

Interviews

Interviews can be tricky to get right, but it is really important you do so to ensure that they **a)** give you a good impression of the candidate and their ability to do the job and **b)** to ensure that the candidate has a positive experience with you and wants to work for your organisation.

Structuring your interviews

- Interviews should last between 45 minutes and 1 hour.
- Whether conducting your interviews in person or online, ensure you are in a private, quiet environment without distractions as this will allow the candidate – and interviewer – to focus on the interview and give their best performance.
- We recommend having an interview panel of at least two people to gain multiple perspectives on the candidates' performances. It is also recommended that one of whom concentrates on making thorough interview notes.
- You should take time to read an application form before an interview and ask questions tailored to the candidate's background/experience.

Tip! – Remember to sell your organisation at interview!

When you are conducting your interviews, remember that interviews are a two-way process, and this is your chance as an employer to inform candidates why they should work for you. You can use the interview as a chance to explain the benefits of working for a SME. Think about what you can offer graduates that larger corporations cannot. Give your candidates a really good impression about your business and why they should consider joining your team!

You could mention the following...

- Give an insight into the type of work that the graduate would be getting involved in and any exciting projects in the pipeline! Are you working with any fantastic clients? Tell them about it!
- SMEs typically offer more variety in a graduate role and more opportunities to make real impact which can sometimes lead to faster progression. Tell candidates about all the experiences they will get working in your team!
- Are there any great perks you can offer employees that contribute towards your organisation being a great place to work? Maybe you offer working from home, discounted gym memberships, fun staff socials and days off on birthdays!

By talking enthusiastically about your workplace and its perks first-hand to graduates, they will take these impressions with them from the interview!

Title	Content
Breaking the ice	Relax the candidate and build rapport through small talk about the weather, current events or their journey. Avoid questions about their family life or anything that could be judged as intrusive.
Introduction	<p>Inform candidates of the practicalities of the interview, including your name and role, length of the interview and that you will be taking notes.</p> <p>You should also explain that this is a competency-based interview so they can provide examples from their education/studies, work experience and/or personal interests and hobbies. Encourage candidates to provide as much information as they can and to be specific about what they did and how they did it in their examples.</p>
Main questions	<p>Depending on time available and length of candidate answers, pick one or two questions for each skill/competency that you are measuring. If possible, start with a simple question to ease them into the interview.</p> <p>You should decide which questions you will ask all candidates interviewing for one role prior to interviews commencing. This will keep your interview process fair and unbiased.</p>
Candidate questions	Allow 5-10 minutes for the candidate to ask questions.
Next steps and close	<p>Tell the candidate when they will be informed of an outcome and whether you will be able to provide feedback.</p> <p>Thank the candidate for their time but try to ensure that any further comments are neutral. Wishing them 'good luck' or saying you hope to see them again is tempting but may raise their expectations or mislead them.</p>

Interview questions

You should seek to ask clear, concise and open questions. You can then follow up with additional probing questions to source further information.

A bad question would be: *Are you a good team player?*

A good question would be: *Tell us about a time where you have worked effectively as part of a team to achieve a positive outcome, what did you do?*

You could then probe to source further information or clarification: *What was your role? How did you support your team? What was the outcome? What would you do differently if faced with the same task again?*

Illegal questions: It is important to avoid asking any question that relate to the 9 protected characteristics (age, disability, marriage/civil partnership, race, pregnancy and maternity, religion/belief, gender, sexual orientation, gender reassignment). Good practice is to avoid questions which are not relevant to the requirements of the job.

Scoring interviews

Often the hardest part of the interviewing process is not the interview itself but rather scoring and deciding on candidates.

During the interview: Observe and record what the candidate says and does. You should record this as accurately as possible, but do not try to evaluate or rate the candidate's comments or actions yet. Candidate quotes are the most useful evidence for giving feedback, forming a fair evaluation later, and using to defend a decision if a candidate should challenge it.

After the interview: Spend a few minutes reflecting on their answers and decide how you will rate each answer, using the framework below.

Score	Description
4	Excellent demonstration of the competency; meets nearly all the positive indicators
3	Very good demonstration of the competency; meets most of the positive indicators
2	Satisfactory demonstration of the competency; meets a few of the positive indicators but may also meet negative indicators
1	Unsatisfactory demonstration of the competency; meets none/very few of the positive indicators and may also meet a number of negative indicators

Considering digital poverty

One of the biggest changes that has occurred in recruitment during the COVID-19 pandemic is the switch to online interviews. Whilst they are very convenient for you as an employer and open the door to a wide pool of talent, we recommend that you consider some of the following points when making judgments during a digital interview.

Digital poverty is very real, and the COVID-19 pandemic has really exacerbated these factors for candidates typically from under-represented groups. Bear in mind that you could potentially be

interviewing students/graduates that either don't have access to a tablet or laptop, don't have room to interview at home or have poor microphone equipment or laptop issues etc. All these issues tend to disproportionately affect applicants who are less well off.

Here are some things you can consider when interviewing candidates online:

- Don't judge a candidate if they don't have a technological set up as good as those of your employees. Remember, this would be easily rectified if they were successful in getting your job!
- Candidates may already feel concerned that they will face judgment based on their living environment so don't let any unconscious biases creep in. You're scoring their answers, not what their bedroom looks like.
- Don't penalise candidates who use mobile phones to conduct their interview – some candidates may need to use mobile phones if they don't have suitable laptops/tablets.

Whether interviewing online or in-person, another thing to be conscious of is biases affecting judgment on candidate appearance. Clothes aren't cheap, and there could be graduates that can't afford professional attire for an interview. Again, any graduates in this position will already be very conscious that this could cause judgment. Make them feel at ease and score on their interview performance!

At the end of the day, it's all about finding the best person for the job regardless of circumstance and background.

Tip – keep your interview forms

If you are accused of discrimination by a candidate, it is your responsibility to prove that this is not the case and not their responsibility to prove that it is. We recommend keeping your interview notes (in a confidential area) for up to 6 months after the interview. This:

- ✓ This provides evidence of good practice
- ✓ These documents are helpful to use when providing candidates with feedback
- ✓ Shows that the employer took reasonable steps to prevent unlawful discrimination or harassment
- ✓ Demonstrates that a decision was based on objective evidence of the candidate's ability to do the job, and not on assumptions/prejudices about the capabilities of groups of people sharing protected characteristics.

Interview template

We have included an interview template which measures four standard graduate competencies (commercial awareness, resilience, organisation and teamwork). You can use this template as it is or include your own competencies and questions.

Candidate name	
Position applied for	
Interviewer(s)	
Date	

Resilience: Tell us about a time when you've had to deal with a difficult set of circumstances. *Probe:* How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?

Answer:

Positive indicators

- Sees difficult problems or projects as a learning opportunity; demonstrates perseverance
- Can articulate learning and outcomes from different experiences, can articulate different options when faced with a challenge
- Remains positive and calm in difficult circumstances; genuine ability to face adversity and still see positives

Negative indicators

- Shies away from challenges or relies on others to deliver
- Fixed thinking style when faced with a challenge. Struggles to articulate options and potential outcomes
- Regularly complains or moans in the face of difficult situations; will avoid tasks they've previously failed at

Score (1-4):

Teamwork: Tell us about a group activity that you have been part of. Were there any times when the team was not working effectively? *Probe:* What did you do? And what was the outcome?

Answer:

Positive indicators

- Able to build effective trusting relationships with a variety of people
- Able to find win-win solutions
- Offers support and help to colleagues
- Enjoys working as part of a team
- Ability to work together to solve problems

Negative indicators

- Has difficulty working with other people, causing offence or upset
- Wins at the expense of others
- Does not engage or offer ideas
- Seems disinterested in team working, or values individual success more highly

Score (1-4):

Organisation: How do you organise your time to ensure you meet deadlines and keep your work to a high standard? *Probe:* What tools and techniques do you use? When have you used these techniques effectively?

Answer:

Positive indicators

- Able to plan and prioritise work effectively
- Delivers positive business results
- Uses their initiative and works well independently
- Shows a range of tools and techniques used to stay organised
- Demonstrates a logical and methodical process
- Understands the importance of attention to detail

Negative indicators

- Poorly organised and unable to prioritise effectively
- Does not deliver results
- Needs lots of supervision, support and direction
- Method of planning work is illogical, or no thought gone into this
- No examples of tools or techniques used to plan work
- Does not understand the importance of planning or attention to detail

Score (1-4):

Competency	Rating (1-4)
Commercial awareness	
Resilience	
Teamwork	
Organisation	
Total score (out of 16):	

4. Work-based tasks

Work-based tasks are useful during the recruitment process as they can assess levels of technical skills as well as more general competencies such as problem-solving, prioritisation and written communication. In these tasks it is difficult for a graduate to 'fake' it, so their performance in the task will give employers a real insight into the candidate's skills. When selecting work-based tasks, they should be realistic, relevant and indicative of the work they will be involved in when they start their role.

Examples might include a:

- Programming test for a software role
- Social media posts for a marketing or communications role
- In-tray exercise for an administration role
- A technical drawing test for an engineering role
- A customer pitch for a sales role
- Event planning task for an events assistant role

Example 1. In-interview presentation (20 minutes)

Give candidates 15 minutes during their interview to prepare a 5-minute presentation. With minimal preparation time, this task will test candidate's communication skills, motivation and ability to work under pressure. The candidate should be briefed at the start of the interview, and you should provide them with pen and paper. This task is also easy to conduct when interviewing online (via Zoom, MS Teams) during COVID-19 restrictions.

An example of what you could ask candidates to present for this task:

1. **Tell us about you!** It would be great to hear about your hobbies and interests, and anything else interesting which you would like to share.
2. **We'd really like to hear about any industry exposure you've had so far.** No matter how big or small, e.g. university projects, a few weeks work experience or a full-time role.
(Questions for after their presentation: What did you enjoy most? What did you find most challenging? Where did you find your strengths lie? What did you learn about yourself?)

Competency	Assessor notes	Score (1-4)
Time management and organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Structure and content of presentation are clear from start to finish• Professional quality presentation• Attempts to make it engaging		

Resilience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sees challenges as a learning opportunity; demonstrates perseverance • Remains positive and calm in difficult circumstances • Confident delivery of presentation, no/few obvious nerves 		
Motivation and drive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of directly relevant successful work experience • Impressive or directly relevant achievements • Highlights the skills and experiences they have learnt so far that are relevant to this role 		
Total score (out of 12):		

Example 2. Event planning task (20 minutes)

This task can also be conducted either on online interview or in-person interviews. Give candidates the following brief, as well as pens and paper:

It is the 1st November and you have been tasked with organising an end-of-year event to celebrate our latest product launch. The venue has been booked but has never been used by the business before.

You have 20 minutes to:

- Please briefly outline the key steps you would take to plan and organise this event.
- Write content for a Tweet and LinkedIn post to promote the event.

Competency	Assessor notes	Score (1-4)
Time management and organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to plan and prioritise work effectively • Gets the details right • Uses their initiative • Demonstrates a logical and methodical process 		

<p>Written communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content is well-written and appropriate to audience and platform • Written content is creative and engaging • No/few spelling or grammar mistakes 		
<p>Commercial awareness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates understanding of business/products/sector through suitable content and style of answer • Understands how best to use different social media channels 		
<p>Total score (out of 12):</p>		