# The Interview – Planning, Documenting, Questioning and Deciding

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1. Interview Arrangements

There are no requirements as to when interviews should be held, but you are strongly advised to hold them as soon as possible after the closing date, to minimise the number of applicants who drop-out as they’ve found alternative employment.

Interview Options

HR recommends that both first stage interviews and formal interviews are held as part of the recruitment process. However, this is a matter for decision by the School / Directorate and it is recognised that the first stage interview may be replaced by an informal visit and/or discussion which will not form part of the formal interview or be fed back into the panel members at the decision making stage.

The Equal Opportunities guidelines must be adhered to in all stages of the selection process.

- Informal Visits / Tours

Informal visits may take place before or after the interview. It is extremely important to make it clear to the candidates whether the visit and any discussions will form part of the selection process. If a visit is to be provided it should be available to all candidates.

If visits are provided it is important to remember that it will also be an opportunity for the candidate to make a judgement about the vacancy and suitable arrangements should be made to ensure the candidate is welcomed and provided with sufficient information about the post to enable them to make the right decision. Ideally, any member of staff involved in these visits will have received the relevant equality and diversity and/or interview training.

Informal visits / discussions may be used to enhance or replace the first stage interview.

- Tests

Using tests as part of the interview process can be an excellent way of distinguishing between candidates who otherwise perform equally. There are, however, key points to remember when deciding on this approach:

- Candidates need to be informed of the test in advance.
- Clear instructions and adequate time should be provided.
- Tests must be directly related to the essential criteria of the job.
- Candidates should be tested in a clear and consistent manner.
- The criteria for assessing performance must be clear, open and justifiable and the method of feedback should be consistent.
• It is essential that reasonable adjustments are made for candidates with special needs or a disability. For example, allowing a candidate with dyslexia more time on a written test.
• The test should be administered by trained personnel.

• Presentations

It is common practice for candidates for academic jobs to give a presentation on a topic, usually past, present and future research. These usually form part of a formal interview process.

Candidates need to be informed of the presentation requirement in advance, including:
• Topic.
• Length of presentation.
• Audience.
• If questions will be allowed (not recommended).
• If facilities such as Powerpoint and/or flipcharts will be available.

The University recommends that all formal panel members are invited to the presentation, although attendance will not be compulsory. There should, however, be at least one member of the formal panel who attends and can then gather audience reaction for feedback to formal panel.

Candidates who apply for non-academic jobs should only be asked to conduct presentations if presentation skills are required as part of the job and they are included as an essential element on the Person Specification.

• First Stage Interview

If a School/Directorate decides to adopt a two-stage interview process it is important to make clear the purpose of each stage.

The purpose of the first stage interviews is to enable the candidate to ask any questions regarding the job, the School/Directorate or the University prior to the formal interview. It also allows relevant members of staff who are not on the formal panel to participate in the selection process.

Sufficient time should be allowed for a first stage interview. It must be made clear to candidates in the letter inviting them to interview that the first stage interview will be used as part of the appointing process.

• Formal Interview

This interview is more structured, with the panel composition often laid down by Statute and with involvement of more senior staff. The formal interview is where the selection panel will determine who they believe to be the most suitable candidate for the post based on questions developed from the person specification. HR recommends that a minimum of 45 minutes is scheduled for a formal interview.
• Linking of First Stage Interview and Formal Interview

If a two stage interview process is used then the Chair of the First Stage Interview panel must be involved in the final decision making process with members of the formal panel. The Chair of the Formal Interview Panel will lead this process. Both interviews must be properly structured and consistent in approach.

2. Panel Composition

Cardiff University has mandatory formal panel composition for all groups of staff, details of which are available below. You must adhere to these requirements when setting up the panel for your specific vacancy.

The Chair for all interview panels will be the Head of School/Directorate or nominated representative. The University has a policy of mandatory training for panel chairs and encourages all panel members to undergo training in interviewing skills and equality and diversity issues.

In addition to the mandatory requirements, HR would recommend that if first stage interviews are held that the panel should comprise of 2/3 members of staff, at least 1 of whom should have been trained in interviewing skills and equality and diversity issues. It is appropriate to include members of staff on an equivalent grade, particularly if they have detailed knowledge of the requirements of the vacancy.

Recruiting Schools/Directorates need to consider issues of equality and diversity and strive for balance with regard to panel composition. The responsibility for the arrangements for panel chairs lies with the recruiting School/Directorate, which will enable recruiters to establish interview arrangements prior to the closing date of the post, thereby limiting possible delays in the recruitment process.

It is important that there is not an actual or perceived conflict of interest between a member of the interview panel and any of the candidates.

Please also consider if you would find it useful for a member of HR to attend the interview. For instance, the interview may be for a very senior appointment, or there may be internal candidates, or the panel may be inexperienced in holding interviews. Should you wish for a member of staff for HR to participate in the panel, please contact HR before the interview date and times are confirmed.

Exceptions to this recommendation are at Reader, Chair, Clinical Senior Lecturer, and equivalent managerial levels, where interview arrangements are administered by HR.
Management, Professional and Specialist Job Family:
- Chair: Head of School/Directorate or nominated representative
- A member of administrative or academic staff external to the School / Directorate and senior to the vacant post
- Line Manager or nominated representative

Teaching and Research and Teaching and Scholarship Job Families:
- Chair: Head of School or nominated representative
- Academic member of non-host School, senior to the vacancy
- A member of academic staff from the School, senior to the vacant post

Clinical Lecturer posts:
As for Lecturer/Senior Lecturer/Other-related, with the addition of:
- Clinical representative of the relevant NHS Trust.

Clinical Lecturer (recognised for training purposes) posts:
As for Clinical Lecturer, with the addition of:
- Representative of the Postgraduate Dean.
- Representative of the relevant Royal College.

Administrative, Technical and Operational Support Job Families:
- Chair: Head of School/Directorate or nominated representative
- Line Manager or nominated representative
- Administrative member of School/Directorate staff (senior to vacant post) – optional

Research posts:
- Chair: Head of School or nominated academic representative, senior to the vacancy
- Line Manager/Grant Holder or nominated representative
- Other member of staff nominated by School, senior to vacant post - optional.

3. Documentation for Panel Members

The responsibility for the preparation of interview agendas for panel members lies with the Recruiter with the exception of vacancies for Chairs, Clinical Senior Lecturers and comparable managerial grades. Administrative arrangements for these categories of staff will be undertaken by the HR Directorate

The interview agenda packs should be emailed to panel members a minimum of four working days prior to the date of interview. HR recommends that the email contains the following documentation:

- A cover sheet outlining the administrative arrangements such as date, time, venue, list of candidates, times of interview(s), special arrangements and details of panel composition.
• Requisition, including job description and person specification.
• A copy of the CV and Supporting Statement.

In addition to the documents outlined above the Chair of the formal interview panel will also require the following additional documentation:

• Emailed references received to date for all candidates (academic vacancies only).
• Salary scales, which can be found at: http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/humrs/staffinfo/payscales/index.html
• Interview Assessment Forms*
• Appointment Form and, if applicable, Honorary Contract Request Form*

The Chair’s Checklist provides a useful summary of actions and responsibilities of the Chair.

*Unless to be completed directly online by the Chair

4. Planning the interview

Interviews are effective selection tools, providing sufficient time is allowed to review the CVs and supporting statements and to plan the interview structure and questions.

How the interview is designed is a matter for the Chair of the panel to decide; as a minimum the interview panel should meet at least 15 minutes prior to the start of the first interview. A meeting will enable the panel to plan and structure the interview so that all essential areas are addressed and candidates are given sufficient opportunity to evidence their ability to satisfy the requirements. The essential criteria in the person specification should provide the basis for all questioning.

During this meeting, the Chair should also assign ‘roles’ and distribute the identified questions to the panel members.

5. Suggested interview structure

Structured interviews conducted in a courteous, professional manner will undoubtedly elicit more information from candidates that those which are poorly organised, run over time or which are lacking in focus and control. A suggested format is as follows:

Beginning:
• Chair greets candidate and puts them at ease.
• Chair introduces panel members.
• Chair explains interview format and duration, including directions on when candidates can ask questions.
• Panel member to provide brief overview of the post (if applicable).
• Candidate to deliver presentation (if required).
Middle:
- Panel to ask questions on presentation (if applicable).
- Panel members to ask agreed questions to elicit evidence. Questions to be based on the criteria specified in the person specification. Panel to ask probing or supplementary questions if required.
- Panel members to take notes of individual responses.
- Chair to invite candidate to ask questions (if they have not already been addressed during a first-stage interview) or add any relevant information.

End:
- Inform candidate as to when a decision will be made.
- Ensure that the University has current contact numbers to ensure the decision can be quickly communicated.
- Thank them for attending interview.

6. Interview Questioning Techniques

The questions should have been designed to ensure that the candidate is able to demonstrate how they meet the criteria specified in the person specification.

To ensure equality and to avoid unfair discrimination, it is essential that the same basic questions are asked of all candidates. Supplementary and/or probing questions can be used when appropriate.

Examples of effective questioning

- ‘Tell me about your skills and qualities that are appropriate to our post.’
- ‘… is a key part of our work – how would you deal with this?’
- ‘What prompted you to apply for this post?’
- ‘What have you found (or would you find) most challenging about managing people?’
- ‘Can you tell us about an important achievement in your career and its relevance to our requirements?’
- ‘We use the … database. What would be the things you would consider when using a new database?’

Always aim to keep the questions clear and simple and avoid the use of multiple questions.

Structure questions along the lines of what, why, where, when or who in order to obtain full answers.
It is far more useful to request examples to support statements relating to skills or experience rather than using hypothetical situations.

7. What to avoid

Ineffectual and/or discriminatory questions

A panel member cannot ask about any personal information which is irrelevant to their ability to carry out the duties of the job, such as a person’s marital status or number of children. Questions of this nature are viewed as indirectly discriminatory and should be avoided in all circumstances.

If a panel member asks a question of this nature, it is the responsibility of the Chair to rule out the question and reassure the candidate as to the non-discriminatory nature of the interview.

A non-exhaustive selection of inappropriate questions is outlined below. All examples are questions which have actually been asked in interviews:

- Different questions for males and females - ‘Are you planning to have any more children?’
- Patronising language - ‘We have a lot of men working here – do you think you can stand up to their ‘robust’ banter?’
- Over-familiarity (especially with the opposite sex) - ‘Are you married?’
- Idiomatic use of language (especially with ethnic minority groups) - ‘What’s your timekeeping like? Do you always turn up on the dot for work?’
- Questions relating to political beliefs - ‘The Government have brought in a lot of new rules, most of which have helped this organisation. Did you vote for them at the last election?’
- Questions relating to the candidate's spouse - ‘What does your husband/wife think about you coming to work at the University?’
- Questions relating to the personal life - ‘I notice you wear a wedding ring, but you have shown yourself as ‘Miss’ on your application form. Can you explain this?’
- Generalisations about a group's perceived culture - ‘If you were appointed, I foresee some of our staff having difficulty with pronouncing your Christian name. Would you object to us calling you something more anglicised?’
- Avoid hypothetical questions – it is far more useful to ask for examples.

Behaviour

Throughout the interviews, all panel members need to be aware of the following:

- Lack of concentration.
- Ignoring candidate difficulties.
- Going off the point.
- Excessive self-disclosure.
- Showing boredom, yawning.
- Making assumptions.
- Ignoring preparation.
- Losing control.
- Ignoring evidence.
- Not listening - a panel can be concerned with ensuring that the requisite questions are asked and not enough time on interacting with what the interviewee is actually saying. Therefore, the panel may miss out on the candidate who is modest about his or her achievements and needs ‘drawing out’ or may decide to appoint the candidate who is articulate but, if questioned closer, would prove to have little substance.

Any of the above could jeopardise the success of the process – and the reputation of the University – by provoking a negative response in any or all of the candidates. It should be remembered that candidates are interviewing the University as a potential employer at the same time as they are being interviewed as a possible employee.

8. Interview Notes

An accurate record of the interview must be kept for a number of reasons:

- Recollection can be easily blurred.
- It provides part of the basis for the personal file for the successful candidate.
- It enables accurate and timely communication with unsuccessful candidates who request feedback from their interview.
- It provides a basis for legislative defence in the event of any claim of discrimination.

9. How to decide

When all interviews and testing have been completed, the Chair co-ordinates feedback from the panel members and manages the decision-making process. The Chair should either complete Interview Assessment forms in hard copy for inputting to system or complete them directly online.

For all panel members, the key points to remember are:

- All selection decisions must refer to the degree to which an individual has demonstrated that they meet the requirements of the Person Specification.
- All parts of the selection process should be considered, including application form, tests, interview performance, presentation and references.
- Discuss each candidate fully and in turn.
- The Chair of any first-stage interview should be invited to feedback to formal panel at the start of the decision-making process.
- Decisions must be made with fairness and consistency, avoiding assumptions.
- If a candidate has not demonstrated that they meet one of the essential criteria then they should not be considered for appointment.

10. Documenting decision-making

The Chair of the interview panel, with the assistance of panel members, is responsible for the completion of the Interview Assessment forms. This can be done online directly or in hard copy then input onto the system.

These forms should be used to provide an accurate and impartial reflection of the selection process and of how the candidate’s demonstrable skills and experience were consistent with the requirements of the Person Specification.

All panel members should keep notes during each interview, for input into the Interview Assessment form at the end of the interview process. Any informal notes should be collected and destroyed immediately following the interview.

The panel should also use the Interview Assessment forms to note if there are any suitable reserve candidates to which an offer can be made if the preferred candidate turns down the offer of employment.

It is important to remember that the information given on this document will form the basis for feedback given to any candidate.

In addition, if the decision is made to appoint a person who requires a certificate of sponsorship in order to work in the UK, the Interview Assessment forms will be used by HR to provide justification of the reasons for the appointment.

Incomplete forms and inappropriate comments on the forms are unacceptable and will delay the formal offer of employment being made.

11. Informing the candidates

HR recommends that all candidates are contacted by telephone within the time period specified at interview – if you’ve said you will contact the candidates within 1 working day, please do so, even if an appointment has not yet been made for some reason. Failure to do so is impolite and can reflect unfavourably on the panel, School/Directorate and the University as an employer.

The responsibility to inform candidates of the outcome lies with the Panel Chair or nominated representative, who ideally should be one of the other panel members. Successful candidates should be asked if they are still interested in taking up the job and, if so, can then be advised that the panel will “recommend to the University that an offer of employment be made”.

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It must be made clear, however, that the formal offer will be issued by Human Resources. All other details can be discussed, including start date, salary level, probation, training, etc.

Successful candidates should also be informed that their appointment may be subject to the receipt of satisfactory references, DCR form, Certificate of Sponsorship, satisfactory health check and CRB check.

During the selection process, the panel may identify a Reserve Candidate to whom the post could be offered if the first choice candidate declines the post. In the first instance, the Reserve Candidate should be telephoned to confirm if they would be interested in the job if the preferred candidate declines. It is the recruiter’s responsibility to inform the reserve candidate if and when the preferred candidate has accepted the job.

All Unsuccessful Candidates should be informed of the panel’s decision as soon as possible via the erecruitment system. Candidates who ask for feedback at this stage should only be given the information documented on the Interview Assessment Form.

12. Informing the University

The Appointment Form on the erecruitment system is designed to specify all information required for the University to issue a contract of employment. A key issue is determination of salary, in which consideration should be given to the candidate’s relevant skills and experience, the salaries of existing staff on the same grade or with similar responsibilities and duties and the principles of equality, fairness and equal pay for work of equal value.

Additional financial verification
The recruiter should review any condition placed against the requisition by either FINCE or RACDV at advertising stage.

Additional Requirements for Clinical Jobs
Clinical jobs require completion of additional documentation, namely the Honorary Contract form which is verified by key staff in the relevant NHS Trust and the Risk Assessment form. Further information on the process for appointing Clinical staff can be found at http://www.cf.ac.uk/jobs/recruiter-information/clinical.html

Appointment Form
The Appointment Form will automatically appear on the online system when you change the status of your preferred candidate to ‘Recommendation to Offer’. HR will be notified that this form has been completed when you click on ‘Save’.
If you are appointing to a clinical post you will also need to add an Honorary Contract Request Form to the required candidate via the ‘Candidate Results’ Panel.

The following documentation should be confidentially shredded:

♦ Interview packs issued to panel members. (if in hard copy)
♦ Any informal interview notes made by panel members.

13. The Formal Offer

A formal contract will be issued within our quality standard of 5 working days from date of receipt of all relevant documentation by HR.