ASSESSMENT CENTRES

This leaflet is available in alternative formats on request.
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An invitation to attend an assessment centre means you have usually passed two major hurdles in the selection process – the application form and a first interview. Larger employers impressed by your performance so far will often then invite you to an assessment centre. It may take place on their own premises, at company headquarters, or at a hotel and may last for two whole days. Assessment centres usually involve taking part in a variety of activities and being observed throughout by a team of selectors.

A typical assessment centre might include:

- Social events
- Case studies
- In-tray exercise
- Group exercise
- Presentation
- Psychometric tests
- Interview

Social Events

You might be told that these are informal (which they are), giving you a chance to relax and settle in, and meet your fellow candidates as well as recent graduates to the organisation and senior managers. Informal they may be, but make sure you behave appropriately and professionally – it’s best to believe that you are ‘on show’ from the moment you arrive. Food and wine may be available in abundance so don’t overdo the wine to give you a bit of courage for the day ahead – it will be noticed and you don’t want to be nursing a hangover when you need to be on tip top form. The social events are there to allow you to relax a bit and be yourself and at the same time you can try and find out more about the organisation and what it’s like for new graduates there. Don’t be afraid to ask questions!

Case Studies

You will be provided with a large amount of information relating to a particular situation about which you have to make a recommendation or decision based on the information provided, some of which may not be particularly relevant. You are being tested on your ability to absorb and analyse information, think logically and express yourself on paper.

In-Tray or E-Tray Exercise
You are presented with an in-tray full of memos, letters and fax messages or e-mails and you have to decide the action to be taken for each one, drafting replies and delegating tasks. Prioritising is important as is completing the task within the allotted time frame. Mark on the correspondence any actions that you wish to suggest and make notes to explain why you have made your recommendation. Skills being assessed include: prioritising, decision-making, the ability to delegate, working under pressure and time management.

**Group Exercises**

These often involve role-play where each member of the group is assigned a role and given a brief for the meeting. You are given a certain amount of time to prepare before the group meets with the issue being discussed from the viewpoint of each member’s assigned role. Usually the objective of the discussion is to come to a decision or resolution about a particular dispute. It could be something like the proposed siting of a new shopping centre on an environmentally sensitive area on the outskirts of a city.

Another type of group exercise is where the group (with no role play involved) is given a topic to discuss (e.g. a current news item) or is provided with an exercise to solve, e.g. surviving in the desert with a limited number of resources.

It’s important to remain positive and enthusiastic throughout. The loudest speaker or the person who hogs the limelight isn’t always the most impressive. Neither is the person who remains silent and doesn’t contribute to the discussion. Having ideas, the ability to analyse and solve problems, showing sensitivity towards others, having the ability to listen, to summarize and move the meeting along is very important, as is being aware of the time as it’s important that the group reaches a suitable outcome in the time given. The selectors will be looking at how people interact, negotiate, communicate and contribute to the group.

**Presentation**

You may be given a title or a choice of titles to prepare beforehand or when you arrive at the assessment centre. Sometimes you may be asked to plan and deliver a presentation on a topic of your OWN choice so it’s a good idea to prepare something beforehand just in case, e.g. on your final year project, a hobby or sport, or somewhere you’ve travelled to. It’s also a good idea to practice delivering a presentation (in front of a mirror if need be!) so that you become aware of how you sound, your body language, and your use of Powerpoint/visual aids. It is also important to stick to the given time limit.

**Psychometric Tests**

You may have to sit a battery of aptitude tests and/or a personality questionnaire. Aptitude tests normally involve verbal reasoning, numerical and sometimes diagrammatic reasoning tests. You sit them under exam conditions and they are very strictly timed.
See the CES handout “Psychometric Testing” for tips on preparing for tests and lists of reference books and websites.

You can’t practice Personality Tests – there are no right/wrong answers and there’s no point in trying to “be” the person you think they’d want you to be because there’s checks in-built into the test.

**Interview**

Often at an assessment centre, you will have a panel interview, involving 2 or more interviewers. The probing is likely to be deeper and more challenging than for a 1 to 1 interview but all advice for the 1 to 1 interview is appropriate (see the CES handout “Interview Skills”). Remember to scan the whole panel as you answer, rather than focussing on just one particular person.

**TIPS FOR ASSESSMENT CENTRES**

- Re-read your application form. Remind yourself of your strengths and why you want the job.
- Research again the organisation and the job. Re-visit their website as it may contain some new material.
- Decide what you are going to wear and try it out beforehand to make sure you are comfortable.
- Get up to date on current affairs by reading a quality newspaper – sometimes the group will be given a topic currently in the news to discuss.
- Prepare for aptitude tests by getting plenty of practice. Download our “Psychometric Testing” handout for a list of websites with opportunities for on-line practice. Also see links below.
- Watch the ‘Selection Success in One’ DVD – available in the CES Resource Room.
- If you have a disability and need adjustments to be made for your attendance at an assessment centre, contact the employer beforehand – this is very important if the assessment centre involves psychometric testing.
- Listen carefully to the instructions given to you at the start of each day and at the start of each exercise.
- If you feel you haven’t done well on a particular exercise, try to forget about it and get on with the next one.
- Try and enjoy it!! If you can relax and be yourself, you will get a lot out of it.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

**Practice Tests online:**

[www.prospects.ac.uk/links/onlinetests](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/onlinetests) - range of online tests  
[www.shldirect.com](http://www.shldirect.com) - practice tests and assessment advice
Reference Books and Leaflets Available in the Careers Resource Room:

“How to Succeed at Assessment Centres”, Harry Tolley & Robert Wood

“How to Pass Graduate Psychometric Tests”, Mike Bryan

“How to Pass Graduate Psychometric Tests”, Mike Bryan

“Psychometric Tests”, CES Handout (available to download at www.bangor.ac.uk/careers)

“Passing Psychometric Tests”, Andrea Shavick

Weblinks:

www.prospects.ac.uk/interview_tips.htm
www.prospects.ac.uk/links/assessmentcntrs

DVD:

“Selection Success in One”, AGCAS - includes ‘The Assessment Centre Video’, “Why Ask Me That?” and “Your Job’s On-line”

“Making an Impact – the Graduate Job Interview”, AGCAS

AGCAS - Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
CES - Careers & Employability Service

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