

Interview structure

The overall objective of the interview is to make an accurate assessment of the candidates and to decide if they are appointable to the job, as well as allowing candidates to make their own assessment about the job and the organisation.

Adequate time should be allowed for the interview to ensure all aspects of the person specification that need to be covered can be done so comprehensively, to allow the candidate sufficient time to ask questions and also to avoid candidates being kept waiting.

As a guide for academic and managerial posts interviews should be at least 45 minutes long with at least 5 minute intervals to allow the panel to take notes/record their views on each candidate.

For other positions within the Professional Support Services at least 30 minutes should be allowed for each interview.

Opening the interview

The Chair should open the interview by:

- Introducing him/herself and the other members of the panel;
- Providing an outline of the process;
- The Recruiting Manager (if not the Chair) will provide a brief explanation as to how and why the position; became available before the main questioning begins (see below for more information on interview questions);
- Panel members then take it in turn to ask questions that relate to the person specification;
- Opportunity for candidates to ask questions at the end of the interview;
- Explanation of next steps;
- Checking whether the candidate has any questions about the process itself before the questioning begins.

During the interview

Aim to put candidates at their ease.

Follow the interview pro-forma:

- Keep notes on salient points using the interview pro-forma that provide evidence in relation to the criteria being assessed in the person specification.
- The interview pro-forma may also be adapted to record assessment against any additional selection methods used.
- Whilst uncommon it is possible that an unsuccessful candidate may request notes/information from the Recruitment & Selection Process if they decide to make a complaint against the University to an Employment Tribunal. If this happens, the University is required to disclose all short-listing and interview notes and other relevant records to the candidate and the Tribunal, even if the case never actually gets to a hearing.
- It is therefore important to only make notes which are relevant to the assessment of the candidate along with any other key points such as notice period, how the candidate can be contacted etc.

Be firm if necessary and ask further questions if you have doubts about what the candidate is saying or if the candidate has not expressed themselves sufficiently clearly.

Be prepared for and allow sufficient time for any questions candidates might ask about for example, terms and conditions, training and development, the area of work, job details, and University facilities (normally around five minutes, although this may take longer for more senior appointments).

Be prepared, if necessary, to explain to the candidate why you asked a particular question.

End of the interview

At the end of the interview questions the Chair should:

- Invite questions from the candidate;
- Establish whether or not the candidate is still interested;
- Confirm that referees may be contacted, if this has not already been done (note that it is possible in some cases that candidates may not wish referees to be contacted until they have received an offer of employment and where this is the case this must be respected);
- Tell the candidate how and when the decision will be made and how this will be communicated;
- Check candidate contact details.

Interview questions

Structuring the interview can help improve its ability to predict performance in the job.

A structured interview means that:

- Questions are planned carefully before the interview;
- All candidates are asked the same initial questions although it is very important that interviewers ask follow up questions of candidates to ensure that they have sufficiently detailed evidence on which to make an assessment so whilst the opening question may be asked of all candidates for the sake of consistency, it is inevitable that more probing follow up questions will vary slightly from one candidate to another;
- Questions focus on the attributes and behaviours needed for the job, as set out in the person specification.

Examples of questions

Different types of questions can help to reveal different kinds of information:

Open questions

Normally used as a starting point for questioning.

Open questions (e.g. "Tell me about...").generally help candidates to relax and encourage them to talk in general terms.

They avoid 'yes' or 'no' answers and are a good starting point for exploring and gathering information.

They do need to be followed up with more detailed probing questions as they are unlikely to provide sufficiently detailed evidence on their own.

Probing questions

Probing questions (e.g. "Exactly what happened next? or "Could you provide an example of ...") aim to elicit more detailed information about the candidate.

Typically start with what, why, when, where, who and how.

Closed questions

Closed questions (e.g. "Would you be able to start next week?") are used to establish facts and clarify specific points, these help to find out single facts or restrict candidates who are rambling.

Reflective questions

Reflective questions (e.g. "Am I right in saying your experience includes...?") repeat what the candidate said, therefore helping to check the accuracy of your understanding and can be used to summarise and lead to a close but in some cases are used to encourage applicants to expand further.

Situational/hypothetical questions

Situational questions (e.g. "Suppose you were asked to do...?", "How would you deal with a difficult customer?") involve asking candidates how they would react or behave in specific situations that might be encountered in the job in question.

Such questions can result in hypothetical answers which may not always reflect how a candidate would behave in practice.

They may however have their uses where the candidate has limited experience from which to draw upon.

Competency/behavioural questions

Competency based questions aim to identify exactly how a candidate has tackled a real situation in the past as this is an effective predictor of how the candidate would tackle similar issues in the future.

Effective competency based questions start by requiring the candidate to provide a specific example of how they have behaved in relation to a given competency, e.g. influencing skills, oral communication skills.

Once the initial example has been provided further probing questions should be asked to gain a detailed understanding of the situation, the behaviour of the candidate in that situation, i.e. how they managed the situation, the impact of that behaviour and what they learned from the experience.

So the starting point is an open question which allows the candidate to provide a specific example:

"Tell me about a situation when you had to influence a group of stakeholders"

Then probing questions are asked:

"What did you do exactly?"

"Describe how you influenced them?"

"How did you deal with those people that did not agree?"

Then get the candidate to reflect on the impact of their behaviour:

"To what extent did you influence the group?"

"How did the group respond to you?"

Finally get the candidate to reflect on what they learnt from the experience and what they would do differently the next time:

"What did you learn from this experience?"

"How would you deal with this situation if it happened again?"

"Would you do anything differently next time round?"

Interview do's and don'ts

Do

- Keep questions clear and only ask one question at a time otherwise you will confuse the applicant
- Ask questions to check information provided on the application form, e.g. any gaps in employment
- Be aware of different styles of communication and differences in culture which can lead to misunderstandings
- Remember candidates should do most of the talking – at least 75%
- Use open and friendly body language – head nods, smiles and eye contact
- Rephrase a question if a candidate has misunderstood
- Ask candidates about the skills they may need to develop further

Don't

- Ask candidates about their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief (including lack of belief), sex or sexual orientation
- Use unfocused behaviour e.g. lack of eye contact, looking disinterested, yawning, distracting body language as this can be discouraging for the applicant
- Make assumptions (for example that someone of a particular race or sex will not fit in with the rest of the team)
- Apply stereotypes
- Ask questions of only one group of candidates
- Use jargon and acronyms

Limitations of the interview

Evidence from research highlights the limitations of the traditional interview as a poor predictor of a candidate's performance in a job.

Information is gathered from the interview in a relatively unsystematic manner and judgements may be made about candidates for a variety of reasons.

Pitfalls

Whilst this guidance is not suggesting that interviews should not be used it is worth being aware of the following pitfalls:

The self-fulfilling prophecy effect

Interviewers may ask questions designed to confirm initial impressions of candidates gained either before the interview or in its early stages

The stereotyping effect

Interviewers sometimes assume that particular characteristics are typical of members of a particular group. In the case of sex, race, disability, marital status, age or ex-offenders, decisions made on this basis are often illegal. However the effect occurs in the case of all kinds of social groups.

The halo and horns effect

Interviewers sometimes rate candidates as good or bad across all criteria and thus reach very unbalanced decisions.

The contrast effect

Interviewers can allow the experience of interviewing one candidate to affect the way they interview others who are seen later in the selection process.

The similar to me effect

Interviewers sometimes give preference to candidates they perceive as having a similar background, career history, personality or attitudes to themselves.

The personal liking effect

Interviewers may make decisions on the basis of whether they personally like or dislike the candidate.