

EMPLOYING YOUR NEW STARTER

Guide 2.4: Obtaining References

When taking on someone new, it's always a good idea to check your facts. Did they really work where they said they did? How well did they do their job there? Getting a reference may help answer these questions.

Who to Contact

Whether it was something you discussed in the interview, or read from their CV, your new employee will have said something about where they have worked before. Now is the time to confirm these details. You can choose how many previous employers you want to contact, but it's a good idea to contact at least the last two. If your new employee has worked for a lot of different employers, you may want to contact more referees.

You could decide to make sure you have references for the last three years, for example.

For each employer, you will need the following details from your new starter:

- Name of person to be contacted for the reference
- Company name
- Working relationship to the New Starter (e.g., previous employer)
- Email address
- Phone number

It's best to get a written reference (by email) but you may need a phone number to chase up the request if it's not sent quickly.

It may be that this is your new employee's first job after leaving school or university. In that case, ask them for contact details of someone in their educational establishment who has known them for some time.

Work or education references are best, but if, for whatever reason, your new employee cannot provide these details, then you could ask for details of a personal referee. Ideally this should be from a person who has known them for many years, is a professional or of standing in the community (such as a police officer or GP) and is not related to them in any way.

What to Ask

When requesting a reference, it's a good idea to send the referee a brief description of the job they will be doing for you. If you have a job description, send that.

You can ask the referee for the following details:

- Position the new starter held at their organisation:
- The referee's relationship to the new starter:
- Dates of employment:
- Main duties undertaken:
- Salary:
- Sickness or absence record – but ask them not to include absences related to disability or to parental rights, for example maternity leave (this may constitute discrimination if it is related to Protected Characteristics):
- Any current, relevant disciplinary records:
- Reason for leaving job:
- Any comments they may have on character, strengths and weaknesses:

A template letter you can use to request a reference is provided below.

Standard References

Some companies have a policy of only providing a standard reference. This means that whatever you ask them they will only provide:

- Name of job undertaken
- Date employment started
- Date employed ended

From this you can tell whether your new employee did work where they claimed to. If you get a standard reference, you should not assume it reflects badly on the new employee in any way – it simply reflects company policy.

Are References Confidential?

References should be marked 'Confidential' and 'For the Addressee Only'. This helps to protect your business from a possible libel claim and is in line with data protection laws.

For HR support, please contact Colden HR on [0121 284 0852](tel:01212840852) or email enquiries@coldenhr.co.uk and quote your NCASS membership number.