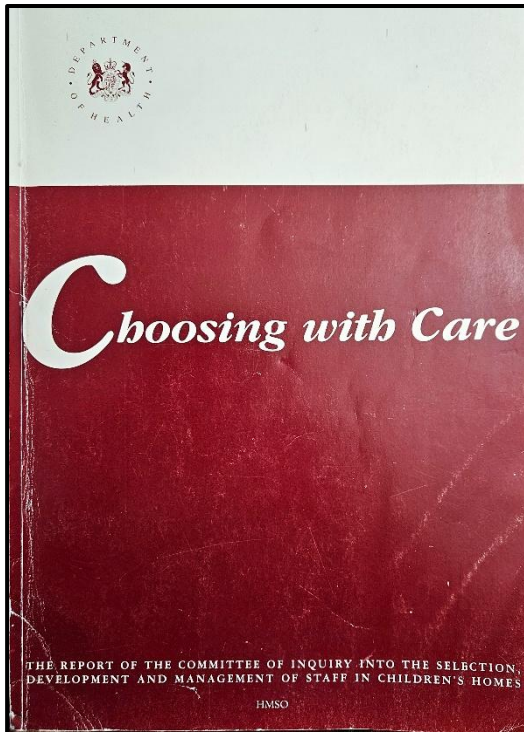


FURTHER INFORMATION & RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE WARNER REPORT



The Warner Report, formally titled "Choosing with Care" (1992), was an influential UK government inquiry chaired by Norman Warner. It was established in response to public concern over abuse and poor standards in children's residential care, specifically focusing on the selection, recruitment, management, and development of staff in children's homes.

While the Warner investigation and recommendations took place over 30 years ago, much of what was in it is very relevant and helpful today.

Report Background and Purpose

The inquiry emerged after a series of high-profile investigations into misconduct in children's homes over several decades. Its task was to recommend practical improvements to ensure children in care were safeguarded from abuse and to address failings in recruitment and training practices.

Key Themes and Recommendations

Safer Recruitment: The report emphasized the need for rigorous safer recruitment and vetting processes for staff, such as routine police checks, comprehensive employment history checks, external advertisement of posts, and reference checks before appointment.

Warner Interview: It gave rise to the "Warner Interview," an in-depth process designed to assess a candidate's personal motivations, attitudes, and suitability for working with vulnerable children. This method involves probing questions about applicants' emotional awareness, self-reflection, and boundaries, aiming to prevent the appointment of individuals who might pose a risk to children.

Lasting Influence

The Warner Report set a new national standard for safeguarding in children's residential services and informed subsequent reports and legislation, such as the Care Standards Act 2000, shaping modern safer recruitment, supervision, and vetting practices.

Below are some of the recommendations from the Warner Report that are worth considering today. While the needs of each job and context are variable, and we might not agree with all of Warner's recommendations, we should at least consider all the key areas and be clear about the reasons for what we do or don't put in place. Paying attention to the staff selection process is one of the most valuable and impactful exercises to influence organizational success.

The tools and techniques discussed below are all designed to increase the information gathered about candidates and to evaluate it more effectively. (Warner, 1992, p.45)

"An employer commented that,

"Our procedures rely upon good sense, gut reactions, and sharing the decision-making."

Warner states, "We consider that it is possible to make the selection of staff more systematic and objective than this".

The Institute of Personnel Management (IPM) noted in its written evidence that, on its own, the interview is not a good predictor of future job performance. Research findings quoted in the evidence suggested that the interview has a validity coefficient of 0.14 (i.e., only 14 in 100 appointments based on interviews will meet employers' expectations on job performance). The IPM commented that this is somewhat worse than making decisions on the toss of a coin. (Warner, 1992, p.45)."

The numbering and quotes in this section are taken directly from Warner so that anyone interested can go directly to the section in the Warner Report.

1. CANDIDATE INFORMATION AND THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

4.1 Too often, insufficient information is obtained on candidates; there is excessive reliance by most employers on the chance performance of a candidate at a formal interview. They need to draw upon a wider range of selection techniques in order to obtain a fuller picture of candidates.

4.2 The process of assessment should be aimed at gaining a full picture of a candidate's personal attributes, skills, and experience.

4.3 Most appointments are made based on an application form and a formal interview. In many cases, the interviews are conducted in panels of four or more people, which is hardly a forum for exploring aspects of personality.

4.6 The aim should be to achieve a full and rounded picture of the candidate, providing more detailed and complete information than is possible with the traditional application form-interview system.

2. WRITTEN EXERCISES

4.12 Muddled managers produce confused staff. Staff who cannot express themselves clearly are likely to make young people in their care confused and possibly angry. Irrational responses to children and young people are likely to worsen problems of control in homes. Most managers and many staff have to write reports, and many of these affect children's future. All this suggests that the selection process should test candidates' ability to think clearly and to express themselves well, both orally and in writing.

4.13 Written exercises can be designed to test clarity of thought and expression, and some respondents to our survey want to see more use of written exercises. The qualities mentioned are particularly important for posts where there is a significant management element. Exercises should take the form of asking applicants to write a short piece on a subject relevant to residential child

care practice or management. Candidates should be asked to complete the written exercise and return it with the application form. The subject of the written exercise should be sent out with the application form, and should state a maximum length of reply. **Usually, 1,000 words should be a sufficient length.**

4.14 (Written exercises) will provide evidence not only of candidates' ability to think clearly and to express themselves cogently, but will often reveal underlying attitudes... Responses should be drawn upon later in the selection process, most appropriately in an interview or discussion with the candidate... Candidates should be told at the outset that their written exercises will be discussed in the interview.

Recommendation 10

Employers should use written exercises in the selection process (including shortlisting) to test the ability of candidates to think clearly and to express themselves.

3. HOME VISITS (This may be a sensitive issue and not always appropriate.)

4.15 An important initial stage of the selection process should always be a visit to the home. We believe that, if properly planned, these visits are a valuable source of information both about and for the candidate. Candidates will be able to reconsider their own application in the light of their experience on these visits, and the employing authority will be able to observe the interaction between candidates and staff and children.

Requirement to attend additional selection processes, such as visits.

4.16 This can only be achieved if the employing authority pays the necessary expenses of candidates, including costs of travel and, where necessary, of overnight accommodation. This will, of course, involve extra costs for the employer, but avoiding inappropriate appointments will save money in the long term.

Recommendation 11

Employers should require all shortlisted candidates to visit the home and meet the staff and children in advance of the interview. Information about the interaction on visits between candidates and staff, and children should be made available to those involved in deciding the appointment of candidates by a person involved in the appointment process.

4. GROUP EXERCISES

4.19 We recognise that effective simulation of work in a children's home will be extremely difficult to achieve. However, it should be possible to simulate the environment in the home and to consider how candidates respond to it. The most appropriate means of doing so is through group exercises and discussions.

4.20 Three forms of group exercises can be identified: with other candidates, with staff, and with children. The latter two, to a certain extent, overlap with visits to children's homes, and there is scope for combining these two exercises. This may take the form of, for example, asking candidates for a head of home post to chair a staff meeting, or allowing candidates to be questioned by the young people in the home.

5. PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS

4.29 In an article in 1991, Blinkhorn and Johnson argued that it rarely happens that better selection or promotion decisions are made when personality tests are used. Six experts replied to their article. Professor Clive Fletcher of the University of London asserted that "It is extremely difficult to see any justification for the Blinkhorn and Johnson view on statistical, empirical, conceptual or practical grounds". He went on to say that personality tests can never be seen as a stand-alone method of selection, but are useful when taken in conjunction with other approaches and, perhaps most important of all, when the users have been properly trained. This is very much the position taken by the British Psychological Society in their evidence to us, although they have also emphasised that tests need to be adapted for the setting in which they are to be used.

4.30 The professional advice given to us is that reputable personality tests do give a reasonably accurate picture of the so-called "big five" elements of personality -extroversion, emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and culture. Some will argue that these "big five" are too crude to be used for personnel selection. It is true that they are not the only factors in choosing people for a job. However, they are important considerations in choosing people to work in children's homes - particularly emotional stability, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. If reliable tests are available for assessing these factors, then it would seem perverse not to use them. They enable interviewers to ask more probing questions about the responses received.

4.31 The other main argument used against personality tests is that they have not been validated against staff's subsequent performance. Although there are few studies in this, we are aware of a four-year study of 750 managers in two different types of organisation (a bank and an electrical engineering company) completed in 1991. This reported a high correlation between the results of personality profiles and subsequent performance.

4.35 We recognise that there has been a level of resistance to the introduction of personality tests. We note also that in many local authorities, personality profiling is used in the selection of senior staff, although it is much less common in more junior grades. Some 17% of local authorities make some use of them for head of homes posts, but only 5% of authorities reported using them 'sometimes' for care staff. However, their use is much more common in the voluntary sector, and within the private sector, less than half the homes say they never use these tests for either heads of homes or care staff.

4.36 In our view, personality tests should be used to help determine the extent to which a candidate fits a person specification. This will invariably have been prepared to require that candidates have certain characteristics and an affinity to work in the particular environment of a children's home. Initially, therefore, we are recommending that personality profiling is used for heads of homes and other management posts in homes, as a means of gaining a fuller picture of the candidates. However, we recognise that the field of personality testing is continually developing, and we consider that it is important that the potential for tests to be used in selecting staff in children's homes should be further explored. The British Psychological Society has stated in their evidence that they are not able to endorse any psychometric tests that are not specifically adapted

to the recruitment and selection of staff in children's homes. This points to the need for more development work to be encouraged by the Department of Health and employers.

6. CANDIDATE REFERENCES

4.43 In our view, appointments should never be made 'subject to references'. Prospective new employers should take the initiative in obtaining information about candidates from previous employers or line managers before the final interview. Previous employers have the information that enables a new employer to form a rounded picture of a candidate's strengths and weaknesses, and this information should be sought by letter and telephone. Information obtained by telephone is often more accurate and revealing, and to forbid the obtaining of it by this means through some misguided view of equal opportunities policies is simply to neglect the interests and safety of children. We consider that local authorities should abandon any embargoes on obtaining information about candidates by telephone.

7. SHORTLISTING

4.54 Shortlisting is an important part of the selection process and should be seen to be undertaken fairly and objectively. Theoretically, there is little difficulty in one person undertaking the shortlisting process if the person specification and application form have been properly designed. However, we recognise that many employers will consider that the process can only be undertaken fairly and equitably by a shortlisting panel, as is current practice. We recommend, therefore, that the shortlisting panel should comprise three people, ideally those who will be responsible for taking the final decision on appointment. There should always be an element independent of the line management of the post on the panel, but line managers should always take part in shortlisting candidates. As far as practicable, the panel should be balanced by gender, and the racial balance should reflect the local population. This is particularly important as many of the respondents to our survey reported failing to achieve gender and ethnic balance on interview panels.

Recommendation 20

Employers should ensure that, wherever possible, shortlists have at least three candidates; that shortlisting panels should include line managers and a person independent of the line management of a home; and that the panel should have no more than three members, balanced by gender and, where appropriate, race.

8. COMPOSITION AND SIZE OF THE INTERVIEW PANEL

4.56 We consider that panels should always contain the line manager for the post, his or her line manager, and at least one other person independent from line management. One of these people should be the designated appointing officer for the post.

4.58 Large interviewing panels are unwieldy and tend to achieve little in terms of gaining further information about a candidate. Evidence suggests that there is little need for more than two people on an interviewing panel. In practice, we recognise that in a large organisation such as a local authority, this is likely to be unrealistic. We consider that interviewing panels should include a maximum of three people. All those who will be involved in making the final appointment decision should be involved in the formal interview.

9. THE TRAINING OF INTERVIEWING PANELS

4.62 Interviewing is not necessarily a skill that everyone possesses. Our survey shows that most local authorities have recognised this. Interview training is generally provided for elected members, and 80% of local authorities report it as "always" or "usually" provided for officers who interview. In the independent sector, only about one-third of those interviewing have been trained to do so. We consider that it is essential that those conducting interviews are properly trained to undertake them. No person should be allowed to take part in interviews without having received thorough training in interviewing techniques and the proper application of equal opportunities policies.

Recommendation 21

Employers should ensure that final interview panels consist of no more than three people, balanced by gender and race as far as possible and appropriate, and should include an independent person as well as the line manager and a person senior to the line manager, one of whom should be authorised to make the appointment.

Reference

Warner Report (1992) *Choosing with Care - The Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Selection, Development and Management of Staff in Children's Homes*, HMSO