

Employment References Policy

Ref ID: W16.4

Additionally refer to:

- Fit and Proper Persons Policy
- Recruitment and Selection
- Disciplinary Policy
- Disclosure and Barring Service Checks (DBS)
- Maintaining Personal Files
- Fixed Term Contractors and Temporary Workers
- Verification of Professional Registration
- Equality & Diversity
- Data Protection, GDPR and Confidentiality Policy
- NHS Employers Employment History and Reference Checks Guidance

Version:	V3.1	
V1 issued	April 2011	
V3.1 Approved by	JNCC	Policy Approval Group
V3.1 Date approved	July 2024	September 2024
V3.1 Ratified by	Director of People and OD	
V3.1 Date ratified	August 2024	
Document Lead	People Governance and Projects Manager	
Lead Director	Director of People and OD	
Date issued:	September 2024	
Review date:	June 2027	
Target audience:	All SaTH Employees	

Version Control Sheet

Document Lead/Contact:	Nick Dowd, People Governance and Projects Manager
Document ID	W16.4
Version	3.1
Status	Final
Date EqIA completed	April 2024
Issue Date	September 2024
Review Date	June 2027
Distribution	Please refer to the intranet version for the latest version of this policy. Any printed copies may not necessarily be the most up to date
Key Words – including abbreviations if these would be reasonably expected to be used as search terms	W16.4, W16, Employment References Policy, References, Employment
Dissemination	HR pages on intranet; Information Bulletin

Version History

Version	Date	Author	Status	Comment
1	April 2011	William Wraith	Final	Employment References Policy
2	July 2020	Keith Hudson	Draft	Employment References Policy, W16.4
3	June 2024	Nick Dowd	Draft	Policy updated in line with relevant legislation and good practice.
3.1	Sep 2024	Chris Goulding	Final	Amendments made following PAG as approved subject to these.

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Policy on a Page

This policy outlines the process that applies to both requesting and providing employment references. The policy complies with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), 2018 and outlines the process that applies to both requesting and providing employment references.

The Trust has a responsibility to provide a fair and timely reference in response to requests from external organisations and for line managers to provide references for employees gaining internal promotion.

This policy applies to all staff including staff registered with the Temporary Staffing Department and those employed on temporary or fixed-term contracts and agency workers where it is deemed appropriate for the Trust to provide a reference.

- It is Trust policy to only provide factual references in response to requests from external organisations and for employees seeking internal promotion. (Reference requests for financial matters i.e. mortgages and personal loans will be handled by Pay Services and are beyond the scope of this policy).
- A reference should aim to provide details of:
 - Where the individual has been employed or has studied.
 - The dates of employment, or duration of study.
 - The position held or course undertaken.
 - Any recent or ongoing disciplinary action or referrals including employees who are subject to performance/capability sanctions.
 - The reasons for leaving employment, training, or study, (where this is known).
- All offers of employment should be subject to obtaining references covering a period of three years, which are satisfactory to the Trust.
- References should normally be requested after the interview.
- Where references are requested prior to interview, for example, for senior appointments such as Medical Consultants or Executive Directors, these must not be seen by the Interview Panel until the outcome of the interviews is known, as references should not form part of the decision-making process of the interview.
- All applicants must be advised in writing when obtaining references at the earliest stage in the recruitment process.
- In all cases, the Trust must seek the applicant's permission before obtaining a reference from their current employer, as they may not have informed them of their intentions to leave the organisation.
- For all new appointments, the Trust will seek the necessary references to validate a minimum period of three consecutive years of continuous employment or training immediately prior to the application being made.

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 This policy covers both the circumstances when the Trust requests or provides a reference in relation to employment and describes the processes that ensure effective recruitment of staff. It outlines the steps to be followed including pre-employment checks.
- 1.2 It is Trust policy to only provide factual references.
- 1.3 Reference requests concerning financial matters including mortgages and personal loans will be handled by the Pay Services department and are excluded from the scope of this policy.
- 1.4 In implementing this policy, managers must ensure that all staff are treated fairly and within the provisions and spirit of the Trust's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy (W30). Special attention should be paid to ensuring the policy is understood when using it for staff new to the NHS or Trust.

2. Scope

- 2.1 The policy applies to all staff who have a responsibility for recruiting staff, including staff registered with the Temporary Staffing Department and those employed on temporary or fixed-term contracts.
- 2.2 This policy also applies to agency workers where it is deemed appropriate for the Trust to request or provide a reference for these workers.

3. Definitions

- 3.1 Employment reference – a factual reference provided to an external organisation requesting a reference for an ex-employee, or a preferred candidate who has successfully been conditionally offered a role within the Trust following an interview to confirm employment with the Trust, or for existing employees who have successfully been appointed to another role within the Trust.
- 3.2 A reference should aim to provide details of:
 - Where the individual has been employed or has studied.
 - The dates of employment, or duration of study.
 - The position held or, course undertaken.
 - Any recent or ongoing disciplinary action or referrals including employees who are subject to performance/capability sanctions.
 - The reasons for leaving employment, training or study, (where this is known).
- 3.3 A copy of the Reference template used by the Trust along with the Factual Reference Flow Chart can be found in Appendix A.

- 3.4 Financial reference – a reference which confirms financial details, for example salary, for the purpose of mortgage applications, home rental etc.
- 3.5 Character/personal reference – a reference provided by a colleague in a personal capacity. Such references must not be on headed paper, must not contain official work email addresses or the organisational stamp.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 Trust Board

The Trust Board has a strategic responsibility to ensure that the policy is communicated to all employees and is effectively implemented.

4.2 Recruitment Team

The Recruitment Team is responsible for requesting all pre-employment references for non-medical staff in line with employment legislation and NHS standards.

4.3 Medical People Services

Medical People Services is responsible for requesting pre-employment references for medical staff in line with employment legislation and NHS standards. This does not include Post Graduate Doctors in Training as they are regarded as being in continuous employment for their full period of training.

4.4 Workforce Assurance Team

The Workforce Assurance Team is responsible for extracting data from the electronic staff records to populate the Trust's factual reference template, (Appendix A).

4.5 People Advisory Team (HR)

The People Advisory Team is responsible for providing information regarding any relevant employee relations matters, e.g. live warnings etc.

4.6 Applicants

All applicants are responsible for ensuring they complete the appropriate section of the application form giving details of suitable referees.

4.7 Employees

Employees seeking a reference from the Trust should ensure they include the correct contact details for the Workforce Assurance Team (not their line Manager's name) to enable a timely reference to be provided. All requests should be sent to the following email address; sath.esr@nhs.net, and employees must include their name and National Insurance number, along with confirmation of their consent.

5. Pre-Employment References

- 5.1 All offers of employment should be subject to obtaining references covering a period of three years, which are satisfactory to the Trust (see 5.3.2 regarding existing staff). References should normally be requested **after** the interview for the successful candidate only. Where references are requested prior to interview, for example, for senior appointments such as Medical Consultants or Executive Directors, these must not be seen by the Interview Panel until the outcome of the interviews is known, as references should not form part of the decision making process of the interview. All applicants must be advised in writing when references will be obtained at an earlier stage in the recruitment process.
- 5.2 In all cases, the Trust must seek the applicant's permission before obtaining a reference from their current employer, as they may not have informed them of their intentions to leave the organisation.
- 5.3 For all new appointments, the Trust will seek the necessary references to validate a minimum period of three consecutive years of continuous employment or training immediately prior to the application being made.
- 5.3.1 If the applicant is employed by another organisation, one reference **must** be from their current or most recent employer.
- 5.3.2 If the applicant is changing roles internally within the Trust, or is currently working as a member of the Trust's staff bank, or is someone wishing to return to the Trust, (having left employment within the last 3 years), they will be required to complete a Self-Declaration form, a copy of which is contained in Appendix C.
- 5.3.3 If the applicant is unemployed, one of the references must, wherever possible, be from the applicant's most recent employer and references from the last three years of employment; if the applicant has been unemployed for a lengthy period, advice should be sought from the Recruitment Team.
- 5.3.4 If the applicant has indicated they have left or are leaving full-time education, references to validate their academic history should be sought from the individual's professor, academic tutor or headteacher.
- 5.3.5 For periods of self-employment, references should be sought to confirm that the Individual's business was properly conducted. This may include seeking information from customers or clients, bankers, accountants, HM Revenue and Customs, or Companies House.
- 5.3.6 If an applicant is registered with an Agency or Consortium, references must be obtained from that Agency or Consortium.

- 5.3.7 Where the applicant has indicated they have undertaken volunteer work, references may be sought through the relevant charity or organisation hosting that activity.
- 5.3.8 As part of the application process, candidates are required to give a reasonable account of any significant periods of time spent overseas (a continuous period of six months or more). If the candidate has declared that they have been employed or have trained overseas (including volunteer work or time served with the armed forces), references should be sought from the relevant body. In a number of European countries, employees are given a government-issue labour book which contains information about their employment history. The Trust will accept this document instead of seeking employment references, however, candidates will be asked to provide supporting documentary evidence such as a passport or work permit.
- 5.4 Advice should be sought from the Recruitment Team or Medical People Services, (where appropriate), where no references are obtained or where a reference is incomplete, unsatisfactory or gives limited assurance.
- 5.5 If the applicant does not name their current (or any other) employer as a referee, this should be discussed at interview. Should the applicant refuse to give the name of a referee it must be explained to them that **NO** offer of employment can be made without suitable references being received, that are satisfactory to the Trust.

6. Providing a Personal Reference

- 6.1 Personal references, e.g. for a colleague, are provided at the discretion of the referee and will not be authorised by the Trust. These include character references and testimonials.
- 6.2 If an employee is approached to give a personal or character reference, it is advisable for them to clarify that the content will be provided through his/her relationship with the candidate in a personal capacity.
- 6.3 Personal references must **NOT** be issued on Trust headed paper.
- 6.4 It should be made clear that the reference is personal and is not authorised by nor provided on behalf of the Trust.
- 6.5 The referee who provides a personal reference is personally liable for any adverse consequences of such a reference, with no recourse to the Trust.

7. Providing an Employment Reference

- 7.1 Requests to the Trust to provide an employment reference should be sent wherever possible by email using a professional address to sath.esr@nhs.net . Any paper requests received must be on the headed notepaper of the company/organisation making the

request. Some organisations, such as the NHS may request references as part of an automated process by e-mail which can be easily verified by contacting the company/organisation. If this is not possible, please refer to the Workforce Assurance Team for guidance.

- 7.2 To comply with GDPR legislation, clarification must be sought from the recruiting organisation that consent has been given by the individual for their data to be released in the form of a reference.
- 7.3 All employment reference requests will be dealt with centrally by the Workforce Assurance Team, in conjunction with the People Advisory Team. This includes medical staff but does not include references for Doctors in training at the end of their placement. References for those Doctors should be provided by the local department where they worked.
- 7.4 Any employee who provides a reference who is not authorised to do so may be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the Trust's Disciplinary Policy (W7)
- 7.5 The reference will be provided using a standard template (Appendix A).
- 7.6 For candidates who are transferring from the Trust to another NHS Employer, the Workforce Assurance Team may provide a reference using the Inter Authority Transfer function on the Electronic Staff Record (ESR).
- 7.7 If the employee resigned before a disciplinary investigation has been concluded or action has been taken, a note will be made on the reference to this effect.

8. Providing a Financial Reference

- 8.1 Reference requests concerning financial matters including mortgages and personal loans will be handled by the Pay Services department and are excluded from the scope of this policy.

9. Data Protection and Safe Handling and Storage of References

- 9.1 Data Protection legislation requires the information contained in personal/job references to be handled confidentially at all times.
- 9.2 During the appointments process, references received by the Trust for candidates are privileged documents and as such their contents must not be divulged to the candidate, nor should references be photocopied. If applicants wish to see the reference they should contact the provider of the reference.
- 9.3 Where administration staff, designated recruitment administration staff, and/or managers are handling references, the contents of a reference must not be disclosed to anyone other than members of the interview panel and only then after the appointment decision has been made.

- 9.4 If a current or former employee wishes to see a reference that the Trust has provided for them, they should make a Subject Access Request addressed to the Workforce Assurance Team.
- 9.5 A reference obtained for the successful candidate at interview will be kept in their personal file. If references were obtained for unsuccessful candidates, these will be retained on Trac for a period of 400 days after the application has been submitted.

10. Training Needs

- 10.1 Managers are expected to be familiar with the contents of this policy and to seek further guidance as necessary from the HR homepage on the Trust's intranet.

11. Review and Monitoring

- 11.1 This policy will be reviewed every three years unless there are significant changes at either national policy level, or locally. In order that this policy remains current, any of the appendices can be amended and approved during the lifetime of the policy without having to return to the ratifying committee.
- 11.2 Audits of recruitment files may take place to ensure consistency of security, handling and storage.

12. Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

- 12.1 This policy applies to all employees equally and does not discriminate positively or negatively between protected characteristics. The reference process is based on objective information and any health matters within a reference must take account of potential underlying disabilities.

13. Standards of Business Conduct

- 13.1 The Trust follows good NHS Business practice as outlined in the Code of Conduct and Managing Conflicts of Interest in the NHS and has robust controls in place to prevent bribery. Due consideration has been given to the Bribery Act 2010 in the review of this policy document and no specific risks were identified.

14. Process for Monitoring Compliance

Aspect of compliance or effectiveness being monitored	Monitoring method	Responsibility for monitoring (job title)	Frequency of monitoring	Group or Committee that will review the findings and monitor completion of any resulting action plan
Active management of any complaint regarding references, and monitoring of quality of internal references.	Ad-hoc quality checks.	People Governance and Projects Manager	Ad-hoc	JNCC

15 References

- NHS Employers: Employment History and Reference Checks (January 2024)

Appendix A

Reference Provided by The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust

Name of individual:					
Date of birth or NI number:					
Start date at Trust:		End date at Trust (If Applicable):			
Current/last position(s) held (including grade/band)					
Reason for candidate leaving (if applicable or known)					
Number of calendar days sickness within the last 24 months;	Days:		Episodes:		
Current warnings on the applicant's record or if the applicant has left, were there any formal warnings on the record at the time of leaving?	Conduct/ Disciplinary		Performance/ Capability		
Is, or at the time of leaving, was the applicant under investigation for any formal matter including conduct/disciplinary or performance/capability, under any Workforce policies?	Conduct/ Disciplinary		Performance/ Capability		Other
Are you aware of any recent/outstanding allegations that were made against the applicant that relate to any safeguarding issues/referrals (including any referrals to the Disclosure and Barring Service or Independent Safeguarding Authority)?					
Are you aware of any recent/outstanding referrals to the applicant's Professional Registration Body?					
If Yes, please give details;					

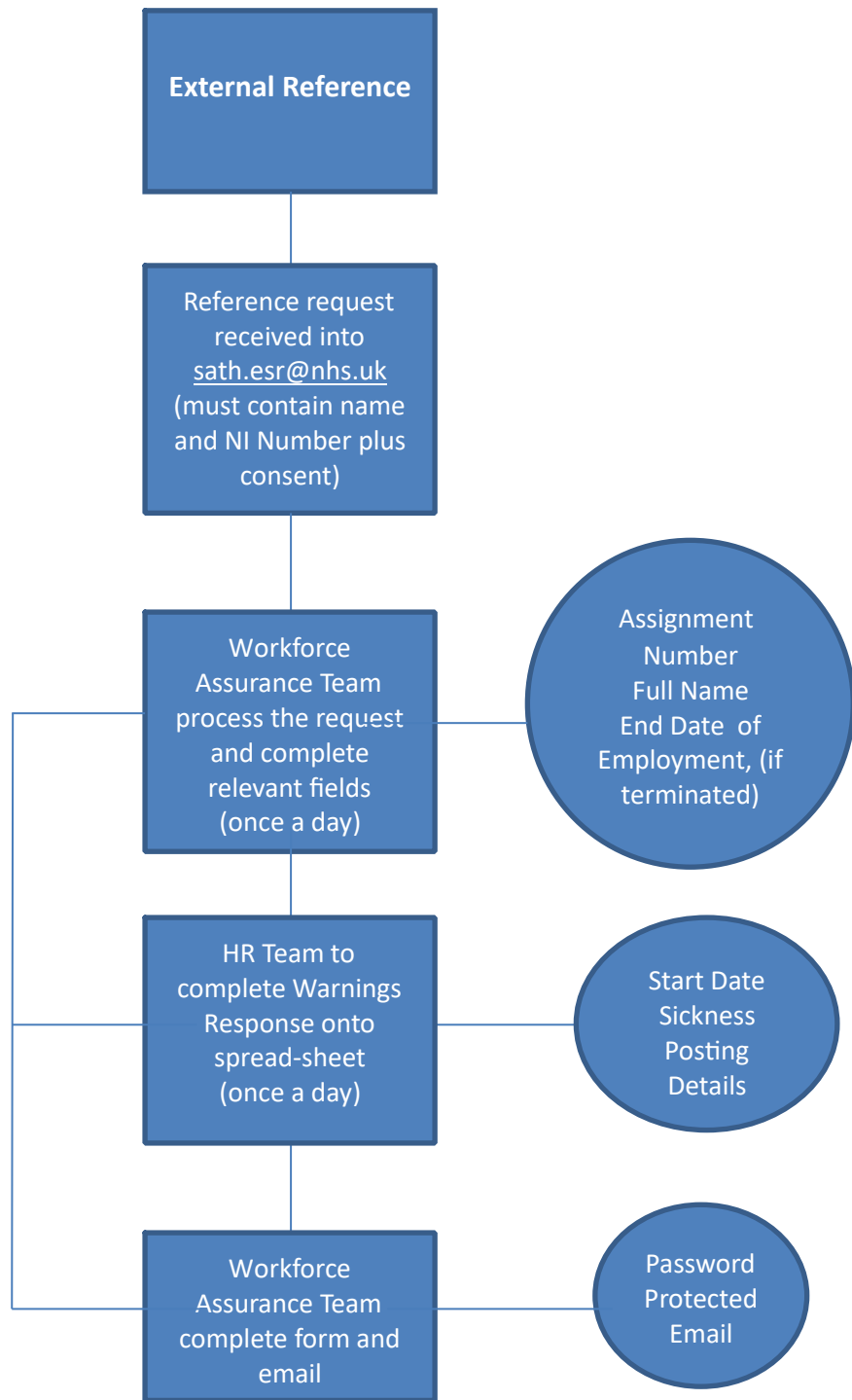
NAME	
JOB TITLE	
CONTACT NUMBER	
DATE COMPLETED	
EMAIL ADDRESS	

The answers given on this reference have been provided in good faith and are correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Data Protection

This form contains personal data as defined by the Data Protection Act 2018 (as amended by the General Data Protection Regulation 2018).. This data has been provided by The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust and is exclusively for the purpose of recruitment. The intended recipient must protect any information disclosed within this form and ensure that it is not passed to anyone who is not authorised to have this information.

Factual Reference Flow Chart



Appendix C

Self-declaration for internal candidates/bank staff moving into another role within the Trust and candidates wishing to return to the Trust (who left within the last 3 years)

Can you please read the statements below and provide a response:

1. Do you have any warnings on your employment record that have not been disposed of including conduct/disciplinary, performance/capability or sickness? This may include warnings that could have been imposed, if you had not left before an investigation had been completed?

Yes or No (please delete whichever is not applicable)

If 'yes', please provide further information:

.....
.....
.....
.....

2. Are you under investigation for any matter (including conduct/disciplinary, performance/capability or sickness) under any of the Trust's employment policies? This may include any formal action that could have been taken, if you had not left before the investigation had concluded?

Yes or No (please delete whichever is not applicable)

If 'yes', please provide further information:

.....
.....
.....
.....

3. Are you subject to any recent/outstanding allegations that have been made against you that relate to safeguarding issues/or referrals (including any referrals to the DBS)

Yes or No (please delete whichever is not applicable) If 'yes', please provide further information:

.....
.....
.....
.....

DECLARATION - IMPORTANT

I confirm that the information that I have provided in this declaration form is correct and complete. I understand and accept that if I knowingly withhold information, or provide false or misleading information, this may result in my application being rejected, or if I am appointed, in my dismissal, and I may be liable to prosecution.

Please sign and date this form:

Full name (in block capitals):.....

Date:.....
.....

Signature:.....
.....

Data protection

This form contains personal data as defined by the Data Protection Act 2018 (as amended by the General Data Protection Regulation 2018). This data has been requested by The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust exclusively for the purpose of recruitment. The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust must protect any information disclosed within this form and ensure that it is not passed to anyone who is not authorised to have this information.