

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

Recruitment and Selection in the Public Sector

A Handbook for Effective Practice



Rob Powell {fyi}
Suzanne Curry

+ return to me please
DPH:



PDT CONSULTANCY

SUITE 22 KOBOLD HOUSE
17 PROWSE STREET
WEST PERTH 6005
PHONE: (08) 9321 5656
FAX (08) 9321 5650
email. pdtu@iinet.net.au

Ab ✓

PROGRAM OUTLINE

Time	Content
8.30	Introduction Legislative requirements in Recruitment and Selection The Recruitment and Selection Process Shortlisting
10.30	Morning Tea
10.50	Interviewing Process Writing questions for interviews Preparing for panel interview Role of the panel convenor
12.30	Lunch
1.15	Panel A interviews
2.30	Comfort stop
2.40	Panel B interviews
3.55	Break
4.10	Issues from interviews Other selection techniques Reference Checking Making a decision Writing Selection Reports Providing Feedback
4.30	Summary and Close



TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CONTENT</u>	<u>PAGE NUMBER</u>
Introduction	1
Legislative Framework	2
The Recruitment and Selection Process	4
Setting the Foundations	5
Obtaining the Best Pool of Applicants	11
Shortlisting	12
Gathering Further Information for Shortlisted Applicants	18
Conducting Effective Behavioural Interviews	18
Interview Procedure	19
Recording Information	22
Panel Convenor's Checklist	27
Preparing Questions	28
The Role of Referees	34
Making a Decision	35
Completing the Process	37
Appendix 1	40



INTRODUCTION

The selection of staff to fill vacant positions is one of the critical human resource decisions that an organisation needs to make. The selection of the best available person for the position can greatly enhance the performance of an organisation and produce benefits that can impact well beyond the immediate work situation. Conversely the consequences of poor selection decisions are at best the failure to improve the organisation's functioning and worse can greatly damage performance and morale.

It is in the interests of all Public Sector agencies to endeavour to select the best available personnel to fill vacancies that occur. Of the variety of selection approaches available to selection panels, behavioural selection can be shown to produce consistently valid and reliable selection decisions.

Behavioural selection is based on using past behaviour as the predictor of future behaviour. When used in a structured selection process this approach involves the identification of the critical elements of the positions to be filled and the use of selection strategies that can identify examples of applicants' past behaviours from which future performance can be predicted.

This process is compatible with the principles of merit selection that are used throughout the public sector. Merit selection is based on three major principles. These are:

- A definition of merit selection as the 'selection of the most suitable available applicant for the position';
- The applicant shall accept the major responsibility for presenting their case for selection;
- Adherence in selection processes to principles of natural justice, fairness and equity and comparability.

The recruitment and selection process outlined in the following sections will allow selection panels to select the best available staff to fill their vacancies. Adherence to the processes outlined will not only maximise the benefits of behavioural selection, it will also ensure Public Sector agencies work within the legislative frameworks which guide their process.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The staff selection process is underpinned by two acts of parliament;

- i) Public Sector Management Act 1994.
- ii) Equal Opportunity Act (WA) 1984.

A third act, the Freedom of Information Act 1992, also has implications for the Recruitment and Selection Process.

i) Public Sector Management Act 1994.

The act provided for the establishment of an independent statutory office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Standards. The Commission has the responsibility to establish the following minimum standards in recruitment, selection and appointment.

Recruitment, Selection and Appointment Standard

Outcome:

The most suitable and available people are selected and appointed.

The Standard:

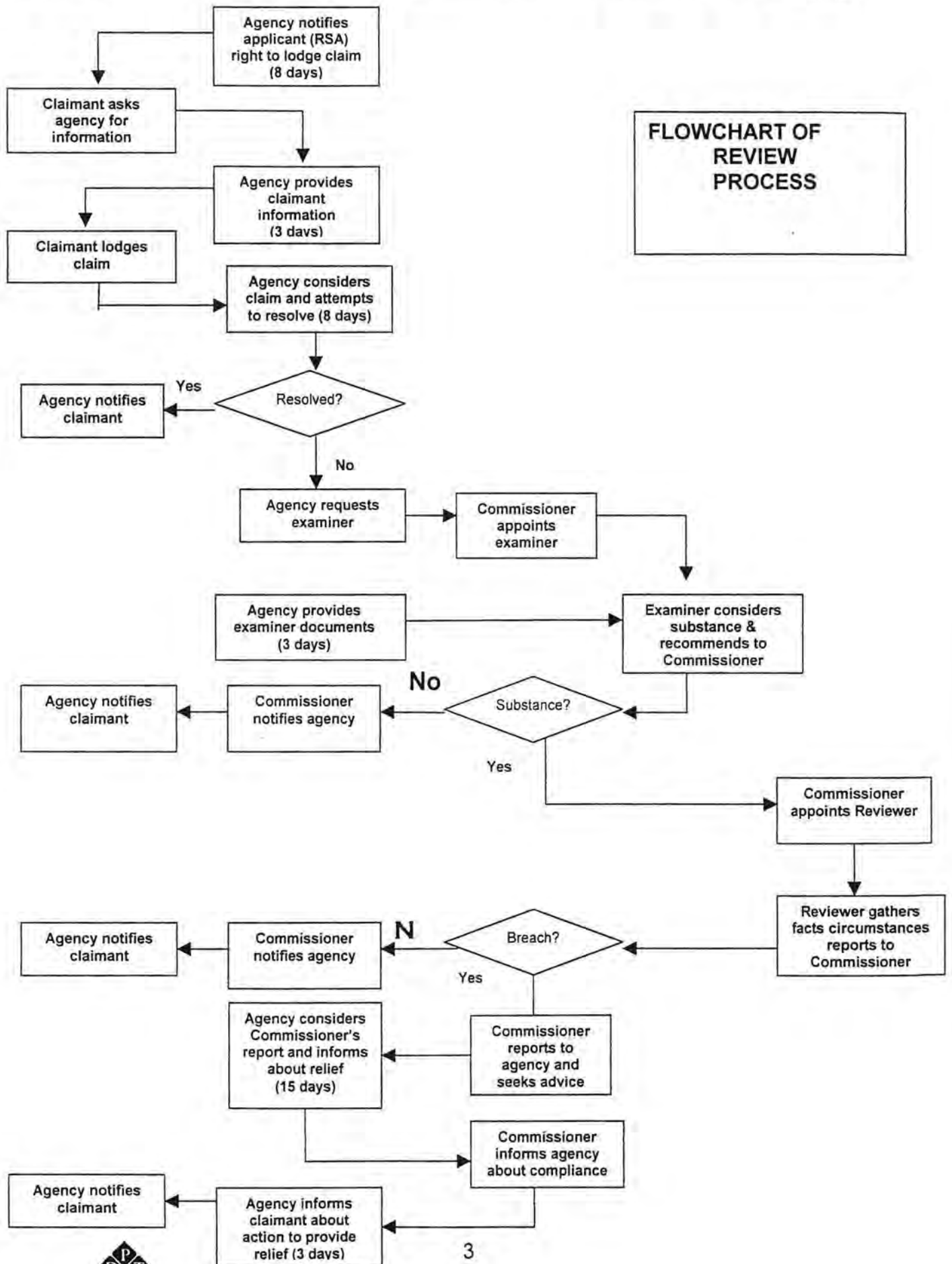
The minimum standard of merit, equity and probity is met for recruitment, selection and appointment if:

- **A proper assessment matches a candidate's skills, knowledge and abilities with the work-related requirements of the job and the outcomes sought by the public sector body, which may include diversity.**
- **The process is open, competitive and free of bias, unlawful discrimination, nepotism or patronage.**
- **Decisions are transparent and capable of review.**

Natural Justice is outlined within the standard to mean:

- Decision-makers must act fairly and without bias.
- A person should not be judge in his or her own cause.
- All parties to the matter should have opportunity to put their own case and all relevant arguments considered before a decision made.
- All persons need to be informed of the basis of a decision, where that decision affects them.

Claimant Public Sector Agency Commissioner Examiner Reviewer



FLOWCHART OF REVIEW PROCESS

ii) Equal Opportunity Act (WA) 1984

The area of employment is one of the areas covered under the Equal Opportunity Act. It is unlawful to discriminate against applicants on the basis of any of the nine areas covered by this act.

This legislation is designed to ensure that applicants are considered for employment on the basis of their ability to meet the requirements for a position and not rejected because of assumptions based on any of these nine specified areas would prevent them performing the job. The Equal Opportunity legislation also gives legal redress to people who have been discriminated against on the grounds covered by the Act.

These areas are:

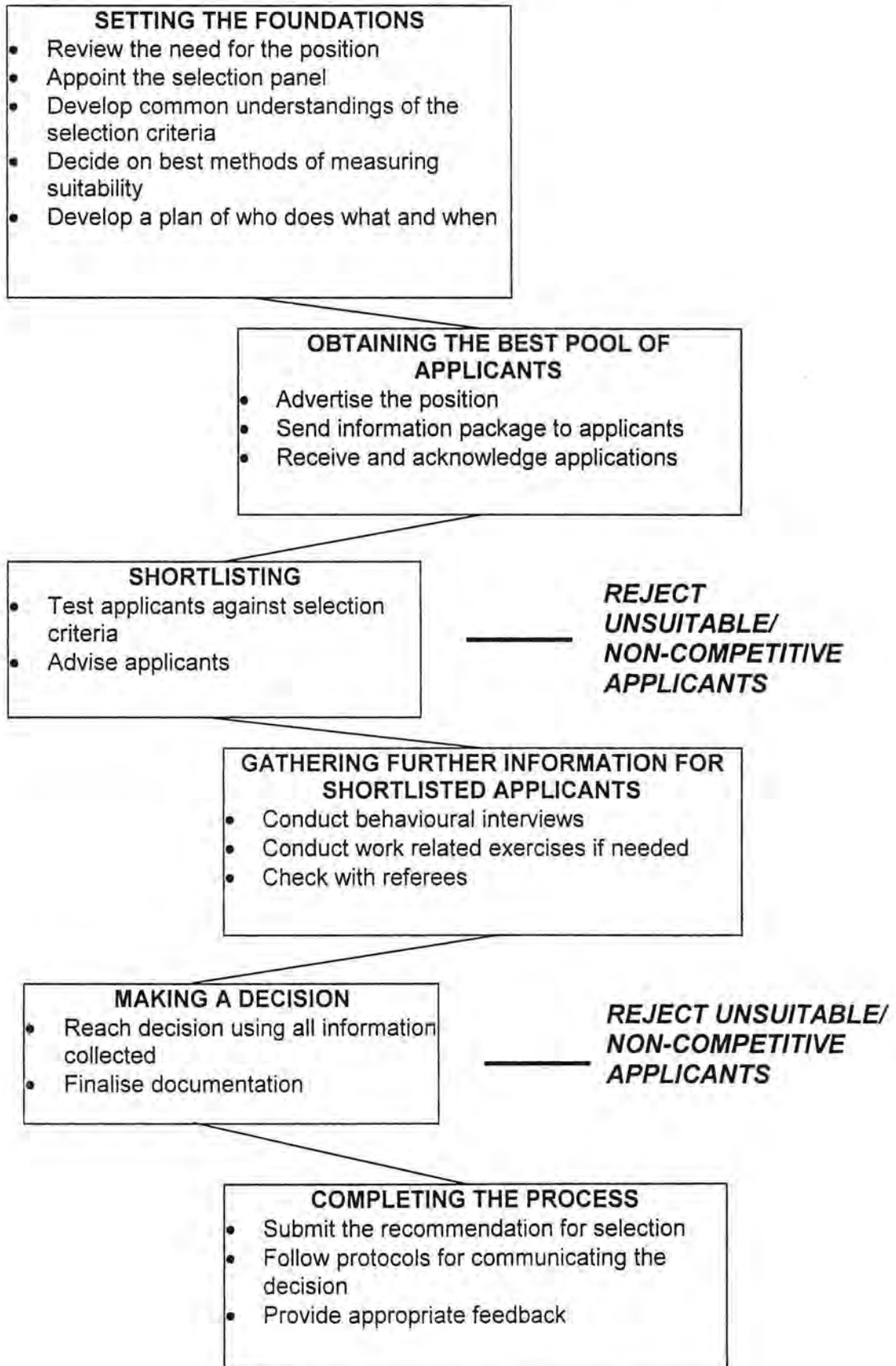
- Sex
- Marital status
- Pregnancy
- Race
- Religious conviction
- Sexual orientation*
- Political conviction
- Impairment
- Age
- Family responsibility
- Gender history

Selection panels must be able to justify their selection decisions on the basis of the selection criteria and not allow their perceptions of the impact of the areas mentioned under the act to influence their decision. It is particularly important for panels to ensure their selection processes especially their interview questions, don't lead unsuccessful applicants to feel that the selection decision was influenced by factors other than the selection criteria for the position.

The Freedom of Information Act (1992)

Part of the intent of The Freedom of Information Act is to make persons and bodies that are responsible for State and Local government, more accountable to the public. The accountability of selection panels in Public Sector agencies falls under this intent. Applicants, through the Freedom of Information provisions, could access information used by panels to make decisions as well as documentation resulting from the selection process, which pertains to their application. This also includes referee reports or written notes of referee comments.

THE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESS



SETTING THE FOUNDATIONS

IS THE POSITION NEEDED?

When a position becomes vacant is an ideal time to check that it is still needed or whether it still needs to be done in the same way. Technological changes can mean that there may be other ways in which a job can be done. So rather than automatically refilling the position, review the position and its requirements. There may need to be changes made to the Job Description Form and the selection criteria. These do take time, however it is better to spend this time than to refill a position that does not meet current needs.

APPOINTING A SELECTION PANEL

The objective is to ensure an appropriate panel of people is formed in order to select the most suitable candidate for the position.

The appointment of a selection panel is necessary for all advertised positions. The composition of the selection panel should be determined and approved by the responsible Director prior to advertisement. The panel may include representatives from outside the Department.

DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS OF A SELECTION PANEL CONVENOR

Typically, the panel convenor will be the relevant line manager who should:

- Be skilled in using objective assessment methods and techniques.
- Understand the need to meet the Standard set for recruitment and selection by the Public Sector Standards Commission.
- Understand the requirements of the job.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE SELECTION PANEL:

- Comprises between 2 and 4 members (both male and female members, where possible).
- Includes (and is driven by) the line manager.
- Includes a person independent from the position/area.
- Wherever possible, panel members should have undergone training in selection techniques. This will not always be possible and the convenor should contact People Services Branch with any concerns about the knowledge of panel members.
- Same panel members for the entire process.
- Member(s) have a clear understanding of the position being filled.
- Where relevant includes members reflecting the gender and ethnic diversity of candidates to be interviewed. On occasion it may be necessary that the original panel advised to the responsible Director will need to be changed. Written advice to the Manager, Workforce Services and Planning via the relevant Director outlining the reason for the change will suffice. It is recognised that it will not always be possible to ensure the panel comprises membership of these groups, so panel members must ensure that the interests of such groups are accommodated by the processes used.

To ensure that the selection process is fair and equitable members of the selection panel are required to disclose prior knowledge of any of the candidates who have submitted applications. Where the candidate is a family member, self disclosure by the panel member and self elimination is expected. However, if the applicant is a friend or close colleague, then:

- the committee member must disclose the nature of the relationship to the other members prior to the shortlisting of candidates;
- the member should remove themselves from the panel if it could be seen that bias could occur for or against an applicant;
- the panel must decide whether a conflict of interest will occur as a result of that member continuing on the panel;
- People Services Branch should be consulted with regard to the next course of action.

REVIEWING THE JOB DESCRIPTION AND THE SELECTION CRITERIA

While this function is largely the responsibility of People Services Branch, the members of the panel may have useful perspectives on the information. Once the position is advertised it is too late to change the selection criteria. So if they are not the most appropriate ones for the current requirements of the area they need to be changed.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Essential criteria

Essential Criteria are those which are absolutely necessary for the performance of the job.

They:

- provide a common standard for all applicants;
- provide a disciplined structure for assessing applicants;
- minimise the possibility of irrelevant matters being taken into account and perhaps adversely affecting some applicants;
- minimise the possibility of EEO practices being contravened;
- remove the possibility of the panel assuming or guessing that someone could do the job.

Check the essential selection criteria for the position you are considering:

- are they job related?
- do they clearly and simply describe what is required?
- are they specific enough and not just vague, generalised "labels"?
- can they be observed/measured?
- what information do you need from / regarding the applicant to decide whether they are capable of performing the job?

Desirable criteria

Being highly competent on a desirable criterion can not compensate for weakness in essential criteria.

- Desirable criteria are those which would greatly assist the person in doing the job. However, if a person did not possess them it would not mean that they were incapable of performing the duties of the job.
- May not be essential because it could be expected that a job holder would acquire them during employment.
- May include specific knowledge about how your particular organisation prefers to function.
- Applicants meeting these will frequently be more competitive than others.



DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ESSENTIAL AND DESIRABLE CRITERIA

Essential criteria:

- are the minimum necessary criteria, each of which is absolutely essential in order for the job to be undertaken effectively;
- describe skills, knowledge, abilities and experience that the occupant of the job will need on commencing in the job and not those which can be learned on the job over time;
- are not agency specific; and
- only include qualifications where these are mandatory due to legislative or registration board reasons, or are an absolute requirement for appointment or promotion to the job and in any case, list the minimum required.

Desirable criteria:

- may be used to separate candidates who have equally met the essential selection criteria;
- are those without which a person may still be able to do the job;
- may include agency specific or function specific knowledge requirements;
- may be acquired, over a reasonable time, or may be trainable;
- are those that would make the highly effective performance of the job more probable; and
- may include minimum qualifications that may significantly enhance the overall effective performance of the job. Account should be taken of the applicants' potential to acquire qualifications during employment.

UNDERSTANDING THE KEY ELEMENTS OF CRITERIA

It is important that once the panel members understand the general meaning and intent of the criteria in the context of the position, they then invest time generating the elements or dimensions of the position related to the selection criteria. There needs to be an awareness of the range of elements that may make up demonstrations of effective practice both within the written application and at interview, or a work related exercise.

Time spent identifying, discussing and recording the potential elements ensures that the panel works together in an informed way. The panel needs to consider if it is being too restrictive and hence potentially biased in generating the range of knowledge, skill and experience candidates might present, that will support them in making valid ratings of the candidates against the selection criteria.

OPPORTUNITY TO CONSOLIDATE LEARNING

EXERCISE

In groups generate and record the elements that might be considered appropriate to three of the selection criteria.

DECIDING ON THE BEST METHOD/ S OF MEASURING SUITABILITY

There are many methods of gaining information on applicants' suitability for positions. While the most common are written material, interviews and referee information, other techniques can be useful in deciding the most suitable person for a position. What is important in deciding on the selection techniques is that the information that they give is related to the requirements of the job and that the information can be validly interpreted. Another consideration is that the selection techniques are fair to applicants and that they don't inadvertently rule out applicants who would be highly suitable for the position.

It is desirable that applicants are aware of what selection processes are going to be used when they apply for a position.

DEVELOPING A RECRUITMENT PLAN

Once the above issues are decided, it is important to develop a recruitment plan. It is desirable to allow the applicants at least two weeks to prepare their applications from the time of advertising the position. Remember that the better the quality of the information the selection panel receives, the easier the selection task will be. Likewise the higher the quality of the applicant pool, the higher the likelihood of getting good quality employees.

The shortlisting of applicants can take considerable time, especially if further data gathering on applicants is required to assist in shortlisting, so allow sufficient time for this.

Interviewing, checking referees and preparing the selection report all take time. Once the recommended applicant is notified of their offer, they may well have to provide 2-4 weeks notice from their current employment situation. It is not unreasonable to expect that the total process can take in excess of 12 weeks. The need to have a plan and an outline of when the various steps can be expected to take place can prevent this time line from increasing.

While the length of time this process takes can be inconvenient and result in positions being vacant for some time, it is important that the various steps are not compromised. The result of rushing the process could be that poor selection decisions are made with the resultant negative consequences to the organisation.

Demonstrate
x ' *OKS shown*
x o *Understanding + how you apply your knowledge*
x o *Detailed info.*

Behavioural ? , open ? (to encourage).

OBTAINING THE BEST POOL OF APPLICANTS

ADVERTISING VACANCIES.

While some of the mechanics of advertising the position may be the responsibility of the People Services Branch, rather than the role of the panel, it is important that the panel be aware of the advertising procedures.

Advertisements should carry the name of a person who can give information about the position. This is best provided by someone who knows the position very well, usually the supervisor of the position who is likely to be on the selection panel.

Gaining an appropriate pool of suitably qualified applicants is important. Consideration should be given to where is the most appropriate place to advertise to gain sufficient quality applicants.

A further consideration should be how much information to provide applicants about the position and the selection procedures. Providing appropriate information on the selection process allows applicants to supply the desired information, which makes the selection task easier and more valid. This is particularly important when the selection processes in an organisation are changing.

RECEIVING APPLICATIONS.

It is important that applicants know where to send applications and that they all go to the same location. This minimises the chances of applications getting lost and also minimises the issues associated with late applications.

The confidentiality of applications is also extremely important. Applicants have the right to expect that the information they provide in their application is confidential. They also have the right to expect that their candidature for a position is also confidential. Whoever deals with the applications should be aware of these requirements.

ACKNOWLEDGING APPLICATIONS.

It is good practice to acknowledge all applications, so that applicants can be reassured that their application has been received. To appropriately acknowledge applications reflects well on the professionalism of the organisation.



SHORTLISTING

TESTING APPLICANTS AGAINST THE SELECTION CRITERIA.

All applicants should be tested against the advertised selection criteria. This should involve all panel members and needs to be done fairly. If instruments other than the written application are used in the exercise, they must still relate to the criteria advertised for the position, and not be based on extraneous variables.

There are three possible outcomes of shortlisting individual applications:

- applicant not suitable (does not meet all essential criteria);
- applicant suitable but not competitive; or
- applicant suitable and competitive.

Each panel member should individually assess all the applicants first, and then the results should be taken to the whole panel for discussion. Where this does not happen the advantages of having different perspectives on the applicants can be lost.

On the first assessment of applications only essential criteria should be used, desirable coming into play only to separate competitive applicants.

LARGE NUMBER OF CANDIDATES

If there is a large number of candidates who reach the final assessment stage, the Selection Panel will need to apply more rigorous assessment techniques to provide for better distinction between candidates. To manage large numbers of candidates, Selection Panels may wish to consider some of the following options. (Note that this list is not exhaustive, and other methods may be appropriate – consult with People Services Branch if further advice is required).

- Develop a matrix for the shortlisting process. This can be modified for use during further assessment stages
- Conduct short screening interviews either in person or via the telephone to determine which candidates have the strongest claims.
- Screen out those candidates who do not meet the desirable criteria to focus on the most suitable candidates.

If the Selection Panel choose to utilise any of these options, each technique is to be applied consistently to each applicant and be fully documented.

For large applicant pools, some form of rating scale will be needed to assist in making judgements between applicants. Whatever rating scale is used, it is important that all panel members are familiar with the scale being used and discussion has taken place regarding the interpretation of the scale. One rating scale commonly used is:

- A Greatly exceeds the criterion.
- B Exceeds the criterion
- C Meets the criterion
- D Doesn't meet the criterion

It is important that scores are not just tallied. This practice can sometimes mask significant differences between applicants.

RECORDING THE INFORMATION FROM THE WRITTEN APPLICATIONS

It is important the information an applicant provides in their written application is recorded to form the basis of the decision making process to shortlist applicants. If only the impressions of an application are recorded, it is very difficult to make a valid distinction between applicants. Applicants should provide **examples** of where they have **demonstrated** a skill or ability in their written applications rather than just making **claims**. A framework to analyse the quality of the examples provided by applicants can assist in making valid decisions.

There are a number of different frameworks. Some of the more commonly used ones are outlined below.

Situation
Task
Action
Result

Situation
Action
Outcome

What
How
Outcome

Context
Action
Result

The framework components outline the information contained in a behavioural example. A completed framework guides the reader toward a full understanding of each past experience. Examples of an applicant's past experience do not have to come from exactly the same position as being applied for, but should be sufficient to demonstrate a person's capacity relevant to that selection criterion and ability to perform well within the advertised position.

COMPARING EXAMPLES

When determining which example provides the most appropriate and highest demonstration of a particular criterion some of the factors that you might consider are outlined below. These are only some guidelines and still depend on the other factors given in relation to the criterion.

Context:

An example that is close to the **context** of the position being considered is probably better than one from a very different context, all other factors being equal. For example if the job requires report writing, a situation where a person has been required to write reports may be a more appropriate demonstration of the criterion of Written Communication than an example where a person has written letters. (Provided there is evidence of the quality of the report).

The degree of **complexity** of the task the person has been able to perform, which is directly related to the selection criterion, could influence your rating of the degree of skill involved. For example where the criterion is organisational skills, the organisation of an international conference would be superior to the organisation of a half day workshop in a person's section. (Where both events ran successfully).

Action:

The action that a person has taken within an example is a clear discriminator regarding the competitiveness on that criterion. The quality of the **process** used in carrying out the action could be seen as directly related to the quality of the action. For example a person who is able to clearly articulate the steps or the process that they went through in an example to demonstrate skills in policy formulation, would be in a stronger position than one who could not.

Result:

Positive **outcomes** resulting from the action taken would be another consideration in determining which example you would rate more highly. The action that results in a positive outcome is usually of higher quality than one that has a less favourable outcome, unless the reason for the poor result was beyond the applicant's control and the steps leading to that point were good.

* The final decision regarding the quality of an example will be determined by balancing the various merits of the above elements put together.

Remember that the example used is only the vehicle to demonstrate the underlying skill or ability relevant to the criterion not the end in itself.



**MERIT SELECTION - WRITTEN APPLICATION EVALUATION
(EXAMPLE)**

Application Evaluation

Position Title:
Position Number:

Applicant: **NAME:**

Ranking: A Greatly exceeds the criterion.
 B Exceeds the criterion
 C Meets the criterion
 D Doesn't meet the criterion

Criterion No	Application Score	Comments
1	A/B	Responses indicated considerable to superior conceptual and analytical skills linked to appropriate strategies and to policy development and strategic planning. Also demonstrated in criterion 5
2	A/B	Responses indicated superior to outstanding ability in both written and oral communication. Many examples very relevant for position being sought.
3	C	Considerable interpersonal skills demonstrated. Also demonstrated in criterion 5. Responses could have been enhanced even more by providing more specific detail of personal skill level in each example
4	C	Mr _____'s examples showed considerable leadership skills while working with a large range of personnel.
5	B	Mr _____ demonstrated excellent skills in Human Resource Management and has had quality experiences that demonstrate his ability within the performance management of staff. He displayed considerable financial management skills in the context of the position being sought.

ADVISING APPLICANTS.

The panel needs to be clear on their assessment of each applicant against the selection criteria. Applicants who have not been shortlisted for interview are entitled to know why they have missed out and may seek feedback later in the selection process. This information is also needed for the selection report. Applicants not shortlisted for interview need to be notified of the outcome of the selection process, however this is not normally done until the recommended applicant is offered the position.

Applicants who have been shortlisted need to be contacted to arrange interview times.

SELECTION PITFALLS

There are some common pitfalls in evaluating and rating applicants. Briefly these are:

First Impression

The appearance or behaviour of the individual (sometimes the way he or she dresses or the layout of his/her application) can bias interviewers for or against an applicant and interfere with the reception of the information presented in the rest of the interview.

Having more than one person conducting the selection process tends to reduce the negative impact.

“Halo” Effect

Sometimes a panel member will be so impressed by an applicant on one criterion that he or she will attribute positive qualities for all other criteria regardless of the evidence. The requirement for panel members to record evidence for each criterion can help to reduce this.

Leniency or Strictness

There are panel members who consistently judge applicants harshly or leniently. For these people it may become difficult to arrive at a final decision because most applicants are rated similarly.

Open discussion by the selection panel members reviewing the criteria and each applicant's performance brings a more factual base to the selection process and minimises global judgements.

Primacy and Recency

This is the tendency to recall the first few applicants and the last few. Those in the middle become blurred in our memory.

Insisting that the panel members make notes during the interview reduces the likelihood of this adversely affecting applicants.

“Outsiders”

Sometimes people who are not so commonly seen in some work groups (eg Aboriginal people, impaired persons and Vietnamese) are seen and described in less favourable terms than those in the majority.

Having a panel made up of members with diverse backgrounds and views can minimise this. Concentrating on factual information collected during the interview can overcome the problem.

Remember : Demonstrated ability to do the job is what you seek from the applicant.



GATHERING FURTHER INFORMATION FOR SHORTLISTED APPLICANTS

CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEWS

As behavioural selection is based on making decisions about future performance on the basis of past behaviour, it is critical that the interview situation obtains good information regarding an applicant's past actions. The following points will maximise the chances of obtaining quality behavioural information from applicants.

THE ROLE OF THE PANEL CONVENOR DURING INTERVIEWS

The panel convenor's main role is to protect the process to ensure that all candidates are treated in a consistent manner, which is fair, equitable and courteous at all times. The convenor has the primary responsibility to ensure that the interviews run smoothly and are conducive to obtaining sound behavioural information. The panel convenor needs to ensure that the interview situation is appropriate and that the interviews are conducted in a manner that reflects the professionalism of the organisation.

PREPARE THE PHYSICAL SETTING.

The reliability of interviews will be improved if they are conducted in a manner that minimises the threat and discomfort of applicants. Some of the factors, which will assist this, are listed below:

- ✓ have a suitable office booked for the period of the interviews and confirm its exclusive availability for the duration of the interviews;
- ✓ ensure there is access to the building and the office for those with disabilities;
- ✓ ensure a reception service is available so that when applicants arrive they know they are in the correct location and provide them with a comfortable and preferably private place to wait until called for the interview;
- ✓ arrange the physical setting so that barriers are avoided and the environment is conducive to obtaining the best information from applicants. Conducting interviews around a large round table may be the most useful situation. Care should be taken to remove the "them and us" feel of the interview room. Make sure that the location of the interviews is physically comfortable;
- ✓ if there is a telephone in the office make sure calls are diverted during the interviews, or if this is not possible, disconnect the telephone;
- ✓ make sure all mobile phones are turned off.

INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

Beginning the Interview

Try to put the applicant at ease. The panel convenor should start the interview by:

- greeting the applicant and ushering them into the interview area;
- thanking the applicant for attending the interview;
- finding out the applicant's preferred form of address;
- introducing the other panel members;
- explaining the purpose and structure of the interview and indicating that notes will be taken by panel members;
- reminding the interviewee that questions will be about the selection criteria; and
- telling the applicant that he/she will have the opportunity to ask questions and/or add any additional information.

During The Interview

The panel members ask their prepared questions of all the applicants. The panel convenor is still required to control this part of the interview by ensuring:

- that the applicants are questioned against the same selection criteria;
- that all applicants are asked the same questions (probing is possible and usually necessary);
- selection criteria are covered in the pre-arranged order;
- there is no discrimination;
- all panel members ask questions; and
- that appropriate eye contact and note taking is maintained.

Any member of the panel can probe for further information. The panel convenor should check whether panel members have finished probing before directing the next question be asked.

At The End of the Interview

In concluding the interview, the panel convenor should leave the applicant with a comfortable and positive feeling about the interview. A suggested format is:

- telling the applicant that the questions are finished;
- inviting questions and/or ask the applicant whether she/he has anything to add that has not already been covered;
- advising the applicant of the next step in the selection process, the approximate timing and when the next contact can be expected;
- thanking the applicant for attending the interview, escort the applicant to the reception area and farewell;

When the applicant leaves the room, the panel should initially use this time to fill out their notes made during the interview. The convenor should then coordinate a systematic evaluation of the evidence and try to assist the panel to come to a consensus on the information presented. Remember you are making a decision on the basis of the information presented to you, not on your impression of the applicant.

CONTROLLING THE PACE OF THE INTERVIEW

Differences in applicants' communication styles and levels of comfort during interviews make it difficult to judge the time required for interviews. A key to good interviewing is providing sufficient time between scheduled interviews. This accommodates the different lengths that interviews might run and secondly allows the panel to thoroughly process the information obtained. It also allows the panel to maintain its energy and focus for subsequent interviews.

For applicants who give too little information the panel can draw out more complete responses by probing and asking applicants to expand on the detail of the responses given. If the candidate is providing generalities, asking for a specific example often allows more relevant detail to emerge.

For applicants who tend to give too much information or wander off track there are a number of strategies to assist in controlling the situation.

- Provide feedback to the candidate on their responses.
Eg. "That is the amount of detail of response we need."
- Talking with the applicant. While the applicant is still talking, interrupting to redirect the direction of the information.
Eg. "John you mentioned the development of the policy, could you perhaps explain what was involved in that?"
- Summarising and redirecting.
Eg. "Jan you have given a good overview of what was happening at the time of the incident, could you perhaps now outline what you did in the situation?"

OPPORTUNITY TO CONSOLIDATE LEARNING

EXERCISE

For a panel you are likely to convene, write down the key points that you would cover at the beginning of the interview.

Write down the key points that you would use to conclude the interview.



RECORDING THE INFORMATION DURING INTERVIEWS

It is important to accurately record the information an applicant provides during the interview. Without an accurate record, panels can easily forget information about specific responses that have been provided by different interviewees. The greater the time that elapses between the interview and the final decision, then the greater the likelihood that important information can be forgotten. The danger is that if specific information is not recorded, then the interviewer may rely only on an overall impression of the applicant, rather than on specific evidence related to the criteria.

As the information gathered during the interview process is intended to help the panel to identify the most competitive applicants, the panel must take notes during and immediately after the interview.

Whilst this is not an easy task, it is absolutely necessary to ensure that quality selection decisions are made. It also aids enormously in the writing of the selection report, as well as in providing appropriate, relevant feedback.

Effective note taking also provides proof that a panel and an organisation have undertaken fair selection processes. This information can provide a critical reference point for either internal or external review of decision-making processes.

Specific notes should be taken during the interview by all panel members. It is a skill that develops with practice.

FRAMEWORKS

When using a behavioural approach to interviewing, a framework to record the information can assist in obtaining the type of information required to make accurate decisions.

As outline in the shortlisting section, some of the more commonly used frameworks are.

S ituation - <i>ex. to be in context.</i>	W hat
T ask - <i>complexity.</i>	H ow
A ction - <i>process (how)</i>	O utcome
R esult	

S ituation	C ontext
A ction	A ction
O utcome	R esult

The framework components outline the information contained in a behavioural example. A completed framework guides the interviewer towards a full understanding

of each past experience an applicant describes. Using a question sheet similar to the example provided on pages 25 and 26 can greatly assist in the interview process.

When recording specific information related to each component, it is much easier for an interviewer to identify "gaps" in their information, which can lead to them asking probing questions for additional information. For example, if an interviewee describes a situation and what actions they took to deal with the situation, but doesn't indicate the result or outcome of their actions, then an interviewer can look at their notes and identify the need to probe by asking "What was the outcome or result of those actions?"

TAKING EFFECTIVE NOTES

The panel should write specific phrases related to each aspect of the behavioural framework that is being used. This information may be recorded using personal shorthand of key phrases or specific elements of the behavioural framework being used. Whatever technique is used, it is vital that the panel member records specific, concrete information rather than evaluative impressions, such as "Seems organised". It would be better to record notes such as "identified tasks that needed to be completed", "prioritised tasks", "met the deadline and came in under budget" as these provide much more significant information than a global impression.

Using the Framework

The following provide some examples of the types of information that may be recorded under each of the aspects of a CAR framework.

Context	"working as member of a committee", "no previous conference ever held", "set budget and timeline of only two months" "responsible for overall organisation of conference" "conference for 400 people"
Actions	"identified tasks to be completed", "made an action plan with timeline", "prioritised longer term, medium term and short term tasks", "co-opted volunteers, delegated tasks"
Results	"conference ran smoothly", "all tasks completed within time and budget", "asked to run next conference owing to success"

Recording and Eye Contact

One of the dilemmas facing panels in the interview process is how to take accurate notes at the same time as maintaining positive interested body language signals such as eye contact. The need to keep eye contact should not get in the way of taking accurate notes.

There are plenty of opportunities during the interview of establishing and maintaining eye contact with the interviewee, such as during pauses, when asking clarifying or probing questions, or when moving to the next question.

Informing the interviewee

It is very good practice for the panel convenor to inform the interviewee that the panel will be taking notes during the interview. This helps reduce some of the discomfort associated with the process of note taking. The panel convenor should say in the introduction and explanation of the interview process something like "We'll be taking notes during the interview, in order to ensure that we have an accurate picture and record of your relevant experiences. We hope that this won't be too off-putting for you, especially when there may be times that we will all have our heads down at our notes!"

Sharing the note-taking

Some panels have found that it is useful to have the panel member who has asked the original question to maintain the greatest amount of eye contact during the response, whilst the other panel members take very comprehensive notes. The extra information gained is then shared amongst the panel members immediately after the applicant has left the interview. If this is a strategy that is adopted, it is vital that panel members only share specific information and not their evaluation of the information. This is to ensure that each panel member makes an *independent* assessment of the information gathered prior to group discussion.

Some panels have also used a scribe whose role in the interview process is only to take notes. Whilst this does allow all panel members to maintain eye contact, there are some costs associated with this strategy. These are:

- The interviewee may be intimidated by having a person who is not taking an active part in the interview. The person's role needs to be clearly explained by the convenor at the start of the process.
- The panel has to have absolute confidence that the recorder will record specific, objective information and not filter out information due to personal bias.
- It deprives the panel of the opportunity to look to their notes and identify the gaps in information that may require a probing or clarifying question.

CONFIDENTIAL
QUESTION SHEET

INTERVIEWEE'S NAME :

SELECTION CRITERION:

QUESTION:

CONTEXT:

Examples of possible probing questions could include: What was the main issue? Why was it an issue? What were other variables that you needed to consider? Tell me more about....

ACTIONS:

Examples of possible probing questions could include: What did you actually do? What was your specific contribution? How did you deal with it? What specific skills were you using?

RESULTS:

Examples of possible probing questions could include: What was the result? What did your actions achieve? What indicators did you have of success?



CONFIDENTIAL QUESTION SHEET

INTERVIEWEE'S NAME: _____

SELECTION CRITERION:

QUESTION:

General Comments:

Context:

Context:

Actions:

Actions:

Results:

Results:

PANEL CONVENOR'S CHECKLIST

1. Preparing the physical setting

Have you:

- Arranged a suitable room?
- Ensured its exclusive use?
- Checked access for disabled?
- Diverted phone calls and turned off mobile phones?
- Arranged appropriate seating?

2. Preparing questions

Have you:

- Prepared behavioural questions to cover the criteria of interest?
- Ensured panel members agree on questions?
- Identified the information required from the questions?
- Determined whether applicants will have prior access to questions?

3. Structuring the Interview

Have panel members:

- Been briefed on the process?
- Been allocated questions?
- Sufficient information recording sheets?

Have you:

- Scheduled the interviews to allow sufficient time for and between interviews?

4. Notifying applicants

Have you:

- Ensured applicants have been notified of the interview times and requirements of the interview?

5. Preparing work related exercises (if applicable)

Have you:

- Tested your exercise for fairness and effectiveness?
- Notified applicants of the use of the exercise?

6. Recording the evidence

Have you:

- Ensured all panel members have discussed the information candidates provided?
- Recorded the information?
- Documented the information in regard to the various selection criteria?

7. Checking Referee

Have you:

- Informed the referees of the selection criteria for the position?
- Only recorded data relevant to the selection criteria?
- Sought applicant permission for contact with referees not nominated by the applicant?
- Verified that your notes are an accurate record of the referee's comments?



PREPARING QUESTIONS

Questioning technique

Ask questions about:

- past behaviour (but not beliefs, feelings or speculations)
- the process of doing tasks / duties.

All panel members should collaborate to develop and refine the interview questions. Once the questions have been finalised, they should be allocated to the various panel members. This involves all panel members in the interview. The questions you develop should:

- be agreed to by the panel members prior to the interviews;
- be numbered and ordered;
- be asked of all applicants;
- be able to be asked of all applicants;
- directly examine the applicant's attributes against the selection criteria

Questions should wherever possible produce responses that are capable of verification.

In forming questions for interview the panel should endeavour to use open questions. 'Open' questions allow a wide range of possible responses to the person answering the question.

eg. What did you do in your last position to contribute to team work?

'Closed' questions narrow the range of responses available to the person answering the question. At the extreme you may only wish for a "yes" or "no" answer.

eg. Did you finish the project on time?

Writing questions from selection criteria

Things to keep in mind:

- ◆ Questions should be open ended but designed to get specific answers.
- ◆ Questions should be based on the selection criteria.
- ◆ Questions should not limit an applicant's response to the criterion by either being;
 - too specific.
 - combining two selection criteria into the one question.
- ◆ Avoid general hypothetical questions but encourage answers based on the applicant's past behaviours. Questions that ask the applicant to project into the position for which they are applying but require them to base their response on past experience may be appropriate.
- ◆ Keep questions brief and to the point.
- ◆ Avoid discriminatory questions.
- ◆ Interview questions are to elicit information, not to intimidate or catch applicants out.

EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS TESTING SELECTION CRITERIA

POSITION: PERSONNEL OFFICER

- Duties:
- Provides an advisory service on personnel policies, practices and procedures and routine industrial enquires and assists employees and management with personnel related matters.
 - Arranges the advertising, selection and filling of vacant positions and acting appointments through expressions of interest.

A criterion that is essential to perform these duties would be:

Criterion 3: A demonstrated ability to work in a team environment.

Possible questions:

1. Please give us an example that you feel demonstrates your ability to work effectively in a team.
2. Please outline to the panel a range of team situations in which you have been actively involved.
3. Please outline to the panel a situation where you have contributed to the good functioning of a team. What did you do to assist the team functioning?

OPPORTUNITY TO CONSOLIDATE LEARNING

EXERCISE

Using the selection criteria from the Job Description used for the shortlisting exercise, write some interview questions.



PROBING QUESTIONS

Any member of the panel can ask a probing question when they are seeking;

- Clarification of any aspect of an applicant's response.
- More specific information from the applicant. (Based on the panel member's behavioural example notes.)

Probing questions can be open ended or closed depending on the type of information required.

Using 'CAR' to probe

The structure of a behavioural example can be useful in assisting panel members to probe for further information. If information is recorded by each panel member using a structure such as STAR, SAO or CAR, gaps in the information can then be probed. The following are typical probing questions that may emerge from an interviewee's response to the panel's initial question.

Context:

"So where did that happen?"

"You said the section had gone through some changes. Tell us a bit more about that."

"So what was your role?"

"I'm not clear on what the purpose of the meeting was. Can you clarify that?"

Actions

"Could you give us more detail about what you actually did in that situation?"

"That's interesting. Tell us a bit more about that."

"So how did you do that?"

Results

"So what was the outcome of the project?"

"Did you get any feedback on your monitoring strategies?"

Probing questions are not questions that can be planned for. They emerge as a consequence of any panel member who requires further information to be clear as to the quality of the response being given by the interviewee. Not all responses need to be probed as the interviewee may have provided sufficient information.

over that!

INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS

Questions can be deemed to be inappropriate if they;

- are discriminatory
- are not related to the selection criteria
- take the interviewee off on a tangent rather than focus on relevant information about their ability against the selection criteria.
- are hypothetical and allow the applicant to talk about what they **would** do rather than what they **have done**.

NOTE: Some hypothetical questions can be appropriate if they provide an insight into the process that a person would use or knowledge that a person requires to complete a task effectively. However these questions would have greater validity if the question also required the interviewee to provide evidence linked to past experiences.

Examples of inappropriate questions.

“Do you think you are young enough to handle the physical nature of this position?”

“Is your wife the sort of person who gets involved in community activities?”

“What qualities do you believe you bring to this position?”

“Why did you apply for this position?”

What are your three greatest strengths and your weaknesses?

REFEREE CHECKING

The appropriate use of referees can add greatly to the validity of the selection process. The often held concern that referees will only say good things about the applicant can be largely overcome by asking referees the right types of questions. The aim of referee checking is to gain further information about the applicant's suitability with respect to each criterion. To achieve this you are in effect conducting a mini interview with the referees. This is a more detailed process than the information provided in referee reports.

There are two types of information that can be sought from referees:

- verification of information that applicants have stated in their written applications or at interview; and
- the referee's assessment of the applicant in direct relationship to the criteria for the position.

If referees are asked very specific questions, they are not likely to over or underrate the applicant. As with questions to applicants, if referees are asked for specific behavioural examples, a good picture of an applicant's demonstrated abilities will emerge.

Eg.

"John gave us several examples of showing strong leadership. Could you please tell us about some of the situations where you have observed John displaying leadership?"

or

"Jan told us about the time when she was involved in the setting up of the new management information system. Could you please give us your memory of this project."

Referees should not be asked questions that do not directly relate to the selection criteria.

If unnominated referees are used, candidates should be informed prior to the referees being contacted to provide them with an opportunity to comment on the referee's objectivity or to provide the name of another person who could supply the type of information the panel is seeking.

Research indicates panels are inclined to give undue emphasis to negative information from referees. Be careful that you weigh up all information provided by referees.

It is important that panels verify the accuracy of their interpretation of referee comments. This can be done by verbally restating the notes taken back to the referee or faxing the notes back to the referee to verify their accuracy.



WORK RELATED EXERCISES

A work related exercise is an example of an applicant's work skills and is sample of a person's behaviour. When used as part of a selection process it can often provide additional information for a panel, though panels need to remember it is only a sample of the applicant's behaviour and should be used in conjunction with other sources of information.

Some of criteria which can be assessed using work related exercises are written skills, verbal communication and presentation skills, work organising, computing skills, logical and analytical thinking and fine motor skills.

When developing a work related exercise a panel must be sure that the exercise is actually measuring what it is intend to measure and must be fair to all applicants. For example a word processing exercise that applicants are asked to complete. If the exercise was given using a word processing package that some of the applicants were not familiar with, then the exercise may well be measuring familiarity with packages, rather than underlying work processing skill. It could potentially also be unfairly advantaging internal applicants who are familiar with the organisation's word processing package over external applicants who are familiar with another package.

It is also important that the one work related exercise is not used to gather information on too many selection criteria at the same time. This will often lead to the information being too confusing to be of practical use to the panel.

In developing a work exercise it is important to choose specific tasks which are crucial to the performance of the work role and that are reflected in the selection criteria. It is important to check that the exercise will give valid information. (eg testing the exercise on a competent job performer.) It is also critical that the criteria for evaluating the applicants' performances are clear and valid.

Work related exercises are often better at identifying which applicants will fail at the job, rather than which applicants will succeed.

MAKING A DECISION

All the information from all sources used in the selection process need to be used to make the selection decision and not just the applicants' interview performance.

The quality of the selection decision will be improved when the following points are considered:

- Discuss all applicants in turn. The aim is to ensure that all panel members are working from the same information base in making the decision. Discuss each criterion for each applicant. Discuss and resolve conflicting information between panel members;
- Where the interview information indicates a candidate does not meet the essential criteria, do not consider the applicant further;
- Each panel member should rank the candidates whom they consider to be the top applicants;
- Where there are differing rankings between the panel members, the reasons for these differences should be discussed in an effort to reach a consensus decision;
- All panel members have equal influence on the final decision.

Remember that it is better to seek further information to determine applicants' suitability, and if necessary to re-advertise the position, than to recommend an applicant who may not have the ability to perform the job.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

If the selection panel becomes aware that an applicant has a potential conflict of interest if appointed to the vacant position **it is important that this be disregarded for purposes of a fair merit based selection process.** However, if the candidate with the potential conflict of interest is subsequently the recommended applicant, the situation must be detailed in the selection report and any appointment will be contingent upon the satisfactory resolution of the matter.

A typical example of a potential conflict of interest may be where the applicant has other employment that they wish to continue that may be in conflict with the requirements of the vacant position and/or the Department. There are numerous other examples of potential conflict of interest, and it is strongly recommended that panel members should consult with either the Manager, People Services Branch or the Manager, Workforce Services and Planning and also refer to the following documents (copies available from the People Services Home Page on the Department web):

- Department Code of Conduct;
- Public Sector Code of Ethics;
- Sections 102 and 21 (11) of the Public Sector Management Act 1994.



SELECTION REPORT

Completion of the selection report is an important accountability requirement of the selection process and provides the basis for feedback to applicants.

A detailed selection report fulfils the Public Sector Standard for Recruitment, Selection and Appointment. (i.e. Decisions are capable of review).

The selection report should be an accurate record of the steps taken by the selection panel and documents the decisions made by the panel at each stage of the process. The information provided within the report should be detailed enough to be reviewed by an independent person. The report should be completed by the panel convenor.

As a guide the selection report should cover these areas.

- details of the job to be filled
- selection criteria used
- method of calling for applications
- names and titles of the selection panel
- any special considerations applied (eg weighting of selection criteria)
- a list of applicants and an assessment of those not shortlisted, outlining the selection criteria which precluded them from being considered further
- the list of questions used at interview
- other selection techniques used
- referees comments addressing the selection criteria
- an analysis against the selection criteria of each applicant interviewed
- a comparative assessment at least covering those applicants assessed as suitable
- a clear statement of the recommendation and reasons for the decision the signature of each member of the panel

Note: The report must include whether the second and third etc ranked applicants should be offered the position should the preferred candidate turn down the position. If the panel feels lower ranked applicants are unsuitable, this must be stated and related to criteria which these candidates fail to meet.

COMPLETING THE PROCESS

SUBMITTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS

In most situations the panel is only authorised to make a recommendation for appointment not the appointment itself. Once the recommendation is made the process and the decision need to be ratified by the authorising officer. It is important that the panel does not give the recommended applicant or any other applicant the impression that they are being offered the position until they have been authorised to do so.

An applicant who is given a verbal offer by the panel, who then does not become the official recommended applicant could have the grounds to take legal action for a breach of promise.

FEEDBACK.

Unsuccessful applicants may not understand why they have not been appointed and may feel disappointed about the decision.

The feedback process should focus on:

- The criteria used in the selection process;
- How the applicant performed on each criterion;
- Realistic courses of action available for improving their competitiveness in particular areas.

Usually the convenor provides the feedback to applicants who seek it.

It is desirable that only one person from the panel gives feedback to all those who seek it. Where different panellists give feedback to different applicants the potential exists for different messages to be given and confusion and dissatisfaction to arise.

All feedback must relate to the advertised criteria for the position.

Good feedback is crucial. Many claims of breaches of Public Sector Standards would be avoided if panels gave good constructive feedback. Many unsuccessful applicants put in appeals because they can't get answers from the panels. Practices such as nominating a person to provide feedback who then goes on leave are not helpful! Agencies and panels need to realise that if applicants go to the trouble of putting together comprehensive applications they deserve more than a one sentence feedback saying "You were quite good but you didn't stack up in the management area."

Remember the professionalism of the organisation is demonstrated by the quality of its recruitment and selection processes and the feedback given.



MANAGING THE SUCCESSFUL APPLICANT

Objective:

- To advise candidates of their success and commence managing the new employee.

Panel convenor's responsibilities:

- Once advised by the Manager, Workforce Services and Planning that the recommendation has been accepted, the convenor may contact the successful applicant to provide speedy informal advice of success.

People Services Branch is responsible for:

- Making the offer in writing.
- Ensuring the letter of offer becomes part of the formal employment contract, and as such is clear, accurate and contains no ambiguities.
- Making sure any probation period is clearly detailed as per the initial information to the candidates.

Once the offer has been accepted and the breach of standard period has elapsed without an application for review being lodged, or once the independent review is completed (if an application for review is lodged), the relevant manager should commence planning to provide a sound induction and an IDAPES planning meeting to ensure that there are no false impressions about either the new employee or the work expected of them.

MANAGING THE UNSUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE(S)

Objective:

- To advise people who have not been successful in the selection process of the status of their application.

Unsuccessful candidates have a right through natural justice to know the status of their application. In the first instance, this means advising them that they have not been successful. Note that unsuccessful candidates will not normally be advised of the status of their application until the selection process has been completed and a recommendation made.

People Services Branch are responsible for sending formal written advice to this effect to all candidates. This formal advice will include the following information:

- confirmation that the selection process is completed;
- advice that a recommendation has been made (the naming of the successful applicant may be appropriate);
- advice that feedback is available (and from whom);
- advice that a review procedure exists (except for fixed-term contract appointments of six months or less).



Unsuccessful candidates who have been interviewed should also be personally contacted by a member of the selection panel via telephone in conjunction with sending of the formal notification because:

- This initial direct contact has the potential to reduce criticisms and claims or unfair treatment by providing immediate and personal feedback.
- The unsuccessful candidate(s) will be less discouraged from applying for future positions in the Department for which they may be more suited.
- It acknowledges the effort put in by candidates.
- It shows that the Department is concerned, respectful and professional in its relationships with others.
- It may reduce damaging and unfair criticism of the Department that may deter future candidates from seeking to join the organisation.

Information should generally consist of a brief verbal summary of the areas that the person was not as suitable as the final candidate. The discussion is not an opportunity to review the decision nor is it appropriate for the candidate to present new information to support their case. Candidates should be given the opportunity to make an appointment for more detailed feedback if they indicate they would like to pursue this.

*Note that under the Freedom of Information Act, candidates have the right to access **any** documentation relating to them which is held by the Department of Conservation and Land Management.*