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# Good Practice Guide: Involving Service Users in Recruitment

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**Project:** Fulfilling Lives: Supporting people with multiple needs  
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This guide has been prepared by peer researchers from the National Expert Citizens Group, part of the Big Lottery Fund initiative *Fulfilling Lives: Supporting people with multiple needs*. It is informed by qualitative research exploring the extent to which service users were involved in the recruitment undertaken as part of the inception stage of the 12 funded projects.

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## The research

This Good Practice Guide is informed by a peer-led research project conducted between September 2014 and May 2015. The research was based on interviews with key project staff and service users designed and conducted by former service users and current members of the National Expert Citizens Group, established as part of the Fulfilling Lives (multiple needs) initiatives. Further information on the research findings is available in the accompanying report 'Involving service users in recruitment' (June 2015).

## Recommendations for good practice

Recommendations of good practice for involving service users in the recruitment process are described for the following elements of the recruitment process:

- *Strategic Commitment for Service User Involvement In Recruitment*
- *Partnership working and influence beyond Fulfilling Lives (multiple needs)*



- *Stages of the recruitment process*
- *Stage 1 – Job Descriptions and Person Specifications; advertising and promoting opportunities*
- *Stage 2 – Short-listing*
- *Stage 3 – Interviewing*
- *Stage 4 – Decision Making*
- *Selecting service users for involvement in recruitment*
- *Supporting service users involvement in recruitment*
- *Benefits of service user involvement in recruitment*

### **Strategic Commitment for Service User Involvement in Recruitment**

Involving service users in the recruitment of staff is a crucial part of ensuring the right workforce is in place. It is important for organisations to demonstrate strategic support for involving service users in staff recruitment, at all levels in the organisation including senior leaders, middle managers, front-line workers and volunteers.

Strategic support for involving service users should be evidenced in statements made by senior leaders and in policies and procedures produced for recruitment processes and communicated to existing staff and to potential candidates for new posts. Policies and procedures should set practical ways in which service users can be meaningfully involved in each stage of the recruitment process. Information should be collected to evidence the benefits of involving service users in recruitment – for example, the number of potential applicants for a role, staff turnover/retention, staff progression and any financial benefits associated with this.

Those funding new posts, either directly or indirectly, should avoid imposing any requirements around recruitment processes – e.g. how and where posts are advertised – that could negatively impact on service user involvement or on the ability of those with lived experience to apply for those jobs.

### **Collaborative working**

Organisations should consider how they can positively work together with other organisations to ensure service users are involved in the process. Where aspects of service delivery are commissioned out to other organisations – as is the case for Fulfilling Lives (multiple needs) – the commissioning organisation should make it a condition of the contract that service users are involved in staff recruitment and could also set out the ways in which they expect this to take place. Organisations could influence others by sharing information about successful approaches adopted in their own organisation, for example, sharing information about what has not worked as well as what has worked well with regards to involving service users in recruitment. It might also be appropriate for service users to provide direct support to another



organisation, for example from their service user coordinator or members of their own service user group.

### **Stages of the recruitment process**

For those services supporting people with multiple and complex needs getting service users involved in the recruitment of staff is a crucial part of getting the right person into post. It may be necessary (depending on the role) to consider the extent to which different needs/services – i.e. substance misuse, offending, homelessness and mental ill health – can be represented on the panel by service users. This does not necessarily mean having four different service users with experience of different needs as many will have experience of more than one anyway.

Organisations should have a written plan/procedure for how service users will be involved in all stages of the recruitment process, not just as part of interview panels. This should include details of the relative contributions of service users and professional staff to the recruitment process and how decisions will be made. For example, for the interview stage of the process, this might mean setting out the scoring process, such as 20% test; 40% professional panel; 40% service user panel. The following sections look at the main stages of the recruitment process in more detail.

### **Stage 1 – Job Descriptions and Person Specifications; advertising and promoting opportunities**

Developing an appropriate Job Description (JD) and Person Specification (PS) for a role is the starting point of the recruitment process. To ensure that the JD/PS meets the business need identified for the role it is important that service users are involved. More than one service user should contribute to this process. A new or existing forum of service users could be convened to review JD/PS for a role and it is important that the JD/PS is not effectively already finalised to allow service users to have a meaningful input to the process.

JD/PS should clearly set out the value of lived experience relevant to the post. JD/PS should seek, wherever possible, to give lived experience equal weighting with more formal qualifications. Other practical steps should be taken to encourage applications from those potentially disadvantaged in the recruitment process, such as the Two Ticks<sup>1</sup> scheme for employing disabled people and the Ban the Box<sup>2</sup> scheme to encourage those with a criminal conviction to apply for roles.

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<sup>1</sup> The Two Ticks Scheme is a symbol of employers who are committed to employing disabled people and will guarantee an interview for someone who meets the basic conditions for the job. More information is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/looking-for-work-if-disabled/looking-for-a-job> last accessed July 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Ban the Box calls on UK employers to create a fair opportunity for ex-offenders to compete for jobs by removing the tick box from application forms and asking about criminal convictions later in the recruitment process. - See more at: <http://www.bitc.org.uk/programmes/ban-box#sthash.mCDFukul.dpuf>



How and where opportunities are advertised and promoted is another key aspect of encouraging applications from a wide pool of potential candidates. Service users have a useful role to play in this and should be consulted about appropriate ways of promoting the opportunities and encouraged to do so through their own networks.

### **Stage 2 – Short-listing**

Short-listing is the first stage at which prospective candidates are filtered out of the selection process. As such, service users should be involved in this process in the most appropriate way as determined by the organisation and the specific role being recruited. Usually this would be undertaken by those individuals who will also take part in the following stage of the process, interviewing. Service users could undertake short-listing as together with professional staff or as part of a separate process. If the latter, it should be clearly set out how the service users short-listing will contribute to the overall process.

### **Stage 3 – Interviewing**

Interviewing is the critical part of the recruitment process at which the final decision is made to appoint new staff into post. Some organisations incorporate service user representation into one recruitment panel, whereas others convene separate interview panels for service users and professional staff. Either model can work effectively; the key is that service users have an independent voice and carry equal weight to that of other individuals involved in the process, regardless of what approach is adopted for the interviewing stage.

Service users who participate on interview panels should develop their own questions and this may be something which a wider group of service users is able to feed into. They should have a say in how their questions fit with others and their questions should carry equal weight in terms of scoring and assessment. Service users should also have an input to the overall wording and tone of all questions being asked in the interview, not just their own. Service users – and other interview panel members – should all sign-off that they are happy with all aspects of the interview process, including questions and scoring system, prior to the interviews.

If a test or scenario is included as part of the recruitment process, this could also benefit from service user involvement to make sure that it helps the organisation to learn more about the prospective candidate in a way which is relevant to the role.

### **Stage 4 – Decision Making**

The opinion of service users should carry equal weight to that of any other individual involved in making the final decision regarding recruitment. The process for making the final decision should be set out in the relevant policies and procedures. This should include details of any scoring-system in place and the relative weightings given to different aspects of the process.



## Selecting service users for involvement in recruitment

Organisations should ensure that there is a variety of service user voice involved across all stages of the recruitment process. Those not able to make the considerable commitment to being part of an interview panel could contribute in other ways. Service user groups could contribute to the development of JD/PS or develop a suitable test or scenario for the recruitment process. Other individuals could be trained and supported to participate in short-listing, interviewing and making the final decision on appointments.

Organisations should have a process in place for a variety of individuals to get involved and for those individuals to progress their own development through their involvement in recruitment. Having a large pool of individuals who are trained and able to get involved in recruitment will ensure that it is not always ‘the same faces’ who are representing service users. It will also allow back-up when individuals are not able to attend or have to drop out of the process for any reason. Selection of those to take part should be a randomised process and not favour one or two individuals.

## Supporting service users involvement in recruitment

Providing the necessary training and support is essential to enable service users to take a meaningful role in the recruitment of staff. Organisations should provide training and support as necessary on the practicalities of making a meaningful contribution to the recruitment process. This should align with any wider training and support being provided to individuals. The following areas of learning should be considered:

- understanding Job Descriptions and Person Specification (purpose and content)
- different approaches to recruitment – e.g. behavioural versus competency models
- policies around ‘Fair and Equal Selection’, including approaches such as Two Ticks<sup>3</sup> and Ban the Box<sup>4</sup>
- short-listing processes and any scoring systems in place
- devising appropriate interview questions
- conducting interviews – what can and can’t be asked; how to score responses to questions; reaching a consensus on decisions

In addition to training, it is also important for organisations to consider any practical support which individuals need to sustain their involvement in the recruitment process. For example, providing money for travel and subsistence and taking into account any potential impact on benefits.

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<sup>3</sup> The Two Ticks is a Government backed approach to encourage applications from disabled people, retention in employment and increasing staff awareness of issues around disability. Further details available here: <https://www.gov.uk/recruitment-disabled-people/encouraging-applications>

<sup>4</sup> ibid



## **Benefits of service user involvement in recruitment**

Demonstrating the benefits of service user involvement in recruitment is a key part of securing strategic support for it and of influencing other organisations across the sector. It is recommended that organisations publicise the way in which they involve service users in recruitment and the benefits this brings to encourage others to adopt and embed similar practices.

The benefits of involving service users in recruitment are twofold: for the individual involved and for the organisation seeking to recruit new staff. At an individual level service users can apply their knowledge about the recruitment process in furthering their own career and develop their confidence and self-esteem through taking a meaningful role in the process. For organisations they stand a better chance of conducting a successful recruitment process which identifies the best candidate for the role with an increased chance of retaining them in post. It also demonstrates that an organisation values service users and the lived experience and other skills/knowledge that they have to offer.

## **Further information**

For further information about this peer-led research project or the national evaluation of Big Lottery Fund's *Fulfilling Lives: Supporting people with multiple needs* please contact:

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