



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Guidance on Recruitment and Selection for Selection Panel Members

Introduction

1. This guidance has been developed to support selection panel members when undertaking recruitment and selection. Please read the guidance carefully so that you are fully aware of all procedures relating to each stage of the selection process.
2. Recruiting the right individuals is crucial to organisational performance. Good recruitment helps us to recruit the right people, for the right roles, at the right time. It ensures that we have the relevant skills and abilities to meet our current and future needs. The selection panel has a vital role to play in ensuring that good recruitment takes place and you must therefore ensure that you have sufficient time to prepare for and participate in the recruitment and selection process.
3. As a general overview, the roles and responsibilities of the selection panel include:
 - Complying with the Recruitment and Selection Procedures. The Chairperson is responsible for providing leadership in ensuring that the selection panel complies with the Recruitment and Selection Procedures;
 - Ensuring sufficient time to prepare for and participate in the recruitment and selection process as recruiting the right individuals is crucial to organisational performance;
 - Attending each stage of the selection process. Only in exceptional circumstances and following consultation with the Human Resources Office, may a selection panel member be stood down or replaced;
 - Making decisions at each stage of the selection process and ensuring that all decisions, and the resultant documentation, are held in the strictest confidence. As such, selection panel members must not discuss the selection process with anyone except those involved in the management of the process.
4. The Human Resources Office also has specific roles and responsibilities in recruitment and selection. It is their role to provide advice and guidance in relation to the Recruitment and Selection Procedures and to ensure that all decisions reached are recorded. At the end of each meeting in the process a checklist will be completed, which the selection panel members and the Human Resources Office representative will sign as confirmation of decisions reached.
5. The recruitment and selection process incorporates the following stages:
 - Pre-Advertisement Stage
 - Planning Stage

- Issuing the Advertisement
- The Sift Meeting
- Request to review Sift Meeting Decisions
- Assessment Stage
- Post Interview Stage
- Pre-appointment checks – appointment of external applicants
- Offer Letters Stage
- Feedback

Pre- Advertisement Stage

6. Following approval to advertise a vacancy, the Human Resources Office will liaise with the Chairperson of the selection panel to identify the other members of the selection panel and to discuss the role being advertised. Draft documentation will be prepared by the Human Resources Office based on these discussions.
7. Recruitment and Selection training will be arranged by the Human Resources Office as necessary.
8. It is important that where prospective selection panel members have professional knowledge of potential applicants, that care is taken to ensure that this knowledge is not shared and does not influence the selection process.
9. Personal knowledge of an applicant will not exclude the person from participating as a selection panel member. However, if the prospective selection panel member has a close personal relationship with potential applicants then they will need to consider if they can fulfil their role in an objective and impartial way and advice should be sought from the Human Resources Office. If appropriate, consideration should be given to identifying an alternative selection panel member.
10. Potential conflict of interest will also be checked and recorded at the sift meeting and selection panel members should contact the Human Resources Office at any stage during the process if they become aware of a potential issue.

Planning Stage

11. The selection panel will plan the competition and agree the documentation during this stage. This stage will include a Planning Meeting which will be attended by the selection panel and a representative from the Human Resources Office.
12. The selection panel will consider the content of the draft Job Specification which will include all information about the role including:
 - The grade, title and salary of the role;
 - The length of the opportunity if the role is temporary;
 - The main duties and responsibilities of the role;
 - Whether flexible working can be considered for the role;
 - The essential criteria for the role;
 - The Assembly Skills and Behaviours that are important for the role; and
 - The shortlisting criteria (if applicable).
13. Once the selection panel has defined the essential and shortlisting criteria for the role, it will select the relevant elements of the Recruitment and Selection Framework to be assessed and identify the appropriate assessment methods.

What is the Recruitment and Selection Framework?

14. The Recruitment and Selection Framework outlines five elements upon which applicants may be assessed during a competition. The five elements are:

- Assembly Skills and Behaviours;
- Strengths;
- Experience;
- Ability; and
- Technical skills.

15. Selection panels are free to select a blend of elements relevant to the role, to enable them to assess everything required for the role. Diagram 1 below gives a brief overview of each element with more detail shown in the paragraphs below.

Diagram 1: Recruitment and Selection Framework



Assembly Skills and Behaviours

16. Assembly Skills and Behaviours are the actions and activities that people do that result in effective performance in a role. As skills and behaviours can be observed and measured, they can help predict an applicant's performance in a role. They can be tested in a number of ways and at various stages in the process. The relevant Assembly Skills and Behaviours must be clearly referenced in the Job Specification so that the applicant knows which Assembly Skills and Behaviours they need to evidence or demonstrate during the selection process.

17. Assembly Skills and Behaviours can be assessed in a number of ways as outlined in Diagram 2.

Strengths

18. Strengths are the things we do regularly, do well and that motivate us.

19. Strengths can be used as part of the recruitment and selection process to assess potential and engagement. Strength based assessment looks at what applicants enjoy doing/would

enjoy doing, have a natural aptitude for and engage with. This approach can help the selection panel decide whether the applicant and the role are a good fit.

20. There are three elements which determine whether something is a strength for an individual:
- **Performance** – they can perform an activity to a high level of capability or proficiency;
 - **Engagement** – they feel motivated, enthused and empowered when doing the activity; and
 - **Use** – they do the activity regularly and as often as possible.
21. All three elements have to be observed for a strength to be identified. As strengths can help assess an applicant's potential, they can be particularly helpful in recruitment to certain roles where the applicant pool may have limited work experience e.g. apprenticeships.
22. Strengths and their definitions will not be included in the Job Specification or advertisement. Doing so can overly prompt a response from the applicant that they think the selection panel want to hear, rather than their genuine engagement with the activity being discussed.
23. The Assembly Commission has its own [Strengths Dictionary](#) – a set of defined strengths that are relevant to the culture and type of work that we do. Strengths are not defined by grade.
24. Strengths will only be assessed by interview.
22. The selection panel will ask a warm up question at the start of the interview. This will help to set a baseline of an applicant's engagement and will be a short question, lasting for no more than two minutes.
23. A warm-up or baseline question at the start will help to settle the applicant and build rapport. It will enable the selection panel to learn more about the applicant and help the selection panel recognise how they speak and show engagement. This question will not be assessed.
24. For each strength which has been agreed by the selection panel as being important for the role, there should be a Strength-based question. The strength being assessed by the question will not be named but the selection panel will instead advise the applicant that they will be asked a strength-based question.
25. Questions can be repeated, however they must not be reframed, rephrased or explained. Interviewers must not probe the answer unless a follow up is provided.
26. The selection panel must observe and note the content of what the applicant says but also their tone of voice, fluency of response and non-verbal behaviours (e.g. eye contact, posture and hand movements). This will enable the selection panel to assess the strength following the interview.

Ability

27. Ability is the aptitude or potential to perform to the required standard. It refers to general mental ability, cognitive ability or aptitude (the innate potential to perform a particular intellectual function or develop a specific set of skills).
28. Usually ability is assessed using online psychometric tests e.g. Verbal Reasoning and Numerical Reasoning Tests. Ability tests will be provided through the Human Resources Office.

Experience

29. Experience is the knowledge or mastery of an activity or subject gained through involvement in or exposure to it.
30. Experience can be assessed in a number of ways as outlined in Diagram 2.

Technical

31. Technical is the demonstration of professional skills, knowledge or qualifications. These can be assessed as outlined in Diagram 2.

Assessing Applicants using the Recruitment and Selection Framework

32. There are a range of tools and approaches that can be used to assess applicants against the essential and shortlisting criteria and the elements within the Framework to determine suitability for the role. Different assessment methods can be used at different stages of the process as outlined in Diagram 2.

33. Not all elements of the Framework are likely to be relevant for every role. To provide flexibility during the recruitment process, none of the elements of the Framework are mandatory, however, where strengths are being assessed, the Strength Dictionary must be used.

34. The selection panel will consider the elements of the Framework that they wish to assess during the competition as well as the essential and shortlisting criteria for the role. When choosing assessment options, the selection panel should think carefully about why they wish to use a particular form of assessment and what they wish to assess.

Diagram 2: Tools to assess the Framework elements

Recruitment and Selection Framework element	Sift			Assessment(s)					
	Application Form	Psychometric Tests – Verbal and numerical	Psychometric Tests - Situational Judgement	Assessment Centre	Presentation	In-Tray Exercise	Written /Oral Analysis Exercise	Psychometric Test - Situational Judgement Test	Interview
T	Orange	Grey	Grey	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Grey	Orange
A	Grey	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Grey
B	Green	Grey	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
S	Grey	Grey	Grey	Purple	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Purple
E	Red	Grey	Grey	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey	Red

35. All competitions will include the use of application forms and interviews. After discussions with the Human Resources Office, the selection panel will decide on the other assessment tools they wish to use. Where tests are being used, these will be supplied using the contract managed by the Human Resources Office and the recruitment timetable will be designed to allow for appropriate testing to be identified and undertaken.

36. The criteria and assessment approach will be outlined in the Job Specification and the Information for Applicants booklet so that applicants know what to expect from the process.

37. The selection panel will discuss and agree interview questions. The interview questions will include a lead question which will be asked of all applicants and supplementary questions, which may be asked if necessary to elicit further detail on responses. All lead and

supplementary questions must be objective, criteria based and relevant to the requirements of the role as contained in the Job Specification.

38. With the exception of strength based questions, when drafting lead questions, it is necessary for selection panels to prepare indicators showing what they would expect applicants to mention in response to each lead question. This is important and assists a panel member who may not have expertise in a particular criterion.
39. The selection panel may wish to assign weightings to each interview criterion which reflect their relative importance. The weighting mechanism can be a multiplier and is usually x2 for the most important criterion. Alternatively, instead of applying a numerical weighting, the selection panel can ask two questions about a criterion if they consider it to be more important. This will mean that the criterion will be scored across a number of questions and allows the criterion to be examined from different angles.
40. The selection panel has the option to set a minimum standard per criterion or an overall minimum standard but a score of "0" in any criterion will result in a failure regardless of the approach. Whichever approach is taken, it must be agreed by the selection panel at the Planning Stage.
41. The selection panel must also agree which panel member will ask which lead question, the timings for each criterion and an overall interview time including the Chairperson's opening and closing comments.
42. It is advised that selection panel members have agreement on how requests for alternative interview dates will be dealt with.
43. A timetable will also be agreed for each stage of the selection process and selection panel members should therefore ensure that they have their diaries with them in order to agree dates.
44. The Human Resources Office will prepare a Job Specification and Information for Applicants booklet based on discussions during the Planning Stage.

The Sift meeting

45. Following the closing date for applications, the Human Resources Office will prepare a sift pack for each selection panel member.
46. The selection panel will not have access to equal opportunities monitoring information.
47. The following documentation will be included in each sift pack and will be given to the selection panel member in advance of the sift meeting once the sift indicators and interview questions have been agreed:
 - Essential criteria
 - Shortlisting criteria
 - Copy of sift indicators
 - Scoring scale
 - Anonymised application form for each applicant containing only the applicant's answers to the essential and shortlisting criteria and the Employment History.
48. All selection panel members must attend the sift meeting. The selection panel are responsible for all decisions reached at the sift meeting.
49. A sift grid will be prepared by the Human Resources Office which identifies applicants by applicant number and which lists essential and shortlisting criteria. Using the sift indicators the selection panel will then determine the eligibility of each applicant against the essential/shortlisting criteria, based only on the information provided in the relevant box of the

application form for that criterion. The selection panel will also use the information provided in the Employment History section of the form to validate information provided by the applicant and will record their decision on the sift grid.

50. The application forms used at sift are retained by the Human Resources Office and any annotations made by selection panel members may be discoverable.
51. At the conclusion of the sift meeting, the Human Resources Office representative will provide the Chairperson with a Sift Meeting Checklist. This must be completed and signed by those present.
52. The Human Resources Office will write to the applicant to advise of the selection panel's decisions taken during the sift process.

Request to Review Sift Meeting Decisions

53. If an applicant requests a review of the decision of the selection panel regarding the fact that they did not progress to the next stage of the selection process, the selection panel will be asked to review their decision. The Human Resources Office will arrange a meeting with the selection panel and provide them with an anonymised copy of the application, the sift grid entry, and anonymised copies of all correspondence relating to the elimination including the applicant's grounds for requesting the review. New information which was not included in the application form will not be considered by the selection panel.
54. The selection panel should reconsider the criterion or criteria which the applicant has asked to be reviewed. If the review is successful the applicant will move to the next stage of the selection process. If the review is unsuccessful, the selection panel will be required to provide the Human Resources Office representative with the rationale for its decision so that they can inform the applicant of the outcome of the review. Once the decision is made, there is no further right to request a review.

Assessment Stage

55. The selection panel will have agreed the methods of assessment using the Recruitment and Selection Framework at the planning stage.
56. If a test, presentation or assessment centre style of exercise is part of the assessment for the role, it may be conducted prior to or on the same day as the interview. It is likely that the selection panel will not be involved in this type of assessment, however the scores from the assessments may be combined with interview scores to give an overall score for applicants.
57. The Human Resources Office will arrange a pre-interview meeting on behalf of the selection panel. It is the Chairperson's responsibility to ensure that all selection panel members are aware of their responsibilities, the interview process and the format of the interview and that each applicant is treated in a fair and consistent manner.
58. Applicants will be required to demonstrate their suitability for the role in the interview. Interview questions are based on the information contained in the Job Specification and may assess different elements of the Recruitment and Selection Framework – Experience, Technical, Assembly Skills and Behaviours and Strengths. The interview will be a blended interview which is a flexible style of interviewing which uses a combination of distinctive interview question types. These are as follows:
 - Past-Behavioural Questions;
 - Situational Questions;
 - Technical Questions; and
 - Strength Questions.

59. The questions will be designed to test the applicant's suitability for the role. Strength-based questions will not be listed on the Job Specification but will be linked to the requirements of the role.
60. At the planning stage, each selection panel member will have selected specific interview criteria to assess during the interview. The same lead questions will be put to **all** applicants.
61. The selection panel may need to probe applicants for further information and this can be achieved by asking objective supplementary questions in order to establish clearly the relevant facts. Usually, these questions will have been agreed in advance of the interviews. If, however, as a result of an applicant's response, the selection panel feels that it is appropriate to ask an unscripted supplementary question, they should do so and make a note of the question in their Applicant Answer Booklet.
62. Selection panel members may know the applicants attending interview. In some cases, an applicant may even work for a selection panel member who may therefore have detailed knowledge of the applicant and their day-to-day work. The selection panel must only assess the information provided by the applicant – they must not make assumptions or use personal knowledge when assessing the applicant.
63. It is vitally important that personal knowledge of an applicant is kept confidential by the panel member during the selection process. Such personal knowledge must not be discussed with the other selection panel members and must not influence scoring. Scores must be awarded purely on the answers provided during the interview.
64. Every effort should be made to ensure that applicants are seen within 15 minutes of the time stated on their invite to interview letter. Should an applicant arrive late for their interview the selection panel may decide:
 - To see the applicant immediately, providing this does not impact on the interview time of the next applicant;
 - To re-schedule the interview; or
 - Not to see the applicant.
65. There may be occasions when a number of selection panels for the same competition will be required to manage a large number of interviews. It is essential that all selection panel members involved are briefed by Human Resources Office in the management of the interviews. The selection panels will all use the same lead questions and score applicants from the same performance indicators. The responsibility for compiling any overall "order of merit" will rest with Human Resources Office.

During the interview

66. The selection panel must ensure that they:
 - Treat each applicant equally and fairly and that they fully cover their specific criteria with each applicant;
 - Take notes / bullet points on the responses provided by each applicant;
 - Ensure that all notes taken are legible, recorded in pen and relate only to the questions and answers used during the interview. These notes will be provided to applicants who request feedback;
 - Keep to the time allocation agreed;
 - Assess each applicant against all of the established criteria listed on their Applicant Assessment Form and register a score in the Marks Awarded column for each of those criteria on completion of the interview. The Justification section must be completed by each individual selection panel member to justify the marks awarded;
 - After recording individual panel scores, the selection panel will then reach consensus and record in the 'Selection Panel Agreed Marks' a mark for each criterion listed. The agreed mark should not be an average of the panel member's marks. If there is a variance

between the panel member's personal score and the selection panel agreed score, the justification for the agreed mark should be recorded by the selection panel member;

- In the event of a tied score, the selection panel will use the rankings agreed at the Planning Stage to review differentiate between applicants who achieve the same overall score. The scores awarded for the criterion that was the highest priority and whichever applicant has scored highest in that criterion, will be ranked higher on the merit list than the other applicant. If the criterion that was the highest priority does not create a differential e.g. both applicants scored the same score in the criterion, the selection panel will move to the next highest priority criterion and so on.
- Indicate the overall performance mark based on the agreed marks for the applicant and this should be recorded on the Applicant Assessment Form; and
- Must record if the minimum standard was reached.

67. In addition, the Chairperson must ensure that:

- They welcome each applicant and explain the interview process;
- The selection panel members are introduced to the applicant;
- The applicant is advised that the selection panel will be taking notes during the interview;
- Each applicant is tested against the criteria in a fair and equitable manner;
- That applicants are not permitted to refer to notes in responding to interview questions;
- As far as possible, the same period of time is provided to each applicant and that 'time in and time out' is accurately recorded on the Applicant Assessment Form. If there is any variation in the length of interview, the reason (s) for this should be recorded;
- Each selection panel member is sure of their role and the questioning sequence has been agreed;
- The selection panel has agreed a time allocation to each panel member and a method by which a 'winding up signal' can be given should time allocation be exceeded;
- At the end of the interview the Chairperson will consider if the applicant has any remaining time in their interview time, if they do the Chairperson will ask the applicant if they have anything to add to their answers. If the applicant has no time remaining the applicant will be asked only if they have any questions in relation to the process/role.
- They should note anything unusual that happened during an interview such as an alarm ringing or a selection panel member leaving the room;
- No two applicants are awarded identical overall performance mark as agreed by the selection panel and that applicants are placed in an order of merit;
- Selection panel members have completed in full, and signed and dated, each Applicant Assessment Form;
- The Mark Frame showing all applicants in order of merit has been completed, signed and dated; and
- All notes (regardless how minor) and all Human Resources Office documentation are returned to Human Resources Office at the end of the interviews.

68. The Chairperson must check all applicant papers returned by the selection panel to ensure that all documents are fully completed and signed and ensure that the merit order assigned is correct, that scores have been added correctly and that scores have been assigned to each applicant.

69. The Chairperson must also ensure that the Mark Frame lists successful applicants in order of merit, each with a unique mark. The unsuccessful applicants and 'did not attend' applicants must also be listed in the appropriate columns.

70. The Human Resources Office will carry out a quality check of all the paperwork submitted by the selection panel at the end of the interview stage.

71. If the Chairperson of the selection panel for an internal competition wishes to contact applicants to advise them of the result of the interview, they may do so after seeking advice from the Human Resources Office. If they decide to contact applicants, the Chairperson must contact all applicants (both successful and unsuccessful) and advise the applicants to treat this information as confidential until they receive the result in writing from Human Resources Office. The Human

Resources Office will still notify the applicants in writing within 5 working days of the merit list being signed.

Feedback

Upon request, applicants will receive a copy of their interview answer booklet and scores. Selection panel members must not offer informal feedback to applicants after interviews have been completed. All feedback requests should be made in writing and will be managed by the Human Resources Office.