment offer.
- Onboarding and induction will be co-ordinated by HR, in conjunction with the L&D Team and line managers.