

General Guidelines for Conducting Structured Interviews

The Interview Board

When developing an interview board the following principles should always apply.

- Interview boards should consist of three people.
 - An internal clinical expert
 - An external clinical expert (external to the location not the organisation)
 - An independent chairperson (external to the location)
- An interview board should always have gender balance.
- Interview board members should not be related to any of the candidates.
- Interview board members should have sufficient time available to them to conduct the interviews inclusive of training.

Preparing for the Interview

In order to get the most out of the interview process, adequate preparation is essential. To ensure that they can focus all of their attention on questioning, listening to and assessing the candidate, the interview board must be well prepared in terms of their knowledge and understanding of the job and the interview process to be used. The guidelines detailed below may help to ensure that the interviewers are adequately prepared.

- The Interview Board should take time to review the job specification, application forms and other relevant documentation prior to the interviews and should be familiar with the information provided;
- The Interview Board should be in agreement on and familiar with the criteria against which candidates are being assessed;
- The Interview Board members should be aware of the areas to be covered in the interview, the order of questioning and who is questioning and taking notes on each area.

Also, it is crucial that interviewers are aware that they, like everyone, have biases (perhaps so inherent that they are not consciously aware of them) and they should not let them affect their conduct and decision-making during the interview process. Interviewers must be objective and retain an open mind over the course of the whole interview. The time during the interview is to be spent gathering evidence in relation to the candidates' skills and abilities; time is dedicated to *evaluating* candidates *after* the interview. Board Members should also be aware of the dangers of making judgements based on whether the person appeals to or is similar to them e.g. as regards age, gender, background, experience etc, particularly in light of international candidates.

Structured Interviewing

There has been extensive work carried out by the former Office for Health Management, as well as specific work carried out by different organisations/ areas to determine the competencies associated with effective performance in a variety of roles across the Health Service. This interview approach is firmly anchored in the requirements of the job and enables the interview board to examine the candidate's specific experience and skills in a number of relevant work related areas. The behavioural interview focuses on exploring examples of experiences of where candidates have previously demonstrated the required competencies and through follow-up questions and probing, elicit information on their specific behaviours in those situations.

The responses or 'evidence' presented by candidates are evaluated against a behaviourally anchored rating scale for each area after the interview. The rating scales typically have statements or indicators of what is associated with good performance in each of the scoring

areas. Other additional features of the approach include keeping detailed records during the interview and using multi-person boards making consensus decisions.

An Integrated Approach to the Interview

An effective approach to structuring the interview is to strike a balance between what the candidate has achieved in their career to date in relation to the required skills for the job and to also examine particular knowledge necessary for performance in the role. A combined approach is most efficient at gathering the required information; looking for evidence of particular clinical/ professional knowledge as well as exploring the key competencies required for performance in the role. This more balanced, job-focused and flexible structure encourages interviewers to gain a holistic picture of the candidates that they will meet.

This integrated approach to the interview structure also achieves a good balance between benefiting from having a consistent and job relevant structure, yet allowing flexibility to interviewers to follow up on relevant areas.

The Core of the Interview – Questioning the Candidate

Good questioning skills are key to effective interviewing regardless of the format/type of interview being used. The way in which questions are asked can have a huge influence on the quality of the information gained from the candidate. Effective questions will obtain the information required and motivate the candidate to talk freely. The following guidelines highlight the type of questions that should be asked and those that should be avoided in order to achieve this aim.

The type of questions asked during the core part of the interview will depend on the format being used but will generally explore the candidates key experiences or achievements in relation to the areas required for the job and/or look at their ability to meet the key challenges of the role.

It may also be appropriate to question the candidate in a way that ascertains their knowledge / experience as it applies to the requirements of the role. However, it is important to remember that information/ evidence from throughout the interview should be used when scoring the candidate on each area.

Table 2: What to do & what not to do when questioning the candidate

What to do when questioning the candidate	What <u>not to do</u> when questioning the candidate
Ask open questions	Ask closed or leading questions except where necessary
Ask only one question at a time	Ask multiple questions together
Keep questions short, clear and unambiguous	Ask long winded, ambiguous questions
Use appropriate follow-up/probing questions	Allow the candidate to wander aimlessly
Address questions to the candidates own experience	Indulge personal interests or curiosity
Allow the candidate sufficient time to gather their thoughts in responding	Use 'rapid fire' questions
Proceed to the next topic if the candidate is in difficulty	Agree or disagree with candidates answers
Facilitate	Interrogate
Come in with probing questions at appropriate times	Interrupt other board members
Follow a logical sequence to questioning	Ask random questions

THE FUNNEL TECHNIQUE

Questioning Technique

Step 1: Identify whether the candidate has had the opportunity to display the skill/quality;



Step 2: Ask the candidate to talk about a specific experience / situation where he/she used this skill/quality and explore in detail
- collect the basic background and contextual information



Step 3: Probe the candidate's account of this experience
Find out exactly HOW the candidate demonstrated the skill/quality -
using a mixture of open and closed questions



Step 4: Check what the outcome or result of using the skill/quality in this experience/situation



Step 5: - Establish what others thought;
How does this experience compare with previous experiences / situations;



Step 6: Check how they have applied what they learnt in this skill area to other situations



Step 7: Check how they can use their learning in this area in this role

©Public Appointments Service

Sample - Question Areas

Question Area 1

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS:	<i>Planning & Organising Skills</i>
Introduction <i>....Hello</i>	<i>I am interested in exploring with you an example of a situation where you successfully demonstrated your planning and organising skills...In your application form you refer to Or can you talk to me about another time.....</i>
PROBING <i>Context</i> WHO? WHERE? WHEN? Deeper WHAT? HOW? WHY?	What was the background to the situation? Where were you at the time? Who reported to you at the time? Who did you report to at the time? When did the situation take place? / Who was involved? What were your timescales to complete the work? How did you ensure you would meet your objective(s)? What resources were available to you at the time? How did you deal with the demands on your resources? What did you do exactly? What factors did you take into consideration? Did you consider / what were the (potential) implications of your actions? What happened initially/first?.....why? What did you do next?.....why? What did you do?What did you say?.....Why? How did you ensure that your objective(s) were met? What were your concerns? What was the biggest challenge for you personally? What were the concerns of the other person(s)? How did you address these? Were there others involved? What was their role? How did you feel at this time? Was there any opportunity for people to learn from this situation?
Outcome Standard Compare	What was the end result? / What happened at the end? To what extent do you feel that the....? What makes you think this? How did other people react to the outcomes?.....How do you know?..... What did they say?
Learning	Is there anything you would do differently next time? In what other situations have you had to do this?
Link to the Role	How do you think your experience applies to this role in the HSE?

Question Area 2

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS:	TEAM SKILLS AND LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL
IntroductionHello	<i>The area I am interested in hearing about is your experience in working in a team. Can you talk to me about your involvement in this area? In your application form you refer to....</i>
PROBING <i>Context</i> WHO?	Can you give me a brief overview of the situation? Where were you (working) at the time? Who was involved? When did it take place?
WHERE?	What did the situation involve?
WHEN?	Specifically what was your role.....what did you have to do?
Deeper WHAT?	What elements/things did you have to consider? What were your concerns? What obstacles did you encounter?
HOW?	What were the concerns of the other person(s)? How did you deal with the people involved? What did you do exactly?
WHY?	What did you do first why? What did you do next why? What else did you do to help resolve the issue? Why did you choose to do that? What was the most difficult aspect? How did you feel? How did the others feel at the end?
Outcome Standard Compare	How did it work out?.....What was the end result? Is there anything you would do differently if it were to happen again? What makes you think this? How did other people react to the outcome?
Learning	What did you learn about your own ability to work independently? What did you learn about your own ability to work as part of a team? In what other situations have you demonstrated your ability to function as part of a team?
Link to the Role	How do you think your experience applies to this role in the HSE?

Question 3:

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS: **COMMITMENT TO PROVIDING A QUALITY SERVICE**

Introduction	<i>The area I am interested in hearing about is your commitment to providing a quality service. Can you tell me about a time when you contributed to ensuring high standards in service delivery?</i>
<i>....Hello</i>	
PROBING	Can you give me a brief overview of the situation? What did this involve?
<i>Context</i>	
WHO?	Where were you (working) at the time? Who was involved?
WHERE?	When did it take place?
WHEN?	
<i>Deeper</i>	How many people were working there? Specifically what was your role.....what did you have to do?
WHAT?	How did you establish that there was a difficulty / area of concern? What elements/things did you have to consider?
HOW?	What were your concerns? What were the concerns of the other person(s)?
WHY?	What did you do first why? What did you do next why? What else did you do to ensure a quality outcome? What obstacles did you encounter? How did you deal with the obstacles? What was the most difficult aspect? How did you feel?
Outcome Standard Compare	How did it work out?.....What was the end result? Is there anything you would do differently if it were to happen again? What makes you think this? How did other people react to the outcome?
Learning	What did you learn about your own commitment to quality? In what other situations have you demonstrated your commitment to providing a quality service?
Link to the Role	How do you think your experience applies to this role in the HSE?

Questioning- Knowledge & Experience relevant to the role

The objective at interview is to determine if the candidate has a high enough standard of professional clinical and practical knowledge and experience to enable him / her to safely carry out the duties and responsibilities of the role.

Board Member questions should draw out the relevant abilities, clinical experience and knowledge of the candidate. The key objective is to gain as rounded a picture of the candidate as possible, by seeking evidence from his / her past experience that will demonstrate his / her ability to meet the clinical challenges of the role. It is important that Board Members are familiar with the content of the Job Specification so that they can question appropriately on this area.

In exploring the key areas identified as necessary for effective clinical performance in the role, you may find the following approach to questioning useful. It captures the best of interviewing and allows for maximum flexibility in determining the breadth and depth of what the candidate has actually done and how they may deal with the challenges associated with the role. For this to be effective, we are dependent on you to question and challenge the candidate from a number of angles. Using the structure below as a broad guide may help to provide a consistent approach to investigating the depth & appropriateness of candidate skills.

Career & Experience to Date (application form)

(a) Candidates will have provided an **overview of their career to date** in their application form. Board Members should explore in more detail any experience that is particularly suited to this role. Themes to address during this part of the interview may comprise:

- Range of experiences
- Career Choices - what influenced them to make those choices?
- Roles/ responsibilities that they have had/ scale of their role/ who worked with/ who they reported to, at what level and the resources they had to manage
- Key learning / challenges from each job/ role/ period
- Why they have chosen to apply for this role at this particular time?

(b) Candidates were also asked to provide specific details from their career to date that they feel make them particularly suitable for this post, with particular emphasis on how they meet the eligibility / post specific requirements for the post. This should also be explored in more detail at interview. The intention here is to determine candidates' suitability for this role.

As an Interview Board it is recommended that you agree questions (in advance of the interview) that will further assist you in investigating candidates' competence in this area at interview.

Structure of the interview

Interviewers should agree roles within the interview. It is suggested that one Board Member open and close the interview and the remainder of the questioning be split equitably between them. The Board Member with the greatest knowledge / experience of a particular speciality area should question on that area.

The Board Member(s) not questioning may wish to come in at the end of a question area to seek clarification, if required. One Board Member must take notes during each interview (see below). It is suggested that the question areas are rotated between candidates.

Note-taking

Notes must be taken of the candidates' responses on the Interview Note Taking Sheet. The note taker should record as much of what the candidate says as is possible. A key word(s) from the question will suffice. The context and details of an example are also worth recording. However, the most important information to record is the actual answers that the candidate provides, as this will be the primary factor in the decision of the interviewers whether or not to pass the candidate.

As note taker, care should be taken to ensure that you are writing as much as possible of what the candidate actually says - not your interpretation of what s/he says. Similarly, notes should be recorded in the order that the candidate presents his / her evidence.

Notes taken can also provide a valuable aide memoire for interviewers when reviewing candidates.

Chairperson's Introduction

The Chair should settle the candidate into the interview by covering the following points:

- Brief introductions
- Thank you for attending the interview
- Interview will follow a structured approach
- Main part of the interview will focus on specific skills relevant to the role
- Will ask you to provide examples from experiences to date
- Examples should consist of situations in which you have had direct involvement
- The role of each Board Member
- You should direct your answers to the Board Member questioning
- Will be taking notes
- May interrupt /refocus if the board have sufficient information
- At the end of each area the other Board Members will have an opportunity to ask supplementary questions
- We will have up to ... mins for the interview
- Opportunity to add anything you believe is relevant at the end
- Help yourself to a drink of water at any stage during the interview

Guidelines for Scoring

Scoring, and the generation of a summary comment justifying that score, should take place directly after each interview. There are a number of areas that each candidate will be assessed against. If a candidate fails one of these areas, he/she automatically fails the interview overall. This is because, in the review of the criteria, it was felt that each area is critical to the ability of the candidate to perform in the role.

How to score candidates on their performance:

- At the end of each interview it is suggested that each Board Member independently rate the candidate on each skill / quality area taking into account evidence from throughout the interview.
- In determining a score for each skill area, Board Members should evaluate the evidence the candidate provided against the indicators of effective performance. These indicators can be used to inform decisions as to the extent to which the candidate meets the criteria.
- In order to avoid any one individual dominating the scoring, the Chair will encourage all Board Members to take the opportunity to lead on giving their evaluation.
- Board Members are encouraged to use the full breath of the rating scale and can take into account evidence from throughout the interview when scoring the candidate on a particular area.
- Candidates should be assessed on each skill area, one at a time, using the scoring guide below. The scores on each skill area are added together to get the overall score

SCORING GUIDE			
Little Evidence of this key skill area presented	Some / Reasonable Evidence evidence of this key skill area presented	Good Evidence evidence of this key skill area presented	Strong Evidence evidence of this key skill area presented
1 - 39	40 - 69	70- 89	90 - 100

- At the end of the each day, and at the end of the week, the board may wish to reflect on their decisions to ensure that they are confident with the scores they have awarded to candidates.

The most critical factor in the scoring of candidates is this: **only candidates that the interview board feel are capable of performing competently within the role should pass the interview. If you are not happy with a candidate, do not pass him/her.** All candidates who pass will be placed on a panel. Potentially, each candidate on a panel could be given a position.

Scoring Bands

Score	Label	Description
<p>100</p> <p>99, 98, 97</p> <p>96, 95, 94, 93,</p> <p>92, 91, 90,</p>	<p>Exceptional/ Excellent</p>	<p>Difficult to see how it could be improved upon. A role model.</p> <p><i>Summary comment might lead in with '<Candidate name> demonstrated excellent evidence / very good evidence of his/ her ability to</i></p>
<p>89, 88, 87, 86, 85,</p> <p>84, 83, 82, 81, 80,</p> <p>79, 78, 77, 76, 75,</p> <p>74, 73, 72, 71, 70</p>	<p>Good</p>	<p>An area of distinctive strength</p> <p><i>Summary comment might lead in with '<Candidate name> demonstrated good evidence of his/ her ability to</i></p>
<p>69, 68, 67, 66, 65,</p> <p>64, 63, 62, 61, 60, 59, 58, 57,</p> <p>56, 55, 54, 53, 52, 51, 50,</p> <p>49, 48, 47, 46, 45, 44</p> <p>43, 42, 41, 40</p>	<p>Acceptable</p>	<p>Achieves a sufficiently high standard to work at the target job level</p> <p><i>Summary comment might lead in with '<Candidate name> demonstrated adequate / satisfactory evidence of his/ her ability to</i></p>
<p>39, 38, 37, 36, 35,</p> <p>34, 33, 32, 31, 30, 29, 28,</p> <p>27, 26, 25, 24, 23, 22, 21,</p> <p>20, 19, 18, 17, 16, 15, 14,</p> <p>13, 12, 11, 10, 9,</p> <p>8, 7, 6, 5,</p> <p>4, 3, 2, 1, 0</p>	<p>Not Acceptable</p>	<p>Patchy. Significant weak areas or uneven aspects to performance</p> <p>Little or no evidence of competency</p> <p><i>Summary comment might lead in with '<Candidate name> demonstrated insufficient evidence of his / her ability to...or, <candidate name> would benefit from.....'</i></p>

Summary Comment

A summary comment explaining the mark given will be recorded on the Interview Marking Sheet. This summary comment will be approximately 2-3 lines and will clearly indicate how the candidate performed at each stage of the interview. This comment is especially important for candidates who are not successful at interview.

It is important that the comment composed and recorded is descriptive and accurate and clearly relates to the candidates' performance during the interview. The comment should represent the consensus view of the board.

Hints and tips on composing summary comments:

- Comments should be phrased in the positive rather than negative e.g. 'candidate could have demonstrated more evidence of his / her ability to '....'Candidate would benefit from better demonstrating his / her ability to'.....

The template described below will help you devise good quality summary comments:

Template = Name + anchor + skill area + reference to the example

e.g. a candidate (John) scoring 54 on Planning and Organising Skills might be told 'John (*name*) displayed adequate (*label / anchor*) evidence of his ability to plan and organise (*skill area*) in his example where he.....(*refer to the example*)'

- It is important that the label / anchor description maps onto the score being awarded
- Summary comments are especially important to candidates unsuccessful at interview

Feedback for Candidates

The Health Service Executive will facilitate a process whereby candidates will be given written feedback on their performance at interview. This feedback will include the candidate's scores on each individual skill area and the corresponding summary comment. All candidates are given a copy of their marking sheet with their interview result letter.