



**SAFER RECRUITMENT PRACTICE:  
AUDIT OF EXISTING RECRUITMENT PRACTICES  
IN RESIDENTIAL CHILD CARE**

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**July 2005**

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## **Executive Summary**

1. In the wake of a number of high profile cases of the abuse of children and young people in residential child care, there have been repeated calls for the improvement of recruitment and selection of residential child care staff. Following the *Children's Safeguards Review*, the Scottish Executive funded the Scottish Recruitment and Selection Consortium to contribute to the safeguards for children by developing a 'toolkit' for safer selection of staff: the Toolkit was published and launched in 2001.
2. In 2004 the Scottish Executive commissioned research from Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRCC) to identify current recruitment practices in residential child care for staff who have unsupervised contact with children and young people and to gauge opinion on how safer recruitment should be taken forward .
3. A postal survey of operational and human resource managers responsible for the recruitment of residential childcare staff in local authority and voluntary organisations was undertaken between January and April 2005. A sample of those respondents was invited to participate in semi-structured exploratory interviews, focusing in more detail on current practice and participants' views on the implementation of the recommendations of the Toolkit.
4. Recruitment of residential child care staff is a regular activity for most local authorities and voluntary organisations who recruit temporary, sessional and relief staff in addition to permanent basic grade care workers and managers. Many interviewees report that although there is no shortage of unqualified applicants there is a serious shortage of qualified applicants at all levels; and this leads to a high demand for short courses in addition to 'on-the-job' training and supervision.
5. Approximately half of the respondents report that they have written policies on staff recruitment but fewer have recruitment policy specifically directed toward safer recruitment practice for residential child care establishments.

6. Few interviewees undertake the collection and monitoring of statistics relating to safer recruitment and staff retention.

7. All local authority respondents report that they are familiar with the safer recruitment ‘Toolkit’ compared with only two thirds of respondents from voluntary organisations. Interviewee responses indicate three types of organisational practice –

1. Those which place safer recruitment at the heart of the recruitment practice and use the Toolkit to develop recruitment procedures.
2. Those which are less aware of the concept and do not use the Toolkit.
3. Those which use some elements of the Toolkit but do not systematically incorporate ‘safer recruitment’ into procedures.

8. Respondents and interviewees were asked to describe their current usage of the eighteen elements of the Toolkit:

- *Job descriptions* are almost always written.
- *Person specification* is undertaken sometimes by operational managers sometimes by human resource managers, occasionally jointly.
- *Advertisements* are always issued according to 90% of respondents although few include information about safer recruitment.
- *Application forms* are more likely to be designed specifically for child-related posts in voluntary organisations compared to local authorities.
- *Equal Opportunities* procedures can be a source of disagreement between social work and human resource managers.
- *Screening interviews* are used according to half of the respondents from voluntary organisations compared with one in ten of the local authority respondents.
- *Identity checks* are undertaken in almost all organisations.
- *Verification of qualifications* is undertaken in almost all organisations.

- *Reference requests* undertaken by means of standardised forms are reported by eight out of ten respondents but fewer (60%) report that references are verified by telephone.
- *Criminal records checks* are always undertaken.
- *Client record checks* are reported by one third of respondents.
- *Personnel records check*: Two thirds of local authority respondents and three out of four voluntary organisation respondents report that these are always undertaken.
- *Panel interviews* are almost always undertaken.
- *Personal interview*: respondents are unsure of the definition of this element and opinions vary considerably on the relevant format and focus for questions. One third of respondents report that they are always undertaken.
- *Capabilities*: Three quarters of local authority respondents and two thirds of voluntary organisation respondents report that they are always used although some report that they use the capabilities as defined in Care National Occupational Standards.
- *Selection Process*
  - i. More than half of the respondents report that written exercises are used.
  - ii. Sixty per cent of local authority respondents compared to forty percent of voluntary organisation respondents report the use of group discussions.
  - iii. About one third of respondents report that young people have been involved in the recruitment process. This has been successful where young people receive some training in interviewing, clear guidance on what is being asked of them, and information about how their contribution will be used.
- *Assessment centres*: one in ten respondents report that an assessment centre approach is being used but there is some variation in the number of elements used and methods of scoring. However, many see the development of a

consistent systematic approach to recruitment as crucial to the improvement in standards of recruitment and selection for residential child care staff.

9. Interviewees describe three main barriers to the implementation of safer recruitment procedures of the Toolkit:
  - Limited awareness of safer recruitment
    - at the senior management and corporate level;
    - by those who provide training in recruitment procedures;
    - individuals who have forgotten or do not know about the Toolkit.
  - Limited partnership between social work and human resource managers who have different perspectives on recruitment issues: social work managers who have an ideal of a child-centred approach and human resource managers with an ideal of fair procedures.
  - Prioritisation of resources
    - Many interviewees report that the requirement to participate in the recruitment process puts pressure on time available to front line managers. With the low proportion of qualified staff in residential child care the responsibility for recruitment and selection falls on the small number of managers with the qualifications and experience.
    - Several interviewees suggest that the development of safer recruitment requires additional funding from the Scottish Executive to provide:
      - training for all involved in recruitment for residential childcare;
      - more human resource staff to administer checks;
      - front line cover to release staff to participate in recruitment.
10. Interviewees made several suggestions on the implementation and promotion of the Toolkit.
  - *Leadership* is expected from the Scottish Executive, CoSLA and ADSW.
  - *Provision of evidence* on the beneficial outcomes from safer recruitment procedures and assessment centre methods.

- *Costing models for the Establishment of Assessment Centres*: several interviewees suggest that the Scottish Executive should provide a model costing to:
  - provide information on likely costs;
  - give guidance on suitable methods of accounting;
  - show estimates of financial benefits accrued from improved staff retention;
  - provide evidence of reduction in costs of disciplinary hearings.
- *Phased Guidance* was considered more useful than the introduction of mandatory standards.
- *Funding* to ensure that safer recruitment is given higher priority can be reinforced by attaching monitoring mechanisms.
- *Training* is required on safer recruitment procedures, and specifically on key concepts used in the Toolkit.
- *Update on the Toolkit* to take account of developments in occupational standards and registration requirements.
- *Publication of an easy-to-use Handbook* for unit managers.
- *Establishment of a National Centre* for recruitment of residential child care staff which could provide a panel of recruitment trainers or recruitment interviewers to those organisations who lacked the resources or the need to set up assessment centres.

## **Introduction**

The recruitment of residential child care staff has become the focus of general interest when cases of abuse of children in residential settings have hit the headlines. Following the various inquiries and reviews into professional and organisational responsibility to safeguard children in residential care, recommendations have been made for the implementation of safer recruitment procedures.

In the late 1990's the Scottish Executive commissioned work to re-design and improve the recruitment process in Scotland. The Scottish Recruitment and Selection Consortium reviewed research and consulted practitioners both within Scotland and internationally. The outcome from their deliberations was the publication, in 2001, of the Toolkit on safer recruitment and selection for staff working in child care.

In 2004 the Scottish Executive commissioned research from the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRCC) to identify current recruitment practices in residential child care, for staff who have unsupervised contact with children and young people, in the light of the recommendations of the Toolkit, and to gauge opinion on how safer recruitment should be taken forward .

This report presents the findings of the research project and an outline is provided in the executive summary. The report starts with a short review of the background to the research and a statement of the research aims. The following section describes the methodology and the limitations of the research. The report goes on to provide an overview of current recruitment practice before providing some analysis of managers' views on staff awareness and practice of safer recruitment procedures. The following section describes the detailed responses from the postal survey on current usage of the eighteen different elements of the Toolkit. The next section, based on interviews with practitioners involved in recruitment, provides an analysis of opinions on the barriers to full implementation of the elements of the Toolkit, and this is followed by a summary of

views on future implementation and promotion of the Toolkit. The report concludes with some suggestions for future research.

## **Background**

In the wake of a number of high profile cases of the abuse of children and young people in residential child care, there have been repeated calls for the improvement of recruitment and selection of residential child care staff. Selection processes were lax and inadequate, and there were concerns about references, police checks and other vetting procedures (Kirkwood, 1993; Levy & Kahan, 1992; Williams & McCreadie, 1992).

Following the trial and conviction of Frank Beck in Leicestershire, an inquiry was established to look specifically at selection and recruitment methods for staff working in children's homes (Warner, 1992). The Support Force for Children's Residential Care (SFCRC) was also established to offer advice on the appointment, selection, support, development and training of staff (SFCRC, 1995a). The Warner Report and the SFCRC stressed the need for improvement in selection and assessment. The *Children's Safeguards Review* strongly endorsed the work of Warner and the SFCRC and also recommended that funding should be offered to the Scottish Consortium to develop further work on selection processes (Kent, 1995).

Following the *Children's Safeguards Review*, the Scottish Executive funded the Scottish Recruitment and Selection Consortium to contribute to the safeguards for children by developing a 'toolkit' for safer selection of staff and carers who work with them. The Consortium's remit was broader than residential child care and involved roles in a range of services: foster care, fieldwork, residential care, day care and community resources. These included: foster carer, social work assistant, resource/social worker, senior resource/social worker, residential care officer, senior residential care officer, residential unit manager, service manager and head of service/assistant director. It was also asked to examine ways of making safer the selection of volunteers who work with children (Scottish Recruitment and Selection Consortium, undated).

The Consortium identified 18 steps in safer selection process which, in brief, were: capabilities, job description, person specification, advertisement, application form, short-listing, equal opportunities, screening interview, identity check, verification of qualifications, reference request, criminal records check, client record checks, personnel records check, selection process, assessment centre, panel interview and personal interview (Scottish Recruitment and Selection Consortium, undated, pp. 8-9). The Consortium also advocated the development of the selection centre approach which involves a process of exercises and tests combining the assessment of as many key aspects of the role as possible (Scottish Recruitment and Selection Consortium, undated).

The Consortium acknowledged that there would be important implications for both employers and potential employees. Additional resources would be needed to take forward the improvements in selection and recruitment practice.

'The additional cost will mostly be in the additional resources needed to staff the selection centres and increased scrutiny of application forms and references... A further implication for employers is that staff members applying for jobs either inside or outside their own agencies will need to be freed up for the additional time required for this longer selection process' (Scottish Recruitment and Selection Consortium, undated, p. 67)

In addition, the Consortium stated that the selection centre approach may be less flexible than more traditional methods and that there will be considerable training requirements to ensure that all those involved are well prepared for their roles (Scottish Recruitment and Selection Consortium, undated, p. 67).

A report by Cassidy (undated) identified a number of issues related to the implementation of the *Safer Recruitment Toolkit*. These included:

- commitment of employers to scale of change involved in full implementation of toolkit approach;

- similar commitment of CoSLA;
- difficulties in estimating the scale of staff turnover and recruitment;
- implications of Human Resources issues such as Equal Opportunities;
- impact of toolkit approach on recruitment given current difficulties;
- issue of responsibility for developing and administering the Toolkit.

Following the introduction of the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act in 2001, standards of care were established by the National Care Standards Committee for children and young people in residential care. Standard 7 lays out standards with respect to management and staffing: Standard 7.7 relates to safe recruitment practice and sets out minimum criteria: criminal record checks, previous employer checks, take-up of references and cross reference to professional and workforce registers.

The Report of the Bichard Inquiry (2004) has reinforced the recommendations to implement a registration scheme for all those working with children and young people, and a blacklist of unsuitable people. Parallel to legislation in England and Wales, the *Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003*, establishes the *Disabled from Working with Children List* (Scottish Executive, 2003b). This law will come into force in 2004. Any individual working with children, paid or unpaid, must be referred to the List when they have harmed a child or put a child at risk of harm and they have been dismissed or moved away from contact with children as a consequence.

## **Research Aims**

- to identify current recruitment practices in residential child care for staff who have unsupervised contact with children;
- to identify views on how safer recruitment should be taken forward, including:
  - barriers to introduction of elements of the safer recruitment toolkit;
  - options for the roll out of the toolkit (e.g. selected elements of the toolkit only).

## **Methodology**

This section provides a description of the three phases of the research and the methods used. It also provides some information on the limitations of the research findings due to the methodology.

### *Phase 1: The postal sample*

In December 2004 invitations to participate in the survey were sent out to Directors and Chief Executives of all 32 Local Authorities and 43 voluntary organisations with responsibility for residential provision for children and young people in Scotland: reminders and follow-up letters were sent out in January and February 2005 to non-respondents.

Twenty-nine local authorities and thirty-two voluntary organisations agreed to participate [Table 1]. In February 2005, questionnaires were sent out to operational managers and human resource managers responsible for recruitment of residential child care staff in the 29 local authority social work and personnel departments, and in the 32 voluntary organisations with residential homes, secure units and schools for children and young people.

Table 1 Response to invitation to participate

1. Local authorities

Invitations to participate	32
no residential child care	2
Refusals - no reason given	1
Number of organisations who agreed to participate	29

2. Voluntary Organisations

Invitations to participate	43
Gone away	2
Don't recruit RCCS	2
Still considering	5
Refusals:	
Lack of time/personnel	2
Number of organisations who agreed to participate	32

Questionnaires were returned from 22 out of the 29 local authorities (response rate of 79%) and 31 of the 32 voluntary organisations (response rate of 93%) who agreed to participate.

Questionnaires were received from both human resource managers and operational managers in some organisations whereas only an operational manager or a human resource manager has responded from other organisations [see Table 2 for details]. A total of sixty-nine questionnaires have been returned from 24 district regions in Scotland.

Table 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

Job Type	Local	Voluntary	Totals
	Authority	Organisations	
Job unknown	1	0	1
Human resource manager only	4	6	10
Operational Manager only	14	24	38
Both	10 (from 5 councils)	10 (from 5 organisations)	20 (from 10 agencies)
Total number of questionnaires returned as at 18 April 2005	29	40	69

### *Phase 2: The Interviews*

Information from the questionnaires was used to guide a further selection of respondents with diverse characteristics – from local authorities and voluntary organisations, small and large organisations, operational managers, headteachers and human resource managers, those who were using most of the elements of the Toolkit and those who were using few elements – for a face-to-face interview. A small number of interviews were also undertaken with trainers and young people. In all, twenty face-to-face interviews were undertaken with people from eight councils, seven voluntary providers and two training organisations.

Interviews focused on general recruitment practice in residential child care, respondents' experience of safer recruitment practice, and their views on the procedures of safer recruitment promoted in the Scottish Executive document commonly known as 'The Toolkit'. A semi-structured questionnaire was used; hand written notes were taken during the interviews and typed up later. Where examples or quotes are provided in the report, they are taken from notes made at the time of the interview and therefore cannot claim to be verbatim.

These exploratory interviews were conducted with a wide range of managers with some responsibility for the recruitment of residential care staff in their organisation. One or sometimes two people were interviewed from selected organisations. There was considerable diversity in the responsibilities of interviewees; some were external managers working for large local authorities whereas others could be the sole administrator for a small voluntary organisation.

Further telephone interviews were undertaken with nine respondents to focus in some detail on specific elements of the Toolkit.

In the report, 'respondents' refers to people who completed the postal questionnaire: 'interviewees' refers to people who participated in the interviews. Three groups of participants are identified in the report: 'head teachers', 'human resource managers' and 'operational managers'. 'Operational managers' includes external managers in LA social work departments, unit managers, and care managers in schools.

### *Limitations of Research*

The postal survey was completed by individuals from a sample of organisations in Scotland. As there is no information available on the recruitment practices of non-respondents we are unable to say how representative the postal survey findings are for the whole of Scotland. However, given the high response rate, there is no reason to believe that the findings are not representative.

The qualitative interviews were undertaken with individuals with different departmental responsibilities in small and large organisations; the sample was selected to provide views of people from a wide diversity of organisations. We are unable to provide a statistical measure of how far these views are representative of staff with responsibility for residential child care staff recruitment in Scotland.

Although the findings from the current research suggest that the majority of respondents and interviewees are committed to developing safer recruitment practice, the report cannot provide information about how far this objective is put into everyday practice; some of the managers interviewed are not directly involved in recruitment interviews and no direct observation of recruitment procedures was undertaken.

### **Overview of Current Recruitment Practice**

Recruitment of residential child care staff is a regular feature for all agencies and establishments included in this study. The majority of interviewees agree that there is no shortage of applicants for basic grade residential child care posts although there is a general consensus that there is a serious shortage of qualified applicants at all levels. The small number of respondents who do report a general shortage of applications for basic child care posts have few characteristics in common except that they work in organisations which have less developed safer recruitment procedures.

Due to the shortage of qualified staff, all agencies are involved in the provision of training which includes short courses for unqualified relief staff, ‘on the job’ training for basic care workers working towards SVQ3/HNC, and day release for managers working toward management qualifications; as a consequence, most agencies have to recruit additional relief workers to cover for staff who are undertaking or providing training.

This high demand for workers suggests that the recruitment procedure is an important feature of residential child care. All respondents describe the constant need to employ

casual temporary staff. These staff may be known as ‘locums’ or as ‘sessional’, ‘respite’ or ‘relief’ workers; it may also include the use of agency staff although this mainly covers specialist staff with some nursing experience. Most organisations rely on a ‘bank of supply staff’ or ‘a pool of known workers’, who have often been recruited after participating in interviews for basic care workers; those who are deemed ‘suitable’ but not offered an appointment are offered the opportunity to undertake part-time sessional or relief work. Voluntary agencies often keep a list of approved sessional staff ‘on their books’.

In some agencies there is a career pathway from sessional part-time worker to temporary worker to permanent basic grade care worker. The first step on the pathway may occur when sessional staff are asked to increase their hours to cover for absences, to cover for staff on training or to fill new vacancies. The practice of ‘backfilling’ i.e. appointing temporary workers to permanent posts and recruiting new staff to ‘backfill’ temporary posts is viewed as helpful especially in local authority situations where managers are not able to include a probationary clause in permanent contracts.

Several respondents spoke of an historical situation where casual staff were ‘getting in by the back door’. They describe how in past times, temporary staff were sometimes recruited by ‘word of mouth’ when a home was desperately short of staff. However, all respondents report that they now use similar procedures to recruit both part-time temporary staff and permanent care workers. Although there is widespread acceptance that temporary staff should be subject to a safer recruitment process that is as equally robust as recruitment for basic care workers, some respondents expressed their anxiety that unit managers may sometimes ‘cut corners’ when they are short of staff and consider that staff shortages constitute a bigger risk to children’s safety.

‘A’ expressed some concerns that responsibility for recruitment has been passed down to unit manager level; she is concerned that unit managers are under such pressure because of the reality of the job that they will be tempted to cut corners in order to get people in to post. She fears that not enough attention is paid to

references. She thinks that the rise in disciplinary hearings is due to poor recruitment practice.

'B' expressed his concern that sometimes unsuitable candidates may slip through. A lot of people are needed to staff the units, and he fears that some managers pay only lip service to the 'safe training and recruitment'. Although managers do undertake training on 'safer care' and leadership courses some people are quite blasé or even lax about recruiting staff.

Recruitment procedures should be informed by organisational policy. The findings from the SIRCC postal survey reveal that over half (57%) of the voluntary agency respondents and a little less than half (43%) of local authority respondents state that their organisation has written policies on the recruitment of residential child care staff [Table 3]. However, many of the documents reviewed for this research provide only general guidance on recruitment and selection; they do not specifically deal with the recruitment of residential child care staff, nor do they make reference to 'safer recruitment' procedures.

Very few interviewees in this study undertake the collection or monitoring of statistics relating to staff turnover; it is therefore not possible to provide an analysis of patterns of recruitment and retention of staff. This is an important issue as it prevents the full evaluation of the impact of safer recruitment procedures.

Table 3 Percentages of respondents reporting on recruitment policy and practice (%)

	Local Authority	Voluntary Agency
Organisation has written policy		
on recruiting residential child care staff	43	57
Organisation plans to change recruitment practice	41	50
Organisation is familiar with the Toolkit	100	67
Toolkit has influenced change in recruitment practice	79	33
Problems have arisen in the use of the Toolkit	41	11

## **Awareness and Practice of Safer Recruitment**

This section uses information from the postal survey to review current awareness of the Toolkit and explores how far these procedures have been put into practice

In response to the postal survey, all (100%) of the local authority respondents report that they are familiar with the Scottish Executive ‘Safer Recruitment Toolkit’ compared to only two thirds (67%) of the voluntary organisation respondents [Table 3]. A higher proportion (84%) of operational and human resource managers state that they are familiar with the Toolkit compared to school managers (68%).

Interviewee responses to questions about safer recruitment fall into three general categories:

1. The first group of interviewees report that safer recruitment practice is at the heart of the process of recruitment in their organisation. These respondents are all aware of the Toolkit and have used it to develop their own safer recruitment procedures.
2. At the other extreme a few interviewees are less aware of safer recruitment procedures and respond to questions about safer awareness by talking about health and safety regulations. They are most likely to report that they do not have a copy of the Toolkit or have not looked at it for some time; they also tend to be most critical of the Toolkit and the recommended procedures for safer recruitment in terms of the required investment of time and cost.
3. The third and biggest group of respondents use some elements of the Toolkit, ‘dipping in and out’, but their organisation does not prioritise the use of ‘safer recruitment practice’ as the core value in the recruitment procedures for residential child care staff. (These issues will be dealt with more fully under ‘Barriers to implementation’). Although some are working toward the introduction of more elements, others say that they cannot commit further resources to develop their

current recruitment procedures which they see as good enough to protect the children from harm.

Within this wider group there are a small group of managers who talk about the pressure and anxiety they feel about recruitment practice. Some are anxious but optimistic:

'I feel a great sense of anxiety recruiting people to look after our young people - these are people who will be with very vulnerable young people 24 hours a day. It's vital that we try to get it right and the whole emphasis here is on keeping them safe.'

Another is less optimistic:

'There is an uncomfortable dissonance between 'good practice' as promoted in the Toolkit and the costs of the process. It is too much to cope with and sometimes managers cannot contain that pressure and the guilt. As service managers you are trying to do your best but you are the backstop.'

#### *Use of the Toolkit*

Although all local authority respondents are familiar with the Toolkit, only three quarters (79%) report that the Toolkit has influenced changes in recruitment procedures in their organisation, and well over one third (41%) of them go on to report that they have experienced difficulties in the implementation of Toolkit procedures [Table 3].

Many of the people who received a copy of the Toolkit in 2001 have moved on as local authority organisations have been working through re-structuring of services. A different group of people with a differently defined set of responsibilities are in post; they may not have been around when the Toolkit was first launched and have not received information or training about its objectives.

Similarly in voluntary organisations, several people new to their posts are not aware of the purpose of the Toolkit. A smaller proportion (67%) of voluntary organisation respondents report an awareness of the Toolkit; only one third (33%) report that their agency has been influenced by it, and subsequently only one in ten (11%) report problems in using it [Table 3].

These findings are confirmed by many of the interviewees who report that they had to ‘look out’ a copy of the Toolkit prior to the researcher’s visit; only in a few organisations is it kept on the bookshelf, readily accessible for regular use.

In contrast with the majority who do not use the Toolkit regularly, those who do use it, albeit partially, are enthusiastic about its benefits and two interviewees report that the procedures, taken as a whole, ‘works like a dream’.

‘Overall the Toolkit has not been as great an influence as other reports like the Kent and Skinner reports, the Edinburgh Enquiry or Tribunals of Employment; they have been more influential. But the Toolkit has helped us to ensure that people have appropriate values for working with children.’

### *Professional practice*

Some interviewees suggest that the introduction of safer recruitment practice is contributing to the professionalisation of residential child care by raising occupational standards, improving staff qualifications and raising the profile of residential child care workers. There is a growing awareness of the need to move recruitment practice on from a reliance on the judgement of individuals toward the introduction of standardised recruitment procedures.

Some interviewees report that their local authority department is working toward the implementation of full assessment centre procedures, involving both human resource and social work managers working together with unit managers to implement thorough

procedures to recruit residential staff. There is a recognition that personnel expertise can offer social work managers considerable support. In other local authorities, interviewees describe routines where personnel officers undertake the administrative checks but unit managers have responsibility for organising and chairing recruitment interviews.

Findings from the postal survey show that half (50%) of the voluntary sector respondents and a little less than half (41%) of the local authority respondents report that their organisation has plans to change their recruitment methods [Table 3]. Several report that their organisation is currently reviewing their recruitment procedure; many respondents report that their organisations plan to make changes to the design of the application form and several aim to introduce written exercises and group discussions.

### **Current Usage of Elements of Toolkit Safer Recruitment Procedures**

The following section gives a detailed description of respondents' use of the various elements of the Toolkit. During the course of the research it has become apparent that respondents and interviewees have different understandings of the definition and purpose of each element; only those who have read the Toolkit and use the recommended procedures regularly have similar understandings of the 'elements'. The interviewer made an effort in each interview to clarify the interviewee's understanding of each term.

#### *Job Description*

Almost all postal survey respondents report that job descriptions are always written at an early stage in the recruitment procedures; only one respondent from a local authority says that they do not prepare job descriptions and one person from a voluntary agency reports that they sometimes do [see Table 4 below]. One interviewee notes that they are usually written by the personnel department.

This does not necessarily mean that job descriptions are carefully re-examined each time a vacancy occurs; a small number of respondents describe how job descriptions are 'reviewed every few years but there has been no need to change them for some time'.

### *Person Specification*

Again almost all respondents report that their organisation uses person specification in preparing recruitment material; this task is sometimes undertaken by operational managers, sometimes by human resource managers and sometimes jointly.

'I used the capabilities to inform writing the person specification but I cannot write the person spec on my own – lots of other people are involved in the process – and you have to consider grading points.'

Although a majority of respondents use capabilities to define the person specification many of them do not use the capabilities as defined in the Toolkit: they use the 'elements of competence' as defined in the Care National Occupational Standards which also form the basis of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs).

### *Advertisement*

Over 90% of respondents to the mail survey report that they always issue a job advertisement for vacancies [Table 4]. Several local authority interviewees report that the content and style of advertisements are defined by corporate policy and issued by human resource departments; the policy is to keep the advertisement simple.

There is considerable variation in responses as to whether the advertisement is worded to emphasise the employer's awareness of 'safer' recruitment of residential child care staff and the commitment to rigorous selection methods. One third of local authority respondents (30%) and nearly half the voluntary agency respondents (44%) report that their organisation does not put any emphasis on safer recruitment procedures.

Advisory handbooks on safer recruitment for residential child care (DOH 1999, ECPAT 1999, Scottish Recruitment & Selection Consortium 2001, NCH 2002) recommend that recruitment procedures ensure that children's homes do not become enclosed communities, and that staff should not simply be promoted within the establishment without due process. Local authority respondents are still less likely than voluntary

agency respondents to report that advertisements for residential child care posts are advertised both internally and externally; nearly one third of local authority respondents report that adverts are not always placed both internally and externally.

### *Application Form*

Many respondents report that the application form used for residential child care applications is not designed specifically with the need to protect children and young people in mind. Voluntary agency respondents are more likely to have a dedicated application form than local authorities; 74% of them report always using a dedicated form compared with 61% of Local Authority respondents [Table 4]. Most local authority interviewees confirm that corporate policy dictates that a standard application form must be used for all vacancies.

Although handbooks on the recruitment of residential child care staff recommend that applicants should be asked about all employment details and gaps in employment, one in four (26%) of local authority respondents report that this is not required in their agency's application form. Moreover about half of local authority respondents report that applicants are not asked about previous names they have used nor about absences from previous jobs; respondents from voluntary organisations are more likely to ask about previous names (59%) and absences (77%).

Interviewees report that questions about gaps in employment are usually asked by the chair of the panel interview as experience has shown that it is worth asking. Some interviewees report that the issue is covered in interviewer training although the procedures are not incorporated into the recruitment system. Others report that sometimes these panel questions may not be very thorough as the unit managers find it difficult to ask probing questions.

'Managers have to be robust about asking these difficult questions, especially when unit managers are desperate for staff and see the applicant as ideal and would solve all their problems.'

Only one third (34%) of local authority respondents and one half (49%) of voluntary agency respondents report that applicants are asked about disciplinary offences in their application form. Not all application forms ask applicants about criminal convictions; one in ten voluntary agency respondents and one in three local authority respondents report that applicants are not asked this question, although one interviewee reports that the applicants are becoming aware of the implications of Enhanced Disclosure and are more likely to self-disclose at interview.

Most agencies (over 80%) advise applicants that if they supply false information in their application they will be liable to summary dismissal; one interviewee notes that the recent tightening up on this issue has led to a dismissal.

#### *Equal opportunities*

Almost all respondents to the postal survey report that Equal Opportunities principles are always applied to selection process [Table 4]. However, there are differences in the interpretation of legal requirements. For example, human resource managers point to the need for standard application forms which support Equal Opportunities legislation and anti-discriminatory practice. This seems to be a point of frequent disagreement between human resource managers and social work managers. One voluntary organisation has obtained professional advice from the Disability Rights Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission on how to develop safer recruitment procedures within existing legislation.

At practitioner level, some unit managers would like to encourage more male applications, be able to identify male applications and interview more male candidates with the intention of appointing a male candidate to improve the gender balance of staffing.

### *Screening Interview*

Screening interviews are less likely to be undertaken as part of recruitment procedures; over a half (59%) of local authority respondents and one third (34%) of voluntary agency respondents report that these interviews are not used [Table 4]. Voluntary agencies are more likely than local authorities to use screening interviews regularly, almost half of the voluntary organisation respondents (46%) reporting that screening interviews are always used compared to 14% of local authority respondents. One interviewee reports that assessment centre procedures are used in the local authority but without a screening interview.

Some interviewees from voluntary organisations describe how they use the ‘screening’ interview to provide information to candidates about the difficulties of the work in the hope that they will ‘put off’ candidates who are not clear about the demands of the job.

‘No problems, not aware of anyone being put off. Found out people giving the wrong information, info not strictly accurate where people are trying to sell themselves on the application form. Often health problems are overlooked. Not necessarily badness, they are not necessarily aware of importance of giving details. Every aspect of application form is questioned in detail and, if they are put off by the process they are not good candidates. It is necessary that people who are appointed are scrupulously honest.’

### *Identity Check*

Almost all agencies undertake identity checks; only one respondent from a voluntary agency reports that identity checks are not made [Table 4].

### *Verification of Qualifications*

Most agencies undertake checks to verify qualifications; one local authority and five voluntary agency respondents report that they only do so ‘sometimes’ [Table 4]. One interviewee confirms that sometimes qualification documents are not seen.

### *Reference request*

Most respondents report that their agency uses standardised forms for references; all referees are sent job descriptions and person specifications, and they are asked about an applicant's performance history, as well as their strengths and weaknesses [Table 4].

Additionally, most respondents (80%) report that referees are asked whether an applicant has been the subject of disciplinary measures.

The majority of respondents (71%) note that applicants are advised that recruiters may approach any of their previous employers if they think that it is appropriate; nine out of ten respondents report that references are always taken up for internal candidates.

Nearly two thirds of respondents (60%) report that they do not use the telephone to chase up or verify references. There is considerable variation in practice as described by interviewees:

- One reports that references are not taken up till after the interviews and are seen as a formality.
- One reports that references are followed up with a telephone call 'if personnel or child care staff think there is something worth following through.'
- Several others found that a telephone call to referees was most useful in checking out the meaning of statements in the reference, especially to establish whether referees were being ambivalent because there were unwritten problematic issues.

Half of local authority respondents (52%) and a smaller proportion (40%) of voluntary organisation respondents note that references are not always read prior to interviews.

### *Criminal Records Check*

All respondents report that criminal records are always checked and applicants are advised in advance that full police checks will be made [Table 4]. Most respondents

report that applicants are also advised that the post is exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act; only two local authority respondents report that this advice is not given to applicants.

Many interviewees complain about the difficulties they experienced when the Disclosure Scotland procedure was first established; many felt that children were put at risk by unfilled staff vacancies as there was a considerable delay in getting a clearance note on the preferred candidate. Although the procedure is now working more efficiently, some interviewees report that it still takes several months to have an appointed person in post if there is any delay in reference and police checks, as the appointed person does not usually give notice of leaving their previous post until they receive written confirmation of their appointment; this long waiting time is frustrating for staff anxious to fill a vacancy.

One interviewee expressed unease about the reliability and comprehensiveness of police checks; she worries that Disclosure Scotland checks may lull people into a false sense of security, especially as the checks may not uncover old offences or offences committed in England or abroad.

Many interviewees are unsure about the term ‘soft data’. One respondent could recall a police report which gave a surprising amount of detail on an applicant who had been involved in an incident some years previously in a children’s home but the interviewee could not recall the outcome of the report. One other interviewee fears that competent persons may be excluded from work if police records include ‘soft information’ on unproven and malicious complaints made by young people.

Several interviewees are more concerned about ‘grey areas’ relating to information about previous offences by applicants. All agree that if applicants do not disclose an offence then they will not be considered for the post, and where minor offences took place many years ago this will not exclude them from being considered. However, respondents express concern about making decisions relating to more recent or serious offences.

Almost all survey respondents report that applicants are advised that checks will be completed before an appointment is made.

#### *Client records check*

Only one third of respondents report that they use client record checks [Table 4]. Two interviewees noted that some local authority personnel departments have vetoed the use of client records as being an abuse of the applicant's right to privacy. These social work managers argue that undertaking any checks which will help to keep a child safe from harm should have a higher priority.

#### *Personnel Records Check*

Two out of three respondents (66%) from local authorities and three out of four (74%) from voluntary organisation report that personnel checks are always undertaken [Table 4]. However, some interviewees did not recognise this term, thinking that it referred to reference checks.

Local authority interviewees were unsure if such checks are made regularly or how long personnel retain files. Social work managers report that checks are the responsibility of personnel departments; they assume that necessary checks will be undertaken and any information arising from the checks will be passed on to the interviewing panel.

Voluntary organisation interviewees, especially those from small organisations, are more likely to report that they have long-serving personnel staff who will remember previous employees and will pass on available information.

#### *Panel Interview*

All local authority respondents and all but one respondent from a voluntary organisation report that panel interviews are always undertaken [Table 4]. Interviewees report that training is provided for all who participate as panel members and there is some agreement that each member of the panel asks the same questions of all candidates.

One young interviewee reports sometimes finding it difficult to decide how to score a candidate's response on the occasions when they have not fully understood that response.

### *Personal Interview*

Respondents from voluntary organisation were more likely to report that a personal interview is always undertaken (36% compared to 30% of local authority respondents) or is sometimes undertaken (31% compared to 22% of local authority respondents) [Table 4]. This result may not be wholly reliable as some respondents may have been unsure of the definition of a 'personal interview' while opinions vary considerably on what kind of questions are relevant.

One interviewee from a voluntary organisation reports that the personal interview is undertaken by the chief executive who asks applicants about their personal values; this information is not divulged to the panel but the chief executive reports whether or not there is good reason not to appoint a candidate:

‘It adds rigour to the procedure and conveys the message that the whole system is geared up to show the value placed on young people. It provides a powerful message. If somebody is put off by that then we don’t want them.’

One local authority interviewee reports that this element of recruitment procedures is not undertaken as the issues relating to personal values are well covered in their assessment centre exercises; it is considered unnecessary to undertake a 'personal interview'.

A number of interviewees express their surprise at how much personal information is given by candidates in personal interviews; they report that it is a most useful exercise as it gives interviewers 'a much more rounded picture' of the applicant.

### *Capabilities*

Three quarters (74%) of local authority respondents and two thirds (63%) of voluntary organisation respondents report that capabilities are used in person specification [Table 4]. However, several interviewees report that they use capabilities linked to the ‘elements of competence’ as defined in the Care National Occupational Standards issued by Scottish Social Services Council which also form the basis of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs).

Some interviewees consider that their organisations have developed the definitions on capabilities to reflect the use of the SVQ model of ‘competencies’. Other interviewees describe their difficulty in understanding the Toolkit definitions of capabilities and how to measure them.

### *Selection Process*

Less than one third of respondents report that they use work-related tasks but this may be due to a lack of definition in the questionnaire. Organisations may be experimenting with work-related tasks and psychometric testing as half (52%) of local authority respondents and a little less than half (42%) of voluntary organisation respondents report that these methods are ‘sometimes used’ [Table 4].

More than half (59%) of the respondents report that written exercises are part of the selection procedures. Interviewees note that it is useful to measure applicants’ literacy skills as they will be required to write up log reports, and some report that they use ‘in-tray’ exercises in the recruitment of managers.

A similar proportion of local authority respondents (59%) report that group discussions are part of the process; just over one third (38%) of respondents from voluntary organisations report the use of group discussions. Interviewees note that there are considerable benefits in using a discussion group because applicants’ views and values become clear very quickly in open discussion. However, one interviewee reports that the

local authority department is not including discussion groups as they want the process to stay ‘fresh’ for both applicants and managers.

Only a few interviewees report the use of psychometric tests, mainly in the selection of senior staff:

‘We don’t like psychometric testing; it has little value in relation to residential child care, although it can be more useful in management interviews as it was developed in the management world. It is unlikely to improve safety of applicants for basic posts and would cause administrative staff difficulty in training people to administer such tests. I prefer exercises based on practice-led initiatives.’

#### *Involvement of Young People*

Around one third of respondents (38% of those from local authorities, 26% of those from voluntary organisations) report that young people are involved in the recruitment process [Table 4], and opinions vary as to its usefulness; some interviewees are very enthusiastic about involving young people whereas a few report bad experiences.

The researcher has been given information about two successful models of involvement of young people. In one model, young people discuss with staff and a support worker which questions are appropriate; then, in the presence of staff who act as supporters and observers, they will interview the candidates and present their observations as advice to the interviewing panel.

The other model of involvement tends to recruit older young people who undertake training with Who Cares? before joining the assessment team with full responsibility to observe, interview and score each applicant:

‘Young people are developing their skills at interviewing and it seems to be a positive experience for them. They are very articulate and we give a high

weighting to their scoring. The involvement of young people has proved useful. Young people are quite astute at picking up whether candidates engage with young people or try to impress the adult person in charge of the task. Sometimes the young people say ‘no, we don’t feel safe’. We are going to develop this part of the exercise, perhaps getting the candidates to complete a task with young people.’

Young people who receive training and support throughout the process report that they enjoy the responsibility; they feel they have something to offer the recruitment process as they have learnt from their experience of ‘living with these people 24 hours a day’.

Those interviewees who report that the process of involving young people was not helpful are likely to have been involved in a situation where the training for the young people was not thorough; sometimes it had not been made clear to staff and children what contribution was expected from the young people, nor how their assessment would be treated, either as simple advisory information or as scored data from them as a member of the interview panel.

#### *Assessment Centres*

Very few organisations use a full assessment centre approach as defined in the Toolkit [Table 4]. About one in ten (14%) of the respondents report that they use this approach but there seems to be considerable variations in the number of different elements of the toolkit used in assessment centre approaches and in the methods of scoring the results from the different exercises.

Many see the development of the consistent and systematic approach of assessment centres as crucial to the improvement in standards of recruitment and selection for residential child care. The selection centre reduces the impact of ‘gut reactions’ and moves recruitment on to become an evidence-based procedure. Interviewees feel that the lengthy procedures help applicants to recognise the importance of the job they are taking on; as one interviewee says ‘it discourages “dodgy” people, and it reduces risk at the front end and employment disputes later’.

Several interviewees related how safer recruitment methods led to the recruitment of staff with 'better values'. Two reported that they considered 'safer recruitment' methods as a good investment of time and effort which would improve retention of good staff and reduce turnover. One interviewee noted that there had been fewer disciplinary hearings and dismissals in the organisation since the introduction of more elements of 'safer recruitment' practice but as yet statistics have not been collated.

A small number of respondents report that their organisation is considering the introduction of assessment centre selection processes; they expect that this change will improve the thoroughness of the selection procedure, with the addition of written exercises to provide information on candidates' literacy skills, and group discussions to illuminate candidates' values and attitudes.

Many interviewees want to implement a recruitment process that will enable interviewers to select individuals with the right qualifications and a sound value base, who can apply skills confidently and who will carry out jobs effectively. Those who have developed a 'safer recruitment procedure' expect that the time and effort invested in the process will be offset not only by the provision of a safer environment for young people but also by a reduction in staff turnover.

Table 4 Elements of the Toolkit used by respondents in Local Authority and voluntary organisations

<b>Elements of practice</b>	<b>Used</b>					
	<b>Not used</b>		<b>sometimes</b>		<b>Always used</b>	
	<b>L.A.</b>	<b>Vol.</b>	<b>L.A.</b>	<b>Vol.</b>	<b>L.A.</b>	<b>Vol.</b>
Job description written	3	0	0	3	97	97
Person specification written	0	5	3	10	97	85
	0	0	7	10	93	90

<b>Advertisement issued</b>						
Advert placed internally and externally	32	18			68	82
Advert emphasises safety awareness	30	44			70	46
 <b>Dedicated application form</b>	 39	 15	 0	 8	 61	 74
Application designed for children and YP	79	36			21	64
Application form asks about all qualifications	0	0			100	100
Application form asks all employment details	24	13			76	87
Application form asks for previous names	52	41			48	59
Application form asks about previous absences	44	23			52	77
Application form asks about criminal offences	28	13			72	87
Application form asks about disciplinaries	62	49			34	49
Referees will be asked about disciplinaries	31	26			70	69
False info will lead to summary dismissal	10	14			86	81
 <b>Equal Opportunities applied</b>	 0	 5	 0	 0	 97	 92
 <b>Screening interview</b>	 59	 34	 24	 17	 14	 46
 <b>Identity checks</b>	 0	 3	 0	 0	 100	 97
 <b>Verification of qualifications</b>	 0	 0	 3	 13	 97	 87
 <b>Referees will be sent standard form</b>	 18	 15			75	85
Refs sent job description & person spec	7	10			90	87
Refs asked about strengths & weaknesses	7	10			86	90
Refs asked about performance history	11	8			85	92
Refs asked about disciplinary offences	26	16			74	84
References sought for internal candidates	0	10			93	85
References read before panel interview	52	40			41	55
References are verified by telephone	62	58			21	34
 <b>Criminal records check</b>	 0	 0	 0	 0	 100	 100
Appl. Advised post is exempt from Rehab Act	7	0			93	97

Client record check	35	38	4	3	39	30
Personnel records check	21	16	7	8	66	74
All record checks completed prior to appointment	0	5			100	95
Panel Interview	0	0	0	3	100	97
Personal interview	44	33	22	31	30	36
Applicants advised they will have personal interview	46	38			50	59
Capabilities of post defined	18	9	4	17	74	63
Work related tasks/ psychometric tests	31	29	52	42	17	29
Applicants will do written exercise	31	41			59	59
Applicants will participate in groups	34	62			59	38
Applicants will meet young people	48	71			38	26
Assessment/ Selection Centre approach	64	70	21	14	14	14

N=29 respondents from Local Authorities and

N=40 from Voluntary Organisations.

## **Barriers to Implementation of the Toolkit**

This section based on interviews with practitioners involved in recruitment, provides an analysis of opinions on barriers to the full implementation of the elements of the Toolkit.

### *Limited awareness*

The Kent report notes the importance of establishing a safe awareness culture, quoting the Support Force for Children's Residential Care which states that an aware culture will include "the elements necessary for a positive care environment and the shared awareness that staff need to have to reduce the possibility of children and young people being abused". The findings from this survey suggest that some organisations lack such awareness in relation to recruitment.

Two interviewees who have used the Toolkit to develop an assessment centre approach report that they have to struggle to change corporate policy on recruitment and to obtain backing for the introduction of safer aware recruitment procedures:

'I would like to see recognition by people above in senior management that Residential Child care is different. There is only so far that I can make changes without some major change at corporate level. Generally Children's Services are not acknowledged to be any different from any other service.'

Turning to issues of training, not all management courses for residential child care staff promote the use of the Toolkit for safer recruitment: and one interviewee reports that the training consultant commissioned to provide training on recruitment procedures for management staff will concentrate on more general issues.

'They will be run by an external facilitator who probably has not heard of the Toolkit on Safer Recruitment. I don't know if she has any awareness of vulnerability of looked after children. She will base seminars on CIPD – concentrate on job descriptions and person specs and general selection training.'

Some interviewees who may have been involved in 2001 have forgotten the relevance of the document:

'I attended a seminar back in 2002 re the Toolkit. I did a report back to the committee and provided feedback to Scottish Exec. I had impression that the Scot Exec intended to make Toolkit mandatory following the consultation stage but as I heard no more I have forgotten about the whole thing.'

Others who are new to the post may not have a copy of the Toolkit and in small organisations are likely to remain unaware of the recommendations of the Toolkit if there is no organisational support:

'I am new to this post and had not looked much at the Toolkit. But I talk to personnel who do use it. I have discussions about recruitment procedures all the time with personnel – as they are keen not to become complacent. It is a learning process for everyone at the moment – we are all aware of the Toolkit and are tightening up our processes. We have an ethos of safer recruitment. Personnel is very much on board and promote the Toolkit as best practice. I came from the experience of working in a different authority and was pleasantly surprised to find tighter checks here especially with sessional staff.'

#### *Limited partnership between social work and human resource managers*

The difficult balance between workers' rights and children's rights needs to be acknowledged and opened up to debate. The current absence of debate and acknowledgement of differences in perspective, responsibility and expertise between social work and human resource managers in local authority settings has hindered communication and therefore has become a barrier to the implementation of safer recruitment procedures in residential child care.

For some interviewees, the social work ideal of a child-centred approach feels as if it is in conflict with the personnel perspective of fairness to employees. For human resource managers there is an awareness of the body of employment legislation and they argue that no one group of workers should be singled out for special treatment.

At worst social workers see personnel as inflexible administrators, and some human resource managers perceive that social work managers would benefit from accepting the advice of personnel professionals who have the skills in recruitment interviewing. Inter-professional rivalry can prevent cooperation when safer recruitment practice is required.

A social work manager reports that personnel advocate that social work recruits residential staff at local authority job fairs, the personnel aim being to fill more posts more quickly; but social work managers would prefer to have a more child-centred approach with a targeted advertising campaign to improve the image of residential child care and attract people who are more suited to the job.

A human resource manager reports that the difference in salary scale between residential staff employed in child care and workers in other forms of care produces problems. Cases are cited where residential child care staff have requested a job transfer after experiencing ‘burnout’ due to the pressures of the RCC job but a transfer is not usually possible without a re-negotiation on pay scales.

When a local authority introduces a policy of zero tolerance of violence against employees this is heralded as a personnel success but it can become problematic when a residential child care worker telephones the police every time a child or young person threatens violence. The worker can claim his or her right to work without threat of aggression or violence but their response can criminalise a vulnerable young person who may have had no criminal record before admission to care.

In several organisations the development of safer practice is being taken forward by social work managers responsible for residential child care provision without the full support or expertise of personnel management at a strategic level. In one organisation this has led to a social work manager seeing the need and developing Toolkit exercises outwith working hours.

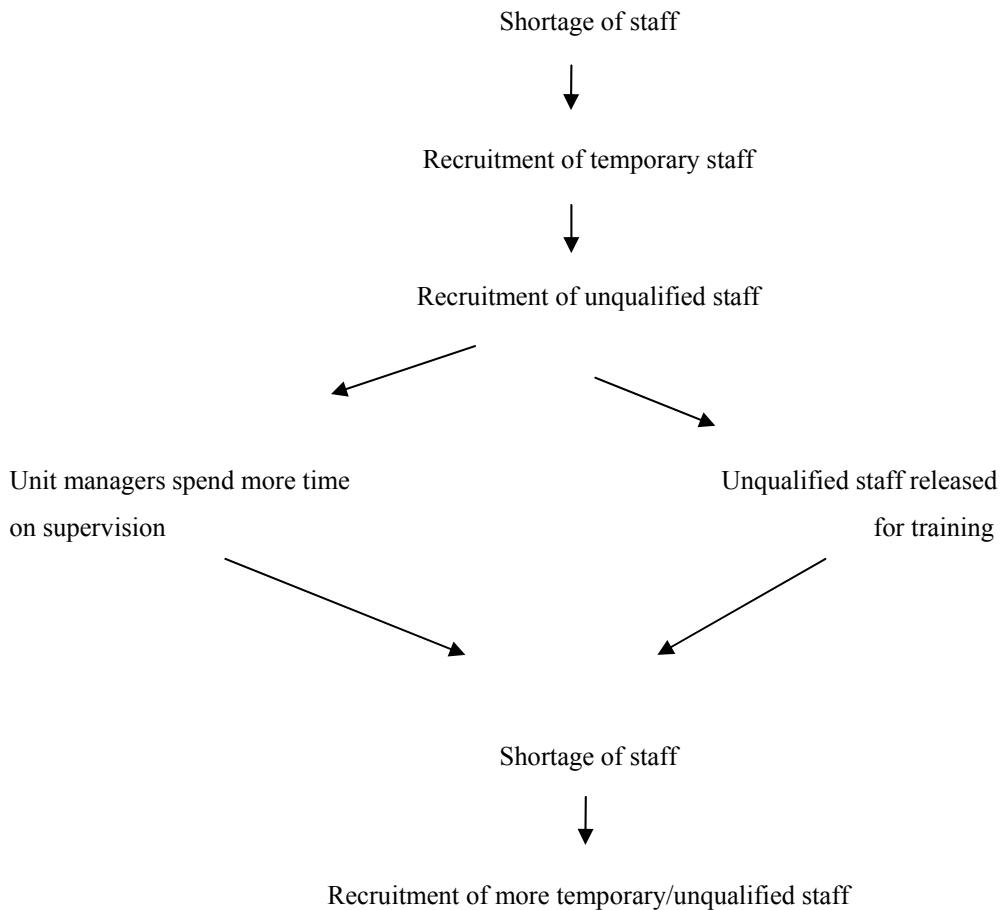
*Prioritisation of resources: time*

Many interviewees report that a major barrier to implementing the Toolkit is the lack of time. Some social work managers note that they are under so much pressure of work dealing with day-to-day decisions that they do not have time to think and plan strategically.

There is a general recognition among those who have read or used the Toolkit that even partial implementation of the procedures requires resources for planning, preparation and training, and few organisations have made these resources readily available. Many interviewees report that they do not have the time required to work on the Toolkit procedures. Those who have experienced how much extra work is involved in implementing one or two elements of the Toolkit report that they undertake that extra work in their own time.

Some interviewees report that their organisations find it difficult to release unit managers for 2-3 days to undertake safer assessment exercises and even more difficult to provide additional time for training in recruitment methods (Fig. 1).

Fig 1. Cycle of recruitment pressures



With so few resources available for training, these organisations do not have the capacity to train assessors capable of implementing the full range of assessment procedures advocated in the Toolkit.

### *Prioritisation of resources: funding*

Several interviewees report that the main barrier to implementing the Toolkit is funding: they perceive that the development and implementation of safer recruitment procedures will take more time than current recruitment procedures, and therefore it will be more costly to provide:

- training for all those involved in safer recruitment practice;
- more human resource staff to administer the checks;
- front line cover for those involved in recruitment and in recruitment training.

‘We need agreed standards for recruitment – to be measured against quality indicators: standards that are clear for employers and are included within the framework of inspection. They should not just be another imposition on employers – the Scottish Executive could show how they see ‘safer recruitment’ as important by funding it.’

## **Implementation and Promotion of the Toolkit**

A few interviewees express their concern that an atmosphere of complacency has crept into recruitment practice and the evidence from this survey suggests that the majority of organisations do not have a systematic approach to the full implementation of the Toolkit or any other package which promotes safer recruitment practice.

### *Leadership*

Many interviewees think that there needs to be leadership from the Scottish Executive and an endorsement from ADSW and CoSLA to promote safer recruitment procedures for residential child care staff. Interviewees in the local authority sector say that it is crucial that Directors of Human Resources and Social Work are actively involved in the promotion and implementation of safer recruitment, and it may be that the Scottish

Executive has a stronger role to play in the voluntary sector and in educational establishments.

#### *Evidence*

Before implementing assessment centre procedures, interviewees want to know whether there is any evidence of beneficial outcomes from the introduction of safer recruitment procedures; they want to see case study reports of how assessment centres have been established and what happened afterwards. As one respondent asks ‘is the outcome evidence solid enough to make these procedures mandatory?’

#### *Phased Guidance*

Generally interviewees favour the issue of Scottish Executive guidance on the implementation of safer recruitment practice; they are not in favour of it being made mandatory although some favour the introduction of minimum standards. Many were in favour of some form of monitoring and inspection although the suggestion that Standards of Recruitment should be introduced within the framework of SSSC inspections was not supported by the majority. On the question of introducing the Toolkit in phases some interviewees were concerned that messages about the need for robust measures of safer recruitment might become diluted in a staged process.

#### *Costing Assessment Centre Exercises*

The additional work of establishing assessment centres has cost implications which organisations have not worked out. In response to the postal survey, very few respondents (11%) were able to provide estimates of the cost of recruitment for residential staff; the estimates varied from £220 to £3000. One interviewee calculated that if costs included costs of providing recruitment training and replacement staff to provide cover for those involved in the recruitment process in addition to direct recruitment costs, it would amount to £15000 per person. Even where advertising agencies have been used, respondents are not able to provide estimated costs of recruitment, nor an evaluation of the impact of the campaign.

Several interviewees recommend that the Scottish Executive provide a model costing to assist organisations. This model would :

- provide information about likely costs;
- give guidance on suitable methods of accounting;
- show financial benefits accrued from better retention of staff;
- show evidence of a reduction in the number of disciplinary events.

### *Funding*

Although many interviewees think that Scottish Executive should provide additional funding to ensure that the safer recruitment initiative is given priority, they suggest that implementation can be reinforced by attaching monitoring mechanisms with the funding.

### *Training*

Training for individuals involved in safer recruitment procedures is seen as a crucial issue by all interviewees, and, as previously discussed, the inability to release people for training because of staff shortages, is identified as a major barrier to the implementation of safer recruitment practice. Interviewees would like to see Scottish Executive support for (free) seminars to review the recommended procedures in terms of everyday practice, provide explanations of key concepts used in the Toolkit, and examine available evidence on the beneficial outcomes of using the Toolkit procedures.

### *Update on Toolkit needed*

Some interviewees think that there is a need to update the Toolkit in the light of recent developments in Occupational Standards and the Registration Scheme under SSSC. Some feel that where there are areas of overlap there may be room for the procedures to be simplified: others suggest that there is an opportunity for collaboration with SSSC to develop and improve a National Set of Standards for Recruitment.

### *Easy-to-Use Handbooks*

Several interviewees recommend that the Scottish Executive publish a small handbook of good practice in safer recruitment specifically for use by unit managers; these should be small condensed publications which outline principles and provide examples which relate to practical case studies of residential child care. Another suggestion is that the Scottish Executive or a training agency publish updated examples of scenarios with exercises and relevant answers to assist hard pressed managers in assessment exercises.

### *National Centre for Recruitment*

A National Centre for Recruitment is recommended by some interviewees, and opinions vary as to whether this should be run by SIRCC or a new independent agency. Some suggest that smaller organisations could collaborate, pooling resources to run assessment centres to establish a ‘bank of suitable candidates’, but this is viewed with ambivalence by some small organisations keen to protect their autonomy.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

This section provides some suggestions for possible long term research to support the implementation of procedures for the safer recruitment of residential child care staff. These are intended to offer an indication of current gaps in knowledge related to safer recruitment, and are not seen to be required prior to taking active steps to strengthen the safe recruitment in Scotland.

Several practitioners interviewed for this research have highlighted the need for an evaluation of the costs and benefits of assessment centre methods of recruitment. Joint economic and social case studies of assessment centre operations would provide information to illustrate models of best practice in terms of financial management, selection, training and retention of staff and the safeguarding of children and young people.

Observation of the work undertaken by recruitment panels, and the role of the chair in facilitating the process, would provide information on the process of safer recruitment; this might include an exploration of lines of communication and responsibility for ensuring that safer recruitment procedures have been undertaken diligently.

There is scope for an exploratory study of the practice of recruitment - what happens from the time when a unit manager becomes aware that a member of staff is going to leave till a replacement worker is in post. Given the variety of procedures described by interviewees in this study, it would be useful to contrast recruitment methods in large and small organisations, and between local authority homes and residential schools. This study would provide guidance on how to achieve a model of good practice in the recruitment of residential staff.

Given the high turnover of staff in some organisations it would be useful to undertake a series of case studies which included observations of recruitment training, recruitment procedures and entry and exit interviews with residential child care staff.

The monitoring of the implementation of recruitment procedures should include the collection of statistics: although many interviewees have information about staff recruitment and retention, including references to suspended and completed disciplinary hearings they are unable to provide statistical information to illustrate the overall patterns of recruitment and staff turnover.

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