

# Case Study



## Housing

### *Southern Housing Group*

One of the largest providers of rented accommodation in South East England, Southern Housing Group is a registered social landlord that provides properties for rent, leasehold and low-cost home ownership in London, Essex, Kent, Surrey, Berkshire, Sussex, Hampshire – and the Isle of Wight.

The Group owns and manages 24,000 homes for more than 66,000 residents. To manage such a large estate the Group employs more than 800 people in a variety of roles from caretakers to call agents in its customer-service centre.

Southern Housing is proud of the service it provides to its tenants and partners, and looks for the highest quality staff in order to maintain its excellent reputation. This requires a consistent approach and uniform standards to be set for all recruitment activity.

The Group's senior recruitment officer explains: "Getting the right people on board is essential for us. However, the nature of our business and the fact that we cover eight regions and work with more than 80 local authorities means we have a large number of outlying offices, and a very diverse range of job roles. Ensuring continuity across the board in these circumstances was proving to be something of a challenge, and we needed to find a way to ensure that our excellent recruitment teams could continue to hire the very best people."

To address this, the Group decided to adopt an online skills testing service. They were looking for assessment modules that were not only cost effective, but easy to set up and use. Following a recommendation from one of its recruitment consultancies, it selected a series of test suites from Skillsarena in March 2005. These included assessment modules for: Microsoft Office software; UK clerical skills; general aptitude; numeracy; literacy; grammar and spelling, as well as evaluation suites designed specifically to test a call centre agent's skills.

"Skillsarena's online testing was the ideal way to address our recruitment needs. The assessment modules are straightforward to use, and can be administered and taken remotely. That means that all recruitment professionals throughout the organisation can use them, and we get an instant picture of a candidate's ability and aptitude. All our applicants take tests of the same standard, so whether they're in Islington or Ashford we know they're being assessed against the same benchmarks." The results are delivered automatically to the test administrator and are set out in a

consistent format. This means that recruitment decisions are less subjective and open to interpretation.

The Group is also using Skillsarena's 'Create Your Own' tool, which has enabled it to develop tests specifically tailored for its own business. "We wanted to make sure that we were assessing people in situations that were as close to real life as possible. For example, we hire a lot of caretakers and the Create Your Own tests enable us to assess their literacy skills by relating the questions to the tasks on their job sheets. We can also set numeracy questions asking them to work out how much paint is required to cover a certain area, or to calculate how many tiles are needed for a new splashback. For more administrative roles we can assess someone's numeracy by asking them to calculate rent payments."

Create Your Own gives the Southern Housing Group the flexibility to adapt its tests to each of the wide number of job roles. By making the assessment relevant to specific jobs, it can make sure that people have the skills that are really needed to carry them out. As a result the quality of the people hired has gone up.

"There have been a number of occasions where candidates have given model answers to interview questions and, in the past, would certainly have been seriously considered for the post. But we can now see whether their numeracy and literacy skills are up to the standard required by the job as well. Online assessment modules help us to see beyond the practiced responses of an experienced interviewee and hire the people who are right for the job."

Skillsarena's tests have been used throughout the organisation for all levels of recruitment – up to the most senior – and have been very well received. The Group's senior recruitment officer concludes, "The response to the tests has been overwhelmingly positive. All of our recruitment managers are absolutely delighted."