

Interviews and Assessment Methods

Interviews

Interviews are the most common way to select applicants. They can be used on their own or in tandem with other assessment methods such as presentations and tasks.

Structure

Prior to the interview, it will be useful to meet with all panel members to agree what you are trying to measure, what questions you will ask, and who will ask what. You may also want to draw everyone's attention to equal opportunities considerations.

The following structure may be useful:

Introduce all panel members – their names and roles. Explain what the length and structure of the interview will be. If the candidate is to give a presentation, do this at the beginning of the interview. Ask all candidates the same questions so that you can gather the same information and make an objective decision. Interviews tend to last for about 1 hour. As a general guide, 10 -12 questions will be sufficient. Open with an easy question to help put the candidate at ease. For example "what interests you about this position?" Use general questions at the beginning, factual questions in the middle and competency based questions towards the end of the interview. Invite questions at the end. Thank the candidate, check their availability if they were to be offered the post, and advise them when they will know the outcome.

Recording

It will be useful to make notes using the following format:

Candidates Name:			
Interviewers Name:			
Question	Who will ask?	Score 1=Low 5=High	Comments / Notes
What interests you about this position?			
List other questions....			
Total Score			

You should keep your recording sheets for a reasonable period so that you can justify any challenges to the overall decision. Under Data Protection laws, candidates may have the right to see any notes made during the interview so keep any comments or observations strictly objective.

General Questions

These are useful at the beginning of the interview and can help to put the candidate at ease. Try to ask one question at a time rather than asking three questions in one sentence which can be confusing for candidates.

Possible general questions include:

I see you studied X to degree level. Can you tell me a bit about your main area of study? Did you study anything outside of this area? What makes a job enjoyable to you? What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? How do you measure your performance? What do equal opportunities mean to you?

Factual / Knowledge Questions

Possible questions include:

- What types of office equipment have you used?
- What software programmes have you used?
- What do you think the key 3 factors are in establishing good professional relationships?
- How do you manage your time?
- What strategies do you use?
- What factors do you need to take into account when developing a budget for an event?
- What is a balance sheet?
- How does writing for the web differ from writing formal reports?
- What processes are important in effective people management?

Competency Based Questions

In asking a competency-based question, the key principles are to:

- Ask the candidates to give you a real example that actually happened to them.
- Don't ask them in broad terms how they generally tackle those sorts of situations.

Examples of competency-based questions include:

- Can you tell me about a time when you have managed a project?
- What was the project and what things did you need to do to ensure the project was successful?
- Can you describe a situation where you needed to undertake research?
- How did you go about it and what was the outcome?
- Can you give me an example of a time when you have summarised complex technical information into a more user friendly format?
- What did you need to take into account to do this well?
- Can you tell me about a time when you have needed to develop a good relationship with a particularly difficult person?
- What did you do to establish a positive relationship?
- Can you describe a time when you have worked under pressure to meet a challenging deadline?
- Can you describe a situation when you have worked as part of a team to achieve a goal?
- Can you tell me about a time when you have been criticised?
- How did you respond?

Probing Further

Once you have asked the question it may be a good idea to ask further questions to get a deeper understanding of how the candidate behaved.

For example:

Imagine that you have just asked a candidate the following question:

Q. "Please tell me about a time when you have offered support to a colleague"

A. "There was a time when Raj, our Sales Manager, came to me with a problem about his sales performance. He asked for some advice, so I tried to be supportive and make some suggestions. I also helped him on some site visits to customers. He took my advice on board very quickly and consequently improved his sales performance."

Supplementary probing questions could include:

- Time - "How recently did this happen?"
- Came to me - "Why did he come to you?"
- Problem - "And what was the Sales Manager's problem?"
- Sales performance - "What exactly was wrong with his performance?"
- Supportive – "How were you supportive?"
- Suggestions – "So what were your suggestions?"
- Site visits – "Tell me a bit more about what you did on these site visits."

This will give you, the interviewer, a more detailed understanding of the situation.

Assessments

Assessments can be used to measure some of the basic competencies described in the person specification, and can be quick and simple to set up. They tend to be used immediately prior to the formal interview.

Common assessments include:

- In tray exercise
Candidates are given a list of tasks and asked to indicate the priority in which they would deal with them, and what steps they would take to complete the task.
- Telephone call
Candidates receive a telephone call from an irate customer and are assessed on their interpersonal skills and their initiative in dealing with the complaint. For example, some may simply offer to take a message whilst others may agree to go away and look into the complaint and call the customer back at a designated time.
- Financial
Candidates are given a set of accounts and are tested on their understanding of them through a series of written questions.

Presentations

It is common to ask the candidate to prepare a short presentation for the interview. The subject matter will depend on the role and requirements. A standard presentation topic is to ask candidates to prepare a 10 minute presentation (including time for questions) on what they would see as their priorities in the first six months.

If you are asking candidates to prepare presentations, you should allow a minimum of 1 week preparation time, and tell them what equipment is available to them. You may also wish to stipulate that all presentations stay within the prescribed time frame.