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**Guidance for Interviewers – preparing for and conducting a job interview.**

**Introduction**

A recruitment interview can be a nerve-wracking experience, not just for the candidate but also for the interviewer. However, a panel interview is a commonly used approach to allow your candidate to provide evidence that they are suitable for the role that they have been shortlisted for. It is also important to remember that it is an opportunity for us as an employer to promote the organisation and therefore attract the best employees. At the interview, we not only want to assess candidates fit with our behaviours and values, but we also want to ensure that our panels act in accordance with them.

As people are arguably the most important resource in any organisation, recruiting candidates that are not suitable can be costly. Equally an interview which is badly prepared and conducted could mean you lost a great candidate. During the selection process candidates are deciding whether they want to work for you, just as much as you are trying to decide whether to hire them. It is therefore important to invest time, in ensuring that effective interviews are conducted, good preparation is essential.

The information below will hopefully provide you with some tips to help you prepare for a good interview and selection process. Many of these are common sense, however sometimes the basics are omitted which leads to a poor experience for both the candidate and the interview panel.

**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

When developing a selection process, it is important to consider matters relating to equality and diversity to ensure that the chosen selection method does not create an advantage or disadvantage to certain groups on the basis of protected characteristics (including: age, gender, marital status, disability, race, ethnicity, nationality, relation or sexual orientation).

You should give consideration to the following:

* Have you adopted a flexible approach to your interview schedule?
* Are the interview questions or exercise instructions written in plain English and are easily understandable when read aloud? For example, the use of colloquial terms or jargon might unfairly disadvantage those whose first language is not English, or unfairly put an advantage to those who have previously or currently works for the organisation.
* Do questions or exercises rely on a particular type of experience which is not a specific requirements of the role? Allow candidates to draw from a wider range of possible experiences.

The panel will absolutely not be permitted to ask any questions that contravene anti discrimination legislation or make any assumptions about a candidate based on any characteristics. For example, do not assume that a female candidate would not be able to travel due to possible domestic or child care responsibilities.

**Preparing for selection**

The selection process is your chance to find out more information about the skills, experience and behaviours that have been provided through the candidate application form or CV. The purpose of the selection process is to satisfy yourself that the candidate meets the requirements for the job, and just as importantly, fits in with the culture of our organisation. Do their personal values align with our organisation values and behaviours and how are you going to assess that?

The responsibilities associated with the role might mean that you wish to incorporate other assessment methods alongside a standard interview process. It is good practice to use several methods in the decision making process to ensure that you provide candidates with different opportunities for them to demonstrate their suitability.

There are many different forms of selection to support your decision, for example:

* Presentation – assessment of communication skills and ability to present to a panel or separate group of stakeholders.
* Skills based assessment tasks – tasks or case studies that assess skills and abilities relevant to the role the candidate is applying for. These should reflect real tasks in the job as far as possible. E.g. asking a project manager to write a project plan or report based on a typical scenario.
* In Tray Exercise- providing mini scenario based activities on a specific task. For example asking an administrator to prioritise a list of tasks and provide a rationale for the order in which they attempted them.
* Assessment Centres or multiple stage assessments- using multiple stages in your recruitment process to gradually reduce the number of candidates can save everyone involved time. Candidates will complete several different tasks and are assessed from multiple sources to support your overall decision-making.

For further advice on what selection methods are suitable please contact the Recruitment and Talent Hub.

**Arranging interview times**

Wherever possible offer candidates a range of dates or offer to accommodate different time slots outside of the typical working day if needed. When arranging interviews, it is useful to consider that some candidates may have time and budget constraints, including caring responsibilities, that may not allow for unscheduled time off at short notice. It is good practice to offer flexibility, either by rearranging the dates or offering to undertake the interview via Microsoft Teams.

If candidates require flexible or reasonable adjustments this should not influence the assessment of the candidate of the interview.

This will also help ensure that you do not have candidates withdraw from their invite.

**How long should an interview be?**

The whole process should be carefully managed to ensure sufficient time is allocated to each candidate and that there is enough time in between interviews to complete the interview comments sheet while it is still fresh in your mind, especially if you have lots of interviews in one day.

Please consider the candidate experience when putting your schedule together, candidates will want to feel valued and that they will have an opportunity to describe their skills and experience. It does not reflect well on the organisation if you have only allocated 15 minutes to interview a candidate.

**Reasonable Adjustment**

Reasonable Adjustments may be requested by individuals with disabilities to enable them to participate in the selection process and/or undertake the role which they are applying for. Where someone meets the definition of a disabled person in the Equality Act (2010) we are required to make reasonable adjustments to any elements of the selection process, or job which places a disabled person at a substantial advantage compared to a non-disabled person.

For example, a neurodivergent candidate may request for interview questions in advance

**Panel Interview Preparation**

**Who should be on the panel?**

There should be at least 2 people on an interview panel which would typically include the recruiting manager and another representative from the Department who is senior to the role being interviewed for. There may be a development opportunity to invite another member of staff to be on the panel as an observer and to assist with any note taking.

If you have internal candidates from within your own team, you may opt to request an additional panel member who has no prior working relationship with or knowledge of the candidate.

Having a varied panel and getting the perspective from multiple people means that decision-making is likely to be fairer.

When making panel arrangements, to add integrity and diversity to your interview process please give careful consideration to the make up of the panel. Please consider diversity in all its forms, including: gender, race, ethnicity, disability and age.

For senior appointments the Rooney Rule will be applied and the Recruitment and Talent hub will be able to provide further advice and guidance.

**Preparing interview questions**

Interview questions should be prepared in advance and agreed collectively by the panel. You will also need to decide what questions will be asked by each person. The panel should be organised and have a clear approach to the interview and not appear disorganised to the candidate.

Interview questions should be structured around what skills, abilities and aptitudes are required. These should have already been defined in the role description and person specification as advertised.

In addition, you will also need to ensure that as a member of the interview panel you have reviewed individual application forms/CV’s and made a note of any key points that emerge regarding each candidate. These could be achievements or successes in a particular area or piece of work, or something you may require clarification on.

Structured interviews and ensuring that the panel ask a predefined set of questions, in the same order, to all candidates, is an effective way to minimise bias and ensure that there is a level playing field for all candidates. This makes it easier for the panel to make direct and fair comparisons between candidates, using objective criteria.

However, this does not mean that you have to read the questions as a ‘script’, each candidate will provide different responses that you may wish to explore further. Ensure that you have provided the opportunity for candidates to confirm if they need reasonable adjustments during the interview process. For example, as well as helping those with physical disability , recruitment processes can be adapted for neurodivergent candidates.

**Competency based questions**

Competency based interview questions will focus on a specific skill or competency required for the role. Candidates are expected to provide real life examples of previous experience. Very often a candidates answer to an initial question will give some information but not enough for the panel to make an assessment of the competency you are assessing. Follow up questions can be used to probe further about the candidates approach , behaviour or skill.

For example an interview question could be ‘ tell me about when you have developed a project on time that met all objectives’. Further probing questions could include ‘ how did you specifically ensure the project was delivered on time’ , ‘what was your role in dealing with any significant challenges’ and ‘ how did you overcome them’

As a general guidance, competency based questions will explore:

* The situation they faced
* The Task they were involved in
* The Actions they took
* The Result of the work they undertook

By asking competency based questions you will encourage candidates to explain not only what they did (the actions) but also their approach and their skills they used to complete the task.

You may also want to use as an alternative some situational questioning, this will focus on the candidate's ability to undertake something they have not done previously. This is useful to use for entry level roles or graduate placements,

The risk with this style of questioning is that the answer is hypothetical and a ‘textbook’ response, not necessarily what will happen when the candidate is faced with that scenario in a real work situation.

**Behaviour & Values Based Questions**

The design and order of questions should be used to encourage the flow of conversation.

As mentioned above, interview questions will typically be focused on the candidates skills and experience but equally important, please do not forget about questions that will tell you more about the candidate themselves. For example, what do they enjoy about their job, what motivates them most in work, what their personal achievements are and what made them want to work for our organisation?

Include interview questions that will explore candidates personal style and behaviour and how they would respond to a particular situation. By using probing questions, it will provide the panel with an opportunity for candidates to discuss their learning and reflection. A probing question, can follow a lead question e.g. how and why a candidate responds to a situation or task.

For example, you may want to include a question based around the candidates ability to work effectively with others. The lead question could be asked as ‘*describe a situation where it was important for you to establish /develop an effective working relationship with someone’*  . The probing questions could include-

* Why was this relationship significant for you?
* What did you learn from this experience?
* What was the outcome and how did that result in how you approach similar situations going forward ?

**The Interview**

**Environment**

Providing the right environment is also an important part of interview preparation, interviews are well known to be a stressful process. Give careful consideration to the layout of the room, is it possible to use a round table rather than a formal rectangular table, or for example seating the candidate at an angle rather than directly in front of you. It may help put your candidate at ease.

Ensure that you have offered the candidate a drink and it is a good idea to provide water on the table for all parties before the candidate arrives.

Make sure that the interview room is not too warm and there is a place for the candidate to put any personal belongings such as a coat & bag.

If you are interviewing within your own working area, it is important to let your team know when the interviews are taking place, so they can be respectful of noise or any interruptions.

If the candidate is delivering a presentation make sure that there is enough room for them to stand and present to the panel and that any equipment has been tested beforehand.

If you are interviewing using Microsoft Teams ensure that your camera is clear and that you are in a room with no likely disruptions. Please ensure that an appropriate corporate background is selected.

**Welcome**

It is the responsibility of the Chair of the panel to use the first few minutes of the interview to settle the candidate and put them at ease. Please ensure that you greet the candidate and ensure that introductions are made with the panel. A suggested interview structure would be as follows:

* Welcome and introductions, introduce yourself and the panel members, including their job titles and what departments or teams they work in.
* Provide an overview of the role, team, department and how the vacancy was created (if appropriate)
* Outline the structure of the interview, the likely duration and who will be asking interview questions
* Outline that notes will be made during the interview to help with decision making
* Confirm to the candidate that they will be able to ask questions at the end of the interview

**During the interview**

Ensure that you actively listen to the candidates response by maintaining eye contact to engage with the candidate and encourage the candidate to elaborate when you require further information or something clarifying.

Candidates will typically be nervous , so please use positive body language to help the candidate feel at ease, for example nodding occasionally and smiling.

If a candidate is struggling to answer a particular question and/or they have misunderstood , it is acceptable to provide a prompt, or repeat the question in a different way. Make sure that the candidate knows that they can ask for clarification, if they are confused or do not understand what is being asked of them.

Wherever possible try and take notes throughout the interview that will help inform your decision. Did the candidate provide a good example , did they elaborate on a particular skill or ability that is required to do the role.

On the interview form there is a scoring system that you can use for each answer, which will help you determine appointable candidates overall. The suggested scoring system is as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Score** |  |
| **0** | No answer given or answer completely irrelevant. No examples given. |
| **1** | A few good points but main issues missing. No examples / irrelevant examples given |
| **2** | Some points covered, not all relevant. Some examples given. |
| **3** | Some points covered. Relevant information given. Some examples given. |
| **4** | Good answer. Relevant information. All or most points covered. Good examples. |
| **5** | Perfect answer. All points addressed. All points relevant. Good examples. |

Interviewers should complete their interview forms independently before discussing each candidate at the end of the process. Potentially, interviewers may be more likely to be influenced by other opinions and score accordingly.

A good interview process will leave the candidate feeling that they have done their best and have been involved in a process that encourages them to be themselves, perform at their best and provide you with the best information possible.

**Finishing the Interview**

The same thought needs to go into ending the interview as you did for the start.

Provide the candidate with the opportunity to ask any questions they have about the role or the organisation and outline what the next steps are likely to be. Remember not to over promise when they will hear if they have been successful.

**Making the decision**

After the interview, each of the panel should add up their scores across all questions independently to support any recommendations for a preferred candidate.

The Recruiting Manger should make sure that there is allocated time to discuss the candidates, and ideally a decision should be made directly after the interviews while the information is still fresh in your mind. However, if it has been a long process, you may want to arrange to meet with the panel on a different day, but wherever possible within 48 hours of the interview assessment.

Deciding on the successful candidate can be difficult as you may have more than one candidate that is closely matched in terms of score and opinion across the panel.

As a first step decide which candidates are appointable and which are not. If there are more appointable candidates than roles, you will need to rank the appointable candidates based on your scores, referring back to your interview notes will help you make this decision. Please ensure that you discuss the merits of each candidates comparing their performance to each question before deciding who is the strongest candidate.

If a decision still can’t be reached, consider inviting the candidates back for a further assessment, but only if you feel that there are areas of the person specification that could be explored further. If you are considering this as an option, please take into account how this will be perceived by the candidate so be very clear about the reasons for any further discussion.

**After the interview Process**

The recruiting manager is responsible for contacting each of the candidates interviewed to tell them the outcome. If you have not got the time to provide further feedback at this stage , make arrangements with the candidate to provide objective feedback at a mutually agreed time.

**Offer of Employment**

When calling to make the offer, detail what the offer is and try and be as clear as possible and provide positive feedback on their performance throughout the interview or assessment process.

Remember that verbal offers of employment should only be on a conditional basis , for example subject to completion of pre employment checks, so be careful what you tell the successful candidate.

Offer the candidate some time to think about the offer if they require it, but put in place a reasonable time scale for when you would expect a decision to be made. Also make sure that your successful candidate is aware that they can contact you to ask any further questions about the role or potential terms and conditions of employment.

It is reasonable that the candidate will not provide any decision on their offer until they have received their conditional offer in writing.

**Unsuccessful candidates**

Although this can be a difficult and challenging conversation, it is the responsibility of the recruiting manager to contact each of the candidates interviewed and update them on their outcome. This should be done in a timely manner in line with what you told the candidate at interview.

You may not be in a position to offer further feedback at this stage, but please ensure that the unsuccessful candidates are aware that they can contact you to arrange for feedback at a mutually agreed time.

Remember that even though they have been unsuccessful for this role , they may be suitable for other roles and with to work for LCRCA , so despite their disappointment it should still be a positive experience with the hope that they apply for other opportunities. Especially if your candidate was ‘appointable’.

**Not Making an Appointment**

There may be an occasion that you do not have a suitable candidate at the end of the interview process, but due to work pressures you feel obliged to make an appointment to help ease the workload for the team. But making a poor decision at this stage will be costly in terms of your time and resource dealing with someone poor performance longer term.

If a candidate has turned down their offer, before making any other decisions explore the reasons and was it something that could be addressed or discussed further?

Before advertising again, make sure that you review again the advert and role description. Have you been clear about the role and the skills required to do the role.

**Further Advice and Guidance**

This is an overview of the interview process and to provide you with some guidance on good practice. If you would like to talk through any aspects of the selection process, please contact the Recruitment and Talent Hub:

[recruitment@liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk](mailto:recruitment@liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk)