

# Soft Landings: Support for Line Managers and Staff

## Introduction

Traditionally, within The Scout Association, the appointment process focuses on identifying and supporting a volunteer taking up a new role. At local level, this model works well with people volunteering for a set role with no competition. For national and UK roles, however, the situation is more complex and we need to consider the support of unsuccessful candidates to retain their skills and enthusiasm in the movement.

## What are soft landings?

Soft landings is the process of ensuring that any unsuccessful applicants for a role are supported to continue their Scouting volunteering journey and develop to their maximum potential as a volunteer. The result of the process is that an unsuccessful member should still have a positive experience, despite not being appointed to the role they applied for. As part of the soft landings process, volunteers are sign posted towards further opportunities in TSA to assist in their personal development.

## How does the process work?

There are 3 stages in the Soft Landing process:

- 1 Breaking the news
- 2 Applicant feedback
- 3 Local support

## Breaking the News

We would all like to tell the successful applicant that they have been selected for the role, but informing the unsuccessful applicants requires sensitivity and skill to keep this as a positive experience for our volunteers.

At the interview (or application stage if there are no plans for interviews), applicants should be informed of the next stage in the process. This should include an expected time frame and method of informing them if they have been unsuccessful.

Whether the candidate is informed in person, by phone or via email, they should be given the opportunity for feedback. Not every candidate will want instant feedback, and this should be respected, but they should know who to ask if they would like to at a later date.

## Applicant Feedback

Many of our volunteers are used to receiving feedback when applying for a job and are increasingly expecting the same when applying for senior volunteer roles in TSA. Although disappointing for the participant, this situation can be an excellent opportunity for their development and we need to be assisting with this.

As feedback should be given to all candidates who are unsuccessful when applying for a role this should be pre-empted and decided on at the same time as deciding on the successful candidate. This helps keep the feedback relevant as the reasons behind the decision not to appoint are still fresh in the mind of the appointing team/volunteer.

Just like giving feedback during a training event, the process needs to be constructive and give the volunteer suggestions of how they can develop themselves.

When considering feedback, a good place to start is the person specification and role description then basing the feedback on areas in the candidate's performance that were lacking from these documents. This should then be followed up with an example of how they can improve. For example:

A volunteer has applied for a senior volunteer role in Adult Training at Headquarters. They are currently a Beaver Scout Leader and, apart from completing the relevant Adult Training modules, have never had any exposure to managing adults or the management of the Adult Training Scheme.

This volunteer's area of expertise is not related to the role that she has applied for & therefore will not have the necessary knowledge to carry out the role. Feedback could include applying for other senior roles that make use of her Beaver section leader knowledge, for example in Programme, or local adult training roles, to gain further experience of the field.

An experienced Scout Leader has applied for the role of Regional Commissioner. Their Scouting history, although vast has always been at section level. Outside of Scouting, his job involves managing a small team of adults in one location.

This volunteer, although experienced in Scouting, may not have the strategic or leadership skills expected of a Regional Commissioner. They should be encouraged to complete some Leadership and Management modules to help develop these necessary skills and should consider applying for a more local manager role, for example District Commissioner or Assistant County Commissioner, with a narrower scope of practice to consolidate his learning.

Some feedback is easier than others. In the above examples there have been obvious areas of a candidate's application that do not meet the person specification, but in some instances there will be two or more candidates who meet all the criteria. This should be fed back to the candidate in an encouraging but factual way and other opportunities should be highlighted to them.

## Local Support

Applicants for national roles do not necessarily come through the traditional hierarchy of the association and even if not successful in being appointed to the role, the volunteer has unconsciously engaged with the Talent Management Model and identified themselves as a volunteer who wishes to take more of a leading role in TSA. These plans may not be known to local managers, who are regularly looking for motivated people to fill key vacancies at District or County/Region(Scotland)/Area/Island level.

Sharing this wish for further involvement should be shared back to the volunteer's usual line manager in Scouting. In practical terms this would usually be a Group Scout Leader, District Commissioner, County Commissioner, Area Commissioner or Regional Commissioner (Scotland). The feedback should inform the manager of the role they applied for, that they were unsuccessful but should consider how they could be developed locally. This could be by:

- considering them for a place on their local team
- contacting their Training Adviser to review their Personal Learning Plan and identify training opportunities to help them with roles in the future
- encouraging the applicant to apply for a talent management activity such as Future Leaders Programme or a local Action Focused Approach event

This contact should be made as supportive as possible and the process should be made known to the applicant at time of application.

## In Summary

