



ASSESSMENT CENTRES

An invitation to attend an assessment centre usually follows successful completion of an application form, maybe also completing psychometric tests and possibly a first interview. Assessment centres may last for one or two days and usually involve participating in a variety of activities, being observed throughout by a team of selectors. Typical activities include:

- In-tray/E-tray exercise
- Group exercise(s), including case studies and role play
- Presentation
- Psychometric tests
- Interview
- Social events

In-Tray or E-Tray Exercises

You are given a number of documents (in no particular order of importance), including e-mails, letters, notes, reports and phone messages, which you will have to prioritise into order of importance and decide on the action to be taken for each one, including drafting replies, all within a specific time limit. The purpose of the exercise is to test how well you prioritise and make recommendations on a substantial amount of information within a strict time scale. Skills being assessed include: analytical thinking, prioritising, decision-making, time management and working under pressure.

Group Exercises

Group activities might involve case studies and/or role plays.

Case Study exercises involve being given a portfolio of information relating to a particular situation/problem and the group has to conduct a discussion to come to a decision or recommendation for solving the problem, which they will present to the panel of assessors. These exercises can often involve role-play where each member of the group is assigned a role and given a brief for their role and the remit they have to 'pitch' in the ensuing discussion. Usually the objective of the case study/role play discussions is to come to a decision or resolution about a particular dispute, e.g. the proposed siting of a new shopping centre in an environmentally sensitive area on the outskirts of a city.

It is important to remain positive and enthusiastic throughout the exercise. The loudest speaker or the person who hogs the limelight isn't always the most impressive. At the same time don't be the candidate who remains silent and doesn't contribute to the discussion. Having ideas, the ability to analyse and solve problems, self-confidence, 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 vital that the group completes the task in the time given. The selectors will be looking at how people interact, negotiate, come up with ideas, communicate, contribute to the group and cope under pressure.



Psychometric Tests

Tests give employers objective evidence that you possess some of the abilities that have been shown as necessary to carry out the job effectively and they usually consist of a range of aptitude and personality tests.

Aptitude tests normally involve verbal, numerical, and diagrammatic reasoning or special awareness tests. You sit them under exam conditions and they are very strictly timed. During the test itself, keep calm, focussed and motivated. You should try to work as quickly and accurately as you can. If you don't know an answer, mark your best choice rather than guessing, as sometimes tests are negatively marked (i.e. you get marked deducted for wrong answers).

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 they build in internal checks to audit consistency.

Prepare for tests by:

- Trying different types of practice tests – this should help reduce anxiety and increase your confidence – see the resources section at the end.
- Brushing up on your basic numeracy skills, e.g. how to work out percentages. Download a copy of 'A Numeracy Refresher' (see link under Resources) which is written specifically to offer practice in basic numerical processes to anyone facing employers' selection tests.

Presentation

You may be given a title or a choice of titles to prepare beforehand or when you are at the assessment centre. You might also be asked to prepare a presentation on the recommendations from one of the group exercises, in which case you can expect to be questioned on the points delivered in your presentation. Again, it is important to stick to the time frame.

Interview

You are likely to have an interview, or interviews, which might be with an individual and/or panel of assessors. The probing is likely to be deeper and more challenging than any previous interview but all advice re interviews is appropriate (see the CES handout "Interview Skills").

Social Events

These are usually informal and might include lunch or dinner with managers and recent graduate trainees in the organisation. This informal setting will give you a chance to relax and settle in with fellow candidates but make sure you behave appropriately and professionally – it's best to believe that you are 'on show' from the moment you arrive. Take the opportunity to talk to staff and find out more about the organisation and what it's like for new graduates there. Don't be afraid to ask questions!



Tips For Assessment Centres

- Re-read your application form. Remind yourself of your strengths and why you want the job.
- Research again the organisation, the job and key competencies sought. 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 – an exercise might involve the group being given a topic currently in the news to discuss.
- Prepare for aptitude tests by getting plenty of practice. See links in Resources.
- Watch the 'At the Assessment Centre' video online on the Employability Hub (Managing your career / career videos) (see over)
- 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 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.

Resources

<http://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/assessment-centres>

Comprehensive information and advice on all aspects of assessment centres

<http://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/psychometric-tests> Information on aptitude tests, critical thinking and situational judgement tests and personality tests with links to free online practice tests. Also excellent tips for preparing for psychometric tests.

http://prospects.ac.uk/interview_tips_interview_tests_and_exercises.htm

Tips for dealing with case studies, in-tray exercises and assessment centre interviews

www.wikijob.co.uk/wiki/assessment-centre

Detailed information about assessment centres – you need to sign up and then log in

www.assessmentday.co.uk/

Practise real aptitude tests and exercises (includes free exercises)



www.mathcentre.ac.uk/types/practice-and-revision/numeracy-skills/

Download the “Numeracy Refresher” leaflet (highly recommended for regaining your numerical confidence!)

<https://www.bangor.ac.uk/careers/employability-sec/careervids.php.en>

Online videos, produced by the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS), cover aspects of job hunting and employability. You will need your Bangor username and password to access these. The **“At the Assessment Centre” video** has short sections on:

- Presentation
- Role play
- In-tray exercise
- Group discussion
- Meal with the selectors
- Case study
- Interview

Reference Books (in Bangor University Main, Normal and Deiniol – check the library catalogue for availability)

‘How to Succeed at an Assessment Centre’, Harry Tolley & Robert Wood

‘The Graduate Psychometric Test Workbook’, Mike Bryon

‘Management Level Psychometric & Assessment Tests’, Andrea Shavick

‘How to Pass Professional Level Psychometric Tests’, Sam Al-Jajjoka

February 2019

