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# Sanctuary Group

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**Title:** References - Group Procedure

**Business functions:** All functions across Sanctuary Group

**Author:** People Services

**Authorised by:** Executive Director - Corporate Services

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**Sanctuary Group:**  
Sanctuary Group is a trading name of Sanctuary Housing Association,  
an exempt charity, and all of its subsidiaries.

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## Objective

To outline the process for obtaining and providing employment references, and to outline the process when appointing candidates who are already employed within Sanctuary Group (the Group) and obtaining internal references.

## Document applies to

All members of staff employed by or carrying out work for the Group.

All Managers responsible for recruitment of any staff, agency workers, or volunteers.

## Review

| Date           | Details  |
|----------------|--|
| April 2025     | Amended: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removal of Appendix 1, Sanctuary Group reference request letter, and Appendix 2, Sanctuary Group personal reference request letter; subsequent appendices renumbered.</li> <li>• Wording added at 3.2 to clarify reference requirements for Ofsted registered services.</li> <li>• Inclusion of reference requirements for Sanctuary Students included a section 4.</li> </ul>   |
| September 2024 | Amendment - procedural change resulting in the removal of reference requirement for any role where the candidate worked in health and social care, or where they worked with vulnerable adults and/or children.<br>Updated titles for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People Services, (formally HR Services)</li> <li>• People Business Partners (formally HR Business Partners)</li> <li>• Talent Engagement team (formally CRT)</li> <li>• Central Talent team (formally Care CRT)</li> </ul> |
| April 2024     | Removal of Appendix 6, Reference Risk Assessment Form as process now completed by CTT via Approvals on Teams.  |
| November 2023  | Formal review - only minor text and formatting changes.  |

## Appendices

Appendix 1 - Sanctuary Supported Living (SSL) reference request letter

Appendix 2 - Sanctuary Supported Living (SSL) personal reference request letter

Appendix 3 - Suitable character reference list

## 1. Reference requirements - guidance for hiring managers

### 1.1 General guidance:

- Obtaining satisfactory references is an important part of the recruitment and selection process within the Group.
- References should only be requested with a candidate's consent and only once a conditional offer has been made and accepted.
- References can be sought via an automated online referencing tool where available. Otherwise, reference requests should be sent via email to enable a quicker response.
- The references must (where possible) be from the applicant's most recent employers. If these references are not offered, you must find out why these details have not been provided by the applicant.
- Employment references must be returned on either company headed paper, from a company email address or with a company stamp. This must match the employer details provided.

### 1.2 Character references:

- In most cases, character references (also known as personal references) are unacceptable as they offer limited information. However, there may be occasions where an applicant is unable to provide references from previous employers.
- Personal references must only be used in the following situations:
  - where an applicant is returning to work following a period of absence, for example, career break, childcare/caring responsibilities, long term ill health;
  - when the applicant is a recent school/college leaver;
  - when the applicant's previous employers are no longer in operation;
  - where an applicant has only ever worked for one employer;
  - where an applicant's long period of service with their current employer means they are unable to provide a referee from a second employer;
  - where an applicant's previous employer has a policy of not giving references; and/or
  - where an applicant has been unemployed and in receipt of benefits.
- When the applicant is a school leaver, a teacher or lecturer are appropriate alternatives. In all other cases, applicants must seek a reference from a non-family member who has known them for at least three years. **Appendix 3** provides a list of suitable character referees.
- Employers are not obliged to provide a reference for an employee or former employee. More employers are moving towards a standard reference response; typically, this may include the person's job title, dates employed from/to and reason for leaving. It is unusual however for an employer to refuse to provide a reference and should this be the case, please contact your People Business Partner.

## 2. Care Quality Commission/Care Inspectorate registered - Sanctuary Care

### 2.1 Reference requirements:

- A minimum of two references covering three years' employment and/or training must be checked.
- Where an applicant is currently employed and has no gaps in three years:
  - **Option 1:** When three years is covered by one employer, this reference must be obtained plus a character reference from the **Appendix 3**.
  - **Option 2:** When three years is not covered by one employer, a reference from the most recent employer must be obtained plus a character reference.
  - **Option 3:** If it is not possible to obtain a reference from the most recent employer, a reference should be obtained from the previous employer, plus a character reference, and a reference risk assessment.
- If an applicant is currently working but cannot provide a seamless three-year employment history or declared a period of unemployment:
  - **Option 1:** Obtain a reference from the current employer and verify the dates of any benefit claimed during this time (for example, job seekers allowance, income support). The applicant must provide details of the job centre where they were registered and how long they claimed for, so that this reference can be sought.
  - **Option 2:** Obtain a reference from the most recent employer and a character reference from the **Appendix 3**.
  - **Option 3:** If it is not possible to obtain a reference from the most recent employer, obtain a reference from the previous employer plus a character reference, and a reference risk assessment.
- If an applicant has been unemployed for a period of three months or more, but has been employed in the past three years, a reference from the last known employer should be obtained plus a character reference from the list below.
- Where the applicant has been self-employed, a professional character reference should be obtained.
- For applicants who have recently left college or university, references should be obtained from a teacher/lecturer.
- Where it is not possible to obtain any employment reference at all, then two-character references should be obtained (**Appendix 3**)
- Where it is not possible to obtain two-character references from **Appendix 3**, a reference risk assessment should be completed and approved by the Home/Scheme Manager. Please contact your People Business Partner for further advice.

### 2.2 Suitable character referees:

- A character reference is provided by someone who knows an applicant outside of work. Rather than work experience, personal references attest to the applicant's character and abilities. **Appendix 3** provides a list of suitable character referees.

### 2.3 Obtaining references:

- Character referees may be contacted for verification via telephone and checked against a register, if possible. References will be documented as verified, signed, and dated by the Central Talent team.
- Where an applicant's references have not been provided within 10 working days after the request was made, the Central Talent Team will telephone or email the candidate to check that they are still engaged in the recruitment process, and may issue a seven day letter giving guidance on a deadline to provide referee details.
- Suitable references must be received, or a reference risk assessment completed and signed off, before a candidate can begin work.
- A candidate starting work is also dependent on receipt of all other mandatory new starter documentation.
- Where any references received cover an employment period of less than three months and this involved working with children or vulnerable adults, further investigations must be undertaken by the recruiting manager to explore the reasons for leaving and this must be fully documented.

## 3. Sanctuary Supported Living and Sanctuary Retirement Living (Care Quality Commission and non-Care Quality Commission)

### 3.1 Reference requirements:

- A minimum of two references covering three years employment and/or training must be checked.
- Where an applicant is currently employed and has no gaps in three years:
  - **Option 1:** When three years is covered by one employer, this reference must be obtained plus a character reference (**Appendix 3**).
  - **Option 2:** When three years is not covered by one employer, a reference from different employers covering the last three years should be obtained.
  - **Option 3:** If it is not possible to obtain a reference from the most recent employer, a reference should be obtained from the previous employer, plus a character reference.
- If an applicant is currently working but cannot provide a seamless three-year employment history or declared a period of unemployment, a gap in employment of up to 30 days is permissible. References should be obtained as outlined above.
- If the gap in employment is longer than 30 days, then references should be obtained as follows:
  - **Option 1:** Obtain a reference from the current employer and verify the dates of any benefit claimed during this time (for example, job seekers allowance, income support). The applicant must provide details of the job centre where they were registered and how long they claimed for, so that this reference can be sought.
  - **Option 2:** Obtain a reference from the most recent employer and a character reference.

- **Option 3:** If it is not possible to obtain a reference from the most recent employer, obtain a reference from the previous employer plus a character reference. A risk assessment may also be required if the most recent employment involved working with vulnerable adults or children.

### 3.2 Obtaining references:

- Where an applicant's previous employer has not provided a reference within 10 working days after the request was made, the recruiting manager and/or Central Talent team must contact the referee to check that it was received and is being processed. The applicant must also be made aware of this and asked to confirm the contact details they provided. In these circumstances, the prospective member of staff will be requested to contact the referee in order to progress the reference.
- The references must be chased at least twice.
- If references are not received, an offer of employment may be withdrawn.
- If the hiring manager wishes to continue in employing the applicant, a risk assessment must be completed and signed off by the People Business Partner. Evidence of request and chasing up of the reference should also be sent to the People Business Partner.
- Suitable references must be received, or a reference risk assessment completed and signed off, before a candidate can begin work.
- A candidate starting work is also dependent on receipt of all other mandatory new starter documentation.
- Where any references received cover an employment period of less than three months and this involved working with children or vulnerable adults, further investigations must be undertaken by the recruiting manager to explore the reasons for leaving and this must be fully documented.
- Reference risk assessments for employees in Ofsted registered services must be approved by the Registered Service Manager.

## 4. Sanctuary Students

### 4.1 Reference requirements:

- Employment with Sanctuary Students is subject to the receipt of one reference which covers at least the preceding three year's employment history.
- If a reference does not cover a three year period, two references will be required.
- Reference will be obtained by the Central Talent Team.
- Written references must be sought for the successful applicant as soon as possible after a provisional offer of employment has been made and accepted.
- If references are not received, they must be chased twice by the Central Talent Team. If references are still not received, the hiring manager may make the decision that the candidate can start work without having received references, a reference risk assessment must be completed and approved by the Hiring Manager. Please contact your People Business Partner for further advice.

## 5. Non Care Quality Commission/Care Inspectorate registered business areas (excluding Sanctuary Supported Living)

**Note:** This section applies to all non-CQC/Care Inspectorate registered business areas and locations, including Property Services, Corporate Services, and Sanctuary Housing.

### 5.1 Reference requirements:

- Employment with the Group is subject to the receipt of one reference which covers at least the preceding three years' employment history.
- If a reference does not cover a three-year period, two references will be required.
- Obtaining references is the responsibility of the recruiting manager.
- Written references must be sought for the successful applicant as soon as possible after a provisional offer of employment has been made and accepted. If using the online referencing tool, please contact the Central Talent Team. If requesting manual references, refer to the email template on [Pulse](#).
- Where a written reference cannot be acquired, a verbal reference can be taken. When taking a verbal reference, the recruiting manager must complete the requested information as per the reference request email [template](#).
- If references are not received, they must be chased twice by the hiring manager. If references are still not received, the hiring manager may make the decision that the candidate can start work without having received references.
- A candidate may start in post before the reference is received, subject to the recruiting manager's approval. However, the references should continue to be chased for retention on the employee's record.

### 5.2 Current employees:

- For current employees who are appointed to a new role within a non-CQC business area, the previous manager and recruiting manager should liaise and hand over any relevant details, however a formal reference is not required.
- If a current employee moves from a non-CQC role into a CQC role or from one CQC role into another CQC role in a different location, the references on file should be reviewed. If they do not meet the CQC requirements for the business area as outlined above, further references must be obtained in line with this policy.

### 5.3 Providing references:

- There is no legal obligation to provide references to other organisations who are employing a former employee of the Group.
- It is the Group's policy to provide factual information only in response to reference requests.
- References will only be issued for employees of Sanctuary; references for volunteers and work experience placements will not be provided.

- The manager must not respond to a reference request. Instead, they must send this request to [references@sanctuary.co.uk](mailto:references@sanctuary.co.uk) who will respond to the request centrally.
- It is the Group's policy not to complete any external forms requesting a reference. References issued will contain only factual information.
- Where a reference request is received for an employee who has been dismissed, as this is factual information, this can be disclosed. Managers who receive such a request should forward this to [references@sanctuary.co.uk](mailto:references@sanctuary.co.uk) who will respond accordingly. Where details of the dismissal are requested, this will need to be referred to the People Business Partner.

#### 5.4 References received:

- References must be requested for all applicants.
- Upon receipt of satisfactory references, these must be attached to the candidate ticket on the Document Management app and kept on the employee file.
- Where there are any reservations regarding a reference, the recruiting manager must notify their concerns to their line manager for their consideration.
- Where unsatisfactory references are received, recruiting managers must contact their People Business Partner for advice.
- A reference provided by an employer to another employer is exempt from any data subject access request therefore no information pertaining to references received should be divulged to candidates who have had their offers of employment rescinded due to unsatisfactory references.

#### 5.5 Providing personal references:

- Where managers wish to provide a more detailed reference for an employee, this must be done on a personal basis only. Managers must be aware that any information they give through a personal reference is their opinion alone and must not be expressed as the views of the Group. For this reason, company headed paper or other company stationery, including company emails must not be used if giving personal references.
- In addition, the use of social networking media to provide personal references for either a current or former Group employee is not permitted, as the information provided could be perceived as being representative of the Group.

#### 5.6 Other types of references:

- Other types of reference requests may include requests from banks for mortgages, requests from estate agents for rentals, or home office requests for visa applications. Any reference requests of this type that are received should be forwarded to the Corporate Shared Service Centre for completion.