

Group Activities

Group activities are used at assessment centres which normally last for one or two days. These exercises form part of the selection process. Employers use a range of exercises to help them to ascertain how you operate and perform in a group setting with your peers. The exercises are designed to assess whether you have the skills and qualities which meet the employer's requirements - the ability to work effectively with others, leadership qualities, as well as your ability to generate ideas in a group, and in particular the qualities that make for an effective team-player. You might be asked to do a variety of group tasks so that the recruiters can see how you work in different settings. These activities are most likely to be observed very closely as part of the assessment centre.

TYPES OF ACTIVITY

Group tasks - These can vary in content from very practical tasks, to working on a problem that is closely related to the type of work for which you are applying, but there is always a clear goal. Candidates may be asked to work together to construct a bridge out of plastic bricks or to develop and present a marketing campaign for a new product within a fixed time period.

On occasions, members of the group or team may be allocated different roles and have to take responsibility for particular aspects of the tasks. For example, the group might have to prepare a set of recommendations regarding the relocation of a factory and each member of the group has a brief to represent a particular department within the organisation such as finance, production and sales. The information that you have been given might include details that no-one else has and vice versa. You may also, in your brief, be told that you need to achieve an outcome that might partly conflict with some or all of the other group members. The recruiter will want to observe how well you can communicate, negotiate and co-operate within the group to reach a satisfactory outcome that is acceptable to everyone. This is often more important than whether you complete the task. At the end of a group task, you will normally have to present your findings or decisions to the assessors. As with any group activity, ensure that you get involved, however silly you may consider the task to be.

Group discussions - The group, usually of four to eight people, would normally be given a particular topic or topics to discuss. This is the most common type of group exercise used at assessment centres. These topics may be of a very general

nature related to current affairs or a subject relevant to the employer.

Employers are increasingly asking groups to discuss a subject related to a case study that you are presented with or asked to read. You will be informed of a time limit for the discussion and often you will be expected to reach a unanimous decision by the end of the allocated time. The main objective of the exercise is to observe your behaviour in the group and not whether the group came to a decision.

WHAT ARE THE ASSESSORS LOOKING FOR?

Whatever the group task, recruiters are observing how you interact with others. Are you able to show that you can work well as a member of a team and make some valuable contribution? Are you able to persuade others to accept your point of view? Don't assume that the successful candidate is the one who does all the talking and tries to dominate the group. It is important that you show that you can listen to others, and using the ideas of others to reach a goal is vital.

There will be at least one or more assessors observing the group who will be looking for candidates who can demonstrate good planning and problem solving skills as well as the creativity of your individual ideas. They will take notes on your performance and look for evidence of positive and negative behaviour.

HINTS AND TIPS

- Make sure that you are clear about what you have to do in the group.
- Start by reading right through any information which you are given and check on time limits. Try to keep the group to time. It can be easy to become so involved in the task that you overrun.
- Although you don't have to be the first to speak, do join in towards the start of the activity. It will help you get underway and you'll feel less nervous.
- Show that you are listening to others by acknowledging their contribution. This could be by nodding, smiling, summarising or developing their ideas or asking appropriate questions.
- Try a subtle way of encouraging other members of the group to get involved and make their contributions. Don't show your frustration when others are constantly talking and trying to dominate the group, instead acknowledge their



contribution and then suggest that others have their say but always in a friendly way with a smile.

- Avoid taking on a persona that you think they are looking for rather than being the person you are at your best. It could make you come across as muddled.
- You may feel that the task is really irrelevant to the job, for example, trying to build a vehicle to transport a tennis ball out of a children's construction kit! However, whatever you are asked to do, show a real interest and be involved. The assessors know the reason for the task and it is your attitude and behaviour in that situation that they will be observing.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PREPARATION

Reading the trade or professional press can help you prepare for a discussion group where you might be talking about current issues in industry. Try to read a broadsheet newspaper on a regular basis leading up to a selection centre and check relevant websites as this may bring you up to date on any developments particularly affecting the sector or the organisations.

Make a conscious effort to actively contribute to seminars, tutorials and project group meetings, as well as student union/society/club meetings.

If you want to get some real 'hands-on' experience of group activities, look out for the "Employer Led Skills Workshops" programme in the autumn and spring term on JobsLive.

There are also a series of careers workshops on assessment centres that the Careers Service runs during the autumn and spring terms.

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

