



Involving people with dementia in recruitment and selection

Key messages

- Many organisations recruit staff or external organisations to work with people with dementia.
- As customers of these services, people with dementia are in a unique position to assess whether an applicant has the right attributes to work with people with dementia.
- There are many ways of involving people with dementia in recruitment processes.
- People with dementia have the right to a say in decisions that affect their lives.

Why involve people with dementia in recruitment and selection

Many different individuals and organisations are recruited to work with people with dementia. They range from permanent support staff to organisations recruited through competitive tender processes for specific pieces of work.

People with dementia have a unique perspective on the skills and attributes that will work well for them. The recruiting organisation may also learn more about the services they provide for people with dementia through the process of involving people with dementia. For example, people might reflect on the aspects of a job description that are particularly important to them, which might provide valuable information about how a role is delivered and the relative importance of key tasks.

Involving people with dementia can offer insight into how applicants respond to people with dementia in real-life settings.

People with dementia have a right to a say in decisions that affect their lives.

‘As service users/clients of the Forget Me Not Centre, we wanted to be involved in every part of the process to find the right person. It is us the person will be working with.’

Forget Me Not group, Swindon

When to involve people with dementia in the recruitment and selection process

People with dementia can be involved at every stage of the recruitment process. Consider:

- Asking people to comment on role descriptions, person specifications and tender documents from the perspective of people with dementia
- Working with people with dementia to develop shortlisting criteria that reflect and are relevant to their experiences
- Working with people with dementia to devise interview questions
- Working with people with dementia to devise and/or deliver other activities to assess candidates
- Supporting people with dementia to be on interview panels.

Who to involve in the process

Ideally, involve the people with dementia who will be receiving services from the person or organisation being recruited.

Some people with dementia might have had experience of recruitment professionally or in other ways. Others might not have had experience but will be willing to get involved. Some people might need more support than others to get involved.

It is important to match involvement with the abilities and interests of the person.

If no one with dementia inside the organisation is able and willing to get involved in the process, consider asking someone from outside, such as your nearest DEEP group.

How to involve people in the process

Working on recruitment documents

Formal recruitment and tender documents are often long, complicated and full of legal and managerial jargon. Much of the content will be set and follows processes set by the recruiting organisation. Changing this can be a long slow process. However, these documents usually allow specific input for the particular job.

If this is the case, consider working with a small group of people with dementia on questions to inform specific parts of the document. Consider:

- Asking people what attributes they think staff members will need. This could include interests outside work and personal characteristics
- Asking about key aspects of the job description. For someone with dementia, what are most important parts of the job? Which parts are less important?

Shortlisting applications

Selection criteria are derived from the person specification. If people with dementia have been involved in setting these criteria, they will already be playing an important role in the shortlisting process.

However, in some situations, there will be additional shortlisting criteria. You might ask people with dementia to consider the relative importance of these criteria but ensure that you provide them in language that is clear and jargon-free.

‘We asked Lynda [Forget Me Not Centre manager] and her team to shortlist for us, based on what we had said we wanted.’

Forget Me Not group, Swindon

Helping people to think of interview questions

In circumstances where it is difficult to involve people with dementia directly on an interview panel, it might be appropriate to ask them to think of questions that could be asked by panel members. Think about asking people with dementia:

- What they want to know about new members of staff
- What the most important attributes for the post might be – and how someone might tell you about them
- About relevant occasions in their experience they would like explored.

This is what members of Forget Me Not group in Swindon had to say about their contributions to questions for an interview:

We each had a question we had worked on before, which was written on a slip of paper. Needless to say, remembering which pocket it was in was not plain sailing!

Questions we asked included:

- What do you think makes a good supporter for someone with dementia?
- If you had dementia, how would you want people around you to behave?
- Can you tell us about a time when you really messed up – and what you learned? (Apparently some people are perfect!)
- Tell us about a time in your life when you needed support and what helped you the most?
- What are your hobbies and interests?

Supporting people with dementia on interview panels

Many people with dementia are able and willing to sit on interview panels, though some might need more support than others.

Anyone who has sat on interview panels will know how tiring it can be. Here are some ways in which we can make the process easier for people with dementia:

- Make sure to allow plenty of time for breaks.
- Prepare the question/s to be asked by the person with dementia in advance and print on a single piece of paper.
- Prompt the person with dementia to ask their question if necessary.
- If the person finds it too tiring to sit through an entire interview, have them ask their question at the beginning or end of the session, then step out. At this point it can be useful to have a team member find out what they thought of the interviewee's response.
- Take a photo of candidates with their permission. This can be a useful memory aid when it comes to making a decision at the end of the day.

Other ways of involving people on the day

It might not always be possible or desirable for someone with dementia to sit in on an entire day of interviews but there are other ways of involving people on the day.

Here is what members of a Forget Me Not group said about their involvement in recruitment:

‘We wanted the candidates to take part in activities with us because you can’t always tell much about a person from their interview alone.

In the art room, we wanted to see if people were willing to ‘have a go’, not take themselves too seriously and have a laugh, so we could discover how interested they were in finding out more about us.

In the kitchen, people helped us make scones. We wanted to find out if people could break down instructions and support us to do it ourselves without taking over.

In the greenhouse, people helped us plant out some bulbs and flowers. We wanted to see if people were prepared to muck in and get their hands dirty (literally). Not everyone rose to the challenge!

A quiz in the conservatory: we wanted to see if people could get things going without needing to be told what to do and again without taking over (too much). We wanted to see if people could think on their feet and use their initiative.’

This guide was created with people with dementia from JRF Sounding Board, Doodle Club Lewisham, the Forget Me Nots (Kent) and the Forget Me Not group, Swindon

DEEP guides aim to support the involvement of people with dementia. Some are aimed at DEEP groups, others at organisations wanting to work well with people with dementia. They have all been co-produced with people with dementia and will be updated regularly throughout the project. Suggestions for new guides are welcome – contact Rachael Litherland at Innovations in Dementia: email rachael@myid.org.uk or telephone 01392 420076.

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