Recruitment and Selection

Interview Standards

Version 10 - May 2019

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Version 10 - May 2019

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Aim

The aim of this course is to provide you with an overview of the standards in recruitment and selection regarding questions, note-taking, marking and the relevant policy.

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Objectives

By the end of this session, with the aid of handouts and notes, you will be able to:

- Identify how to devise relevant questions in order to measure knowledge and skills;
- Identify how to assess evidence provided by candidates against set criteria; and,
- Make appropriate notes on relevant documentation to record performance and answers to questions.

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Introductions

- Your Name
- Where you work
- Have you interviewed before?
- What panel are you sitting on?
- Chairperson or Panel member?

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Course content

- Criteria
- Sift
- Questions
- Weighting
- Note taking
- Marking
- Merit order
- Tied candidates
- Documentation
- Legislation

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Civil Service Commissioners for NI Principles of Recruitment

1. Appointments should be made on merit
2. Appointment process should be fit for purpose
3. Appointment processes should be fair and applied with consistency
4. Appointments should be made in an open, accountable and transparent manner.

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Role of Commissioners

- Ensure appointments to the NICS are on the basis of merit;
- Approve appointments through open competition to the Senior Civil Service;
- Publish and maintain a Recruitment Code;
- Audit recruitment policies and practices;
- Require Departments and Agencies to publish information about their recruitment practices.

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4 Stage Authorisation for SCS Competition

Stage A: Authorisation to advertise the proposed appointment;

Stage B: Authorisation to issue the invitations to interview, and first and second assessments, if appropriate;

Stage C: Authorisation to notify the successful candidate(s); and

Stage D: Approval to issue final offer(s) of appointment(s).

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Criterion-based interviewing

- Based on the premise that ‘past performance’ is the BEST indicator of how someone will perform in the future.
- Involves seeking out RELEVANT experiences or behaviours.

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Roles & Responsibilities

Before the interview

Before the interview - Chair

- Prepare yourself & your panel
- Ensure you & your panel members receive correct paperwork
- Consider how your panel will work
- Arrange pre-board meeting.

Before the interview - Panel Member

- Attend pre-board meeting
- Discuss & agree the requirements of the post
  - what is an excellent, average, poor candidate
  - agree interview plan, time management issues
  - who covers what criteria
- Study the background papers
- Conduct paper sift (if necessary)
- Decide which topics you will raise to test your criteria
- Formulate some initial questions and agree these with NICS HR
- Agree the standards for each of the criteria – positive indicators.

Roles & Responsibilities

During the interview

During the interview - Chair

- Set right tone
- Candidate check & introduce panel
- Settle the candidate
- Open the questioning
- Pass the candidate to next panel member
- Keep track of time
- Keep an eye on questioning
- Bring the interview to a close
- Give candidate opportunity to add further information.

During the interview - Panel Member

- Keep candidate at ease
- Ask relevant questions
- Listen & look attentive throughout
- Avoid discrimination
- Explore all the evidence
- Take notes
- Keep track of time
- Handle problem situations.

Roles & Responsibilities

After the interview

After the interview - Chair

- Lead discussion to agree panel assessment
  – hear panels' views first & then give your own
- Return all board papers, documentation & personal notes to HRConnect/NICS HR.


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After the interview - Panel Member
• Make your own assessment of each candidate
• Complete board form - mark and comments
• Discuss & agree panel assessment
• Ensure that all evidence for individual & panel assessments is recorded through specific comments & examples
• Return all board papers to Chair.


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Types of questions
✓ Open
✓ Probing
✓ Closed
? Hypothetical
× Multiple
× Leading.
?

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Criterion-based interviewing

CRITERION

- Ability to motivate a team

QUESTIONS

- “Give me an example of a situation where you had to convince your team of the value of something they were reluctant to do?”
- “How did you achieve this?”
- “What barriers did you encounter?”
- “With hindsight, would you have done anything different?

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Criterion-based interviewing

- Hypothetical responses have not been lived through or may be ‘textbook answers’
- Assessment is against a Template/Set criteria and not one of immediate comparison with another candidate.

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Note taking

- Gather relevant information;
- All panel members to take notes;
- Factual evidence – not your interpretation;
- Provide Feedback;
- Discoverable.

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Rating procedure

- Panel members record evidence during interview
- Those interviewing on a criterion **must** take notes
- At end of interview, panel members review all available evidence
- Each panel member arrive at a personal rating and record
- Panel discussion led by Chair, panel reach consensus, justify differences.

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Completion of board forms

- Candidate's identification name/number
- Time in, time out
- Personal marks for each individual criteria
- Comments as evidence for marks awarded
- Agreed panel assessment mark
- Signature & date
- Be careful about writing anything that later could cause embarrassment to you or the organisation.

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Course content

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Objectives

By the end of this session, with the aid of handouts and notes, you will be able to:

- Identify how to devise relevant questions in order to measure knowledge and skills;
- Identify how to assess evidence provided by candidates against set criteria; and,
- Make appropriate notes on relevant documentation to record performance and answers to questions.

ASSURANCES THAT MUST BE PROVIDED TO COMMISSIONERS AT 4 KEY STAGES OF THE SCS COMPETITION

Stage A:	Authorisation to advertise the proposed appointment. The NICS seek authorisation to advertise the proposed appointment. The Competition Initiation Meeting has taken place and the Candidate Information Booklet and advertisement have been prepared.
Stage B:	Authorisation to issue the invitations to interview and first assessment. The NICS seek authorisation to issue invitations to interview or first assessment as appropriate. The panel have applied the eligibility/shortlisting criteria to the candidate application forms.
Stage C:	Authorisation to notify the successful candidate(s). The NICS seek authorisation to notify the candidate that they have been successful. All assessment stages/interviews have been completed and the merit list has been created.
Stage D:	Approval to issue final offer(s) of appointment(s). The NICS seek approval to issue the final offer of appointment to the candidate.

What is criterion-based interviewing ?

- It is based on the premise that past performance is the best indicator or predictor of how someone will perform in the future.
- It involves seeking out the candidate’s experiences and examples of past behaviour (what they have said and done, thought and learned) which are relevant to the criterion being tested.
- It means that judgment is made by the panel only on the candidate’s ability to do the job.
- It does not rely on hypothetical questions that encourage hypothetical answers.
- Assessment is against a pre-set template of behaviours which go to fill the requirements or criteria for the job. It is not one of comparison of one candidate with another.
- It allows the panel to work as a team in coming to a final decision that can be justified
- Works on the same principles as “behavioural” or “competence-based” interviewing.

Interviewing practice

“ . . . all are given the same opportunity to demonstrate their abilities . . . ”

This, and the need to avoid applying differential standards, are the reasons behind the NICS practices of :

- having pre-determined questions which we ask for each criterion area
- having a scoring frame for each criterion area agreed beforehand and adhered to throughout
- having a set way of introducing and closing the interviews
- ensuring that every criterion area is examined and assessed
- timing each interview carefully so that it is no more than plus or minus two minutes from the agreed time. Chairpersons should add a note of explanation only for any unusual occurrences.
- ensuring that none of our biases or prejudices play any part in awarding or withholding marks

All papers in the interview room are part of the record and need to go back to whoever is organising the competition. They are required to keep the papers for 5 years in case there is a challenge.

Structure of the interview

There are many ways of structuring the interviews. The panel should use the pre-board meeting to agree on what is most comfortable for the candidates and themselves. Once started, the format cannot be changed.

This is one proposal that should allow the panel to work as a team. It can be adapted to any size of panel and any number of criteria.

Chair	:	Introductions "Thank you for that. Now let's move on to the first criterion and I will hand you over to . . . "
Panel member 1	:	Say something like "Hello, name. I'm going to ask you about . . . My first question is . . . " At the end, say something like "Thank you. That's all I want to ask you. Now I'm going to pass you on to . ."
Panel member 2	:	As for panel member 1, greet the candidate by name, mention the criterion and start the questioning with your Lead Question. Finish with a thanks and pass on to Panel member 3 or pass back to the Chair.
Chair	:	The Chair should ask if the candidate wishes to add anything to what they have said or clarify anything that they have said. Finish by thanking the candidate.

This may seem too formal and stiff. Feel free to make your choices on how you want to run things but be business-like and fair to all.

Preboard meeting

The Codes of Practice say that each panel should meet well before the boards in order to plan their approach. It is important that every panel operates in the same way and that everyone is clear about:

- **What the boards are looking for**?
  The core competencies are set out in the board papers. Make sure that you are thoroughly familiar with them.

- **Equal opportunities legislation**.
  Some of the requirements are set out later.

- **Structure of the interviews**.
  - be sure that you know how long each interview will last
  - be sure that you know how long there will be between interviews
  - make sure that each of you are clear on what will happen
  - decide on who will take which criterion
  - confirm the running order as advised
  - confirm approximately how much time each criterion should get, leaving the Chair two minutes to introduce each interview and a minute or so at the end to wrap things up
  - decide on how time will be kept - will there be a clock behind the candidate's chair and/or one on the table?
  - decide on how the Chair will signal to a panel member when their time is almost up

    Hint - choose to move something distinctive like a watch, a napkin, or a glass but not a pen, you might want that. Move it away from the panel member and leave it in a new position as a permanent indicator.
  - decide on who will first greet the candidate outside the room, check on who they are and bring them into the room. It is probably better for a panel member (rather than the Chair) to do this.

- **Knowledge of what is being sought**.
  It is also useful for each panel member to know what the other is looking for. All of this should ensure that there are no overlaps or gaps and will help the interview go more smoothly.

Role of the Chairperson

It is the Chair's responsibility to manage the entire process. You will clarify any points with the competition organisers and convene pre-board meetings. In the interests of fair and equal treatment it is essential to run each interview to the same pattern.

On the day
Meet in good time to make sure that the room is satisfactory - has everyone got all their papers, are there spare pens, water and glasses (and tissues to mop up spills). Make sure that each candidate has a fresh glass of water and, if you can, make sure that the candidate's chair is without arms. Remind your panel members of the policy on equality, the need for fair and consistent treatment and ask them not to take risks they don't have to take.

At the start of each interview the Chair should :

- note the time as the start of the interview (you can do this while a panel member is about to show the candidate in)
- welcome the candidate in a friendly but business-like way, smile and "talk" them from the door to the chair - it can seem a long way. it might sound something like "good morning. you are very welcome take a seat. there's a glass of water for you. now, you are . . . ?"
- check on who they are, using their full name from your timetable
- ask which name they would like the panel to use
- find a non-pejorative way of asking how to pronounce an unfamiliar name – repeat it accurately and say thanks
- introduce the panel member(s) and yourself
- mention that if a panel member interrupts them, it will be because the panel member feels you have given them sufficient evidence in that area
- explain that the panel will be making notes throughout; this is normal practice and you should not let it distract you
- mention that they will have an opportunity, at the end, to add or clarify anything
- check that they are happy and hand over to the first panel member and note the time

It may look as if these items will take a long time but about a minute and a half is all it takes.

Role of the Chairperson

During the interview

- **YOU SHOULD NOTE THE TIME THAT EACH CRITERION STARTED.** You should quickly calculate when the next hand-over should be. This is best done on paper and used as a reminder. You will have enough to think about than do sums in your head and remember when the thing started!

- If a panel member begins to run over time the Chair should signal accordingly.

- Throughout each interview you will want to :
  - ensure that the panel ask all of the prescribed questions
  - safeguard fairness and consistency throughout
  - ensure that control is kept throughout
  - ensure that the interview plan is followed - every time
  - control a panel member, if necessary

- When all criteria have been examined, the questioning will come back to the Chair.

- You should make a point of asking the candidate if there is anything they wish to add or clarify. It is not a good idea to ask the candidate if they have any questions. The chances are that you will not be able to answer them but a bigger problem is that you will lose control of the time. Much better to ask "Is there anything that you would like to add to what you have already told us?"

- Finish by thanking them for coming.

Role of the Chairperson

After each interview :

The Chair should lead the discussion when the panel is evaluating each candidate's performance and arriving at a panel agreed mark. In the event of an unresolved difference of opinion about a score, the Chair must facilitate the discussion and examination of candidate evidence in order to arrive at a panel agreed mark.

The Chair should see that all of the paperwork is complete before the next candidate.

At the end of the competition

The Chair should :

1. note any points of interest for possible action by the competition organisers - eg a disability.

2. note anything that would be useful to have recorded in the event of an appeal - something unusual that happened before, during or after an interview like an evacuation, one of the panel members having to leave the room, the timings going badly adrift or candidates interviewed in a different order, for instance.

3. ensure that the necessary documentation and administration is completed and in order. In recruitment competitions, you will be asked to complete an evaluation form which will ask whether any diversity issues arose that should be considered by HR Connect.

4. ensure that all papers are passed to the organisers at the end of the exercise.

Afterwards

Do not discuss a candidate's performance with them or anyone else – or disclose anything about anybody else's performance either.

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Role of the Chairperson

The following is a list which should be used as a guide of what to address in the introductions of the interview:

- Welcome interviewee
- Ask the candidate to confirm their full name
- Introduced self and other panel members
- State that this is a criterion-based interview and state competition (whether trawl or general service board)
- State the number of criterion you will be testing against and list them
- Explain who will ask each criterion in the order they will be asked
- State how long the interview should last
- Explain that the panel members will be taking notes throughout the interview
- Offer the interviewee a glass of water
- Advise them that they can ask you to repeat Lead questions and clarify supplementary questions if necessary
- Explain to the candidate that the interview is time bound and we may need to interrupt them
- Remind the candidate that if they have a mobile phone, if they would switch if off
- Ask if the interviewee is clear on all the above, then proceed with the interview

Role of panel members

Before

Once you have agreed to be a panel member make sure that you have ring-fenced time for preparation as well as for the interviews.

Read all of the board documentation to thoroughly acquaint yourself with what is being sought.

Keep a weather eye for possible conflicts of interest or instances of past history that might influence the equality of opportunity agenda. Discuss any possible difficulties with the Chair and the competition organisers at the earliest opportunity.

Use the pre-board meeting to do a bit of sharing and team building about how you are going to operate together. Be guided by the Chair's checklists elsewhere in this booklet.

On the day

Arrive in good time and get yourself organised and settled in.

Raise any points you need to with your colleagues.

Role of panel members

During the interviews

Greet candidates, pronounce their names carefully and remember to smile!

While you are asking the questions, use the listening skills mentioned previously.

Let the Chair take care of the time keeping. Look out for the agreed signal and decide whether and how to wrap up. If you are not quite at a conclusion, then ask another question and get the evidence while you can.

While you are note-taking, remember what was said previously. Try not to look at the candidate a lot while you are taking notes – glance up occasionally. Try to resist looking at them during the long silences; it only puts additional pressure on them.

After each interview

Make sure that you score each criterion and then work with your colleagues to agree the "Agreed by Board" mark.

Review how well the panel is performing – for instance, how well are the signals working, how good is the listening, are any clues being missed, or were there any signs of bias?

Points to remember

- Be business-like and polite
- Do not lose the human touch by being too scientific
- Do not pass judgment or moralise during the interview
- Do not argue with the candidate
- Do not react in any way to any information about any of the nine aspects of Section 75. Get beyond the label, the stereotype and your own bias to the skills and abilities of the candidate
- Avoid giving feedback by using words like “That’s great” or “brilliant” or “very good”; they can be misleading and open to the candidate thinking that they are doing really, really well. Stick to “Thank you for that” in a business-like tone of voice.
- Avoid jargon and “in-house” terms
- Allow for silence - give them time to think - and watch for clues for whether you should intervene or wait
- Make sure that your notes capture the evidence needed to justify the marks awarded to each candidate
- Work as a team - ask each other for feedback on how you are doing and tell the other(s) if you think they are taking unnecessary risks or missing opportunities or whatever

Using the NICS Competency Framework

Following the introduction of the new NICS Competency Framework in April 2014, selection processes for recruitment and promotion competitions within the NICS, below SCS level, have changed since 1st April 2015.

There are 10 competencies allocated within 3 Strategic Clusters in the new NICS Competency Framework; each competition will **not** require that all 10 competencies be assessed.

- When assessing staff at grades up to EO1, selection processes will normally use a minimum of 4 competencies.
- When assessing staff at grades SO and above, selection processes will normally use a minimum of 6 competencies.

The competencies selected must include at least 1 from each of the 3 Strategic Clusters set out in the Competency Framework.

The decision on, and justification for, the choice of competencies to be used in selection resides with the vacancy holder, in consultation with the HR competition lead.

The new NICS Competency Framework, 2014, can be found on HRConnect or the NICS Recruitment website.

Questions

Questions are essential if we are to compile the evidence on which we are going to base our assessment of the candidate's ability to do the job.

To help us in that assessment, all of our questions must be both USEFUL and RELEVANT to the criteria. If we do not ask the right questions and seek useful and relevant information, we are wasting our time and failing to do our job. Once the candidate has left the interview room, we cannot add to the information already elicited from the individual - our chance has gone.

The Core or Key Question(s) at the start of each criterion area must be prepared (and recorded) in advance and adhered to rigorously throughout every interview.

Some refer to the Core or Key Question as the "Lead Question" – please be careful not to confuse this with "Leading Question" mentioned later.

Panel members will also be permitted to ask agreed supplementary questions to probe and/or clarify the candidate's response eg with regard to their specific role or of their use of jargon.

If you have the opportunity try speaking the question(s) to make sure that you are familiar with them. They should be delivered slowly and clearly to enable the candidate to understand them.

If the candidate has a problem with the question(s), you should repeat the wording but be very careful not to change the meaning of the original question.

Every supplementary question must be relevant to the criterion being investigated. Supplementary questions should be written down before the interview as it is good practice to be prepared. During the interview it is good practice to use your supplementary questions to probe what the candidate has said for clarity or detail. However, there may be a situation where the available supplementary questions do not fit the example given by the candidate and in this case you may phrase your own question. It is important to note that all panel members must record the new question as well as the answer from the candidate. The new question must link to the lead question and the NICS Core competencies or Professional Skills for Government, whichever is applicable.

You must not alter the lead question.

Knowledge criterion

Knowledge and Skills criteria call for somewhat different handling by the interviewer.

Knowledge criteria are most commonly found in the criteria set for specialist posts and will seek to establish the candidate's familiarity with, and understanding of, Codes, Directives, or Standards, for instance and, sometimes, their application.

NICS practice is that the Core or Key Question(s) remains the same throughout the competition and is asked of each and every candidate in exactly the form that it has been written.

In a Knowledge criterion, the opening question may ask the candidate to describe what they understand the main purpose of a particular Code to be.

It is not good practice to launch with why they think Codes are necessary or why Standards are good things. Answers to these questions are usually too abstract or too general for our purposes.

It is much better to start with establishing their understanding of a particular document or practice and then begin to explore their understanding of the reason for the Standard, its implications and outworkings, benefits and drawbacks. Your supplementary questions will probe and test their understanding and their thinking. It may be useful to explore their opinions of the soundness of the document or how and why the Standard should be revised or left in place, or what they think are the acceptable exceptions to the document.

Be careful if you stray too far into their application of that understanding - you may be intruding on one of the skills criteria which will be examined separately.

The style of questioning in a knowledge criterion is about knowledge, understanding and opinion. This is different to the questioning in a Skills criterion where the emphasis should be of the candidate's application of the skills to overcome problems, deliver results or ensure service delivery, for instance.

Skills criterion

The opening question is another Core or Key Question.

Again, NICS practice is that the Core or Key Question(s) remains the same throughout the competition and is asked of each and every candidate in exactly the form that it has been written.

A good Key Question in a Skills criterion has three characteristics. It invites the candidate to tell you about :

- one specific example
- in the past
- when they exercised the skill or ability in the criterion.

  The verbs in the criterion are the skills areas. Make sure that the principal or high-level one appears in your question. You can check on the other verbs in your supplementary questions.

Common openings have been :

“Tell me about a time when you . . . ” or
“Please give me an example of when you . . .”

- criteria are always written in the present tense. Our questions have to change that to past tense
- practise speaking the question out loud to uncover any problems with delivery or pronunciation
- you might change “a time” or “an example” to “one time” or “one example.” This can help the candidate to focus on a single instance and that will help you when you begin to probe.
- in practice, too, a slight emphasis on “you” might help their focus
- it is your choice whether you want to add something like “What did you have to do?” to the end of the question

Skills criterion

Your Core or Key Question should **not** ask "How would you . . .?" or "How do you. . . ?". The answer, at best, will tell you that they know the theory. You are much more interested in what they have done and how they did it – and you haven't time to explore theory.

You will come across a criterion that has several verbs. It is your choice how to handle this.

If you can, construct a question that covers all of the ground and does not sound clumsy, then use that. You need to be sure, though, that the candidate actually answers all of the question.

You might want to ask two Core or Key Questions. If you do, it would be a kindness to the (nervous) candidate to say something like "I will be asking about oral and written communication. I want to start with oral and we'll look at written later".

Whatever you choose to do, please remember that NICS practice is that Core or Key Question(s) remain constant throughout the competition

Types of question

Open

These are the most valuable type of questions to use.

They are called open because they leave the style, content and length of answer to the candidate. Open questions usually start with Who, What, Where, When, How or Why.

Asking open questions requires high-quality listening on our part.

But open questions can lead to problems; candidates will either speak at great length, or go off at a tangent, or simply not answer the question. You can control the first, to some extent, by including the word “briefly” in your next question.

Another way of gaining control is to interrupt courteously – compose your next question, clearly signal with your eye contact and body language that you want to say something, pick your moment and go for it.

For the candidate who will not answer the question, you need to give them a quick steer towards what you want to hear. Do this gently and without upsetting or “throwing” them.

If the candidate persists in not answering the question you may be entitled to take the line that you have given them the same opportunity as everyone else so it is their loss if they choose to waste their opportunity.

Closed

Closed questions usually start with “Are you ... ?”, “Did you ... ?”, “Have you ... ?”, “Could you . . .? or “Would you ... ?”.

The only answer is “Yes” or “No”. By using only closed questions all that you achieve is proof that you were right all along!

Types of question

Closed questions, though, do have a role if you want to clarify or check on what has just been said. You should use a closed question en route to something else, so have a follow-up open question ready too.

It is good advice to keep closed questions to a minimum.

Even away from the interview room try transforming your closed questions into open ones – you will be surprised by how much new information you can gather – provided you listen, of course!

Probing

Rather than skimming lightly over a number of areas you should probe deeply in a few areas relevant to the criterion. You should test and challenge what you are being told. You need to be sure that they have been there and done whatever. You also need to have an idea of how they coped, what they were thinking and what they learned from the experience. If it is not their experience they are telling you about probing will help make "the wheels fall off". If it is their experience you will amass evidence on which you can hang points with some confidence.

In probing we use the **Funnel Technique**. This settles on one example of the candidate's behaviour and drills down through it. The technique helps you get to grips with the breadth, depth and extent of their skills and abilities, what they did and why, the thinking and reasoning that they were using and what they had learned from the experience. All of that is evidence on which you can base your evaluation of their ability to do the job. The build-up of detail can help convince you of the truth of what you are hearing.

Types of question

The sequence could include a selection from these suggestions :

What did you actually do?
What was your specific role?
Why did you do it that way?
What difference did you make?
What was your (unique) contribution?
What went well?
How did you keep things on track?
What else did you do?
How did you plan it out?
What were you trying to make happen?
Why did you choose that?
What were you trying to prevent?
What risks were you taking?
What help did you get or look for?
How do you know it was enough?
What pitfalls were there?
What were the benefits of that?
What did you find difficult?
What long-term targets did you have?
What interim targets did you have?
How well did you achieve them?
How did you know?
What skills did you have to use?
What were the implications of … ?
What else could you have done?
What did not go so well?
How did you cope?
What was your thinking?
What did you learn?
What would you do differently?

Your paperwork may suggest supplementary questions but be careful how you use them – listen carefully and choose a question that will develop, explore, probe, test or challenge in a way that is relevant to the criterion. Your supplementary questions should make the conversation flow so that you can be sure of the evidence.

Beware of asking questions that are not relevant to the criterion – the topic and the information may be fascinating but is that what you are there for?

Supplementary Questions should be agreed beforehand, but you do **not** have to ask all supplementary questions.

Questions to avoid

(or keep to a minimum)

1. Avoid **hypothetical questions** that ask what they *would* do unless :

   - the criterion is "situational". These are used in some competitions where actual experience is deemed to be unlikely or unevenly available to all candidates. In this case, you will be given scenario questions to ask. "I would" answers are expected and accepted
   - it is a knowledge criterion
   - you are asking about learning

   In other circumstances, hypothetical questions add little of real value. At best the answers demonstrate a knowledge of the theory or of some supposedly "right" answer. Neither answer can do much to convince you that they have an *ability*.

2. Avoid **present tense** questions. Questions about what they do, rather than what they *did*, lead to generalised answers, usually about the theory of something or what they are doing in their present job. If the candidate's best example comes from the present job, then fair enough. But don't lead with the present tense.

3. Avoid **leading questions** which come in three guises:

   - one type almost tells the candidate what we expect to hear. For example "I'm sure you will agree with me that ..." or "You don't mean to tell me that a manager of your experience . . . ?"
   - a close relative consists of making a statement and inviting the candidate to agree or comment
   - another variety involves floating options at the candidate. The implication is that we know the answer already and all he/she has to do is confirm how clever we were. For instance "Did you solve that by doing A or B or C?"

Questions to avoid

(or keep to a minimum)

4. Avoid **multiple questions** where the candidate has to remember all the components posed in one long question. For instance, "How long ago was that, who else was involved and what was your role, were you in the lead maybe?" It is highly likely that the candidate will not address all of the issues either because they cannot remember all of the question or they might choose to ignore some of it. And you may not realise what has happened until much later. It is much better to ask each question separately – and wait for an answer.

5. Avoid **long introductions** before asking a question. You might want to tell them how good you are or just sound clever. You may find it therapeutic to think out loud or you might want to give the candidate time to think. At best, all of these come across as self-indulgent and are only likely to confuse or irritate the candidate (and your fellow panel members!).

6. Avoid **ambiguous** or **vague questions**.

7. Avoid, too, **jargon** and "**buzz words**" unless it is clear (perhaps from the application form) that both you and the candidate are working to the same definitions. Knowledge of jargon – and the ability to weave it into sentences - is not a necessary requirement for the job; a thorough understanding of the concepts is much more likely.

Public Appointments

The Northern Ireland Civil Service uses criterion based interviewing for its external recruitment, internal promotion and public appointment competitions.

The purpose of departmental public appointment competitions is to identify suitable candidates for consideration by Ministers for appointment to the boards of public bodies.

Most public appointment competitions are regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments, an independent, statutory office holder appointed by the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

The Commissioner's role is to prescribe and publish a Code of Practice which sets out the procedures that departments are expected to follow and the standards they are expected to meet when making appointments to the boards of the public bodies they sponsor.

Whilst not exactly the same the Commissioner's role is not dissimilar to that of the Civil Service Commissioners except of course that it relates solely to public appointments.

The Commissioner has the power to audit departmental public appointment competitions to establish whether they have complied with his Code of Practice and to publish a report setting out his findings.

As with internal and external competitions the overarching principle underpinning public appointment competitions is selection on merit. Where public appointments differ from external and internal selection competitions is the principle of Ministerial choice, which means that Ministers can, if they wish, choose who to appoint from a pool of suitable candidates.

It is important to remember that anti discrimination legislation does not just apply to employment it also applies to public appointments as was demonstrated in the case of Lennon v DRD in 2012.

Public Appointments

As member of a selection panel for a public appointment competition you need to know if the Commissioner's Code of Practice applies to the process you are participating in and if it does what are the implications for you. The Department overseeing the competition will be able to provide you with this information.

Note taking

It is vital that we take lots of notes during each interview.

They will be used to :

- provide an accurate and formal record of each interview
- remind ourselves of what the candidate was asked at interview and what their responses were
- justify our markings of each candidate
- help differentiate between the performance of candidates when we come to complete the final order of merit
- provide proof, in the event of a challenge, of what questions were asked and what the answers were

Every piece of paper in the interview room becomes part of the process and must be passed to whoever is organising the board.

Your notes should be a record of all of the questions asked and as much as possible of the answers. Your notes should accurately support the marks given later.

But :

- avoid recording your reactions to what is being said – that's for later
- avoid vague adjectives which might be interpreted differently – comments like petite, warm, attractive, vivacious, gentle, pushy, bubbly personality, long blond hair, has good grades.
- avoid judgmental comments
- do not doodle or draw on any papers
- make sure that you write in pen, NOT in pencil – the latter is liable to the interpretation that you meant to alter it later!
- try to use the same pen throughout

Note taking

So how do we do this ?

- While you are questioning panel membes should be encouraged to take brief notes during the interview where possible. They should **not** attempt to produce any notes at the end of the interview. In terms of individual scoring they can seek factual information from colleagues to assist with this process.
- While others are questioning you should :
  - capture as much as you can of the answers – use whatever abbreviations you like during the interview but make sure to make it more legible and more complete while it is still fresh in your memory
  - keep up with the flow. If you miss something let it go. The chances are that someone else will have captured the idea or that they will remember it later.
- Be sure to note any time that a panel member uses an additional clarification question.
- Practise whatever works well for you.

Evaluating and assessing

In many competitions, the scoring framework will have been compiled for you already and you may need a separate briefing on its use.

The Codes of Practice ask that we have a scoring mechanism in place before we begin interviewing and then use it consistently for all candidates.

It is important that panels reach agreed marks that can be justified – both in terms of marks awarded and in terms of marks withheld.

It is vital that the agreed marks are based on the evidence presented at interview. Beware of the Horns and Halo effects and of prejudice, stereotyping, generalisations and first impressions. None is acceptable. Beware, too, of highly-articulate candidates; they can sometimes make a very good impression but be over-rated when the evidence is reviewed objectively.

In some competitions, however, you will have to devise your own. This section describes a number of approaches to doing that. Whatever method you use must be fair and consistent.

Scoring frameworks 1, 2 and 3, in the Appendix, are from the National School of Government. They consist of a three-column grid with each column headed “Poor”, “Satisfactory” and “Outstanding”. Scoring framework 4, although similar in principle, does not use these headings but instead gives a numerical score.

We start by identifying what we expect of a satisfactory candidate. To do this, study the published criterion, pick out the verbs and place them down the length of the centre column. Bearing in mind the grade of the post(s) and the nature of the duties, begin to paraphrase those verbs with others of roughly the same value. What you are trying to identify is a range of behaviours that are appropriate, at this level, in this criterion.

Evaluating and assessing

In doing this, ideas will come to mind about what constitutes an outstanding performance at this grade. These verbs or phrases should go in the "outstanding" column. Generate as many words and phrases as you can that will describe the level of knowledge, skill, ability, thinking or learning that you are hoping to find in the really good candidates.

The "poor" column usually ends up looking very much like the examples quoted in the next pages but you should feel free to add whatever ideas make sense in your competition.

The ideas across the columns do not need to line up or relate to each other. There might be a spectrum of the same factor from "poor" across to "outstanding" but it doesn't have to be like that.

Am I prejudiced and does it show?

How do you react to people who are

over 50 or under 25?

short or tall?

men or women?

Do youthink anything different about people who

wear unconventional clothes?

have an unusual hairstyle?

have body piercings – ears, nose, lips, cheek, tongue?

have obvious tattoos?

have certain accents?

have a handshake that is limp, or dead, or moist?

have a handshake that is bone-crunching?

have an obvious disability?

Do you say or do anything different with women who

are pregnant?

seem like a “dumb blonde”?

appear to be lesbian?

wear certain perfumes?

Do you react in any way to men who

wear earrings?

have distinctive aftershave?

have beards or moustaches?

seem to be gay?

wear suede shoes?

have white socks?

Am I prejudiced and does it show?

And what about those who

cannot engage in eye contact?

blush as they speak?

do not laugh at your jokes?

bring a clutch of papers with them?

drum their fingers?

start every answers with “Aye” or “Yes” or “Well, now . . .“

ask you to repeat your questions?

suck their teeth or smack their lips?

spill their glass of water?

have not combed their hair?

have left their mobile phone on?

remind me of someone else?

remind me of me?

Recognising a personal bias is half the battle in controlling it. But you are not likely to treat someone differently because of any of these, are you? How could you justify it? And how would you check that none of your prejudices are visible while interviewing or evaluating a candidate?

Remember, a reaction does not have to be negative to be unacceptable.

Positive and negative evidence

MANAGING A QUALITY SERVICE CRITERIA

Key examples of Positive evidence

- Sets clear performance measures for self and team
- Ensures that systems and procedures are best suited to meet customer needs
- Established what customers need
- Monitors and reviews service provision
- Looks for ways to improve service
- Identifies who customers are
- Deal with customers courteously and fairly

Key examples of Negative evidence

- Shows little concern for improvement
- Not able to identify customer requirements
- Demonstrates little concern for needs of the customer and generally sees customer as a hindrance to getting job done
- Not able to identify what is important in service delivery and how to prioritise work to ensure that customer needs are met
- Reactive to customer needs rather than looking for ways to improving service
- No sense of targets or results needed
- Few systems is place to enable effective monitoring

Scoring framework

There is no, one, right way of compiling one of these scoring frameworks. But each item must be justified in relation to the specification of the position to be filled.

It is essential that the scoring framework remains unchanged throughout the competition and that it is used consistently throughout.

In using the table to decide on a score after the candidate has left the room, the interviewer will look at the range of evidence available from the answers given. The evidence will probably be spread across the columns; some here and some there. The interviewer will take all of this into account when deciding just where the mark lies.

There is no mathematical formula for arriving at the score. However, the distribution of poor, satisfactory and outstanding components in the candidate's answers will allow you to discuss your evaluation with your fellow panel members when arriving at an "Agreed by Board" score. By being specific about what the evidence was, and comparing that with what you were expecting to hear, you are minimising subjective judgment, minimising the impact of any bias or prejudice and using a common language to reach a decision.

The scoring framework can also allow you to justify your score - to yourself, to your fellow panel members, to the candidate at feedback time and to a Tribunal, if there is one. If a scoring framework is not available, one approach is to start by identifying what we expect of a satisfactory candidate. To do this, study the published criterion and pick out the verbs. These are the Positive Behaviours that are appropriate at this level of the organisation in that criterion area.

In doing this, ideas will also come to mind about what constitutes a weak performance in that area. These are the Negative Indicators.

Scoring framework

There is no one right way of doing this but each panel member must record an individual score before discussing and agreeing the “Agreed by Board” mark. Each score and each variation must be justified.

The other essential component is that the basis of scoring remains unchanged throughout the competition and that it is used consistently throughout.

In using the Positive and Negative Indicators after the candidate has left the room you will look at the range of evidence available from the answers given. The evidence may lie in both areas and you will take all of this into account when deciding just where the mark lies.

In arriving at your score, remember the “Horns and Halo” effect – is your score soundly based only on the evidence at interview or has something else coloured your opinion?

Keep a record of why the panel arrived at that mark (especially if it is significantly different to any individual panel member scores)

APPENDIX

Sample Scoring Framework – 1

CRITERION – Communication and Interpersonal skills

Poor	Satisfactory	Outstanding
Seldom ... Never ... Only 1 example of .... Very poor example of ... Unconvincing No contrary evidence example Not sure what he/ she actually did No evidence of valuing ... No learning from experience Did not answer the question	*Examples of ability to* Be clear about objectives and able to communicate clearly to others Empathise with others Use oral skills effectively Clarity Choosing vocabulary to suit audience Use written skills effectively Clarity Brevity Able to describe impact and effect Make effective choice between oral and written Convince Persuade Influence Build and maintain a relationship Focus on objectives	In a wide range of situations Colleagues Subordinates Customers Providers Folk at a distance Complainers Victims Can explain how and why Appropriate and effective use of assertiveness and listening skills Including at a distance Agrees, reviews and takes remedial action to reach targets
0 to 19	20 to 39	40 to 50

Sample Scoring Framework – 2

CRITERION – Handle change and uncertainty positively

Poor	Satisfactory	Outstanding
Didn't see it coming Only impact on self	Early identification of pending change and its impact on section	Discuss with policy makers or higher authority Identify benefits for staff
Not aware of bigger picture	Own knowledge of wider issues	Seeing wider implications beyond own interests Above, below and peers
Little evidence	Communication with all Active Listening Eliciting fears Handling rumours	Empathy with staff Identify and make use of opinion makers Task, Team and Individual concerns
	Acting and reacting promptly	Solve problems SMART objectives
Little that was really new Little evidence Little imagination shown	Evolve and agree plan of action Involve all in decision making Sell benefits	To individuals, team and branch - encourage laggers Avoid making promises that could not be kept Empower others to take responsibility Led implementation Urgent production of ideas
Little evidence Few examples of reaction to changed needs Little urgency shown	Implement Minor changes needed Plans adapted to keep to budget, time, plan etc to still achieve	Tending to revolutionary but appropriate and acceptable Thinking outside the box Major adjustments needed and acted upon but still achieving objectives
	Real change / improvement	Total change of direction Need for new role and major behaviour change recognised and acted upon Very tight timescales
0 to 3	4 to 6	7 to 10

Sample Scoring Framework – 3

CRITERION – Analytical and Problem Solver Skills

Good analytical and problem solving skills and the ability to relate the purpose and direction of their own work to the broader strategy of the organisation.

Poor	Satisfactory	Outstanding
Seldom or never Only one example of ... Very poor example of ... Followed precedents only, no revision Followed set ideas of others No variation or input of own ideas / insights Poor build up, lots of scene setting Activity rather than outcome focused No awareness or doesn't value the need for ...	Able to analyse causes and effects Use of available information Evolving possible solutions Innovation Evaluating each Deciding Setting objectives Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Time bounded Developing appropriate strategy including roles of others, taking their strengths and weaknesses into account Implementation Keeping on track Focus on objectives Good use of resources Own role and that of	Involved others Managed the situation Discussed interim stages with mentor Short and long term objectives Sought and used feedback Took remedial action early How well planned or effective Effective choices Good use of a novel approach Value for money Other advantages

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Sample Scoring Framework – 3 contd

Poor	Satisfactory	Outstanding
No clear evidence of what they actually did Use of "we" rather than "I" No contrary evidence example No learning from experience Did not answer the question Unconvincing	Others Supporting/encouraging others Successful / effective Evaluating Reviewing Long term review Learning for self, branch, organisation Convincing example Clear contribution to organisation	Large impact on work of organisation Strategic importance of contribution Evidence of growth in knowledge, skills, behaviours 21 to 25
0 to 11	12 to 20	

Sample Scoring Framework – 4

Rating	Criteria
18-21	• Strong in setting clear performance measures for staff • Very adept in suggesting improvements and carrying them through • Very skillfully establishes customer needs and expectations • Very clear understanding of barriers • Little weakness in any of examples
12-17	• Sets acceptable clear performance measures for self and staff • Suggests improvements • Establishes what customers needs are • Identifies barriers to excellence • Reasonable understanding of customers needs and expectations • Monitors progress against targets
0-11	• Displays little capacity in setting clear performance measures for self and staff • Rarely suggests improvements • Makes little effort to establish customer needs and expectations • Has difficulty identifying barriers to excellence

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