



ASSESSMENT CENTRES

While attendance at a selection centre usually follows success at a first interview, for some the selection centre will be the first time the candidate meets the employer. Selection methods vary depending on: a) the company, and b) the function, but many large organisations use an elaborate procedure at selection centres with interviews and possibly tests, punctuated by a series of group exercises and presentations. Most activities are not unexpected but it is best to be prepared for anything, particularly if your chosen employer is looking for adaptability or ability to cope with ambiguity.

The previous evening

An overnight stay is often part of the process. You are invited to dine with other applicants, senior managers and, very often, recent recruits on the evening before the selection day. Although this is not usually part of the formal selection procedure, take the opportunity to ask questions, discuss the organisation with recent recruits and make a good impression, as much informal assessment takes place. You may be given details of the following day's "task" or problem to work on overnight, so don't be tempted to sit in the bar too late.

The next day

Selection exercises will vary, but some of the following will be included:

- Interview(s)
- Group discussion
- E-tray exercise
- Case study/scenarios
- Business game(s)
- Written tests
- Presentation(s).

If the process takes place in the employer's premises a tour may be included and this will give you another opportunity to ask questions.

A typical day might run as follows:

- 9.00 Coffee/meet other applicants
- 9.30 Introduction
- 10.00 Interview with member of HR
- 10.45 Coffee
- 11.00 Tests, in-tray or other written task
- 12.30 Briefing
- 12.45 Lunch
- 1.45 Presentations
- 2.15 Group exercise
- 3.45 Tea
- 4.00 Interview with line manager.

Interviews often play an important role (see *Going for interviews* for more advice). If you have already been interviewed, the interview at the selection centre is likely to be more challenging.

Second interview tips

- A second interview is likely to be more focused on the specific role you applied for than a first interview
- A 'technical' interview may mean related to a discipline e.g. Engineering or IT. Or it can mean related to a function or industry you've applied for, e.g. finance, whatever your degree discipline is
- Your potential line manager will probably be highly influential in selection.

Group discussions

Employers will often ask you to discuss a topic and/or give you a group problem solving exercise. This will be observed and the following points noted:

- who talks but doesn't listen
- whose points are accepted or ignored
- who encourages others to participate
- who wanders from the subject
- who is very dominant - interrupting or squashing other contributions
- who builds on and adapts ideas
- who is insensitive or sensitive to the feelings of others
- whose contributions (or lack of) make little impact on the group or task.

Different job functions often require different personal qualities and no one approach is definitely the "right" one. Be aware of your strengths and weaknesses in group situations but not over paranoid about saying the 'wrong' thing. If you don't speak you can't be assessed.

Case studies and business games

You may be asked to consider a particular problem and will be given a briefing paper about it. The problem is usually representative of challenges faced in that organisation, i.e. selecting a site for a chemical plant, deciding on a sales strategy or choosing which event to sponsor as a company. Often, the objective is to reach a consensus. You could be given a similar exercise to work on individually. In that situation it is likely you will be asked to present your recommendations to the assessors or less likely, write them into a report.

Business games may be used, particularly with applicants to the financial or commercial sectors. The candidates are divided into teams and fed a certain amount of information, on which the game is based.

During case studies and business games you will be assessed on your interpersonal skills, as described under 'Group discussions'. You will also be expected to show a level of business awareness. For example identifying which decisions could be most commercially viable or risky.

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E-tray or In-tray exercises

You are presented with the "typical" contents of an employees in-tray, physically or electronically, and within a given time you are asked to prioritise the items and draft replies or decide appropriate action. Items can vary from, for example, a pressing business decision to a junior member of staff's personal problem. The Careers Advisory Service has several sample In-tray exercises.

Giving a presentation

You may be given a topic to prepare before attending the assessment day. Or without prior notice you may be given preparation time during the day/ evening. Try to speak clearly and confidently and ensure you keep to the allotted time. It is a good idea to use *brief* notes and only make statements you can defend if challenged. Try to structure your talk well with an introduction and conclusion or summary.

Occupational testing

Aptitude tests

Many employers use standardised tests to assess ability. Most commonly they test numerical and verbal reasoning and sometimes other aptitudes relating specifically to the position applied for.

Unless the role you are applying for demands advanced mathematical skills generally the aim is to see how well you deal with numerical data, rather than to assess advanced mathematical prowess. You should have the knowledge to tackle the numeracy section of most tests if you have a good GCSE pass in mathematics, but the pressure comes with working accurately within the time constraints. You are generally not expected to answer all questions and you gain no marks for 'nearly correct' answers, so don't sacrifice accuracy for speed too much.

Verbal reasoning tests work in the same way. You probably won't finish the paper, but you will have to show that you can understand verbal information and draw accurate conclusions.

The Careers Advisory Service runs classroom practice sessions. We can also give you access to online tests. In both cases you receive feedback on your performance. If you need further practice additional resources are available online and in the Careers Advisory Service library. See our website for details.

Personality measures

Some employers use personality questionnaires to look at how your behaviour, strengths and preferred working style may fit with their organisation and/or the role you have applied for. You can't practice personality measures as the responses most desired by the employer will vary. However, some of the books we have on testing will include some example questions and if you have any particular worries or questions about personality assessments do ask as we have Careers Advisers trained in personality testing. We also offer MBTI, a personality typing assessment not directly used in recruitment but often used in the workplace and elsewhere for personal and team development. Personality measures can also help in career choices and planning.

Former students' experiences

Make full use of the networks available to you. Some students fill in a report giving details of their experiences of the selection process with a particular employer. These reports will help you know what to expect, and are available for you to look at. Employers who visit campus to run workshops or promote their graduate opportunities through presentations and careers fairs frequently send Bath alumni to these events. You can also contact Bath graduates through our *Graduate contacts list*. These are just some suggestions for networking, see a Careers Adviser if you would like more guidance.

And afterwards....

Whatever the outcome, be sure to take up any offer of feedback on your performance. If it isn't offered then ask. Even if unsuccessful or decide you didn't want the job anyway, feedback close to

the event will help you prepare for future assessments. Quality and detail of feedback varies hugely across organisations, but many who do offer feedback are surprised how few take it up. If you could spare the time to fill in a form about your experiences to help students who follow you, we'd appreciate it.

Further guidance and information

Lectures and workshops to help you with all stages of the application and selection process are run by the Careers Advisory Service and employers as part of our events programmes.

We have many resources relating to all stages of selection, including a large number on occupational testing. Information resources online and held in our library are catalogued on our website: www.bath.ac.uk/careers/catalogue.

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This publication is available online at www.bath.ac.uk/careers/catalogue/skills.html#assessment.

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