

Recruitment and Selection - Managers Guidance

How to Interview Effectively

The aim of the interview is to enable candidates to demonstrate their suitability for the job. Interviews can be stressful for everyone involved so anything you can do to reduce the tension and enable the candidate to feel comfortable from the start will be very helpful.

Before the interview

Before the day starts, check that the room has been set up in a suitable way and that water and enough clean glasses for all panel members and candidates are available. Put notices on the doors to indicate that interviews are taking place to prevent unwarranted disturbances.

Agree in advance with other panel members what questions you are going to ask, what you are looking for in each answer and a marking system. It can sometimes be helpful to allot a certain number of points to each question and mark each candidate's answer on a numerical basis, with the highest scoring applicant being the successful candidate. The questions do not all have to be of the same value – some may be more important and therefore worth more than others. It is also a good idea to work out what are the essential and desirable points which the candidates should cover in each answer. This will enable you to ensure that your minimum acceptable level of performance is met. If you are unable to find a candidate who performs sufficiently well, you should not make an appointment at that time but should readvertise at a later date.

During the interview

Introductions

You will develop your own interviewing style with experience. It is important that you tailor your approach to the level and type of job for which you are interviewing. For some entry level jobs, some candidates may have little experience of formal interviews and a conversational style would be appropriate, whereas for other roles, candidates would expect a thorough, in depth, and more formal interview. The overall aim is to get the best from candidates in order that you can assess their suitability for the post.

At the beginning introduce the panel members to the candidate and explain how the interview will work, explain about any other tasks to be done, if any, and roughly how long the process will last. Tell the candidate that notes will be taken so that what they say is captured.

Questions

You will have prepared a list of questions in advance in conjunction with the other panel member(s) to explore the qualities, experience, knowledge, and skills taken from the essential criteria on the Job and Person Profile as well as the personal effectiveness and approach to work of the candidates. There is no set number of questions to use – about 5 to 8 is often a good number for an interview lasting about 30-45 minutes. It is a good idea to start with something not too taxing to help the candidate to relax.

All candidates should be asked the same broad questions but supplementary and probing questions which arise from this will depend on what answers the candidates give. Interviews need to be conducted flexibly and questions can be dealt with in any order to ensure proceedings flow smoothly. Questions should be expressed in simple language, and be directly relevant to the content and scope of the job. If a candidate seems to be struggling to understand a question or find an answer, consider rephrasing the question in different words so that an answer is encouraged. Give candidates time to collect their thoughts and respond fully or offer to return to a question at the end of the interview.

All questions should be open, rather than closed – i.e. questions which require a detailed answer rather than a simple yes/no. Open questions often start with How, Why, Tell me about etc. Competency questions based on past behaviour can often give a very good guide to future behaviour. For some jobs, you may like to think of some scenarios to test reactions to different circumstances.

Be careful not to place undue emphasis on knowledge of the Council's policies and procedures, which could unfairly penalise external candidates. Such knowledge can be acquired quite easily once in post. A positive attitude and underlying ability to learn is often more important as these are more difficult to acquire. Some attributes are difficult to train people in – for instance being able to build rapport with people, or possessing a keen ability to learn new things. If such traits are important in the role you are recruiting for, ask at least some questions which test the values, attitude and behaviours you require as well as skills and knowledge. For instance ask individuals about how they have overcome adversity or what is the best example of customer service they have ever encountered or delivered or what have they done that they are really proud of. If someone has no direct experience of your particular kind of work, ask questions about what they have done previously - they may well have transferable skills which would be valuable.

You may wish to ask a question with two or more sub sections. If so either ask the first part and then go onto the second, or set out the question in its entirety and then

repeat it, breaking it down, asking each part section by section, so that the candidate does not have to hold it all in their head at one time.

Candidates should have an opportunity to reflect equality and diversity dimensions in their answers and relate this to their job role.

You should check that the candidate fully understands the requirements of the job, particularly with regard to any special conditions e.g. unsocial or irregular hours or travel and that they can comply if selected.

In order to comply with the Equality Act 2010, which seeks to protect candidates from discrimination, you are not allowed to ask any applicant health or disability related questions, including those about a person's attendance record, before they have been selected as the most suitable candidate.

However you are allowed to ask interview candidates about their ability to undertake fundamental or intrinsic requirements of the job. An example might be where the job involves a significant amount of manual handling. To find out about a person's suitability for the job you should ask questions about skills and experience, not health or disability. For example, ask candidates to tell you about their recent experience of doing a specific part of the job such as manual handling and not whether they have any problems with their back which makes it difficult for them to do heavy lifting. You must take any reasonable adjustments that could be put in place into account when deciding whether an applicant is suitable for the job.

For all posts requiring a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, candidates must be made aware that their records will be checked with the DBS and asked if there is anything they would like to say to add to the recruitment decision making process. For these posts, you should ask if the candidate has lived or worked abroad for six months or more in any one country after their 18th birthday, as if so they will be required to obtain a certificate of good conduct.

For all posts requiring a professional qualification as an essential requirement (e.g. Social Worker), candidates must be informed that the vacancy requires the postholder to hold a (e.g. social work) qualification and be registered with the relevant body (e.g. Health and Care Professions Council HCPC). It can be helpful to point out at interview that the candidate's registration status will be checked as part of the pre-employment procedures and to ask if there is anything that they wish to make us aware of in connection with their registration status.

At the end of the interview you might like to give the candidate the opportunity to go back to any question they struggled with and then to raise any questions they may have. You should then explain the next steps in the recruitment process and when and how they will be notified of the outcome.

Evaluation

Each panel member should do an individual evaluation of each candidate as the interview progresses. Afterwards the panel should confer and come to an agreed decision. It may help to have a scoring system if there are candidates who are closely matched or disagreement among panel members. This process should have adequate time allotted to it so that it is not rushed.

After the interview

It is vital to keep clear and accurate records to back up the decisions made. Occasionally a recruitment decision is contested and your notes of why you made your decision will provide vital evidence to support your position. All interview notes should be signed and dated by the panel members. Any surplus photocopies or print outs of confidential information should be collected by the chair of the panel and destroyed when the interviews have finished. Only the original application form, references and notes should be retained and kept for 12 months. The documents for successful candidates should be saved in Recruit and will be kept on their Personal file in accordance with the document retention schedule which is available on dnet.

Our application form includes information about disclosing criminal records. If a candidate discloses to you at interview or thereafter that they have something to declare, you should discuss the issue with them so that you understand the circumstances. The Proceed to Offer letter contains an instruction to the successful candidate to report any criminal convictions to the recruiting manager. If the post requires a DBS check, then you need to wait for receipt of the outcome of this. If the successful candidate has disclosed information to you at any point about a criminal conviction, you should keep a written note of the discussion and report the matter to your Service/Assistant Director so that they can decide whether the disclosed information is relevant to the post in question and if so how it should affect the recruitment decision. A note recording the discussions which have taken place and the outcome, or the Trace Approval form in the case of DBS jobs, should be scanned to the SSC at dbs@derbyshire.gov.uk so that it can be kept on the individual's personal file for the duration of their employment with Derbyshire County Council and in accordance with the Councils HR retention schedule.

Reasonable Adjustments

Most people find interviews stressful but some people have extra difficulty because of a disability. In these circumstances you might find the guidance below helpful as reasonable adjustments for some candidates.

Possible difficulty	Interviewer's behaviour
Communication difficulties (e.g. people on the autistic spectrum, learning difficulties, speech difficulties)	Use simple language and rephrase if necessary Give people time to answer Check your understanding by repetition or rephrasing
Applicant may not be able to articulate how they reached solutions (e.g. people on the autistic spectrum or with dyslexia)	Focus on evidence of outcomes rather than the process of how they were achieved.
Unusual appearance (e.g. people with facial disfigurement, obvious physical disabilities; those with dyspraxia may appear untidy and clumsy)	Be alert of unconscious prejudices. Don't make assumptions about a person's abilities on the basis of their appearance
Social skills e.g. engaging with all panel members	Chair of panel to explain the interview structure clearly at the start and signal transitions from one panel member to another
Making eye contact (can be difficult for some people with autism or mental health conditions)	Be aware that some people cannot sustain eye contact and should not be treated differently as a result
Unusual body language (e.g. tremor or tic)	Be aware that some people cannot control this and should not be treated differently as a result
Responding appropriately to questions. Some people may struggle with hypothetical questions	Prompt for more detail if needed. Stop someone giving excessive detail. Look for evidence of past behaviour rather than asking hypothetical questions if this gives the evidence you need.
Applicant appears uncomfortable with lighting or temperature (some people are hypersensitive to sensory input)	Check if the interviewee is comfortable and adjust conditions
Applicant fails to sell themselves because they are stressed	Look to reassure and support the person to help them feel at ease
Applicant has little previous work experience	Prompt the interviewee to think about other contexts which could evidence relevant experience