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Reviews candidate assessment methods as part of the recruitment process, focusing on interviews, psychometric tests, skill-based assessment tasks and assessment centres. Selecting staff has two main stages: shortlisting and assessment. In both stages employers should ensure that their selection methods treat candidates fairly, without discrimination or bias, and that selections are made based on the candidate’s ability to perform the role, contribute to the organisation and their potential for development. This factsheet focuses on the assessment stage of the selection process for the employer and candidate, including the methods of interviewing, psychometric testing, skill-based assessment tasks and assessment centres. Member tool: CIPD Buddy BETA Experiment with AI to find answers on this topic with our prototype. Login to explore CIPD Buddy

After a short-listing process, interviews are very widely used in the selection process. For the employer, the interview is an opportunity to: Gauge candidates’ experience and ability to perform in the role. Explain the employee value proposition, including learning opportunities and employee benefits. Give the candidate a positive impression of the organisation as a good employer. For the candidate, the interview is an opportunity to: Understand the job and its responsibilities in more detail. Ask questions about the organisation and the employee value proposition. Decide whether they would like to take the job if offered it. Use structured interviews

Structured interviews involve asking a predefined set of questions, in the same order, to all candidates. Candidate responses are then scored using consistent criteria against a set of pre-agreed criteria for each question. For example, a question might test whether a candidate is knowledgeable about the risks of a particular process. They could then be scored based on how many risks they identified, whether they covered key stakeholders in their risk assessment, or similar factors. Using structured interviews is an effective way to minimise bias and ensure there is a level playing field for candidates from marginalised groups. They make it easier for the interview panels to make direct and fair comparisons between candidates, using objective criteria. Elements of a well-structured interview

A structured interview should incorporate the following elements:

- Develop a set of questions and scoring criteria for use in the interview. During the interview, ask all candidates the same questions in the same order and score responses according to the objective criteria. This makes responses comparable and makes it less likely that decisions will be based on personal biases. Conduct interviews using a panel rather than a sole interviewer. Having multiple interviewers in the same interview has been shown to lead to fairer and more accurate results than having multiple interviews with only one interviewer (Huffcutt, A.L., Culbertson, S.S. and Weyhrauch, W.S. (2013)). Prepare interviewers for consistent interviewing. Provide them with the questions and criteria ahead of time and highlight the need for consistency in the interview. Encourage the panel to meet in advance to assign questions to individual members and take independent notes. Interviewers should assign scores to each candidate response independently before discussing them as a group. Discussing the candidates before this point means interviewers are more likely to be influenced by other interviewers’ opinions, and potentially by the opinion of the most senior person there (Behavioural Insights Team (2017)). To ensure fair and successful selection, it’s best to use several methods in the decision-making process. Insights from the interview should be supported by other data where possible, for example psychometric tests or task simulation activities, which could be conducted at interview stage or with technology beforehand. It’s important that selection interviews are conducted professionally. Everyone involved in assessing candidates should have the necessary skills (for example in interviewing and testing) and have been adequately briefed about the job in question and its requirements. A poor interview experience can undermine an employer’s brand as candidates might share their unfavourable impression of the organisation with other potential applicants and customers. Following up with candidates in a timely manner, and giving feedback following an interview demonstrates appreciation of their time and enhances the candidate experience. Evidence suggests that standardised tests or tests of cognitive ability can be good predictors of job performance, especially for occupations that require complex thinking, although test results should never be the sole basis for a selection decision. Used correctly, psychometric tests allow employers to systematically assess individual differences (for example in ability, aptitude or personality). They are often administered online, particularly when assessing high volumes of applicants. Tests should be supported by a body of statistical evidence which demonstrates their validity and reliability. Most tests are developed by occupational psychologists and should be accompanied by detailed manuals that explain how test scores should be used so that employers can compare their test candidates against benchmark scores of similar people (also known as a norm group). Administering tests and analysing the results is a skilled task and requires training and certification; the British Psychological Society set clear standards on testing and test use. Before using a test, recruiters should: Ensure that those involved in administering tests have had appropriate training to do so. Consider whether it is appropriate to use a test at all (will it provide additional relevant information, and is it relevant to the job/person specification). Identify who will choose, recommend and assess the value of tests. Check the copyright of tests and conditions of use. Decide how the results will be used. Identify potential equal opportunities issues (that is, whether the tests will disadvantage certain groups, or might need to be adapted). Establish a process for giving feedback. Decide how test results will be stored and who will have access to them. Job applicants should: Be given advance notice to make any practical arrangements to enable them to take the tests. Be told about test requirements and duration of tests beforehand and have the opportunity to raise queries or request adjustments. Have access to an appropriate environment in which to take the tests. Be made aware of feedback arrangements. It’s also helpful to provide some examples of what the test questions cover and where possible link to practice tests, especially where candidates may not have come across psychometric assessment before (for example, in graduate recruitment). Skill-based assessments are tests that assess skills and abilities relevant to the role the candidate is applying for. They can include work sample tasks, situational judgement tests, simulation exercises, or assessment centres. Skill-based assessments should resemble real tasks in the job as far as possible. Skill-based assessments have been found to be better predictors of performance on the job when compared with traditional approaches such as tests, reviewing job experience, education, or unstructured interviews. Examples of work sample tasks: For a customer-facing role, role-play a situation that requires the candidate to resolve a challenging customer interaction. For a role that requires data analysis, ask candidates to analyse a dataset and pull out key summary statistics and trends. For a role that requires stakeholder management and communication skills, ask candidates to write a brief email to a potential client. For more information on skill-based assessments see our Inclusive recruitment employer guide. Assessment centres are used for selection as well as promotion and professional development purposes. They require candidates to complete several different tasks and often combine behavioural ratings, cognitive and personality assessments obtained from multiple sources. The tasks set should clearly relate to the person specification and reflect the reality of the job. They must be administered in a systematic way, with candidates being given the same types and numbers of tasks to complete within the same timeframe, so that they have equal opportunity to demonstrate their abilities. Depending on the nature of the job, tasks might include individual or group work, written and/or oral input, and tasks prepared in advance as well as those performed solely on the day. This could involve delivering a report or presentation, time management or task prioritisation exercises, individual problem solving, group discussions, simulations of business activities, or functional roleplay. Assessment centres should be overseen by experienced selectors to ensure objectivity and consistency. Selectors must be trained to observe, actively listen, record, classify and rate behaviour, and seek evidence accurately and objectively against the job description and person specification. They should have had training in interview skills and equality, diversity and inclusion. A feedback session with either an occupational psychologist or someone trained to deliver feedback is of benefit to candidates and indicates the organisation is serious about fair selection. The British Psychological Society’s Division of Occupational Psychology has created a comprehensive standard focused on the design and delivery of assessment centres. Its purpose is to raise the standard of assessment centres by identifying and improving poor practice. The CIPD contributed to this standard which covers: specifying the purpose, scope and design of the centre, the standards of competence and professional behaviour required of the different roles involved, delivery and data integration and decision making, appropriate reporting and feedback of results, managing the data derived including access, use and storage evaluation of centres. Any offer of employment should be conditional on satisfactory clearance of pre-employment checks such as references from the candidate’s previous employer(s). References should contain factual information such as length of past employment, job title, brief details of responsibilities, overall performance, time-keeping and reason for leaving. However, recruitment decisions should never be based solely on references as they provide a limited perspective of an individual’s suitability for a role. CIPD members can find more legal detail in our References Q&As. Additional pre-employment checks are needed if, for example, the job involves working with children or vulnerable adults. This factsheet was last updated by Claire McCartney: Senior Policy Adviser, Resourcing and Inclusion, CIPD

Claire leads our policy work on flexible and new ways of working and resourcing and talent management. She also works in the area of equality, diversity and inclusion and leads policy work on carers, working parents and compassionate bereavement support. Job seekers are increasingly using AI in a number of different ways, but are a growing number of organisations right to ban its use by candidates? Or is there a more nuanced approach to consider in the context of modern job hunting? Explore our collection of resources and Q&As covering the recruitment process, from pre-employment checks, to employing overseas workers

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