

Interview and Assessment Centres

Specialty selection involves a number of assessments with different panels, with some involving structured interviews and others a range of tasks or scenarios. Most specialties have three stations as a minimum. If you apply for NHS jobs which do not require a full assessment centre, you will still need to develop excellent interview skills, since the process is structured and rigorous.

Presenting yourself at interview

You should be ready for questions asking for specific examples of experience and achievements relating to the essential job requirements, so read Person Specifications carefully and have potential scenarios in mind.

Communications research has found that in the first 5 minutes of an interview you will convey information by:

55% - body language/non-verbal cues
38% -tone and pace of voice
7% - the words you say

Being well-presented and appearing confident and assured will all help to create that vital first impression. Make eye contact with all panel members, not just the person asking the question. Keep body language “open” — avoid nervous gestures (twiddling pens, hair, twitching feet etc.). Allowance is often made for initial nerves so allow yourself time to settle down and then focus on building rapport with the panel.

How you say what you say can have as much, if not more impact than the words and language you use. Sound interested in your answer, don't sound over-rehearsed, try to modulate your voice.

Candidates can fail to impress by not answering the question so listen carefully. Ask for a question to be repeated if you

are not clear what you have heard. There are four basic underlying themes a panel is getting to when asking a question:

- Why have you applied for this job/speciality? (Motivational interest)
- What can you do for us? (What skills, knowledge, and intellectual ability can you offer?)
- What kind of person are you? (What are your attitudes, values, and motivation levels? Would you get on with others in our team?)
- What distinguishes you from all the other applicants?

When a question is asked, try to think which of these themes it is aiming at. Frame your answer accordingly.

CV/Portfolio Interview

In this station the focus will be on your reasons for applying to a specialty, what evidence you have that you are the right kind of candidate. You will have to talk about *you* — often the hardest subject of all! You may be asked to submit or self-score your portfolio in advance or give it to the panel in the room. Portfolios can be requested in interviews for non-training and consultant posts so keep it up to date and take it with you to all interviews.

- Get your portfolio up to date and ensure it is neat and well-ordered with sections clearly labelled.
- Have a short CV at the front — themed to the specialty you are applying for.
- Flag any areas you want the panel to see – make them stand out so that can be found in limited time. Don't be afraid of talking about more challenging experiences or portfolio gaps. These can show reflective practice and demonstrate personal insight.

- Sell yourself! Show how you can demonstrate genuine interest in the speciality, even if you have not had a post or rotation in it.
- Be careful about telling jokes — not everyone will appreciate your sense of humour.
- Speak clearly and stick to the time allowed or limits to the number of slides.

Clinical Scenario

You may be presented with a clinical case, given some time to think about it and then asked questions to assess your clinical skills in diagnosis, treatment planning, and patient care. The level of questioning may be incremental i.e. the questions get more difficult as you give each response. Don't worry if you reach a point where you don't have the knowledge to give a firm answer. Assessors may escalate their questions to identify your threshold of competence but will not necessarily be expecting you to know everything there is to know.

- Make sure you spend time looking at the information before you say you are ready
- Be aware that some of the information will be less relevant; focus on key facts
- Make definite recommendations and don't be afraid of saying you don't know.

Presentations

In this station, you may be given a topic or a choice of subjects, some visual aids (e.g. blank flipchart) and a short amount of time to prepare a brief presentation, which must then be delivered within a time limit. It is not only your communication skills that are being assessed, but your ability to think on your feet and under pressure — all skills you use when working with patients.

- Read the brief carefully; map out a rough structure (e.g. by using a mind map) before drawing up a presentation.
- Try to use something more interesting than words on the page to present information (diagrams, pictures)
- Make sure your presentation has a clear structure. Introduce it by explaining what

you will be covering, deliver the talk and then summarise your main points.

- Be careful about telling jokes — not everyone will appreciate your sense of humour

Patient role play

Panel members or professional actors may present as patients. They can sometimes give you "cues" to lead you to a point where you can demonstrate competence or understanding. They may also deploy deliberate non-verbal behaviours, so watch and listen to your patient carefully!

- Don't overact — try to appear realistic
- Think about the skills you need to demonstrate e.g. empathy, communicating bad news, directing
- Show listening as well as talking skills

Practice Makes Perfect

Research the current selection process thoroughly. Applicant guidelines often outline what will happen or offer practise material. You can find out from recent applicants what they did, but remember, processes can change from year to year. Do ask an educational supervisor or colleague to put you through your paces and give you constructive feedback. Ask your Postgraduate centre whether any mock selection centres are arranged locally.

Final Preparation

There is nothing worse than arriving at an interview late, flustered or having forgotten a crucial document. Think ahead, have all the relevant paperwork for the day ready, be clear about directions to the venue, have your "interview outfit" ready the night before and keep a clear head.

Consultant interviews

These interviews differ in that there is less focus on clinical competence, as your CCT provides evidence of that. It will involve a large panel and many more questions about your broader awareness of the specialty, NHS policies, leadership and management. Health Education & Improvement Wales arranges practice interview courses to help with preparation.