Guide to Selection Methods

Selection Method	Description	Information Provided	Advantages	Disadvantages	Points to Consider When Using
Face-to-face interviews	Involve obtaining information about a candidate (e.g. performance in previous roles) to make an assessment about his/her ability to perform effectively in the relevant job.	Previous experience, knowledge, attitudes, aspirations.	Give potential employers and candidates the opportunity to meet face-to-face, exchange information and have a mutual preview. No other selection method can achieve this in quite the same way. Relatively low cost.	Ongoing concerns about their ability to predict effective job performance. Tend to involve the interviewee providing examples of previous performance which means that the information collected relates only to reported performance rather than actual evidence of a particular skill or behavioural attribute. Panel interviews can be artificial, overly-formal, poorly controlled and off-putting to candidates.	It is possible to improve the objectivity of interviews. For example, by ensuring that questions are prepared in advance, all candidates are asked the same questions in the same order, questions focus on the skills and attributes needed for effective job performance and a structured scoring system is used. You should carefully consider which selection criteria can be meaningfully explored during an interview and which should be tested using another method instead of/as well as in the interview.
Telephone interviews	As above, with the difference being that the interview is conducted over the telephone and is commonly shorter in length than a face-to-face interview.	Previous experience, knowledge, attitudes, aspirations.	Quick and relatively quick way of reducing the number of candidates to be invited to a face-to-face interview down to a manageable number. May help to increase focus on the quality of the information presented by a candidate because interviewers are not distracted by how people look or present themselves. Can be helpful when it is not possible to interview candidates face-to-face (for example, when candidates are based overseas).	Research suggests that interviewers tend to be more critical of candidates in telephone interviews than when they interview face-to-face. The fact that the interview is conducted by telephone means that normally one interviewer is involved. This increases the risk of subjectivity. It can also be difficult for the interviewer to ask questions, take notes and listen effectively to the candidate. Potential for bias against accent or speech problem Candidates may find the process off-putting (e.g. because they can't see how their answers are being received).	As with face-to-face interviews, it is important to make the process as objective as possible, for example, by preparing questions in advance and asking candidates the same questions in the same order.

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Assessment Centre	Involves multiple applicants being assessed by multiple assessors, using multiple selection methods. Depending on the nature of the job, methods used might include interviews, in-tray exercises, group problem-solving tasks or discussions, presentations, role plays and tests. To increase objectivity, they are normally organised so that each participant is seen by a different assessor for each exercise.	Dependent on the selection methods chosen from the list above to feature in the assessment centre.	Generally considered to be effective predictors of performance because of the range of methods and assessors involved. Often involve activities which allow observation of how potential employees behave in situations similar to those that they will encounter in the job. Flexible – give plenty of scope to introduce a variety of exercises that are of specific relevance to the job and organisation. Can give candidates a better feel for the organisation and its values so that they can decide for themselves whether it is somewhere they want to work.	Costly and labour-intensive to prepare and run.	The resources required to design and run assessment centres mean that they are likely to be cost effective only for: • Senior roles • Roles which are critical to the success of the organisation • Roles where the successful candidates are expected to be employed for a long time and in whom significant investment will be made (e.g. graduates)
References	Involves asking a candidate's former employers (or, where the candidate has not been employed, other people in authority whom they know e.g. University tutor) to provide factual information about the candidate and for views about his/her suitability for the job.	Previous history, perceptions of others.	Academic references tend to be more reliable than references for other positions. Referees are more likely to know those on the Selection Panel, which makes it more likely that the referee will take the time to give a fair, considered assessment. Can be useful for double-checking factual information for a preferred candidate in non-academic recruitment (e.g. dates of employment, seniority, reasons for leaving).	Research has shown references to have low validity as predictors of performance as they can be highly subjective. Many organisations now have a policy of using a standard reference template which is completed by the HR Department and confirms only that an individual worked for the organisation for a particular period in a particular position. Opinions about character and suitability for the job are less reliable than confirmations of factual details and should be treated with caution.	The Equality Act 2010 Employment Statutory Code of Practice states that references should only be requested after a selection decision has been made to ensure that decisions are made on the basis of objective criteria. Outside of academia, this is normal practice and it recognises that non-academic references tend to be most useful as a 'double-checking' mechanism. It is strongly recommended that this approach is taken for academic-related and assistant staff. Where a reference is negative, it is good practice to allow the candidate the opportunity to comment upon it.

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Ability tests	Tests which assess each candidate's general ability (e.g. IQ), literacy, numeracy, skills which relate to a particular job or personality traits. Tests are generally accompanied by normative information (i.e. scores of a normal population of similar people, such as graduates or senior managers) which candidates scores are compared against.	Aptitude, skills, intellectual ability.	Research has shown that ability tests can be more effective predictors of performance than many other selection methods. They do this by providing objective results which identify candidates who do/do not possess characteristics (skills, ability, aptitude) which are important for effective performance in the role. Can be used at different stages of the selection process e.g. to sift out applicants where large volumes of applications have been received or during the final stages to supplement information gained from interviews. Online tests can enable immediate feedback and lower delivery costs, making them more affordable for lower paid jobs.	Tests do not provide evidence of effective performance itself. Can be costly. There are concerns that some tests can discriminate against certain minority groups. May make some candidates anxious and risk them under-performing.	Tests should only be used if they are clearly related to the job and genuinely measure skills/abilities set out in the person profile. Administering, scoring and analysing tests and providing test feedback is a skilled task. This means that the person(s) responsible for doing so should have gained the relevant certificate of competence from the British Psychological Society (Level A for ability tests and Level B for personality tests). Tests should have been through a rigorous development process. Providers need to be asked about: • Details of how the products have been developed and tested • Evidence that the product is a valid measure of the relevant skills/attributes • Whether norms have been built from robust samples, are up-to-date and an appropriate comparator for your vacancy • Whether the products have been tested amongst different groups and found to be free of unfair bias against those with protected characteristics • Compatibility of online tests with different internet browsers Advice can be sought from the British Psychological Society on which tests are likely to be appropriate (see www.psychtesting.org.uk). If you are using online tests, you may wish to state that candidates will be tested again under controlled conditions or that random retesting will take place to reduce the risk of cheating.
Personality tests		Personality traits, values, motivations. Normally used for managerial roles.	Can be used to assess how well an individual's personality matches that believed to be ideal for the job, how well the individual will fit in with the organisational culture and how well his/her personality might complement those of existing team members. It is generally accepted that well-designed psychometric tests can predict aspects of job performance reasonably accurately if used properly. Can be particularly helpful for identifying areas to discuss in an interview.	Some researchers question whether a questionnaire can provide sufficient and accurate information about a person to reach meaningful conclusions about his/her suitability for a job, as well as whether individual jobs can be analysed in terms of the traits that it would be desirable for the role holder to possess.	

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Group discussion or problem solving exercises	Often involve a group of 4/5 candidates being given instructions to carry out a particular task or tackle a particular problem within a time limit. The group is left to decide how the activity or issue is to be tackled and who should do what. The aim is to observe how each candidate behaves in relation to the others e.g. who takes the lead, who persuades others. In some exercises, there is an activity or problem with a correct answer or outcome and who contributes the most to this being achieved is observed. In other exercises, the outcome is more open-ended with the focus being on the process.	Co-operation, negotiation, influencing and leadership skills; creativity and teamwork.	Test a wide-range of interpersonal skills. Allows candidates to be seen together.	The fact that candidates are competing against each other for a job and are being observed means that the situation is contrived and behaviour may not be reflective of how they would behave in a real-life scenario. For example, candidates may try to points score at each other's expense or act a particular way because they think it demonstrates a behaviour that is being assessed. If the number of candidates requires more than one group, there will be different group dynamics which may create an unlevel playing field.	You should try and measure any skills/attributes being tested by this method using at least one other selection method. Interference from other candidates may mean that a candidate finds it difficult to demonstrate their skills effectively in this situation but is capable of scoring highly in these areas on another exercise. Exercises should be piloted and tested to ensure that the timings are appropriate and that instructions are clear and unambiguous.

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Role play	Staff members are used to play roles in a job-related scenario. For example, dealing with an angry customer, discussing performance issues with a member of staff. The candidate is briefed on the scenario they are about to encounter and is asked to respond to the situation in the way they would in real-life.	Knowledge; analytical, problem-solving, communication, interpersonal and decision making skills.	Enables candidates' performance to be assessed in a realistic work situation.	Some job content does not lend itself to this type of exercise. Some candidates may feel uncomfortable or offended at being asked to 'act', particularly applicants for senior roles.	There may not be strict right and wrong answers to these exercises which means that assessor judgement will need to be used to determine how effectively the candidate has performed. For example, how effectively the candidate has approached the activity and how well he/she has justified this. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the process remains fair and objective, for example, by being clear on which selection criteria are being assessed, determining how these might be effectively demonstrated by candidates and measured within an exercise (e.g.by developing positive indicators) and agreeing a structured scoring system.
Presentation	Can come in different forms but commonly involves giving each candidate some information to read (e.g. about a job-related issue or situation) and giving him/her a limited amount of time to prepare a presentation (e.g. on how they would approach the issue) then deliver it to the selection panel. Academic presentations may involve presenting to a wider-audience (e.g. other academics, students) on a given topic.	Knowledge, communication skills, organisation skills, time management.	Allows selection panel to assess whether candidates can develop reasoned arguments and practical solutions to problems while under pressure. Particularly useful if the role will involve having to give presentations or strong oral communication skills.	Can be unnerving for candidates if they are asked to make a presentation on a particular subject without preparation time. Presentations to larger audience can become subjective unless the audience is clear on the criteria being assessed and their feedback is properly captured and documented.	Exercises should be designed in consultation with existing roleholders so that they are realistic and workable. They should be piloted and tested to ensure that the timings are appropriate and that instructions are clear and unambiguous. You can estimate the validity of an exercise by asking a sample of existing roleholders to undertake it and then assess whether: - The exercise reflects the job, by comparing the tasks and required outputs in the exercise with those required in the job - The outputs from the exercise provide sufficient information about the selection criteria it is intended to measure - The results reflect assessments of the roleholders' performance (e.g. by comparing their results against one another, those of their team leader/manager) Scenarios should not be specific to the Higher Education sector unless knowledge and experience of the sector is required for the role.
In-tray exercise	Involves each candidate being given a number of documents (e.g. memos, emails, telephone messages) related to the job to read through. Each candidate is then given a specific amount of time to prioritise the tasks and decide what action they would take. Candidates may be asked to write down or present their decisions and the reasons for them. More complex versions involve adding new documents to the in-tray at particular points or asking candidates to compose a letter or a report in relation to an in-tray item.	Planning and organising skills, analytical skills, problem-solving skills, decision making ability, delegation skills, approach to dealing with colleagues and customers.	Relatively straightforward to develop. Assess a number of different skills and attributes. Can be undertaken by all candidates at the same time.	In some areas, the exercise will only indicate the approach a candidate would like to take rather than directly testing their skills for doing so (e.g. their interpersonal skills, ability to negotiate and delegate).	

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Other work sample / simulation	Each candidate completes an activity (work sample) or series of activities (simulation) which are closely related to the tasks which will be undertaken by the role holder. In-tray exercises, presentations and group discussions are all types of simulation.	Skills, job tasks, performance standards.	Exercises based on real-life job tasks or situations can be highly effective because they require a practical application of skills and provide objective information about a candidate's ability to perform the tasks needed for the post. Gives candidates a realistic job preview so that they can consider whether or not they will be suited to a job and whether they will enjoy it. Candidates can usually appreciate the relevance of the exercise, accept that its use may be justified and consider that the use of the results in shaping hiring decisions is legitimate. Link between the exercise and the selection criteria/person profile is clear. Particularly useful for roles which involve the practical application of skills (e.g. computer programmers, technicians, administrators) or jobs where there are set rules and procedures.	Although this type of exercise replicates the tasks that the individual would perform in the job, the test situation is not a true reflection of the day-to-day reality of the role. Only suitable for tasks that can be completed within a short space of time. Do not assess whether or not the candidate will have the motivation and personal attributes to perform well in the role once employed.	Designing a simulation for a specific vacancy is particularly effective as this ensures a close match between the exercise and the tasks, outputs and behavioural attributes which relate to the job. However, this can be resource-intensive. If you are considering using an off-the-shelf simulation, you should ensure that it involves job-relevant tasks and provides measures which fit with your selection criteria. The more complex the job, the more likely it is that there are not right and wrong answers and that an element of assessor judgment needs to be used on how the candidate has performed. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the process remains fair and objective. If is likely that candidates are not expected to have undertaken the task previously (e.g. if the job involves using specialist equipment or software and it is not essential for them to have used this before) then you should give appropriate instructions or training before candidates are asked to complete the exercise.