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## Recruiting and Training TCK Staff

Staff teaching and working with our TCKs come from a huge and ever growing number of countries. They range from school leavers on their gap year to active retirees on yearly renewable contracts, and their assignments include the whole range of staff needed in a school as well as family tutors and support staff in specialist agencies. They may be serving in very comfortable expatriate enclave communities or in remote and physically difficult conditions. Given these huge variables, how can we answer these questions properly. Can we.....

1. ensure the right match between the worker and the assignment?
2. communicate clear expectations about the kind of staff needed and that all of our recruiters and trainers know these expectations?
3. work out clear and consistent screening of staff before arrival?
4. ensure that relevant and necessary training is given for the many diverse roles?

### Communication, communication, communication.....

Two years ago I was asked what some of the biggest challenges were in our own role as International TCK Consultants. The top three that we identified were all rooted in difficulties in communication. It is clear that it is worth getting communication right, but all too often we get it wrong or it is inadequate

In an age of easy communication channels, we are easily overloaded, and so we do not always sift out the important from the latest thing that seems to demand our attention.

Most of our TCK schools are in the position of relying on agencies or individual recruiters in the most likely sending countries. A lot of trust is placed in these recruiters to adequately screen applicants and train them once accepted. However, communication between the school and the agencies is not always clear enough. It is not unknown for agencies to start the recruitment process only to find that the vacancy was already filled several months beforehand. More concerning still is that occasionally staff reach a school without there ever having been clear communication about their role on arrival: the frustration that this can cause is not difficult to imagine!

Schools need to be really clear about the staff that they require, and keep their vacancy lists up to date. They also need to be clear about the kind of person that is needed, specifying qualifications and experience, the type of personality and any other relevant factors. Schools have to spell out these expectations in order to avoid the frustration of dealing with continual requests to try and place staff not suited to the assignment. Of course agencies need to ask for clear information and guidelines as well, but the receiving schools are the ones with urgent needs, so the greater communication responsibility lies with them. With skype and other similar tools, schools are now able to meet face-to-face with prospective staff who have been initially screened by an agency.

The school staff will be working with the potential recruit, so they have the responsibility to verify as much as possible for themselves that the person applying is suitable for the vacancy.

The same principles apply for a family looking for a tutor or a specialist support agency seeking staff. In order to provide a good match, our agency has a questionnaire available for the parents requiring a tutor to fill in. The questions are designed to help the family to provide a thorough profile of the tutoring situation, and to think through aspects that they may not have considered, such as how the tutor will be supported and mentored whilst on the overseas assignment.

We also provide a questionnaire for recruiters to give to those applying. In the same way, the questions are designed to cause the tutor to think through all aspects of the role, and to consider the different issues that might arise during their term of service.

Given how intense the family tutor role can be, it is vital to be as satisfied as possible that the match is right for both sides – the agency and applicant on the one hand and the family on the other. There are so many variables that it is impossible to generalise, but the tutor needs to be mature, able to live independently, able to relate well to children and adults, have a clear love for children, and an ability to teach.

The tutor is not some kind of paid companion for isolated children, but obviously he or she will normally be socially involved with the family as well as doing the teaching.

One other point to note on recruitment of tutors is that often the person asked is a family friend or even a family member. This is usually a good thing, as the demand for tutors always exceeds supply, so any recruitment method is welcome, especially one that brings out someone already known. However, it is essential that correct recruitment and training procedures are followed. There have been numerous examples of poor sending practice with inadequate screening and training, but this can be minimised in the future by improving our procedures and practice.

## **Screening**

All too easily some recruiters can fall into the trap of considering a person for TCK work who is unsuited to any other overseas assignment. It is true that some schools can do a great job in mentoring young people and drawing on their developing skills (e.g. as teaching or dorm assistants) in a way that would be impossible in many overseas settings. However, those young people have to display enough maturity, emotional stability and teachability for this to work. If they need a very large amount of support and mentoring, this can drain the time and energy of the core career staff in the schools.

Although few TCK staff live in isolated or physically demanding settings, they still face the pressures of the overseas situation. Those challenges include adaptation to an international team, community living with its necessary rules and procedures, working to a tight routine, and socialising with work colleagues, making it difficult sometimes to switch off from work. This means that teachable, well-balanced, and adaptable staff are needed. Applicants without these qualities should not be sent to work with TCKs. In some cases the kindest thing for all concerned is to turn down the application, but there is also the place for recruiters to defer the application to allow time for the candidate to grow and

develop. What must never happen is for recruiters to constantly give applicants the benefit of the doubt and assume that school counsellors or pastoral staff will always be there to help them cope.

The selection of good houseparents has to be particularly rigorous as this is one of the most open-ended, yet demanding, roles in a residential school. The houseparents' work in shared parenting is huge in the development of boarding children for better or for worse. Where the relationship is good the children may well relate to them as family members for life. One young woman we know told us how important her houseparents were, as a stable and decisive influence during the troubled times of marital problems and subsequent divorce of her parents. Conversely, history shows us that in far too many TCK schools in the past, the wrong people were put in place because of very poor selection procedures, and long-term damage in the lives of TCKs has been caused as a result.

A few pointers about the kind of people who make good houseparents. They should be...

- good parents to their own children
- warm in personal relationships so that they are at ease relating to children and their parents
- secure in their own identity and willing to admit when they get something wrong
- willing to learn
- firm, but fair and consistent
- spiritually mature and able to mentor and guide others
- demonstrate personal and relational skills (practical and administrative skills are useful, but are secondary to these)

Any assistants working with the houseparents need to have the same characteristics, but as they are nearly always younger, their experience and skills in these areas will usually be more limited.

## **Training**

As in any profession or vocation, training for TCK work is vital. In a recent conversation with child protection specialists it was clear that their "audit" of much TCK training is that it is inadequate, not just by a small margin in some areas, but often extremely inadequate. It has all too often been the case that TCK staff have been sent with nothing more than a two or three day course giving a basic introduction to the agency before going. In addition there may be no plans to mentor or train on the job other than by trial and error. The failures of this kind of approach have been obvious and repeated.

Our agency has MKPFO (UK) or TCK-PFO (USA) pre-departure training as a requirement for all TCK staff. Where it is not possible to attend either of those courses, an equivalent has to be arranged using local TCK staff, on-line training and skype seminars. This needs to be applied with no exceptions, and not bypassed for the sake of ease or expediency for those newly recruited or the sending staff. There should be no fast-tracking or corner cutting because of the perceived desperation of the receiving school or family.

A pre-departure course is only one element of overall training. On-the-job mentoring is also essential, either within the TCK school or from a consultant for family tutors who are more isolated in their day-to-day work. Such mentoring should be in addition to the more

formal regular appraisal procedures normal in most schools and agencies. Some parts of the world also have a wide range of formal staff development courses and conferences available. Similar material is available in on-line courses, making them accessible anywhere in the world with reasonable internet access.

The training should be actively planned between the sending agency and receiving school or family, from the time the new staff member has been accepted to go. It needs to be structured so that training requirements and expectations in both the sending and host countries are clarified: this helps avoid unnecessary duplication as well as the risk of missing out key elements by default.

**Steve Bryant - WEC International MK Consultant**

## **Finding a tutor for your children – blessings and pitfalls**

A good home tutor can be of enormous benefit to a family serving in a place where a suitable school is not easily available. The right person brings fresh input to the family and often frees up one or both parents for more time in ministry with nationals. Conversely, a tutor who does not fit well into the situation may need a lot of extra input and support, which can be difficult for everyone involved.

Tutors are often recruited on an *ad hoc* basis by individual and families, but this can mean that they bypass screening procedures and training, and that during their time overseas the pastoral and accountability structures are unclear. All kinds of problems may result from this, and long term damage can be done both to the families and the tutors themselves.

Parents need to consider all kinds of practical questions when they are looking for a tutor for their children. Our organisation uses a questionnaire (adapted from the original supplied by another agency) to help with this process.

The questions that need to be addressed are discussed in the paragraphs below. If you would like a copy of the questionnaire itself, please contact us.

### **The family**

Create a brief profile of the family including length of time on the field, the ages and grade levels of the children, and whether they have had a tutor before. If so, how did it work, and what lessons were learned? Specify which children need a tutor. This is needed in order to avoid misunderstandings: the tutor should not be expected to look after preschool siblings or other 'extra' children at the same time. Clarify whether any of the children have special educational needs, or if there is a growing concern about their progress. Have any such children had a formal assessment or diagnosis, and what recommendations have been made? To what extent have these been followed through?

### **Living arrangements**

It is often assumed that the tutor will live with the family, and that this will not be a problem. It may work well if certain conditions are met, but there are potential pitfalls.

There should be a clear understanding that the tutor needs his or her own space, and – for example – should not be expected to share a bedroom with one of the older children. The parents need to consider whether there is adequate space in the house, and the layout suitable to provide privacy for the tutor. Other options may include living elsewhere but taking meals with the family, or living completely separately, although close by. If the tutor is young and away from home for the first time, an ideal compromise may be that he or she lives with another family or group of singles. Older and more experienced people may be happy to live alone, if the local security situation permits it.

## **Costs**

The costs of the different accommodation options need to be considered. Be clear on how these costs will be met.

## **Lifestyle**

Provide information about the climate of your area, including seasons, temperatures, amount of rainfall, dust and pollution.

Think about the medical facilities available in your area. Are there medical conditions which, in your opinion, would make it very difficult for a potential tutor to cope?

What sort of Internet access is available in your area? What is the electricity supply like?

List the essential items and clothing which a tutor would need to bring to your location. Could these be purchased in the host country? At what comparative cost? Is it advisable to ship goods into the country?

What items or styles of clothing are appropriate or inappropriate in your location? Would different clothing be needed in other places, such as in the main centre or in large cities?

## **Language**

Think about how your tutor will manage if he or she knows little or no local language. This situation can potentially make the tutor very dependent on the host family and can cause frustration and stress. It is important to make realistic provision for language learning.

How could this be done? Could you help with teaching the basics or do you have access to a local person who could do this? How much time will you need to allocate for the tutor to acquire some basic skills in the necessary language?

## **Travel**

Consider whether it is possible to get around alone without the national or local language. Provide information about travel in and out of your area, and within the country, which would be helpful to a prospective tutor.

## **Relating to the family**

Many prospective tutors are now under 25. How much do you know about the background and expectations commonly found in young people from this generation (known as Generation Y)?

Think about your daily lifestyle, and how a tutor would need to fit into this. For example, if your day starts at 6 and school starts at 7, explain this before the tutor is recruited. If vegetarians or vegans would struggle in your location, make this clear. Think about the tutor's involvement in household chores. Would you expect them to wash up or clean the house?

### **Supporting the tutor**

Consider the place that the tutor would occupy in your family life. Think about your family's activities – sports, family birthdays, outings etc. How would you include the tutor and at the same time maintain special family times?

Many tutors are young and away from home for the first time. Consider how much emotional, social and spiritual support you are willing and able to provide. Try to be realistic, balancing this against the demands of family life, work, and maintaining communication with your team and home end support network.

### **Other support and accountability**

Consider the opportunities for worship and spiritual input that are available in your home, and in other settings nearby. Would expectations be placed on the tutor, such as being expected to teach Sunday School or lead worship, for example?

In fellowship with others, decide how the tutor would fit into and be supported by the wider ministry team in your area. Set an accountability structure in place so that both the parents and the tutor can refer to a third party for input and support. This will be absolutely essential if for some reason the arrangement does not work out.

Consider the opportunities for social or ministry relationships that are available to the tutor outside the family, in your location. Make the most of contact with cultural peers nearby, and try to ensure that there are scheduled times in a centre or other meeting places of expatriates.

### **The schooling programme**

Describe your methods of discipline, and consider whether you are strict, moderate or relaxed in disciplining your children. This will need to be explained in advance to a potential tutor. Bear in mind that people from different cultures may have widely varying ideas on discipline, and bringing up children in general.

Specify the hours that you would expect your children to be under instruction from the tutor. Clarify the expectations that you would have of the tutor regarding supervision or discipline of your children outside of instructional hours. Remember that the tutor needs time off as well as preparation time for the classroom. The 'family and tutor' situation can be very intensive, especially in a context where there are few relationships outside of the family circle. Think about how to ensure that the tutor has adequate, regular time off. Be aware of possible places to visit or things to do in your area.

Provide a calendar of term dates with breaks and holidays included. Give specific information about the curriculum that your children are using: will the tutor be expected to

follow the curriculum without deviation, adapt it to fit your children, or to deviate in certain areas?

What facilities are available for the education of your children? Ensure that you have a separate room where the lessons will not be disturbed, adequate desks, shelving, a black or white board, etc. Describe the supplementary resources and educational materials that are available in your home, and clarify which materials you wish the tutor to bring. Be prepared to pay for these.

### **The ideal tutor**

Think about the kind of person that you need. For example, would you be prepared to have an 18 year old gap year student, or someone who was experienced but not qualified? Would age be a factor? Are you in a setting where it would be easier to have a man than a woman, or vice versa? If a couple applied, could you deploy both of them, or find another role for the non teaching partner?

### **Cultural matters**

The tutor may be from a different culture or nationality than that of the family. Think about aspects of your national and family culture which may need explaining to someone from a different cultural background. The tutor will need to adapt to you, and you to the tutor.

### **Anything else?**

Are there any other considerations which would be helpful for the prospective tutor to know?

***Gill Bryant - WEC International MK Consultant***

(with acknowledgement to Wycliffe Bible Translators)

**Educare** is a free e-magazine for TCKs, their families, staff working with TCKs and any others concerned for their education and welfare. It can be freely distributed to anyone who would benefit from it. Educare is a ministry of WEC International.