

AN INTERVIEWEE'S GUIDE TO COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEWING

WHAT IS A COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEW?

Competency based interviewing is sometimes known as evidence based interviewing.

The theory behind this style of interviewing is that your past work behaviour is a good predictor of your future job performance. It is used as a tool to discover how your behaviour in a previous role or situation can contribute to your performance in the job you are being interviewed for. You will have the opportunity to use real life, work related experiences as evidence of how you are able to apply the knowledge and ability you claim to have.

As all interviewees for the same post are asked the same non discriminatory questions, this ensures fairness and consistency in the selection process.

HOW CAN I PREPARE?

You will be notified of which competencies are most relevant for the vacancy you are being considered for and you should refer to the Interim Competency Guide for the full definition of the SDS competencies.

The first stage is to then start to collect your evidence. You should spend some time reflecting on your best work achievements over recent times – **e.g.** situations where you feel you have perhaps gone the 'extra mile' or where you have managed to turn around a very difficult situation. (Remember that you can also use evidence from outwith the workplace if you feel it better demonstrates your competency in a particular area – e.g. perhaps where you carry out voluntary work or sit on a committee. However, it is generally better to use work based evidence where you can).

Make a list of these situations and jot down some notes following the STAR technique described below.

In addition to the competency based questions, if you are in a specialist or technical role you are also likely to be asked some technical or specialist questions. These are used to assess your knowledge level in a certain subject area so you should ensure your specialist knowledge is as up-to-date as possible.

HOW DO I ANSWER THE QUESTIONS?

Competency based questions will generally start 'Tell me about a time when' or 'give an example of a situation where you

In responding to a competency based question, the most important thing is to give a real example of something that actually happened to you. Don't talk in broad terms about how you generally tackle these sorts of situations or what you would do in a hypothetical situation. You need to be able to talk about a specific example in quite a lot of detail.

You should remember that some of the examples you have thought about as part of your preparation, will provide evidence against a number of different competencies (e.g. communication, team working, analysis and problem solving) so when answering interview questions, choose the example that you feel demonstrates strongest evidence against the competency you are being asked about. *(NB The interviewer will generally introduce the competency that is being covered before going on to pose the interview question. This will provide you with a steer as to the type of evidence the interviewer is looking for.)*

A common mistake is that interviewees have a pre-planned answer that they want to get in. That's fine if it answers the question. However, if you come out with an example that's really good but does not answer the question, the interview panel will have difficulty in marking you.

A good way to structure your answer is by using the **STAR** technique:

S	Situation	(what was the situation you were in?)
T	Task	(what was the task you were faced with?)
A	Action	(what was the action you personally took? What were the challenges/obstacles you faced and how did you overcome them?)
R	Result	(what was the outcome following your intervention?)

You must remember to use 'I' statements when replying to competency based questions. The interview panel want to know what **you** did, not what you did as a team and will want to understand what changes happened as a result of **your** actions and what the effects of these actions were on others.

You may also be asked to **reflect** on your actions and could be asked questions such as 'if you had to deal with a similar situation again, what would you do differently?'; 'what have you learned from this experience that would be relevant to this post (you're being interviewed for)?'

When providing your evidence, the interviewer(s) may interrupt you at any point and follow up with all sorts of supplementary or probing questions to get a better understanding of what you did. As a result, any candidate who did not actually experience the situation they are describing will find it very difficult to provide enough detail.

You may wish to use the internet to read up more about this style of interviewing and to obtain some examples of the types of questions that could be asked.