

Assessing Candidates

A Guide for Recruiting Managers

Once a short-list of applicants for a position has been made, it is necessary to consider how the panel will assess the candidates in order to select the most suitable candidate(s). There are many options available and there is no 'right' answer, as assessment tools and techniques will vary depending on the requirements of the assessing panel and the requirements of the vacant role.

Panel Members

It is good practice for the panel to remain the same in both short-listing and assessment stages, as this allows a complete picture to be drawn and a consistent assessment to be undertaken. However, this can be changed where the absence of individuals is unavoidable. Normally, a panel will be composed of three to five people, with at least one of whom has been trained in Recruitment & Selection. It is good practice to have a panel of different people in relation to background, responsibility and role, as this will give the most objective assessment possible and improve the likelihood of selecting the best candidate and removing any doubt over equality.

Assessment Tools

Evidence suggests that interviews and references, in isolation, can be relatively weak predictors of performance and that the success rate of selection can be significantly improved by including other assessment tools. These tools can provide additional information about candidates and suggest areas for further investigation at interview. Careful thought does need to be given to ensuring the appropriateness of the tool in assessing the essential criteria for the job. The panel should agree the selection techniques and criteria, and this would normally involve an interview as a minimum, but it is good practice to involve additional selection techniques that provide a broader assessment, and therefore better information on which to base the decision on who to employ.

Some suggested assessment tools could include;

- Presentations – these can demonstrate an ability to research a topic and communicate concisely and effectively, and manage their time
- 'In-tray' exercises – these can demonstrate an individual's ability to prioritise, organise, and manage their time
- Observed group discussions – these can demonstrate personal and interpersonal skills
- Practical tests – these are suitable where jobs require specific skills that can be readily assessed, e.g. keyboard skills
- Psychometric tests – these can measure technical skills, general intelligence, aptitudes and personality tests. However, tests must only be conducted, and the results interpreted by qualified assessors

Planning the Assessment Event

Candidates should be informed in advance with sufficient time to carry out any preparatory work required before the assessment process takes place, and normally a minimum of seven days notice should be given of the selection process. The information given to candidates prior to the assessment event should include some detail of the selection tools that are being used, along with an itinerary where possible and overall duration. It is advisable to give the applicants enough information to be able to make necessary plans for the day and also to prepare for the tests in order that they can give their best performance on the day.

The selection panel should be provided with all the relevant information before the assessment day, preferably with enough time to digest this information, such as;

- A timetable for the process.
- A full list of the candidates to be assessed.
- Copies of the completed application forms, job description and person specification.
- Copies of any references received (if working with children).

Prior to the process, the selection panel should also consider, and decide;

- Who will chair the panel?
- The role that each member of the panel will play
- In the interview, the core questions to be asked of the candidates, and by whom
- The sequencing and structuring of the process
- How the assessment of the candidates will be conducted
- Who will collect the required pre-employment evidence?

Reasonable Adjustments at Interview

Candidates should be asked in advance of the assessment event if they require any adjustments to be made in order to attend the selection / interview process, usually as a result of a disability or condition. Where the candidate has raised awareness of any requirements, then any such provisions must be made.

Safer Recruitment

As part of the recruitment process and aligned to best practice and safer recruitment, there is a difference when assessing those positions that will have contact with children. This difference is that prior to the assessment event, references will be sought and those that are received will be made available to the panel who can then use these to add to the discussion at interview, or take these into account when making their assessment.

Evidence Gathering at Assessment Event

Some information and evidence relating to pre-employment checks can be collected at interview, which will then facilitate a faster time to hire once successful candidate(s) are identified. This information should be checked, photocopied, signed and dated at the assessment event before being sent to the Recruitment Centre. The information and evidence that may be collected includes;

- Qualification Certificates
- Evidence of Eligibility to Work in the UK
- Completion of a CRB Disclosure
- Post Threshold Certificate (teaching staff only)

Interviewing the Candidates

Interviews are the most used of the assessment tools available. They are recommended as they allow direct contact with the candidate and permit specific questions to be asked. The interview also allows a candidate to assess their perception of those they may be working with, and for the panel to try to understand how the personality of the individual may fit with the colleagues they will interact with.

The interview determines the suitability of the candidates for the post based on objective information given that relates to the job description and person specification. These should be determined by the panel in advance of the interview, but supplementary questions can be asked depending on a candidate's response. This ensures that all candidates receive the same 'pre-selection' information and that they each enjoy a fair opportunity to present themselves. The candidates can also be given a clear picture of the organisation and the expectations of the role and so allowing the panel to maintain the image of the organisation.

Notes must be taken by the panel in order to retain the essence of the interview, and so providing evidence of decision making as well as permitting effective feedback to be given to candidates who are not successful. It is important to note that under the Data Protection Act, the potential exists for interviewees to have the right to see their interview notes.

All of the panel members will assess, and so score, the candidate against how well they answer the questions and demonstrate the person specification criteria. The panel can then recommend a preferred candidate, but the line manager should be the one to make the final decision.

Interviewing Good Practice

When considering the arrangements for interviewing, it is good practice to consider the following;

- Provide informal seating arrangements that put candidates at ease. An interview 'across a desk' can impose a barrier
- Ensure comfortable lighting arrangements. The candidate should not be facing bright lights or strong sunlight
- Be thoughtful with refreshment arrangements – if the panel have coffee, at least offer the same to candidates
- Make the event free from interruptions
- Recognise that everyone gets tired at the end of a long day. Don't be over ambitious on the number of interviews that can be completed in a day, and make a conscious effort to ensure that the candidates seen later in the process are given equal attention to those seen earlier.

Interview Expenses

Candidates are entitled to claim for expenses incurred whilst attending interviews should they make such a request. Any requirements for overnight accommodation should be raised in advanced and agreed with the relevant cost centre manager.