

Assessment Centres

WHAT IS AN ASSESSMENT CENTRE?

An assessment centre is a combination of interviews and other selection activities such as presentations, group exercises and written tasks. It can be from half a day to one or two days long and a number of candidates are invited to take part. An invitation to an assessment centre follows a successful first round (or rounds) of interview. An assessment centre is expensive for an employer to put on, so by this stage of the process they only invite candidates they believe have a reasonable chance of success. It's important to go well-prepared so that you can confirm their positive impression of you.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Assessment centres vary a great deal. You should be told what exactly to expect when you are invited to one. In general you should expect:

- Social/informal events – for example a networking lunch, a drinks reception or downtime between exercises with the other candidates. Be aware that these are just as much a part of the assessment as the other elements. They test your ability to network and act professionally.
- Information session or tour – a chance to learn more about the organisation and the role and perhaps see where you would be working. Again, this is part of the selection so be prepared to look interested, be friendly and ask sensible questions.
- Interviews/activities – these are used to test for various abilities that link to the role and organisation you have applied for. See below for more detail.

TOP TIPS

1. Remember that you are being measured against the selection criteria and not the other candidates. It is perfectly possible for all the candidates at your assessment centre to be hired – they may be your future colleagues! Therefore, work in a co-operative and supportive manner with the others in your group.
2. Try not to worry if one element does not go as well as you would have hoped on the day. Keep a positive mind-set as you move into the next activity. You are being assessed on how you do throughout the whole assessment centre, and

a good performance in one part can compensate. Do your best in each part.

3. Sometimes some of the activities may seem silly or childish, for example constructing something from Lego with a group. In fact, all the activities have been chosen carefully to reflect the criteria used by the employer e.g. communication skills and teamwork. It's your attitude and behaviour that are being observed, so enter into the spirit of each task.

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 handout '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 'Giving 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 SUPPORT

Available from the Careers Service:

- **Careers Service website** section on Assessment Centre Activities: www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/assessment/activities
- **'At the Assessment Centre' online** - 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/resources/videos
- **Prospects website** - www.prospects.ac.uk - look for 'interview tips' under 'Careers Advice'
- **Reference books** - including: 'Succeeding at Assessment Centres in a Week'; 'How to Succeed at Assessment Centres'; 'Second Interviews and Assessment Centres – Going all the Way!'; 'How to Succeed at Interviews and other Selection Methods', Careers Group, University of London.
- **Careers Service events** - each year we plan talks and workshops which are designed to enhance your chances of success in the application process - for details, see [JobsLive*](#)
- For information on the disclosure of disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia please see information on the Careers Service website: www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure

* www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/jobslive

