

# **PDSA Policy References**

**Last reviewed date: August 2019**

## Policy Statement

Reference checks assist PDSA in helping to decide whether an individual is suitable for a role within the organisation.

Reference checks are part of the standard recruitment process and apply to all roles in PDSA.

PDSA is fully committed to safeguarding the welfare of everyone it comes into contact with. Other background checks may therefore also apply depending on the role.

All offers of employment with PDSA are conditional upon receipt of 2 satisfactory references.

## References Policy - Objectives

The objectives of this policy and the supporting procedure are to:

- Outline PDSA's reference process to assist in checking the suitability of an individual to fulfil a role;
- Outline PDSA's stance on references and the consequences of not fulfilling the condition of employment;
- Outline PDSA's commitment to the safeguarding of all parties whom it may come into contact with;
- Set out the responsibilities of all parties involved in the reference process;
- Provide information and guidance on how references will be requested and processed at PDSA; and
- To ensure compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Equality Act 2010 when handling information contained within references.

## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.0 What are references?**

A reference is a communication (usually a letter) from a previous employer that provides information on the individual's employment. References provide an opportunity for the PDSA to check the employment information provided by the individual and to gather information on his or her time working for his or her current employer and/or previous employer(s).

### **1.2 Why are references important?**

Obtaining 2 references helps in the decision making around assessing an individual's suitability to fulfil a role. It also helps to protect our people and our reputation. Getting references adds another stage to the recruitment process, but it is an important safeguarding precaution and can be a deterrent for those who have something to hide.

## **2.0 Responsibilities**

### **2.1 Candidate/Employee Responsibilities**

Individuals have a responsibility to provide the names and contact details of 2 suitable referees soon after they receive their offer of employment and at the very latest prior to their start date.

It is the candidate's responsibility to ensure their referee's respond to the request and ensure 2 references are returned as soon as possible. References must be returned within 4 weeks of the start date.

### **2.2 HR Responsibilities**

HR Shared Services will monitor and review the overall reference process by;

- Alerting the line manager if 2 references are not received in the appropriate time frame.
- Alerting the line manager if a reference is received that warrants discussion with the individual.
- Completing all external references requests received on behalf of PDSA.
- Ensuring all references are stored securely in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

### **2.3 Line Manager Responsibilities**

Line managers are responsible for requesting referee details from their new starter as part of the offer process. This is done through the online application tracking system.

The line manager is responsible for checking suitable referees have been provided and sending out subsequent reference requests. Where referee details are not supplied the line manager will contact the individual to discuss as this may affect the start date or offer of employment.

Line managers will review references received and act accordingly. In relevant cases, the line manager, supported by the Regional HR Operations Advisor, may need to discuss a reference received with the individual either over the telephone or in person.

### **3.0 Reference process**

#### **3.1 When will referees be requested?**

Only those individuals that have been offered employment with PDSA will be required to give referee details. Referee details will be requested during the offer process and are to be provided prior to the start date.

#### **3.2 When and how are references requested?**

PDSA will obtain express permission from the individual before references are sought in order to comply with their rights under General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). This is done through the on-line application tracking system. By providing referee details, individuals give their express consent for PDSA to contact their referees immediately.

Ideally written references should be obtained but where this is not possible, a verbal reference may be requested. In this case, the line manager should complete the reference request form, ensuring all questions are answered, and they should sign and date the form themselves stating the name and position of the individual who provided the verbal reference.

#### **3.3 What information is requested?**

Reference requests will only ask for information that will help decide whether the individual is suitable for the role with PDSA, such as employment dates, job title and reasons for leaving. Information is also sought around the individual's suitability to work with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

#### **3.4 Who can provide a reference?**

PDSA will always ask for 2 suitable referees to be provided. PDSA define a suitable referee as the individual's most recent employer. PDSA will request references from the individual's current employer and the employer prior to that to ensure the information is up to date and relevant.

In situations where the individual is unable to provide 2 suitable referees PDSA may accept a character reference from, for example, a teacher, college tutor, landlord, support worker or community group leader. PDSA does not accept references from a family member or a friend.

#### **3.5 What is considered satisfactory?**

As per a condition of employment, both references received must be to the satisfaction of PDSA. The line manager will be responsible for deciding if a reference

is satisfactory or not. The below list is an indication of what may constitute satisfactory (but not exhaustive):

- The information in the reference matches that given by the individual e.g. previous date of employment and job titles.
- The information in the reference is unambiguous and clear
- Any discrepancies in information provided can be clarified either by the referee or the individual

#### **4.0 Managing references received**

In order to fulfil a condition of employment, ideally PDSA should be in receipt of 2 satisfactory references prior to the individual commencing in their role.

PDSA recognises there may be occasions where this is not practical and therefore may decide it appropriate to allow additional time in which to receive 2 satisfactory references. References must be returned within 4 weeks of the start date.

##### **4.1 2 satisfactory references received**

When 2 satisfactory references are received, they will be logged and stored securely, in line with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). The individual will have successfully met that condition of employment.

##### **4.2 No referees provided**

Prior to the start date it is imperative the individual has provided the names of 2 suitable referees. In cases where no referees are provided this may delay the start date or even result in PDSA withdrawing their offer of employment.

##### **4.3 References sent but not returned**

Where 2 suitable referees have been provided but the references have not been returned by 4 weeks into employment, the line manager will invite the employee to a meeting, along with the Regional HR Operations Advisor.

The circumstances will be discussed, and a decision will be made about continued employment.

##### **4.4 Unsatisfactory reference received**

The line manager will always take steps to obtain clarification in respect of any information provided in a reference that is ambiguous or otherwise unclear. PDSA will not automatically assume information contained in a reference that differs from that provided by the individual is correct.

The line manager will invite the individual to a meeting, along with the Regional HR Operations Advisor. The individual will be given the opportunity to provide an explanation to any discrepancies between the information they have provided and that disclosed in the reference.

The exact content or source of the reference will not be disclosed. An exception to this may be to clarify factual information that the individual will already be aware of

such as dates of employment.

In order to make an informed decision on the individual's continued employment the line manager will investigate the situation. Consideration will be given to whether the information provided is relevant to the post that the individual will be fulfilling. Any process of verification may involve PDSA contacting the referee for further clarity. Where this is the case, PDSA will endeavor to make the individual aware. PDSA may also request additional referees with the individual's consent.

## **5.0 2 satisfactory references not received – outcomes**

### **5.1 Reference risk assessment**

In exceptional cases, where 2 satisfactory references have not been received, a risk assessment may be deemed appropriate. This will be carried out by the line manager, supported by the Regional HR Operations Advisor, and the individual. A meeting will usually take place first to determine if this is appropriate in the circumstances.

A risk assessment may be completed in cases where there is a good valid reason why 2 satisfactory references cannot be provided such as;

- An individual has worked for the same employer for longer than 7 years (therefore likely any prior employer likely to have disregarded their details)
- An individual has only worked for one previous employer
- Previous employer no longer operating/ceased trading
- Previous employer's policy is not to provide a reference

Upon completion of the risk assessment, a decision will be made as to whether the individual can continue in the role or whether their employment is ended.

### **5.2 Pre-employment – withdrawal of offer**

If a reference is deemed unsatisfactory from PDSA's perspective, and the individual has not commenced employment, the offer will be withdrawn.

PDSA will handle withdrawing a job offer in a sensitive manner and verbally (initially). The line manager will telephone the individual to explain that a condition of the offer has not been met and that the offer of employment is being withdrawn. This conversation will be followed up in writing.

The individual will have the opportunity to talk about the decision and the line manager will take the time to listen sensitively to the individual's views. The line manager will record the reason for withdrawing the offer and the main points of the conversation.

### **5.3 Commenced in role – Termination of employment**

If a reference is deemed unsatisfactory from PDSA's perspective, and the individual has commenced employment, the individual's employment may be terminated.

A decision to dismiss will only be made after the circumstances of the case have been thoroughly investigated and all other options have been explored but deemed inappropriate. Other options may include conducting a risk assessment or redeployment into a different role.

## 6.0 Responding to References received

PDSA has a moral duty to provide a reference but will only provide factual information.

It is PDSA policy to confirm only the individual's job title and dates of employment. No further information will be shared. There may be exceptional circumstances where we are required, or believe that it is appropriate, to share additional details, for example for safeguarding purposes.

The Human Resources Shared Service team will provide a reference on behalf of PDSA. Line managers should not provide a reference for either a current or ex-employee.

Reference requests should be sent by email to [hr.administration@pdsa.org.uk](mailto:hr.administration@pdsa.org.uk). References are provided in writing only; no verbal references will be given.

References will only be provided to a future employer; references will not be sent directly to the individual.

Any references provided will be done in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Equality Act 2010.

PDSA do not give general references or 'to whom it may concern' letters, unless in exceptional circumstances.

### **Supporting procedures and Information:**

*Recruitment policy*

*References Risk Assessment*