



▶▶ Competency-based interviews:  
Tips and advice

Select, Develop, Support

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## What is a competency-based interview?

- » Competency-based interviews are based on the premise that past behaviour predicts future behaviour. Candidates are asked questions about how they have actually behaved in past, job-related situations.
- » In developing competency-based interviews, the role/job is firstly thoroughly analysed. This identifies the competencies (skills and behaviours) required for the role. From this, questions are developed, each targeting a specific competency, such as Collaboration and Teamwork.
- » During the interview all candidates are asked the same opening questions to ensure consistency across interviews. The interviewer will then ask probing questions to follow-up candidates' responses. Notes are taken during the interview in order to assess the candidate's performance once the interview has finished. Candidates' responses are marked against a pre-defined rating scale, again to ensure consistency across interviews.

## Before the Interview: Preparation is key

- » List all the skills and behaviours required for the role: Ask the organisation to provide details of the competencies to be assessed. If the competencies are not provided by the organisation, review the job description. This will highlight the jobs' duties and responsibilities. From this, identify the skills and behaviours that are required for the role and are therefore likely to be assessed.
- » For each competency, think of specific examples of situations in which you have demonstrated these skills and behaviours. Have these examples in your mind during the interview, so that you are able to refer to these when relevant.
- » However, avoid preparing 'model' answers for a competency. It is likely that this will cause you to provide responses that do not completely answer the specific question being asked.

## During the interview: Top tips when responding

- » Do not feel that you have to immediately jump in to responding to a question. For example, say to the interviewer "Please can I take a moment to gather my thoughts". Take a moment to think of a specific example that would best demonstrate your capabilities.
- » Ensure that you listen carefully and fully understand the question and what is required before responding.
- » The interviewer is interested in you and your suitability for the role. When providing an example it is therefore important to demonstrate what you personally did in that situation. For example, if describing an example of working as part of a team, the interviewer is less interested in what the team as a whole did, and more interested in the actions you personally took as part of that team.
- » Use genuine examples and be prepared to have your examples explored in more depth.
- » Be specific in your responses: Provide examples of specific situations to demonstrate the behaviours required. In addition, when responding to the probing questions,

ensure you are specific in your response. This will help to ensure the authenticity of your responses.

- » Avoid responding in general terms. The assessor is not as interested in what you tend to do or what you might do, but more interested in what you actually did.
- » Provide clear, concise, yet informative responses. Provide enough detail so the interviewer understands the example and so that you are able to demonstrate your ability in that area, but not too much that your key messages are lost.

### **Example of a useful model to use for interviews:**

- » STAR is a model which may help you when preparing for your interview and it is also useful to keep it in mind when responding to the questions as it provides a logical structure to your answer.

- » In each step of the STAR model describe the following:

**Situation:** the context of your example.

**Task:** what you had to do.

**Action:** what you did, how you did it and why.

**Result:** the outcome

- » When responding to a question using the STAR model, the Action step is particularly important. This is where you will need to demonstrate your skills and capabilities. It is therefore important to focus the majority of your response on this part.
- » However, it is also important that you make the outcome clear, so that the assessors can see the impact and effectiveness of your actions.