

# Interview format and practical arrangements



## Format

If selection tests are to be used they may take place either before or after the interview, as long as candidates are clear about the arrangements.

## **Example format**

1. Introductions
2. Explanation of format of interview (s), any selection tests and anticipated timings
3. Clarify details of application/CV (if necessary)
4. Structured questioning based on selection criteria for the post
5. Questions about availability to start work, expectations of salary (if any), and any job specific requirements such as flexibility to work irregular hours, etc.
6. Time for candidate to ask questions
7. Explanation of any pre-employment screening (health questionnaire or security screening)
8. Explanation of next steps and anticipated timescales for selection decision to be made

**Panel/sequential interviews:** The panel should agree whether the candidates should have one interview with a number of interviewers (a panel); or whether the candidate should meet the interviewers sequentially, either individually or in smaller groups. In choosing an approach consider the nature of the job, the time/rooms available and whether any interviewees have special requirements. If the sequential interviews approach is chosen, consider the effect on the interviewee, ie will they find themselves repeating comments at each interview and become bored/worried/confused?

**Questions:** While discussions in different interviews for the same post may take different directions depending on the candidate's interests and responses, it is important that there is consistency in the type of questions asked, and that candidates are not selectively asked questions depending on their age, gender or any other protected characteristic.

For example:

- If there is a requirement to travel as part of the duties, each candidate should be made aware of this requirement and is asked how they would be able to undertake those duties. Candidates should not be asked about domestic circumstances or childcare arrangements.
- If flexibility over hours is required this should be explained and all candidates should be asked whether this would cause a problem, and if they would be prepared to work late on occasion if required.

Candidates must be assessed solely on their qualifications, relevant knowledge, experience, and personal qualities in the light of the selection criteria for the post. Care needs to be taken with questioning in this area to avoid the impression that, for example, marital status or domestic responsibilities are being taken into account in the decision as to whether or not to appoint. Care should also be taken in the phrasing of questions on communication skills and the candidate's ability to get on with colleagues, since in some circumstances they could be construed as implying stereotypical judgements of ethnic minority candidates.

**Styles of questioning:** All questions asked must relate and be based on the selection criteria for the post.

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1. **'Open' questions** are useful to begin the process of probing the candidate, and may include the following:

- 'What ... ?' 'Tell me about ...' (ie questions which cannot be answered with a 'yes' or 'no'); or
- 'Why did you do/choose ... ?', 'Can you give me an example to illustrate/ support what you have just said?' rather than using leading or assumptive questions imposing the questioner's assumed answer.

2. **'Quantifying' questions**, for example, to assess how much experience, how many staff managed, how often a task performed, how big a budget managed, how much sick leave etc.

3. **'Behavioural' questions**, inviting the candidate to give specific examples from their own experience.

4. **'Hypothetical' questions**, asking the candidate to describe their reaction to an imagined situation. These are often useful for candidates with limited experience.

5. **'Closed' questions**, inviting a short answer, usually 'yes' or 'no'. These types of questions can be useful for checking information.

Interviewers are advised to avoid the following types of questions:

1. **'Multiple' questions**, for example 'What do you think makes a good administrator, do you consider yourself to have those qualities and what evidence can you show us in support of this?' Candidates will often not answer all of these questions in detail; it is better to ask each part separately.

2. **'Multiple-choice' questions**, for example, 'Did you leave that job because you wanted to widen your experience or because you wanted promotion?') invite answers from a restricted range, possibly excluding what may be the real answer.

3. **'Leading' and 'rhetorical' questions** both tend to be signalled by an exposition of the interviewer's point of view and expect either the answer 'yes' or no answer at all. Such questions are commonly, and appropriately, used in a teaching or other academic context but are less useful in an interview, where some candidates may not feel able to challenge the point of view being put forward by the interviewer. Since what is being sought are the candidate's views or experience, an open question followed by probing is likely to be more effective. The self-confidence of candidates will to some extent determine how they answer leading and rhetorical questions; it will also affect their response to 'self-assessment' questions, such as 'Do you think you are good at ...?' or 'What are your greatest strengths?' Self-confidence may or may not be one of the qualities sought and in the latter case questions of this kind may be best avoided. It will be essential to follow up any self-assessment questions with effective probing.

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## Practical arrangements

Practical arrangements for the interview day need to be considered including arrangements for interviewing candidates with disabilities (see separate guide) and [priority candidates](#).

**Timing:** Ensure that adequate time is allocated for each interview and that all candidates are allowed the same time. Allow a reasonable gap between interviews; to summarise the conclusions from the previous interview, and to review the papers for the next candidate.

Sufficient time should be taken after the interview, possibly leaving twenty-four hours for reflection, to allow proper discussion and a final decision to be reached.

**Rooms:** Ensure that the room(s) to be used is/are appropriately arranged so that, for example, the room is properly lit. Bear in mind that interviewers' notes may be visible to the interviewee, even if the papers may be 'upside down' to them.

Interviewers sitting behind a desk / table create a formal effect; a more relaxed atmosphere can be achieved by using comfortable chairs, placed at angles to each other. There should be no interruptions either from the telephone or by people entering the room unexpectedly.

**Venue location:** Candidates should be sent clear directions explaining how to find the venue for the interview. Proper arrangements need to be made to welcome the candidates and to show them where to wait. The CoreHR interview invitation letter prompts departments to specify location/welcoming instructions, and can be adapted as needed. Maps may also be attached.

**Note-taking:** A [Sample interview record](#)  (43kb) should be used by panel members. Notes of a particular discussion may be taken by those other than the questioner. Interview forms should be collected by a member of the panel (normally the chair) at the end of the interviews and kept for six months after the appointment. Decisions taken at the end of the interview process should be recorded systematically by means of a summary version of the interview notes in which the decisions are explicitly related to the selection criteria. Notes of individual panel members should not be retyped after interviews. Notes must be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

All notes from shortlisting and interviews are potentially disclosable to candidates, and therefore should relate strictly to the selection criteria and avoid inappropriate language, or shorthand. If a recruitment decision is challenged and the case goes to an Employment Tribunal, the tribunal may order the 'discovery' of the notes taken at interviews. Notes must be retained in their entirety.

**Meals and tours:** The offer of a meal out to shortlisted candidates can give them a chance to discuss matters which may not arise at interview, eg living in Oxford. You **should not** treat any discussion over a meal as part of the selection process. This should be made clear to candidates.

Those involved at this stage should have sufficient knowledge of the post in question but should **not** be involved in selection. Consideration should be given to any cultural and/or dietary requirements.

If candidates are offered a tour of the department any information or assessment made during the tour should not form part of the selection, unless it has been made clear to candidates in advance that this part will be assessed as part of the decision-making process. In such cases those conducting the tour should be involved equally with all candidates and should report to the panel against specific selection criteria.