

Guidelines for obtaining and providing references

Overview

- 1. Obtaining references in connection with recruitment..... 1
 - 1.1 Obtaining a reference..... 1
 - 1.2 Content of a reference..... 1
 - 1.3 Examples of questions that may be asked 1
 - 1.4 Obligation to record and file notes 1
 - 1.5 Consultation procedure for negative references2
- 2. Providing references for current or former employees.....2
 - 2.1 Disclosure of data in connection with references.....2
 - 2.2 Content of a reference.....2
 - 2.3 Obligation to record and file notes3
 - 2.4 Consultation procedure for negative references.....3

1. Obtaining references in connection with recruitment

References should be obtained as part of all recruitment processes including both technical-administrative and academic positions to ensure that the most qualified applicant is offered the position. This also applies even if the applicant is already employed at Aarhus University.

1.1 Obtaining a reference

Before any reference is obtained, the hiring manager must ensure that the applicant has been informed of and has agreed to the following:

- that references will be obtained,
- from whom and at what point in the process references will be obtained, and
- which types of information will be requested.

The applicant may, for example, be informed by email and at the same time be asked to provide the name and telephone number of the person(s) who may serve as referees. [See example.](#)

Providing information for the purpose of obtaining a reference is voluntary for the applicant. However, obtaining references may be set as a condition of employment by the university, and lack of providing the information may therefore affect the final decision on whether the applicant is offered the position.

Please note that Aarhus University is considered one unified employment area, and an applicant transferring directly from another position within AU will not be subject to a probationary period. It is therefore essential to ensure that the applicant is suitable for the position prior to employment.

Once the applicant has provided the reference information, and the applicant has agreed to the obtaining of references, this must be recorded in Statens Rekrutteringsløsning (SRL), the Danish State Recruitment System.

1.2 Content of a reference

References may be used to obtain information concerning the following:

- Working relationship
- Verification of the information provided by the candidate in an application
- Professional and personal competences, work tasks and results
- Performance and working capacity

The hiring manager must not request or obtain information about the applicant's private matters, including political affiliations, membership of associations, sexual matters, criminal offences, health conditions, significant social issues, or misuse of intoxicants.¹

However, it is permissible to obtain information about matters that may illustrate the professional qualifications and suitability of the applicant relevant for the position. This may include information about the applicant's job-related competencies, the quality of their work performance, reliability and attendance, and whether tasks have been carried out independently or in collaboration with others.²

1.3 Examples of questions that may be asked

Below are examples of questions that may be asked when obtaining references:

- During which period was X employed?
- What position did X hold, and what were their primary responsibilities?
- What level of responsibility was assigned to X?
- How did X perform in the role (e.g., strengths, areas for development, tasks they excelled at or found more challenging)?
- How did X interact with colleagues, supervisors, and external partners?
- Did X have a reliable and stable attendance record?
- What were the reasons for X leaving, or intending to leave, the position at your organization?

1.4 Obligation to record and file notes

In connection with obtaining references, a memo summarizing the key points must be prepared for the

¹ Pursuant to Section 28 of the Danish Public Administration Act, Article 9 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and Section 8 of the Danish Data Protection Act.

² Aarhus University obtains the reference(s) on the legal basis set out in Article 6(1)(e) of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

content of the information.³

The memo must include the following information:

- the name and organization of the person contacted,
- your own name and position at Aarhus University,
- the date of the contact,
- the purpose of the contact, and
- a summary of the information provided.

Once the record has been prepared, it must be filed and retained in accordance with applicable documentation requirements. The applicant will have a right of access to the memo.

Records relating to applicants who are not offered employment must be filed and stored in AU's recruitment system.

1.5 Consultation procedure for negative references

If the information provided by the reference raises uncertainty or potentially results in a decision not to offer employment, the applicant must be given the opportunity to comment before a final decision is made.⁴

Before initiating this consultation process, it should be considered whether the available information provides a sufficient basis for the assessment, or whether it may be appropriate to obtain additional references — for example, from another employer, colleagues, or collaboration partners.

During the consultation, the applicant must be presented with the relevant content of the reference and be given the opportunity to provide their own account before a final decision regarding non-appointment is taken. If the outcome is that the applicant is not offered the position, the refusal must be accompanied by a statement of reasons.⁵ Assistance can be obtained from HR for this purpose.

2. Providing references for current or former employees

There is no obligation for a manager to provide a reference for a current or former employee, and the manager may therefore always decline to comment or choose not to address specific matters.

If a manager decides to provide a reference, the following considerations must be observed.

2.1 Disclosure of data in connection with references

Managers at Aarhus University may provide information about a current or former employee in connection with the employee's job application to another employer, provided that the recruiting employer confirms that the current or former employee has consented to disclosure such information.

For practical and administrative reasons, it is recommended that references for former employees are only provided for up to five years after the former employee has left the position at Aarhus University.

2.2 Content of a reference

References may be used to obtain information concerning the following:

- Working relationship
- Verification of the information provided by the candidate in an application
- Professional and personal competences, work tasks and results
- Performance and working capacity

The manager must not disclose information about the current or former employee's private matters, including political affiliations, membership of associations, sexual matters, criminal offences, health

³ Pursuant to Section 13 of the Danish Access to Public Administration Files Act (regarding the duty to make written records)

⁴ Pursuant to Section 19(1) of the Danish Public Administration Act (regarding information "to the detriment" of a party)

⁵ Pursuant to Section 22 of the Danish Public Administration Act (regarding the duty to provide reasons for a refusal)

conditions, significant social issues, or misuse of intoxicants.⁶

However, it is permissible to disclose information that is directly relevant to the current or former employee's professional qualifications and suitability for the position. This may include information about the employee's job-related competencies, the quality of their work performance, reliability and attendance, and whether tasks have been carried out independently or in collaboration with others.⁷

2.3 Obligation to record and file notes

In connection with disclosure of references, a memo summarizing the key points must be prepared with the content of the information.⁸

The memo must include the following information:

- the name and organization of the person who made the enquiry
- your own name and position at Aarhus University,
- the date of the enquiry,
- the purpose of the contact, and
- a summary of the content.

Once the record has been prepared, it must be filed and retained. The current or former employee is entitled to access the record under the applicable rules on the right of access.

The record of the reference must be filed in the current or former employee's personnel file in AU's electronic case and document management system, Workzone. If assistance is needed, [the department's Workzone superuser](#) may be contacted.

2.4 Consultation procedure for negative references

If a manager at Aarhus University provides a reference about a current or former employee to another public-sector employer, and the information leads the other employer to reconsider or withdraw an offer of employment, the employee must be given the opportunity to comment before a final decision is made.⁹

Please note that the other public-sector employer in this case will present the content of the reference to the employee, and the current or former employee may provide their own statement before another public-sector employer makes a final decision not to offer the position.

⁶ Pursuant to Section 28 of the Danish Public Administration Act, Article 9 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and Section 8 of the Danish Data Protection Act.

⁷ Aarhus University collects the reference(s) on the legal basis set out in Article 6(1)(e) of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

⁸ Pursuant to Section 13 of the Danish Access to Public Administration Files Act (regarding the duty to make written records).

⁹ Pursuant to Section 19(1) of the Danish Public Administration Act (regarding information "to the detriment" of a party).