WHAT IS AN ASSESSMENT CENTRE?
An assessment centre is the final part of the selection process that some of the large employers use before making their final choice. It is a series of extended selection procedures. An invitation to attend an assessment centre usually follows on from a first successful interview, which can either be a telephone or face-to-face interview. Employers use a range of activities to help them to ascertain how you will operate and perform in a group setting with your peers.

WHY ARE THEY USED?
Employers are serious about your application at this stage if they have invited you to an assessment centre. They will have invested time and money in you to attend the assessment centre, so they will expect a lot from you. Assessment centres are a more objective way of selecting people for a job. They can enable an employer to build up a fuller picture of the candidate by testing their skills and personality in real work type situations.

WHAT DO THEY INVOLVE?
Assessment centres vary a great deal, from an extended second interview to a series of tests, exercises and interviews over a period of one or two days sometimes involving an overnight stay. They are held either on employer’s premises, in a hotel or at a training/conference centre with four to eight candidates being invited at any one time.
It is a real opportunity for you to demonstrate what you can do and show what you have said you can do in your application, in a variety of situations.
There will be at least one or more assessors observing the group. They will be looking for candidates who can demonstrate good planning and problem solving skills as well as the creativity of your individual ideas. The observers will take notes on your performance and look for evidence of positive and negative behaviour.
An assessment centre will typically include a number of elements:
- Social/informal event – an opportunity to meet people from the organisation and the other candidates
- Information session – more detail about the company and the role
- Interviews/exercises – designed to assess your potential

The activities will have been chosen carefully to reflect the criteria used by the employer in order to diagnose which candidates offer the best match for the job. Avoid the temptation to opt out because you consider the activity to be odd or too silly. You must have a go and enter into the spirit of the task as it will be your attitude and behaviour that will be under observation.
Remember your performance will be measured against the employer’s selection criteria and not against other candidates. All the candidates could be offered a position or none of them. It is important to work in a co-operative and supportive manner with the others in your group as this will pay dividends in the final selection.
Try not to worry over things you think have not gone well at any stage, it is important to move on to the next activity and do your best there as you may have a chance to compensate later on.

TYPES OF ACTIVITY USED
- **Psychometric Tests** - these can be either aptitude or personality tests, timed and taken under examination conditions. Personality questionnaires provide an insight into your personality rather than measure ability and there are no right or wrong answers. The aptitude tests are designed to measure your intellectual ability, most commonly numeracy, verbal and diagrammatic reasoning. See our handout ‘Psychometric Tests’
- **Interviews** - This could be a one-to-one or a panel discussion but is always a two way process. See our handouts ‘Develop your Interview Skills’ and ‘Interviews’
- **Presentation** - is a popular choice at assessment centres as it will show an employer your ability to research, understand and communicate effectively to a diverse audience. See our handout ‘Making Presentations’
- **Group Activities** - these can vary in content from very practical tasks to working on a problem that is closely related to the job role but always with a clear goal. Candidates may be asked to work together to build a tower from plastic cups or to develop and present a marketing campaign for a new product within a fixed time period. Selectors will be looking for your ability to work effectively with other people. See our handout ‘Group Activities’
- **Case Studies** - You will be provided with information related to a particular situation and asked to make recommendations within a fixed time limit. Your
judgement, ability to analyse information from a business scenario and express your ideas in writing or verbally in a clear and logical manner is what is being tested. See the CD on ‘How to Crack a Case Study’ (Bain & Company) in our reference library – ask at the reception desk in the Careers Service for this

- **In-Tray/E-Tray Exercises** - These are business simulation exercises to test your ability to deal with a lot of information in a limited time period. You are being tested for your time management, planning and organising skills. You may also be given an appropriate work role and expected to deal with ‘typical paperwork’ like memos, reports, etc. for that job. See our handout ‘Written Exercises’

**NO OFFERS AFTER ASSESSMENT CENTRES?**

If you are getting as far as an assessment centre then your applications are fine but something must be going wrong during the final stage of the selection process.

Don't be afraid to ask for help.

- You can ask the employer for feedback on your performance and most are happy to provide it.
- Reflect on how well you prepared and if you were faced with a similar situation again, what you would do differently and how could you better demonstrate the competencies/qualities for the role that you were being tested for at the assessment centre.
- Talk to a Careers Consultant if it is not obvious how you could improve your performance in the future. Discussing and reflecting on your performance with the Careers Consultant can often help identify the problem and find a change of strategy.

Remember, you were very close. Practice makes perfect, so stick at it!

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

Available from the Careers Service:

- **‘At the Assessment Centre’ DVD** - provides an insight into the range of activities which take place at assessment centres. This and other videos are available via the Careers Service website - [www.imperial.ac.uk/careers](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers)
- **Handouts** - ‘Assessment Centres’, ‘Making Presentations’, ‘Psychometric Tests’ and ‘Written Exercises’ – available online or to take away from the Careers Library
- **Careers Service events** - each year we organise a comprehensive programme of careers talks, skills workshops, including ones on Assessment Centres, designed to enhance your chances of success in the selection process. This information is available online from the careers website – JobsLive and in the ‘Career Choice’ publication.

- **Online** - The Careers Service website - [www.imperial.ac.uk/careers](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers) has a section on assessment centres, as does Prospects – [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk), follow the links for ‘careers advice’ from the front page.

For information on the disclosure of disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia please see the information on the Careers Service website: [www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure)