

REDUCING THE ODDS

SELECTION METHODS FOR SENIOR
POSTS IN THE HOSPITAL SERVICE



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REDUCING THE ODDS

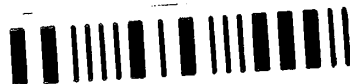
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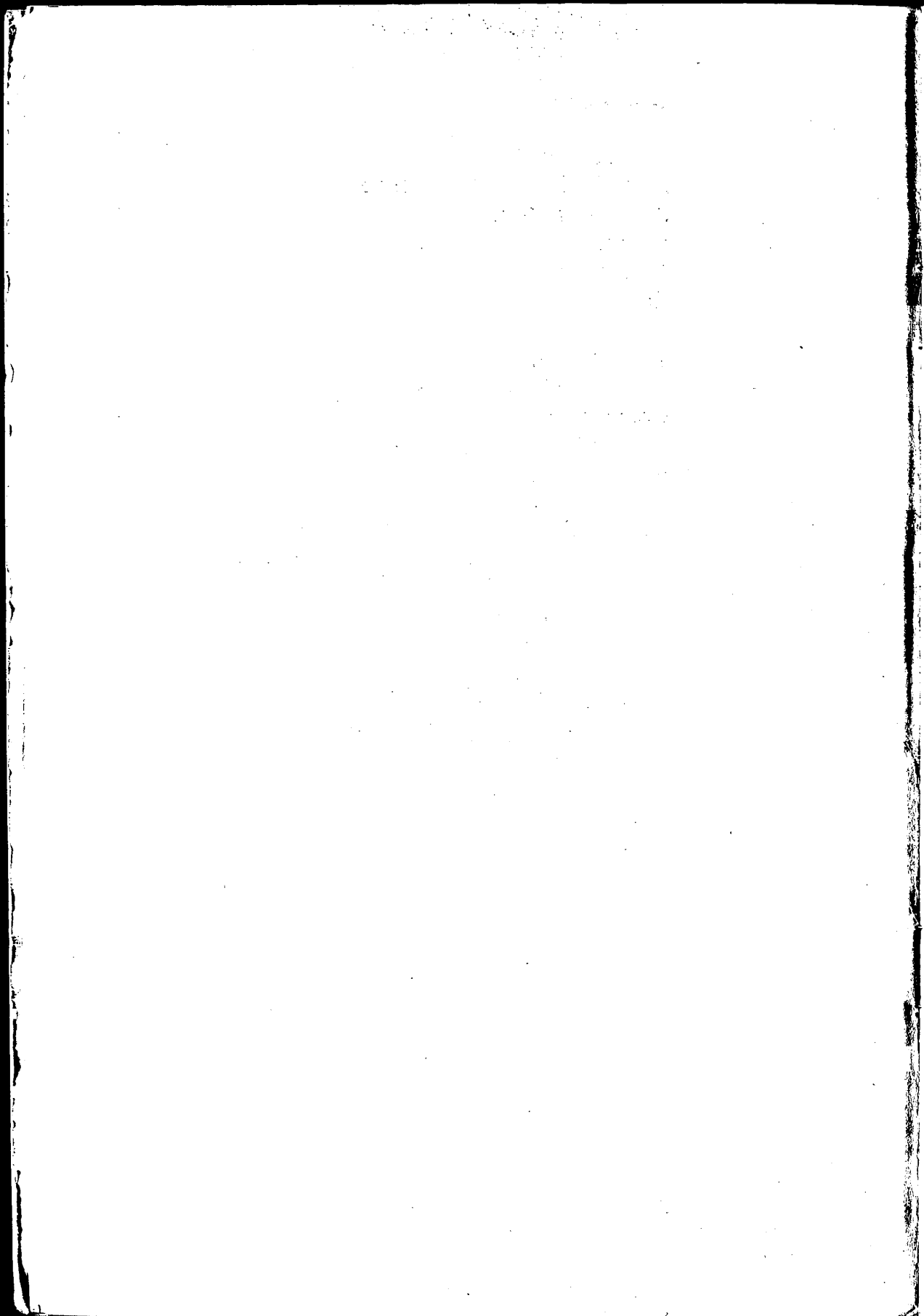
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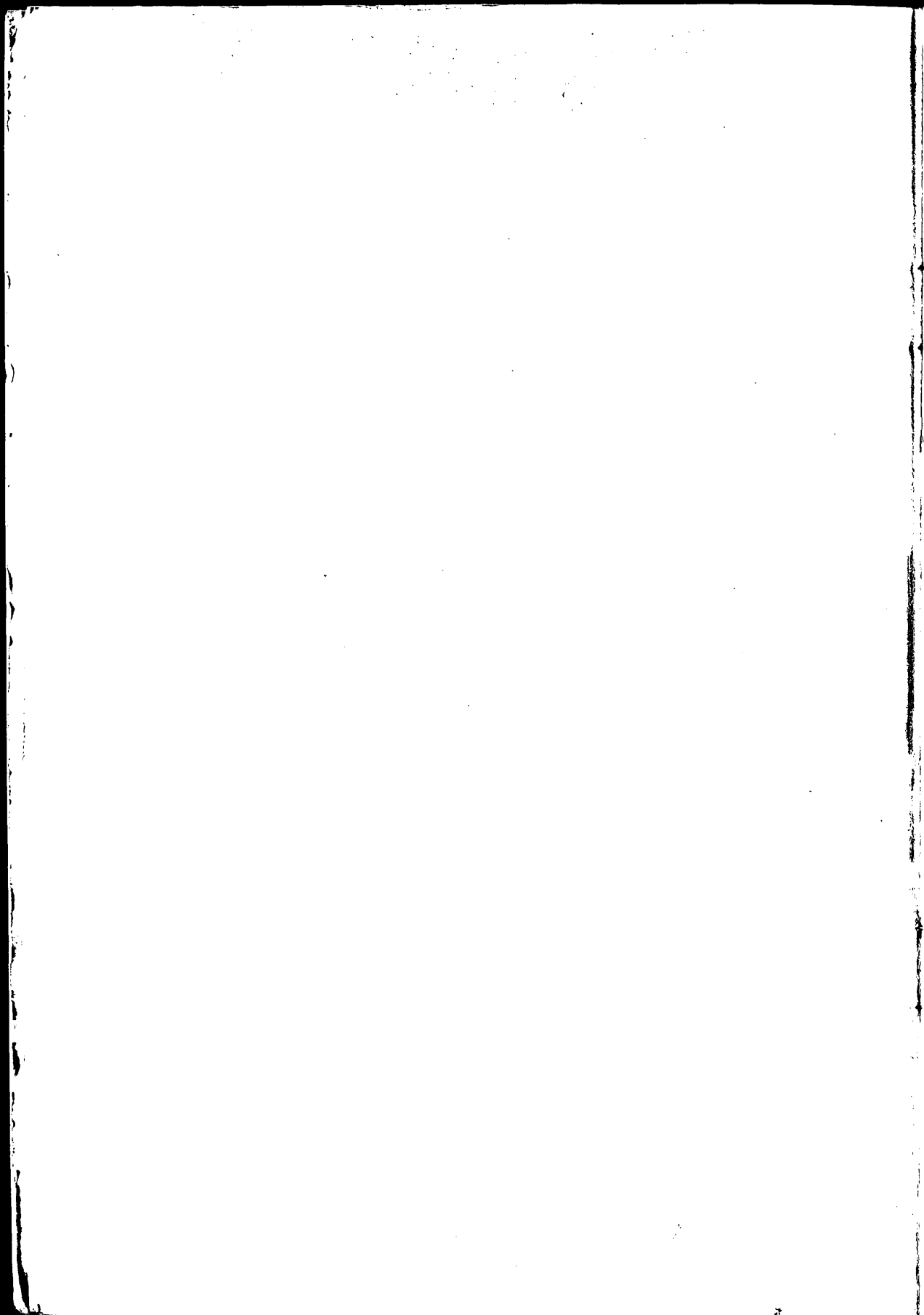
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Introduction Both the National Staff Committee, in their report enclosed with *HM(67)2*, and the National Nursing Staff Committee have drawn attention to the importance of the techniques of personnel selection and interviewing, and urge that members and officers of employing authorities should have some knowledge of them. The procedure for appointing hospital administrative staff was laid down in *HM(67)2* and *HM(67)71*, but within this framework there seemed to be a need for guidance on good practice. The King's Fund, in consultation with the NSC, published the first edition of *Reducing The Odds* in 1968. Continued demand for the booklet has led to this revised edition which includes, in the appendices, sample forms designed by the NSC and NNSC for use in selection procedures.



Steps in the Selection Process The following would generally be accepted as necessary steps in the process of selection¹:

- 1 *an analysis of the job concerned in order to prepare a job description and a personnel specification*
- 2 *notification of the vacancy to potential sources of recruitment, including advertising (see Appendix A)*
- 3 *the receipt of completed application forms (see Appendix B)*
- 4 *the preparation of the short list, taking into consideration the applications received and other relevant information, such as staff annual reports and references*
- 5 *further references taken up on the short-listed candidates (see Appendix C).*

Job Description The purpose of analysing the duties attaching to the post is to prepare a job description² listing the duties involved and the conditions of employment relating to that post. Particulars should be summarised in the advertisement and sent in full to every candidate, so that he has the necessary information to decide whether to pursue his application.

1 Compare two case studies published in *The Hospital*:
'TRYING, I.M.' Deputy group secretary wanted: the tenor of an interview. *The Hospital*, vol. 59, no. 8. August 1963. pp. 481-484.

CUMING, M. W. How to get a man. *The Hospital*, vol. 60, no. 10. October 1964. pp. 599-601.

2 For a fuller treatment see Job descriptions for hospital staff, with guide notes by Maurice W. Cuming. London, King Edward's Hospital Fund for London, 1972.

The members and officers who will form the short-listing panel and the final selection committee should also be given copies.

A personnel specification is also necessary, for use by the selection committee, describing the sort of person considered suitable for the post available. This should distinguish between essential qualifications, listing such things as educational requirements, previous training and experience, and any personal factors which are relevant.

Sources of Recruitment In the hospital service there are well-established methods for notifying vacancies – mainly through advertising in the general and professional press and by means of bulletins from the regional boards.

The text of the advertisement should contain essential information to attract candidates in the first place. It should point out, for example, any unusual or challenging aspects of the post, and should always invite officers interested to send for a copy of the job description.

Applications The use of adequate application forms, see Appendix B, will provide short-listing panels with a good groundwork of information. Taken together with the other relevant documents, such as annual staff reports and references, they will enable them to tackle their task of preparing a short list.

Application forms will also help in structuring

the interviews at the final selection stage, giving pointers for discussion with the candidates.

Many senior officers say that they like candidates to write letters of application. The trouble is that the contents of these tend to vary so much. Some are short, others are expansive. Most of them leave out important facts or gloss over aspects of experience which do not stand very close inspection. Application forms, on the other hand, can demand all the information relevant to the job concerned, so that candidates will be considered on an exactly comparable basis.

Short-listing With the information contained in application forms, annual reports and references available, the process of short-listing becomes one of matching each applicant against the job description and selecting those who on paper best appear to meet both the requirements of the job and the interests of the service.

References Reference enquiry forms have been designed by the national staff committees, and are used to obtain information from present employers about candidates who are not subject to annual staff reporting. An example is given in Appendix C. The value of references is sometimes discounted, since so much depends on interpretation and on knowing the person who writes them. Such criticisms perhaps have less validity in the senior ranks of the hospital service, where officers generally know each other and where it is hoped, in any event, that the demands of professional

integrity would ensure a high standard of objectivity and reliability.

The Interview There are three purposes to be achieved in interviewing, and if only these were fully appreciated by members and officers charged with the responsibility of filling jobs, many of the complaints heard about the way in which candidates are treated at interviews would disappear. These purposes are :

- 1 *for the employer to obtain all the information about the candidate necessary to decide his suitability for the post*
- 2 *to give the candidate all relevant information about the post and the organisation of which it is part*
- 3 *the public relations function of leaving the candidate with the sense that he has been treated fairly.*

Much has been done in trying to perfect methods of achieving the first function of getting information from candidates. The second purpose, however, has been comparatively neglected ; particulars or job descriptions should have been issued and additional information should be given to candidates at the interview if they need it. There is an advantage in showing them the actual place or office where they will be working and introducing them to the people with whom they will work – both have a direct impact on job satisfaction and morale.

If the third purpose were to be kept continually in mind, it would greatly influence the manner in which interviews are conducted. For candidates to feel that they have been treated fairly, they must be given the chance to ask questions and these must be properly answered. Some may appear trivial to the interviewer, but they may be very important to the candidate. A clear aim of any employing authority should be to send unsuccessful candidates away feeling genuinely sorry that they have not got the job because it seemed such a good place to come and work in. As it is, many committees seem quite oblivious to the amount of goodwill they lose as the result of bad interviewing practices.

The first impression that candidates gain is most important. Thus, written applications should be individually acknowledged, rather than by a duplicated letter. Gate or enquiries desk staff should be forewarned of the arrival of candidates, to ensure courteous reception. Punctuality should be observed, as with any other business engagement. A comfortable waiting room should be available with up-to-date reading matter, and with toilet facilities adjacent. Obviously the interviews should take place in a private room, preferably without a telephone and free from interruption. There is much to be said for furnishing this room informally, say with easy chairs around a coffee table, to escape from the normally intimidating atmosphere of a committee room.

Most members and officers would probably reject any suggestion that they cannot conduct good interviews, because they see this particular ability as a reflection of how well they can handle people, get them to talk freely, and make judgments on their personalities. Yet interviewing demands skills in which few members or senior officers have been properly trained.

To start with, these skills can be improved by adopting a systematic approach, in order to make sure of matching the candidate's abilities and experience with the job requirements. An interview should always follow some sort of plan, not in the sense of a stereotyped sequence of questions, but rather as a means of checking that all the necessary information has in fact been obtained.

The best-known formal method is *The Seven Point Plan* devised by Professor Alec Rodger when he was head of the vocational guidance department of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology¹. The following headings and notes are adapted from this plan. In effect it comprises a short list of items which together offer a comprehensive method of linking the requirements of a job with each candidate's occupational assets and liabilities.

1 Rodger, Alec. The seven point plan. London, National Institute of Industrial Psychology, paper no. 1, third edition 1970, reprinted 1972.

The first application of the plan lies in making a thorough analysis of the **job requirements**.

What does the job demand in the way of general health, strength, appearance, manner, voice?

1 Physical make-up

What does the job demand in the way of general education, specialised training, and previous experience?

2 Attainments

What level is required to do the job (a) satisfactorily (b) well?

3 General intelligence

Does the job involve any special dexterity – manual, verbal, musical, artistic, etc?

4 Special aptitudes

How far does the job require a special interest in, for example, outdoor life, being with other people, solving problems that require a logical approach, artistic expression?

5 Interests

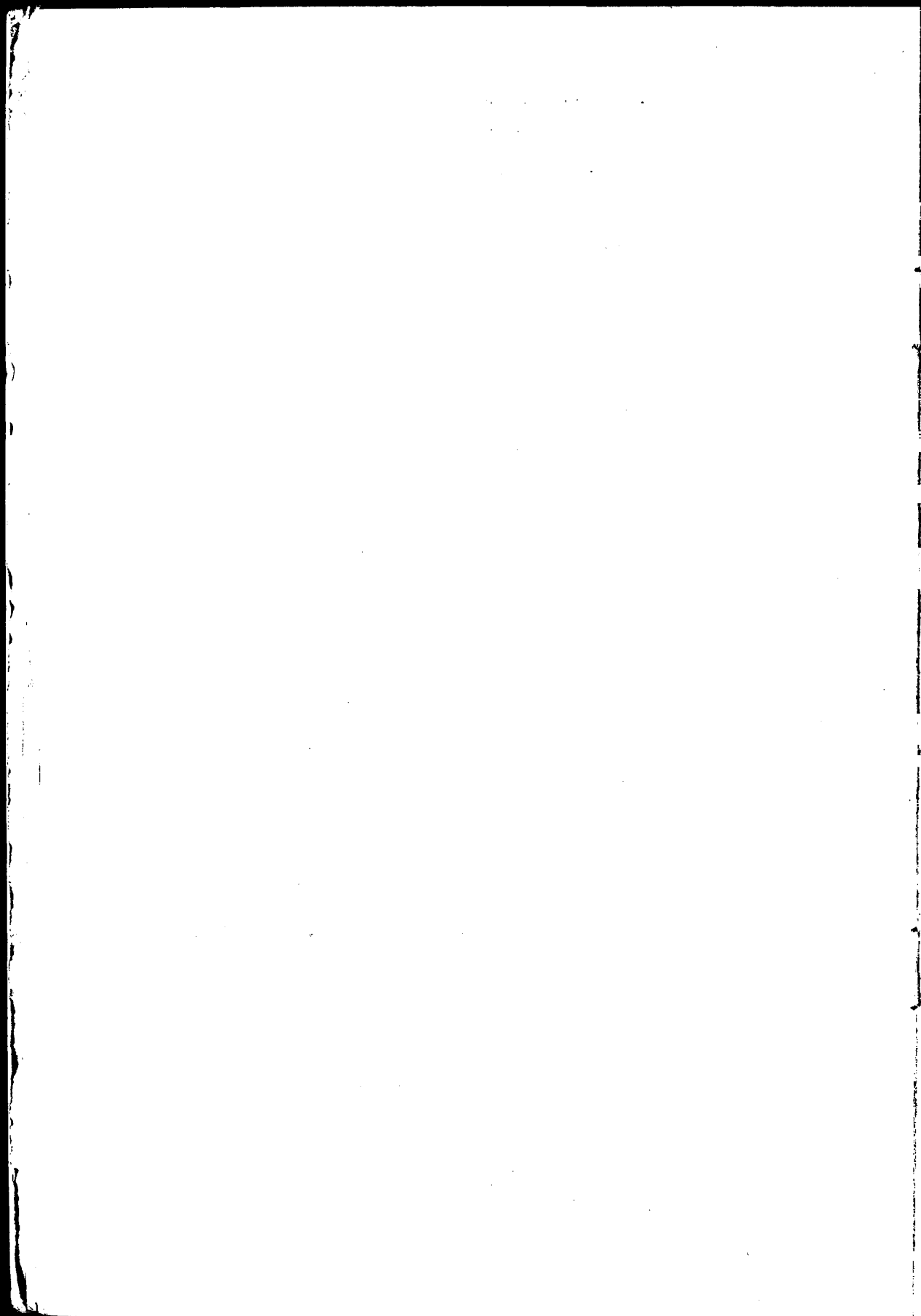
Does the job call for any of the following qualities – leadership, acceptability to others, reliability, sense of responsibility, self-reliance, etc?

6 Disposition

How will the pay, prestige and status of the job affect the worker's private life?

7 Circumstances

	Having evolved the job's requirements, the selectors will attempt to link these and the differences shown between the candidates, in order to find the best match. The assessment of candidates should, therefore, be carried out under the same headings.
Physical make-up	Has the candidate any defects of health or physique that may be of occupational importance? How agreeable are his appearance, bearing and speech?
Attainments	What type of education has he had, and how well has he done educationally? What occupational training and experience has he had already, and how well has he done in his previous jobs?
General intelligence	How much intelligence can he display, and does he ordinarily display?
Special aptitudes	Has he any marked mechanical aptitude, manual dexterity, verbal facility, artistic or musical ability?
Interests	To what extent are his interests intellectual, practical, creative, physically active, social, artistic?
Position	How acceptable does he make himself to other people? Does he influence others? Is he steady and dependable? Is he self-reliant?
Circumstances	What are his domestic circumstances? How large is his family? Does he own his house? Is he willing to travel?



Procedure for Interviews Careful provision should be made prior to the candidates' arrival. A timetable should be settled for the task involved, taking account of the numbers to be seen and the need to give each equal opportunity. The time of the coffee break should be decided, and the whole timetable explained to the candidates so that they know clearly what is going to happen. The members of the selection committee should have studied the application forms and other documents beforehand and have memorised the more important details they contain. This is not only good manners, it also leaves the members free during their discussion to concentrate on the main task of assessing the candidates. The initial approach to each candidate must be friendly and designed to put him at ease so that he behaves in a normal manner. This is difficult in front of a committee, but can perhaps best be done by starting on some subject of mutual or general interest, often revealed in the candidate's application.

The selection committee should bear in mind certain well-established rules about interviewing.

- 1 *Its members must appear interested throughout and not seem merely to be going through an irksome routine.*
- 2 *They should do the minimum amount of talking themselves, encouraging the candidate to speak freely. It is not necessary, however, to take each candidate through all the factual details supplied in his application form. Rather, he*

might be asked to concentrate on those aspects of his career history which he considers to have been most important in his own development, or to be most relevant to the job under consideration.

- 3 Committee members will want to interject questions from time to time to get more information or change the topic being discussed. Obviously these questions must be relevant to the issue, and should be asked one at a time. They should be phrased so that they are easily understood, but cannot just be answered by 'yes' or 'no'; nor should they be leading questions which suggest the answer likely to be favourably received.*
- 4 Members must remain detached. They must not obtrude their own personalities into the exchanges in order to create an impression. They must not express opinions about episodes in a candidate's career, let alone censure him. They need to be aware of their own prejudices and make allowances for them.*
- 5 Notes of fact may be taken during the interview, with the candidate's agreement, but notes concerning the assessment of the candidate should be written only after he has left the room.*
- 6 There can be no hard and fast rules about the length of time an interview takes. So much depends on the candidate, the type and seniority of the job, and the methods used, but all candidates should be given at least the minimum amount of time which has been agreed beforehand by the selectors.*

7 The overriding consideration is to be as thorough as possible. In particular, there must be no reluctance to examine closely any areas of doubt about a candidate's career. A new job is a very important event, both to the man concerned and to the organisation likely to employ him for many years to come; there can, therefore, be no evasion, and the questioning must be exhaustive.

The main quality of a good interviewer is his ability to become one with the candidate. This presupposes that he has done his homework, thoroughly knows the job and anything else about the organisation likely to interest the candidate, and has memorised personal details from each candidate's application.

Committee Interviews The hospital service still does not employ specialist personnel officers on a scale sufficient to handle all appointments, so there is often no expert in selection methods readily available to advise members. This being so, it is perhaps best to have a committee of interviewers – at least the members can prompt each other and help to cover the whole field of enquiry between them. And since the filling of senior posts is so often a matter of promotion as well, this method offers some guarantee of objectivity and fairness.

But there are serious disadvantages which must be overcome. One which increases as the number of members on the selection committee grows is the difficulty of putting each candidate at his ease. How can he be expected to relax and

behave naturally, as he would in the job if appointed, when he is sitting on a solitary chair surrounded by a large group of people all of whom may be complete strangers to him ?

Apart from their effect on the candidate's nerves, large committees often become confused in their procedure. Important aspects of a candidate's experience are overlooked, questions are repeated and members sometimes seem more intent on impressing each other than considering the candidate. Selection committees must follow a more constructive pattern. Their size should be limited to a maximum of six including the assessor or assessors, each of whom should be properly introduced to the candidate in turn. They should agree areas of questioning between them so that there is no repetition or hogging of the time by individual members. Above all, they should carry out the necessary preparation by studying the job description beforehand, and try to acquire experience in the methods of finding out if candidates possess the qualities needed to do the job successfully.

A Note on the Technique of Group

Discussion Still more information can be obtained about candidates by giving them a subject to discuss together as a group and observing how they react to each other. The point about this technique is that people in senior posts spend a great deal of their time thinking up ideas and then trying to persuade their colleagues to accept them. It is very difficult to judge a candidate's ability to succeed in this vital role merely by interviewing him, but

a group discussion can give some indication of how each candidate is likely to get on with other people. The subject for discussion could be 'current problems in the hospital service', for example, or any reports recently issued.

While the discussions are going on, the members of the selection committee have the opportunity to observe the intellectual and social skills of the candidates and the attitudes of mind they display. Afterwards they can analyse the effort made by each individual – the number and quality of his contributions to the discussion, whether they were well expressed, to the point, and positive. Above all, they will consider what influence he had on the group, the extent to which he had dominated it, whether he had helped it to make progress in its discussion, or prevented it from doing so, and the ways in which he made his criticisms and received any directed at him. His intellectual skill would be reflected by the evidence he gave of thinking logically, clearly and in a flexible manner. Evidence of social skills will be seen in how he gets on with other members of the group, if he is tactful in what he says, and if his personality makes an impact. Something of his personal approach to life should be detected : whether, for example, he tends to be positive and constructive, or negative and critical. Certain other elements – initiative, self-confidence and dependability – might also be revealed.

The important thing which must be emphasised

about the group discussion method is that it
but one way of providing additional
information about candidates. It is not a
substitute for any other aspect of the
election procedure. The evidence it
produces must be added to and compared with
that derived already from applications,
reports and interviews.

Appendices

Sample forms used in the procedure for
appointing senior staff

Appendix A Notification of a post in the
administrative grades in the hospital
service

Appendix B Application for a post in the
administrative grades in the hospital
service

Appendix C Reference on an applicant for a
senior nursing post in the hospital
service

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Appendix A

- 1 May be omitted where the post applied for is above the senior administrative grade
- 2 Please place an * against qualifications gained by examination
- 3 For applicants from inside the hospital service only
- 4 But for previous posts held during the last 36 months add full addresses of employers, unless posts were also with your present employer

Please turn over

Signed on behalf of the employing authority
 Designation or grade
 Date

Name(s) and address(es) of up to two representatives of the employing authority who will be involved in short-listing

Date convenient to the employing authority			
day	am or pm	date in full	
a for short-listing to take place b for final selection to take place			

Journals in which it is proposed to place the advertisement

Name(s) and address(es) of up to two representatives of the employing authority who will be involved in short-listing

Signed on behalf of the employing authority

Designation or grade

Date

Appendix B

Telephone number		Date of birth		Age	
General education (1) GCE, etc. subjects		Year obt'd		Further education and professional qualifications degrees, diplomas, etc. held (2)	
Level		Year obt'd		Degrees, diplomas, etc. being studied for	
Name and full address of present employer		Present post held		Level/part	
Salary scale		Present salary		Pointage (3) where applicable	
Scale number (3)		From		To	
Names of employers for previous posts (4)		Previous posts held (most recent first)		From	
To		From		To	

1 May be omitted where the post applied for is above the senior administrative grade
2 Please place an * against qualifications gained by examination
3 For applicants from inside the hospital service only
4 But for previous posts held during the last 36 months add full addresses of employers, unless posts were also with your present employer

Please turn over

*Please use a separate sheet if the space provided for any answer(s) is not sufficient.

Form NNSC R1 (revised)

*Delete as applicable

Signature of applicant

Date

Please give the names of all journals and/or papers in which you saw the advertisement for this post

3 All applicants: please give below the names and addresses of two referees who have consented to be approached for a reference on your behalf

	Present employer	Previous employer
i prior to short-listing	Yes*No	Yes*No
ii only if you are offered an interview	Yes*No	Yes*No
iii only if you are offered the post	Yes*No	Yes*No

2 Applicants outside the hospital service: may your present/previous employer be asked for a reference?

1 Applicants already in the hospital service: are you subject to staff reporting? Yes*No

Reports and references

A reference is normally sought prior to short-listing from an applicant's present employer and, if he has been with his present or last employer for 18 months or less, from his previous employer also. This does not apply to inservice officers subject to annual staff reporting.

1 Applicants already in the service

2 Applicants outside the hospital service : may your present/previous employer be asked for a reference?

	Present employer	Previous employer
i prior to short-listing	Yes*No	Yes*No
ii only if you are offered an interview	Yes*No	Yes*No
iii only if you are offered the post	Yes*No	Yes*No

3 All applicants : please give below the names and addresses of two referees who have consented to be approached for a reference on your behalf

Please give the names of all journals and/or papers in which you saw the advertisement for this post

Signature of applicant

Date

*Delete as applicable

Form NNSC R1 (revised)

*Please use a separate sheet if the space provided for any answer(s) is not sufficient.

3 How does he/she carry out the managerial duties of his/her present post? (Please indicate strengths and weaknesses in performance. Leadership, generation of new ideas or methods, relationships with medical and administrative colleagues are some of the factors relevant to this section.)

2 Are there any shortcomings or lack of experience which ought to be brought to the attention of the selection committee? If so, please say whether they present serious obstacles to the successful performance of the duties of the post.

To assist the selection committee in reaching a fair and balanced judgment on the applicant's suitability for the post in question, a description of which is enclosed, please complete the following sections* :

1 Please say to the best of your knowledge and belief how well you think the applicant would perform the duties of the post for which he/she has applied. (Please answer this section briefly and in general terms ; more specific answers are required in other sections.)

PART A TO BE COMPLETED BY THE APPLICANT'S IMMEDIATE SUPERIOR OFFICER OR OTHER SENIOR OFFICER MOST FAMILIAR WITH HIS/HER WORK.

Post applied for

King's Fund



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