Teagasc Interview Guidelines

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1. INTRODUCTION

Thank you for sitting on this interview board for Teagasc**. The recruitment and selection process is a critical process to ensure that Teagasc continue to recruit talented and diverse staff.** This document will guide you through the interview process and help you as you prepare for the day of interview. For queries, please contact Tanya Egan, Recruitment Services Manager (Tanya.egan@teagasc.ie or 076 1112452)

2. PLAN THE INTERVIEW

Your interview questions should be prepared in advance of the interviews. When preparing your interview questions, you should draw on the job specification to ensure that the questions you ask are relevant to the job. You may consult with the relevant Hiring Manager in advance of the interviews to assist you in preparing questions relevant to the role.

Teagasc uses a Competency-Based approach to interviewing. This seeks evidence of how a candidate performed in the past as a means to predicting future behavior.

These interviews are based on finding out whether or not a person has the competencies required to do the job. Competency is defined as the behaviours that employees must have or must acquire in order to achieve high levels of performance. Competencies represent the language of performance in an organisation, articulating both the expected outcomes of an individual's efforts and the manner in which these activities are carried out. Performance is not just measured by WHAT was achieved but also by HOW it was achieved.

3. FORMAT OF THE INTERVIEW

Introduction & Career to date:
It is recommended that the Chairperson commence the interview by introducing the Board Members to the candidate and providing the candidate with an overview of the format that the interview will take. The emphasis during the first few minutes will be on putting the candidate at ease. It may help to remind candidates of the following points:

- that the Board will be using the information supplied in the Application form in addition to the competency interview
- what the role of each Board Member is and the competency area they will assess
- that questions may be asked about the the candidates' career to date
- the importance of putting forward your own personal contribution at all stages;
- that the candidate will have an opportunity to add information and/or ask questions at the end of the interview;
- that the interview board may interrupt candidates in order to get through the range of questions
- that interview board members will take notes during the interview

Once the initial introductions are complete, the Chairperson should start with a review of the candidate's career to date or other such introductory question relating to career to date. It is important to note that the time allocated for this is quite limited (for example 5 minutes). Themes to address during this part of the interview may comprise:

- Range of experiences
- Career Choices - what influenced them to make those choices
- Roles/ responsibilities that they may have had/,scale of their role, who worked with, who they reported to and at what level, what resources they had to manage
- Key learning/ challenges from each job/ role/ period
- Why they have chosen to apply for this role at this particular time

Approach to Competency Based Questioning:
Board Member questions should draw out the relevant skills, abilities, experience and knowledge of the candidate. The key objective is to gain as rounded a picture of the candidate as possible, by

seeking evidence from his/her past experience that will demonstrate his/her ability to meet the challenges of the role for which they are being interviewed. The hiring manager will have prioritized the most important competencies for the role and this will form the basis of how the time is broken up for the interview.

In the interview you are determining what a candidate actually said or did in given situations to predict their future performance (relative to the competency that you have been asked to cover). Below are some of the best practice guidelines around questioning that you may need to familiarize yourself with.

- Keep to a logical sequence – avoid jumping from one topic to another
- Link each new question to the interviewee's last reply, where appropriate
- Ask one question at a time, keep questions short and avoid multiple questions
- Don't talk too much. Apply the 80/20 rule, i.e. that candidates should do 80% of the talking whilst the interviewer should do 20% only. Remember to listen and to concentrate on what is being said and on the meaning behind the words.
- Get the candidate to give specific examples of situations rather than hypothetical examples. Remember that the candidate is likely to be aware of the 'right' response and want to succeed in getting the job. In answering a hypothetical question they will naturally try to give you the answer they know you want. Actual examples make this more difficult and give you a better insight into a person's actual work behavior.
- Use open-ended questions to invite a full reply.
- Use nondirective questioning – questions should not infer an acceptable or correct answer. Candidates are anxious to make a good impression and will be looking for clues that allow them to present themselves in the best possible light. An example of a directive question: I expect you found that to be a valuable experience? Non-directive: Perhaps you could tell me what, if anything, you gained from that experience?
- Avoid asking leading questions e.g. you didn't let the individual get away with breaking the rule did you?
- Find out the 'why' behind actions. Do not assume.
- Emphasise the parts of the candidate's background where they have the greatest chance to show the behavior sought. You will source this information on their application form.
- Vary the construction and phrasing of the questions so that they are not repetitious.
- Start with broader questions about a background area.
- Ask to have technical jargon clarified where necessary.
- Do not test out assumptions by offering guesses about the facts – ask about the facts.
- Phrase questions affirmatively rather than apologetically.
- Avoid collecting information not relevant to the targeted criteria. Good planning is key.

Interview board members are required to systematically **probe** candidates' on their experience using 'what' / 'where' / 'when' type questions and seeking out examples that help the interview board to understand the context and background to the topic under discussion. From the example that the candidate has provided it is important to understand;

- the challenges / level of complexity of the example they have provided
- the key players i.e. who else was involved
- the actual responsibility of the candidate/ involvement of others

Don't take what a candidate says on face value. Explore the actual personal contribution of the candidate, the obstacles that had to be overcome and the outcome feedback received. Don't allow the candidate to theorise, or give you the text-book answer and endeavor to establish what they learned from the experience and how they could apply this learning to other situations i.e. added value. Candidates should be able to talk comfortably about the relevance of their experience to other problems / situations in a wider context - What parallels would they draw?

For all experiences put forward, they should be linked to their relevance to the role for which the candidate is being interviewed – what is the relevance / how is it relevant / how does it prepare you for what you may be presented with / what will you bring to the table / situation (e.g. strengths / skills). What have you learned that will help you in the role ... How will you deal with x situation...

4. DURING THE INTERVIEW

Best practice guidelines to apply during the interview are:

- Maintain pace of control
- Use “How?” and “What?” questions to prompt examples and get to the real motives and feelings. “Why?” questions place more pressure on people because they suggest that justification or defence is required. “Why?” questions will probe and drill down to root causes and feelings, but use with care as this is a high-pressure form of questioning. Your aim and responsibility as an interviewer is to understand the other person and not to intimidate, which does not facilitate understanding.
- Maintain eye contact
- Be prepared to reflect and summarise
- Maximise your listening – minimise your talking (80:20 rule)
- Treat all candidates equally
- Probe the application form to clarify any unclear points
- Allow the interviewee to clarify any questions or their understanding of the questions

5. CLOSING THE INTERVIEW (Chairperson)

Best practice guidelines for closing the interview are:

- Thank the candidate
- Invite the candidate to ask questions or add any information
- Provide a timescale for notifying candidates of outcome
- Clarify any additional points that are important to the role (e.g. location of the post, if there is travel involved etc.)

6. NOTETAKING

From a best practice perspective, it is important that interview board members take comprehensive notes during each interview as these notes are required to support a fair and accurate rating of each candidate on each of the competency areas following the interview. Note-taking is normally rotated between the interview board members to allow the person who is not asking the questions to take the notes. Interview board members are advised to write a summary of what is said, and not an interpretation of what is said or not verbatim every word that is said. These summary notes are an objective record of the interview and may be used as evidence and justification for any decisions made, should the decision of the board be questioned.

The Freedom of Information Acts gives candidates the right to access the reasons for decisions which affect them, and this includes access to their interview record (scores achieved and notes taken during interview). Board members are reminded that candidates may observe members of the interview board making informal notes during the interview and may, as sometimes happens, request a copy of these notes to be made available to them as well as the formal record of the interview. The board are advised to provide a summary comment for each candidate at the end of the evaluation to capture the key points relating to their rating at the interview. This comment will be provided as feedback to candidates on request, and is particularly important in situations where the individual has been unsuccessful at interview. In summary:

- Notes should be factual and no opinions about candidates or what they say should be captured.
- Notes should only be written on the official note taking form which is supplied in the interview pack. Notes can be typed or handwritten.
- Write notes only on the front side of the form provided.
- It is imperative that they are legible and that each note page is signed and dated by the person who took the notes – electronic signatures are acceptable.

7. SCORING

Use the Teagasc Interview Marking Sheet to score candidate responses against the specific competencies. Consider the following when scoring:

- Similarity – the more similar the example to the target job, the better it predicts performance.
- Impact – some situations are more meaningful or significant.
- Recency – recent behaviour should be given more weight – but all things being equal, this criterion does not carry as much weight as similarity and impact.

Other considerations include:

- The importance of the criteria you are evaluating – some criteria will have more weight than others.
- Trainability – some skills and competencies are more trainable than others,
- Motivational Fit – this is your evaluation of whether or not a candidate will "want" to do the job.

As you are interviewing as part of an Interview Board, the assessment from each interviewer needs to be discussed and a consensus mark reached. The Chair of the interview board is responsible for co-ordinating this discussion and ensuring all perspectives are heard. This open discussion will ensure fairness, objectivity and accuracy. The Teagasc Interview Marking Sheet with the consensus mark is then completed. This must be signed (electronic signatures are acceptable) by all those who participated on the interview board.

8. AFTER THE INTERVIEW

The following documentation should be returned to the External Service Provider/relevant Teagasc HR Officer by the Chairperson of the interview board:

- Interview Marking Sheet
- All notes taken
- Any additional documentation printed by you in preparation for interviews should be carefully shredded by you on completion of the process. This is a Teagasc GDPR requirement.

The results of the interview should remain confidential and should only be communicated by HR except where otherwise agreed.

9. DISCRIMINATION - THE LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

The Employment Equality Acts, 1998-2008 prohibits discrimination on nine grounds in relation to employment as follows:

- Gender
- Civil Status
- Family Status
- Age
- Disability
- Race
- Sexual Orientation
- Religion
- Membership of the Traveller community

Discrimination is described in the Act as the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person is, has been or would be treated, in a comparable situation on any of the nine grounds. The Act outlaws discrimination in relation to and within employment.

10. DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Teagasc is heavily invested and supportive of having a diverse and inclusive working environment. Interview board members can update themselves on Teagasc diversity and gender strategies and action plans at this link.