

## PARTICLE PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY RESEARCH COUNCIL

### GUIDANCE NOTES FOR INTERVIEW PANEL MEMBERS

---

These guidance notes aim to help prepare you for the task of serving as a member of an Interview Panel. They cover not only the procedures and good practice to follow in preparing for and conducting interviews themselves, but also explain the functions and importance of individual Panel reports and how these should be compiled.

Before serving on any Interview Panel, appropriate formal training must be undertaken, preferably in attendance on an *Interviewing Course*. These guidance notes are not intended to replace such formal training but to supplement it and can be used as a reminder before any interviewing exercise is undertaken.

**NB** The majority of staff appearing before an Interview Panel are seeking promotion, and the guidance is written on that assumption. It will, however, be equally appropriate for instances when candidates are seeking a post on level transfer terms.

---

#### Paragraph

#### Section

### 1. Interview Panels

1.1 - 1.2	General Principles
1.3 - 1.5	The Panel's size and function
1.6 - 1.8	Chairperson's Duties

### 2. Equality of Opportunity and avoiding discrimination

2.1 - 2.4	Council Policy
2.5 - 2.9	Racial discrimination
2.10 - 2.15	Discrimination on grounds of gender or marital status
2.16 - 2.17	Disability

### 3. Before the Interview

3.1 - 3.5	Documentation
3.6 - 3.8	Shortlisting
3.9	Interview Briefing
3.10 - 3.12	Interview Plan
3.13	Environment for interview

### 4. The Interview Itself

4.1	Compose yourself
4.2 - 4.4	Put the candidate at ease
4.4 - 4.7	Be purposeful in questioning
4.8 - 4.10	Probe deeply
4.11 - 4.13	Practise the art of effective listening
4.14 - 4.16	Making notes

4.17 - 4.21	Use all the evidence
4.22	Staying 'neutral'
4.23	Reaching a candidate's limits
4.24	Handling problem situations
4.25	Additional Points to Remember

## **5. After the Interview**

5.1	Give a provisional view
5.2 - 5.5	Review all the evidence
5.6 - 5.9	Build up a picture of the candidate
5.10 - 5.11	Avoid discrimination
5.12 - 5.13	Retaining notes
5.14 - 5.15	Functions of the formal written report
5.16 - 5.21	Content and style of the report

## **6. Summary**

### **Annexes 1 and 2 : Examples of Panel Reports**

## 1. Interview Panels

### **General Principals**

- 1.1 Council Employment Memorandum (CEM) 7B sets out the Council's recruitment procedures, and CEM 7D 2 sets out the Council's statement of promotion principles, on which its promotion procedures are based. The main principles of CEM 7D2 are:

*'The consideration governing all promotions will be the advancement of the efficiency of the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council, while having due regard to the career development of employees. The Council's aims in this respect can only be secured by determining promotions on the grounds of fitness ..... The aim of the Council will be to select for promotion the best of its staff who may be suitable for available vacancies.'*

- 1.2 The Council is an equality of opportunity employer. Full guidance on the importance of equality of opportunity and avoiding discrimination is given in Section 2.

### **The Panels' size and function**

- 1.3 The Panel should comprise a Chairperson and no more than three members, two would be sufficient in most cases. If a specialist is co-opted onto the Panel, one of the regular members should not normally actively participate in that particular interview. There should be no general observers present during the interviews. The candidates will be informed beforehand of the membership of the Panel.
- 1.4 The interview is, only one, albeit the most important element of the Council's agreed promotion/selection procedures, as it provides an opportunity for the Panel to correct, to confirm, expand and supplement the documentary information available about the candidate e.g. Annual Staff Reports, application forms, references. In assessing candidates' individual qualities and their overall suitability for the post, you are expected to take account of all the evidence at your disposal, not just that gleaned from the interview itself.
- 1.5 At the end of the interview, the Panel will assess the candidate's suitability for promotion and/or for the post applied for, having regard to all the information available to it, including the paper record. It will then present a factual, unbiased report, reflecting the views of the Panel and providing a substantive record of each candidate interviewed.

### **Chairperson duties**

- 1.6 It is the Chairperson's duty to guide and control the Panel, to review the requirements of the post and establish criteria for assessment, to decide, in consultation with Panel members, a plan of approach to the interview (including sequence of questioning and the time each member should devote to questioning on the areas to be covered) and the making of assessments, and to ensure that this plan is followed.
- 1.7 Subsequently, the Chairperson is responsible for preparation, agreement and submission of individual reports on each candidate though the Chairperson may in fact delegate responsibility for preparing initial drafts of the reports to Interview Panel members.

Candidates will be placed in order of merit. The Chairperson will recommend which candidate is most suited to the post to be filled.

1.8 Additional guidance on the Chairperson's role and responsibilities is available in a separate document.

## 2. The Council's Policy on Equality of Opportunity

2.1 As an employer fully committed to equality of opportunity in the workplace the Council has a policy that employment and advancement will be judged solely on the basis of the individual's ability, qualifications and suitability for the available work. Discrimination on the grounds of disability, race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, marital status or age is unacceptable.

2.2 Moreover, under the Disability Discrimination Act, the Sex Discrimination Act, the Race Relations Act, the Equal Pay Act and the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, the Council has legal obligations to ensure that no unlawful discrimination takes place.

2.3 The Council requires its employees to exercise a personal responsibility for the practical application of the policy in the course of their day-to-day activities and, where applicable, line management activities. Those employees involved in recruitment and personnel management have a special duty to apply this policy carefully and conscientiously in those aspects of their work which relate to other employees of the Council and to all applicants for employment with the Council.

2.4 As part of the Council's policy for putting the equality of opportunity policy into practice, selection and promotion procedures are continuously monitored to ensure that they are free of unfair discrimination. The results of the monitoring are reported each year to the PPARC Whitley Council at its Annual General Meeting.

2.5 The Race Relations Act 1996 makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person, directly or indirectly, on racial grounds, i.e. on the grounds of colour, race and nationality, including ethnic or national origins. The interview must therefore be completely objective and give candidates every chance to show their qualities. You must take care that all candidates are asked questions which are relevant to the requirements of the job.

2.6 Candidates must be assessed solely on their relevant knowledge, experience and personal qualities. You must ensure that the agreed criteria for the assessment of candidates do not in themselves discriminate indirectly against members of a particular racial group.

2.7 You must guard against the more subtle and unconscious varieties of discrimination which can result from general assumptions about the capabilities, characteristics and interests of ethnic minority groups. For example, avoid any preconceptions about their ability to supervise, or about the possible reactions of other staff or members of the public to the employment of ethnic minority workers in the higher band, or in particular posts in that band.

2.8 Personal qualities are most likely to be the subject of generalised assumptions and prejudices. Ethnic minority candidates could be placed at a disadvantage, for example, by questions, which assume a common cultural background or experience with that of Panel members. You need to be aware of these possibilities in framing your questions.

- 2.9 The ability to communicate is important. To do an effective job, an individual must be able to give and follow instructions readily, and in some jobs may need to be easily understood by colleagues and members of the public face to face or on the telephone. The ability to communicate with others, including junior staff, may well be more important in the higher band. All candidates should be judged on the same basis and care needs to be exercised not to make unjustified assumptions about their ability to communicate. For example, you must ensure that your initial reaction to an unfamiliar accent does not bias your judgement of an otherwise fluent English speaker's ability to communicate. When the Panel decides that a candidate is unsuitable for promotion largely on grounds of communication difficulties, this should be made clear in the Panel's report and, where possible, examples given of such difficulties.

### **Discrimination on grounds of gender or marital status**

- 2.10 The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 makes it unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly on the grounds of gender or marital status. The Panel must be particularly careful not to treat a person of one gender less favourably than a person of the other gender or a married person less favourably than one who is not married. All candidates should be assessed on the basis of the same job-related criteria regardless of marital status and domestic responsibilities.
- 2.11 You must ensure that the agreed criteria for the assessment of candidates do not in themselves discriminate indirectly against women. You must also guard against the more subtle and unconscious discrimination, which can result from general assumptions about women's capabilities, characteristics and motivation.
- 2.12 You must guard against preconceptions about what are 'men's' jobs and what are 'women's' jobs, and against stereotypes of the kinds of work which are suitable for men and women. For example, it would be wrong to regard women as generally more suitable for detailed case work than broad policy jobs, or as generally unsuitable for senior management jobs because some men - and women - are said not to relish working for women.
- 2.13 If an assessment of candidates' future potential to rise one or more band is relevant, you should make no unwarranted assumptions about the potential of men or women or their motivation to advance in the Council. Women may communicate differently from men, but people who appear less assertive in presenting their strengths or franker in revealing their weaknesses need not be less effective in the job. The assessment of each individual's potential should be based on the same objective criteria, and should not be influenced by preconceptions about the relative characteristics, or abilities, of men and women. Individuals may vary widely in their management styles, but may nevertheless be equally effective.
- 2.14 You must avoid asking women candidates' questions, which are irrelevant to the job. Examples of the sort of question that would normally be irrelevant might be:
- *'Any intentions of getting married?'*
  - *'Any plans for a family'*
  - *'How would you, as the boss feel if you were the only woman in an all-man office?'*
- 2.15 Questions that are relevant to the job - for example, about candidates' ability to undertake travel, when this is a feature of the work - should be asked of both men and

women. Similarly, if mobility is involved both men and women may be asked about it in relation to family circumstances, but you should make no unwarranted assumptions about the future mobility of women candidates based on hypothetical circumstances.

## **Disability**

- 2.16 The employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (effective from December 1996) make it 'unlawful for an employer to discriminate against a disabled person'. An employer discriminates against a disabled person 'if for a reason relates to the disabled person's disability, he treats him less favourably than he treats or would treat others to whom that reason does not or would not apply' and 'he cannot show that the treatment in question is justified'.
- 2.17 You should have no preconceptions and make no assumptions about the limitations of a disabled candidate. The Chairperson should put disabled candidates at their ease by explaining that disability will not affect the consideration they will receive. Where a disability is either apparent or has been mentioned by the candidate the Panel should feel free to discuss it but questions must be concerned solely with the requirements of the work. Questions about disability should not be phrased negatively. Instead of 'surely you must have difficulty doing .....' say 'how would you ...?'. There should be no general questions about disability or medical issues. In asking questions about disability you should not treat a disabled person less favourably than a non-disabled person without justification. Consider whether, after any appropriate reasonable adjustment to the working environment or employment arrangements, a disabled candidate would actually be a better person for the job than any other candidate. A note of the disability, together with its possible significance in relation to the work, should be included in the Panel report.

## **3. Before the Interview**

### **Documentation**

- 3.1 As a member of an Interview Panel, you must ensure that you receive the following paperwork:
- Copy of the CVN containing a detailed job description
  - Application forms
  - List of candidates' publications (if applicable)
  - Reports of any previous interview(s) in band (Internal candidates)
  - References (external candidates)
  - Performance requirements of the band (band descriptions)
  - A person specification, prepared by Personnel, which lays down the qualifications, experience and competencies which the successful candidate must have.
- 3.2 Each internal candidate's Annual Staff Report file can be made available to the Chairman for reference before and after the interview.
- 3.3 You should familiarise yourself thoroughly with the documents provided, noting any points which require clarification with your colleagues on the Panel before the interviews. Examine the qualifications and career history recorded on the application form and note any points (e.g. apparent inconsistencies, 'gaps' in career) to be followed up during the interview.

- 3.4 Begin to relate each candidate's apparent qualities to the requirements for the post to be filled.
- 3.5 If you are a co-opted specialist member, select specific areas, which you wish to cover with the candidate which you, can then clear with the Chairperson.

### **Shortlisting**

- 3.6 A shortlisting exercise of all applications will be carried out.
- 3.7 It is your responsibility to ensure that you are involved in the shortlisting exercise. Every candidate applying for a post has the right to expect that their application will be treated fairly. If a person fails to get an interview, and not all the Panel has been involved in shortlisting, there could be grounds for appeal. Therefore all Panel members must participate in shortlisting although the Chairperson will make the final decision.
- 3.8 Objective, job-related criteria should be drawn up at the outset of a recruitment exercise and recorded in writing. Personnel will provide a job description and person specification from which the criteria can be derived. Criteria to be used for shortlisting will of course depend on the band to be interviewed and the post(s) to be filled, but the following qualities are required to some extent to perform most jobs within the Council and relate to the competencies agreed for personal development:
  - i. **Professional, Scientific and Technical Knowledge**

e.g. ability to acquire and maintain the appropriate level of technical and professional knowledge;
  - ii. **Policy Planning and Implementation**

e.g. ability to analyse and appraise a problem and reach a balanced conclusion;
  - iii. **Management of Resources**

e.g. ability to manage time, staff and co-ordinate internal and external resources, including goal-setting, priority setting and obtaining value for money;
  - iv. **Communication and Representational Skills**

e.g. ability to work in a team, relate to work colleagues, customers, etc. effectively;
  - v. **IT Awareness**

e.g. ability to use and understand application of mainframe computers, electronic mail and PCs;
  - vi. **Financial Management and Control**

e.g. ability to interpret and use financial data;

**vii. Performance and Standard Office Tasks**

e.g. checking documents for accuracy and identifying errors; maintaining accurate records;

**viii. Understanding of Work and its Context**

e.g. ability to interpret and apply procedures in relation to current job; ability to appreciate the broader context in which the Council operates.

**Interview Briefing**

3.9 The Chairperson of your Panel will call you to attend a pre-interview briefing, or allocate time before the interviews commence, at which the following will be covered:

- the Panel should define the standard which will need to be attained by agreeing the requirements for the post(s);
- the Panel should refine the criteria to be used for assessment, using as a base the selection criteria that were identified and used for the shortlisting exercise. The following general checklist might be helpful in this context:

***INTELLECTUAL ABILITY***

- *ability to analyse a problem, i.e. ability to use knowledge and experience to penetrate to the root of a problem and understand the issues involved;*
- *ability to appraise a problem, i.e. ability to assess facts, show awareness of the wider context and present a realistic solution;*
- *quality of judgement, i.e. ability to reach a balanced conclusion after analysing and appraising a problem.*

***KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE***

- *knowledge of present job and its correlation with the work of the Council; and/or education;*
- *breadth and depth of knowledge outside the context of the present job;*
- *use of previous work experience.*

***POTENTIAL TO MANAGE STAFF, as demonstrated by:***

- *maturity of thought;*
- *ability to 'think on their feet';*
- *practical experience (substitution of temporary promotion);*
- *capacity to delegate;*
- *capacity to motivate.*



## ***PERSONALITY, ORAL EXPRESSION AND INTERACTIVE ABILITY***

- *ability to communicate effectively with work colleagues, customers, etc;*
- *clarity of expression*

### **Interview Plan**

- 3.10 Agree the interview plan. You should agree as a Panel how the interview time will be used. You should agree an outline structure and who will cover what ground in questioning. Decide which topics you will raise. Aim to cover two of three topics at most and be content to focus on just one if it yields the information you seek about the candidate. If you find any gaps in the background information about a candidate, use questions to obtain the facts you need.

### **What to expect**

- 3.11 Panels should tailor questions to the level and qualifications of each candidate. You can, however, expect a candidate to:
- know something about the work of the Council outside his or her own section, i.e. set his/her own particular job in context (internal candidates);
  - have some ideas on what the higher band will demand and the differences from the present band (internal candidates);
  - put forward logical, well-structured opinions on subjects in which he or she has expressed interest;
  - handle the interview intelligently by giving some indication of his or her strengths to be utilised in the post applied for /higher band.

On the other hand you should not plan to raise topics which call upon a candidate:

- to discuss difficult philosophical subjects;
- to offer solutions to complex problems occurring outside his or her experience;
- to know everything about a subject raised for questioning;
- to express his or her own political or religious views.

### **NOTE: SPECIALIST MEMBERS**

- 3.12 Your role differs from that of other members; your job is to test the degree of competence and expertise that the candidates possess in a particular specialism. You have been co-opted because none of the 'core' Panel members possess such detailed knowledge. If you are a specialist member you should certainly be familiar with all the general guidance for Panel members, but as well as being concerned with a candidate's overall ability you will be asked to direct your questioning to test the candidate's depth of understanding in their specialist field.

## Environment for Interview

3.13 You should check that:

- the candidate will have a drink of water within reach;
- you have screened out as fully as you can any disturbing noises from outside;
- the room is adequately lit, ventilated and heated;
- there are notepaper and blackboard/OHP facilities, if necessary

## 4. The Interview Itself

### Compose yourself

4.1 Many Panel members become nervous before interviewing. If nerves do trouble you, it's well worth spending a moment becoming composed before the candidate appears. Remind yourself that you are well prepared and reflect on the fact that a calm manner in you will help the candidate to relax.

### Put the candidate at ease

4.2 When the candidate enters the room you can help put him or her at ease by looking businesslike but also friendly and relaxed. This will encourage full and frank answers to questions and natural behaviour as far as possible in this situation. As a result your job of making a fair and thorough assessment should be made easier. Remember - a smile is very encouraging.

4.3 Introducing the Panel members by name should be decided by the Chairperson before the interviews begin. There is no fixed rule as to whether such introductions should be made; it is a matter of choice. The Chairperson will often offer a brief outline of the Panel's purpose and procedure especially for the benefit of those - such as school leavers - who may have had no experience of this type of interview. It is also helpful to candidates to get used to the sound of their own voices at the earliest possible stage, an objective usually accomplished by one or two simple questions posed by the Chairperson.

4.4 Give the candidate your full attention at all times. Candidates notice - and comment on - interviewers who study papers, doodle or let their eyes wander. Besides, you can learn a lot by studying the candidates handling questions from your colleagues. To listen properly demands effort: it is just as much an active role as is the asking of questions. By all means make the occasional note but try to do so at obviously relaxed moments. In discussion put your questions clearly and crisply. A smooth flow of questions will help to establish rapport, so maintain the character of a discussion with the candidate; follow up leads from previous answers. Do not reveal any information given in confidential reports and/or references.

### Be purposeful in questioning

4.5 Neither rely on prepared questions, however conscientiously you have devised them, nor let the candidate have a free hand to choose all the topics. Guide the discussion along relevant and informative channels. Work from relatively straightforward issues to more challenging topics.

#### 4.6 DO

- ask relevant questions. Give candidates the best possible chance to show their suitability for the post in question;
- ask open questions, e.g. Why, How, When, Who, What. These provide scope for the candidate to talk; usually, the more candidates talk, the more you can discover about them;
- ask short, simple and unambiguous questions, one at a time. Avoid long speeches and explanations when you ask a question. Ensure that any difficulty comes in answering your question, not in deciding what it is. The candidate should do most of the talking;
- relate each question to the previous answer wherever you can. Follow through points which arise so that questioning progresses consistently and smoothly;
- test how well the candidate can think about a problem and reach a reasonable conclusion;
- seek to discover how fully the candidate has the qualities needed for the post applied for;
- probe the candidate's character and ability but **not** in a bullying manner;
- adhere to the time allowed for the interview as much as possible.

#### 4.7 AVOID

- questions which imply any kind of discrimination, (see earlier sections) or which are irrelevant;
- questions requiring two or more answers;
- questions about people's private lives unless they are relevant to the appointment;
- leading questions (those that suggest the right answer). Such questions can suggest where you stand on a subject and induce the candidates to give answers they think will win favour.

If any issues which might be construed as discriminatory or irrelevant are raised during the course of the interview, the Panel Chairperson will make it quite clear that the Panel will assess the candidate solely on his or her ability to do the job.

#### Probe deeply

- 4.8 Plan and keep in mind the areas to cover, but be flexible in the amount of time devoted to a particular topic.
- 4.9 If you find the candidate responding with relevant information, continue to probe the topic until sufficient evidence has been obtained to enable you to make a reliable

assessment. But if you judge that the topic is not a rewarding one, it should quickly be abandoned as unprofitable.

- 4.10 It is better to pursue a few topics in depth rather than a larger number superficially.

#### **Practise the art of effective listening**

- 4.11 Prepare beforehand (read up, think) so there is no need for attention to be distracted by reference to documents.
- 4.12 Maintain obvious interest in what the candidate is saying. If you show this, the candidate will respond more readily; if you feel it, your questions come more easily and spontaneously.
- 4.13 Don't worry about the impression you are creating on your fellow interviewers. What is important is your contribution to the overall assessment.

#### **Making notes**

- 4.14 In making notes, concentrate in relevant assessments. Note, not so much what the candidate said (though sometimes a brief factual record is helpful) as what you learnt from it about the candidate's reasoning powers, judgement, quality of inter-personal skills, enterprise, or ability to cope with a crisis or set-back. Remember though, that you should not take copious notes while the candidate is talking to you - this indicates that he/she does not have your full attention.
- 4.15 Don't let obvious weaknesses distract you from looking for possible strengths - or vice versa.
- 4.16 If you have agreed a set of assessment headings as part of your interview plan, record your impressions briefly under the various headings while the interview is in progress.

#### **Use all the evidence**

- 4.17 Resist first impressions - do not make up your mind about a candidate until the interview is over. For instance, do not let your first reaction to an unfamiliar accent bias your judgement of a candidate's ability to communicate. If you quickly form a view of a candidate, note it for what it is, a first impression and nothing more.
- 4.18 Recognise your biases. We all have biases about physical appearance, dress, lifestyle and manner of speech, for instance. Recognise them for what they are and set them aside from your job of assessing a candidate's ability. There is a need to distinguish clearly between evidence and inference. Everyone is prone to make assumptions about other people - in everyday life this can be a useful short cut to making the decisions affecting them. However, the experienced interviewer will be aware of his or her own assumptions so that they can be set to one side and the assessment of the candidate based purely on the evidence presented in the interview and supporting information.
- 4.19 Wait for all the evidence. Some candidates warm up more slowly than others and so may improve as the interview proceeds. Others may appear good at first but not sustain the performance. Try to ensure that all candidates feel their abilities have been fully explored and that you have learned a lot about them.

4.20 Do not let your feelings about a candidate show.

4.21 Do not expect a candidate to address you by name or in any specific way.

### Staying 'neutral'

4.22 You will find it unhelpful to identify yourself with a particular point of view, especially over controversial or political issues. If you do not agree with a view expressed, be wary of flatly contradicting it. You could worry the candidate and affect his or her performance in the rest of the interview.

However, do feel free to 'float' views impersonally in opposition to those the candidate expresses and then invite his or her reactions to them.

### Reaching a candidate's limits

4.23 Stop a line of questioning when you have clearly reached the candidate's limits. If the candidate cannot answer a question, do not leave him or her floundering. Offer a lead and see if he or she can continue to cope. It is better for candidates to convince themselves that they cannot deal with a topic than to feel that they failed on one question that took them by surprise.

### Handling problem situations

4.24 Most candidates will cope with the interview and present no problems. From time to time however, you may encounter the situation detailed below, and it is a good idea to think beforehand about how you will cope with them.

## 1. The candidate says very little

---

Likely causes	How to handle
The candidate is shy and/or inarticulate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Try to put the candidate at ease</li><li>○ Give the candidate plenty of time to collect his or her thoughts</li><li>○ Give encouragement, e.g. look attentive, respond with a smile</li><li>○ Do <u>not</u> try to help by talking more yourself.</li></ul>

---

---

## 2. The candidate talks too much

---

When to interrupt	How to do so
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ You have all the information you require on a topic, or</li><li>○ You are not competent to assess the content of what he or she is saying, or</li><li>○ The candidate's answer is irrelevant to your question.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Change the subject yourself politely but firmly, or</li><li>○ Leave it to the person chairing the Panel to intervene and say that a particular avenue has been sufficiently explored.</li></ul>

### 3. You suspect the candidate is being deliberately evasive

Insist on a direct answer.

### 4. The candidate tries to bluff the Panel

If candidates make exaggerated claims or over-sell themselves persist in your questioning until you get the facts.

### Additional Points to Remember

4.25 There are a number of factors which undeniably have an important bearing on candidates' suitability for appointment but which you may not pursue in the course of the interview, as they will be covered by Personnel as part of the pre-appointment enquiries which apply to all external candidates recommended for appointment. These factors concern eligibility, in terms of qualifications, and character. Information which may be potentially adverse to candidates, such as convictions or reports of insobriety or dishonesty, may be given confidentially to the Chairperson who should not normally reveal the facts prior to the interview but who has discretion to do so after the candidate has left. Also, you should not refer, in the course of discussion with candidates, to information derived from referees' reports since these are supplied on the basis of confidentiality.

### 5. After the Interview

#### Give a provisional view

5.1 After the candidate has left, the Chairperson may first ask each member of the Panel to give a spontaneous assessment as to the candidate's fitness for the post, as demonstrated by the interview. A more detailed evaluation of all the evidence will either substantiate or contradict this initial reaction.

## **Review all the evidence**

- 5.2 The Panel should then get down to a systematic discussion of the candidate, using relevant headings as guidelines if these have been previously agreed. Minor differences need not be argued, but where opinions differ sharply it is important to review the evidence until a reasonable consensus (occasionally agreement to differ) has been reached.
- 5.3 Balance what you learnt from the interview with what the background papers told you. Remember that an interview shows only a small sample of a candidate's range of behaviour. So do not discount a candidate who shows up badly when his or her reports show a consistent ability to master a range of difficult jobs.
- 5.4 An interview is a one-off occasion and, as such, cannot be the sole arbiter of promotion. However, it does attempt to provide an objective measure of an individual's merit. A situation in which someone performs poorly at interview but is nevertheless promoted solely on the strength of their supporting documentary paperwork is not common. However, on the rare occasion when the documentary evidence is so strong that it outweighs a poor interview performance, there is a crucial need for the Panel's overall decision and justification for reaching it to be carefully and accurately documented and defensible if scrutinised at a later date.
- 5.5 Direct reference to the candidate's ASR file can be particularly helpful where there is disagreement between Panel members or when the candidate is considered a borderline case.

## **Build up a picture of the candidate**

- 5.6 The final discussion should concentrate on building up a picture of the candidate as a person.
- 5.7 Discussion may include: assessing how far candidates have developed, having regard to the opportunities available to them, visualising how they might perform in the post, and considering how they might develop in future, having regard to their aptitudes, interests and motivation.
- 5.8 Relate your assessment and your final recommendation to all the evidence, giving full weight to that available before the interview as well as your own interview impressions and the observations of your colleagues.
- 5.9 If candidates are to be placed in order of merit, the Panel may find it helpful to draw up a provisional rank order after each day's interviewing.

## **Avoid discrimination**

- 5.10 You should apply precisely the same standards to every candidate.
- 5.11 As you do so, guard especially against the subtle and unconscious forms of discrimination. Take care to avoid making general assumptions about any of the following: the abilities, characteristics, interests, motivation or potential of ethnic minorities or candidates of either gender, or of disabled candidates.

## Retaining Notes

- 5.12 You should remember that Panel decisions and the reasons for them must be recorded. Where a record of the criteria used is in itself sufficient to explain the decision, this will be adequate. However, in accordance with good recruitment practice, the Chairperson should, in any case, use the report to indicate the strong and weak points of candidates who are not recommended for appointment with, wherever practicable, the reasons why they are considered less suitable than those who are recommended. Such comments are especially valuable in dealing with enquiries or complaints. All formal reports, must be retained by Personnel for at least one year. These documents may have to be produced at Employment Tribunal hearings or in a Court of Law if an unsuccessful candidate lodges a complaint of unlawful discrimination. The Tribunal or Court may order the disclosure of such documents relating not only to the complainant but also to other candidates who were interviewed by the same Panel.
- 5.13 You should be aware that an employer is under no legal obligation to tell an unsuccessful candidate why he or she was not chosen for the job. However, under the questionnaire procedure provided under the Race Relations Act, the Sex Discrimination Act and the Disability Discrimination Act, a person who has brought or is considering bringing a complaint of discrimination may question the employer on its reasons for carrying out any relevant act, such as rejecting that person. An employer's response to such a questionnaire is admissible in evidence during the Tribunal proceedings, and a failure to respond, a late response, or an evasive or equivocal response may give rise to an inference of unlawful discrimination.

## Functions of the formal written report

- 5.14 The individual interview Panel report is a very important document to Management regarding internal candidates, both as a basis for giving feedback and as a tool for future personal development. It should therefore be as explicit, factual and constructive as possible, and of course, 100 per cent accurate.
- 5.15 Each report will come under close scrutiny for a number of purposes, including:
- to provide Management with substantive information on performance at interview and overall recommendation on promotability (internal candidates);
  - to provide line managers with the source of material necessary or detailed feedback to be given;
  - to help line management and the individual in their assessment of personal development needs;
  - to be used in the event of an appeal against non-promotion/selection.

## Content and style of the report

- 5.16 The report will need to explain in detail **whether the candidate is suitable for the particular post** as well as whether he/she has reached the required standard. However, there are some general guidelines to be borne in mind that will assist the author in ensuring that all relevant material is included. The basic format should be as follows:



## **Section 1. Introduction**

5.17 This section should cover the candidate's general presentation, manner and approach to the interview, and pay particular attention to the opening account of the present job, subsequent questioning on specific duties which arises from it and a summary of other areas of questioning covered in the interview.

## **Section 2. Main body of the report**

5.18 This is the section which should contain the most factual information about the candidate's strengths and weaknesses, level of knowledge and ability both in a specific area and in a wider context, and a statement on the level of importance of the various aspects identified to the overall judgement. It is very important that concrete examples should be given to support the statements which are made - to make judgements in isolation will be of no value to the line manager who must explain to a candidate how the identified weaknesses can be resolved, or to the Appeals Panel which is weighing up evidence to determine how a certain judgement has been made.

## **Section 3. Recommendations**

5.19 A general summary of the candidate's overall performance should be made in this section, making reference, as appropriate, to the supplementary information available to the Interview Panel and explaining the balancing factors which have led the Panel to make this recommendation. There should also be any additional comments to be used in feedback by line managers - these are of course particularly important in the case of those candidates not recommended for the post.

5.20 As stated previously, this format can only serve as a general guide and there will naturally be occasions when reports will need to vary considerably in length, content and general emphasis. However, it is very important to remember the kind of information that needs to be imparted and to understand why it is required.

5.21 It goes without saying that all reports should be grammatically correct, easy to understand and have a fluid style. There are certain types of comments which is best to avoid, as follows:

### **i. Avoid personal comments**

e.g. 'Mr X had a very uninteresting personality'.

This is a gratuitous comment on a personal quality that is in no way related to Mr X's ability to perform in the new job or the higher band.

### **ii. Avoid coded references**

e.g. 'Mr Y was refreshingly forthright in some of his answers'.

This comment can be interpreted in either a positive or negative way. It could mean that Mr Y puts forward strong opinions in a well-argued and incisive way, or it could mean that he is a normally reserved person or has been over-critical in such a way as to impede his overall performance.

iii. **Avoid tentative/obscure comments**

e.g. 'Miss S's answers tended to be slightly pedestrian'.

This comment is now so qualified by the use of the words 'tended' and 'slightly' that it is scarcely worth making and is in this case only valid if it is contributed to the Panel's judgement about Miss S's ability to perform in the post.

iv. **Avoid covert value judgements**

e.g. 'Mr Z gave superficial answers to questions of a broader theoretical nature, admitting that most of his structural design knowledge had been gained by practical experience'.

This is a rather harder thing to spot, but in the example given above the use of the word 'admitting' implies that gaining structured design knowledge by practical experience is in some way a disreputable thing which the candidate would have preferred to hide. Another example is 'The candidate conceded that something was true'. These implied judgements are very easy to slip into using, but they tend to result in a report which, whilst giving an overall negative impression, does not give any specific reasons why a candidate is not considered suitable for work at the higher band.

At Annexes 1 and 2 are fictitious examples of Panel reports using the format outlined above.

6. **Summary**

These guidance notes are designed to assist Interview Panel members at all stages of an interviewing exercise. They should be re-read on each occasion that you are asked to take part in such an exercise. If you have any further queries, you should contact Personnel, who will be pleased to advise you.

## PANEL REPORT

## BAND 5 - GENERALISTS

## MRS X, SWINDON OFFICE

## BAND 6 - BAND 5

1. Although nervous, Mrs X gave a well-rounded description of her present job. She demonstrated clearly that she was well informed on most aspects of her work in the PPD Secretariat. However, she was noticeably less sure of herself when questioned on the wider issues around her job - for example, she did not know what her Band 5's responsibilities were nor the role of a committee member in the Council.
2. Mrs X demonstrated to the Panel that she was a competent, well-organised Band 6 whose enthusiasm and knowledge of secretariat work are valuable assets to the organisation. However, there were definite weaknesses identified in her response to questions on wider issues (e.g. understanding of grants finance, value of peer review) and her ideas on staff management were not developed to their logical conclusions. She did, however, have some sound, well-structured views on the advantages and disadvantages of undertaking repayment work and the benefits of computerisation.
3. Overall the Panel believed that Mrs X was not ready for promotion to the post. It agreed that she would benefit from broadening her work experience further to give her a wider appreciation of the Council's work and the work of those around her. She also needs to be encouraged to project herself more positively in the interview situation.

NOT RECOMMENDED

Panel Mark D

## PANEL REPORT

CVN / 96

## MRS A, SWINDON OFFICE

## BAND 4 - TRAINING OFFICER

1. Mrs A gave a clear and logical description of her career history to date and her particular experience of the advertised post, explaining that she had previously worked in the training section of a large government department and outlining the innovative changes which she had made to the junior training programmes while in this post. She also had a broad knowledge of general Council procedures and, when questioned more closely about their relevance to the training programmes, was able to present well-constructed, balanced arguments to support her views.
2. The Panel was very impressed by Mrs A's ability to 'think on her feet' not only in the training area but also on wider topics outside the areas in which she had worked. In particular it considered that her inter-personal qualities, as demonstrated by her ability to present the pros and cons of arguments in an enthusiastic but convincing way, and her knowledge of the basic training principles and systems, made her a suitable choice for this particular post.
3. The Panel concluded that Mrs A had amply demonstrated her general ability to operate at Band 4 level and specifically to fill the Training Officer post. It agreed that she would be able to make a totally effective contribution in any generalist Band 4 post.

RECOMMENDED FOR THE POST.

**Panel Mark B**