Interview Tips

Interviews are a crucial part of the recruitment process for all organisations. Their purpose is to give the interviewer(s) a chance to assess your suitability for the role and for you to demonstrate your abilities and personality. As this is a two-way process, it is also a good opportunity for you to ask questions and to make sure the organisation and position are right for you.

These are the topic areas included in this document.

- Types of Interview
- Preparation
- Making a good Impression
- Interview Questions
- Ending Your Interview Positively
- Interview Problems

Once you have sent your application in it is essential that you maintain a standard of professionalism whilst in the process of organising and attending interviews. Make sure you return all telephone calls or emails, even if it is to say that you are no longer available for an interview. Let CPP know if you cannot attend an interview, for SBAA vacancies telephone 2596 3984, for BFC vacancies telephone 2596 2553 or 2596 3456. Apart from the fact that this is a basic courtesy, you never know when you might encounter the same individuals again.

**Types of Interview**

Interviews can take many different forms. The interviews carried out by SBAA and BFC boards are done in a Competency based format. The interview board of interviewers normally consists of a Chairperson, co-ordinating questions, often the Line Manager, and another, either an independent individual from the working area or a subject matter expert.

Core Competences provide a means of bringing together the various components of effective performance - experience, knowledge, attributes, skills, behaviour etc. Importantly they focus on outcomes and results. Core Competences are those that have been identified as being key to effective performance in the MOD, whatever your job or Band. Each competence has a set of effective and ineffective indicators, these are not to be used as a checklist, but they provide indicators of the kind of things we would expect to see as good and poor performance in the competence. The MOD has used competency
based process system for some years now, and is a key tool to select people for jobs and to support their training and development.

- **Competency based interviews** - These are structured to reflect the competencies or qualities that an employer is seeking for a particular job, which will have been detailed in the job advert. The interviewer is looking for evidence of your skills and may ask such things as: ‘Give an example of a time you worked as part of a team to achieve a common goal’.

- **Structured interviews** - The interviewer has a set list of questions, and asks all the candidates the same questions.

- **Formal/informal interviews** - Some interviews may be very formal, while others will feel more like an informal chat about you and your experience or interests. Be aware that you are still being assessed, however informal the discussion may seem.

**Preparation**

Preparing for a face-to-face interview

Once you are offered an interview, you should be given the following information, location, directions and start time. If not, do ask to clarify any points that are not clear.

Make sure that **you:**

- double check the time and date of your interview
- know how to get to the venue and how long the journey takes
- plan to arrive early, it is an expectation that you should arrive at least 15 minutes before the start time. Don’t rush in late.

What you may need to take with you:

- The interview letter, with the name(s) of the interviewer(s) and their address and phone number.
- A map of how to get there.
- A note of the key points you want to make and any questions you want to ask.
- A number to call if you are running late (but remember to switch your mobile off before going into the interview).
What to wear:

- Dress appropriately. It is important to look smart for your interview, but you also need to feel comfortable so that you can relax. If you want to wear a suit or equivalent business wear, that is fine, but do choose something clean and smart.
- Decide what to wear well in advance - do not leave it until the morning of the interview. Make sure that it is clean, ironed and ready to wear.
- Make sure your shoes are clean.
- Avoid using an overpowering aftershave or perfume that has a very strong smell. Equally, smokers resist the temptation to have a cigarette directly prior to the interview, as the smell may linger on your clothes.

Remind yourself about you!

Read your application form again, thinking specifically about the qualities the employer is looking for. Work out how best you can demonstrate these to the interviewer(s), and how you can sell yourself at interview. Remember that they have shortlisted you for interview because they are prepared to spend time finding out more about you.

In order to organise your thoughts, you could ask yourself questions such as:

- What does the job involve and why do I want it?
- What qualities do I have that make me suitable?
- What are my key strengths?
- What skills will I need and what skills have I gained from my work-related and extracurricular activities? Think of examples.
- Practice your answers by speaking out loud, get used to hearing your own voice.
- Think about what examples you can give in relation to the core competencies that have been stated in the advert. These are in addition to the ones that you have included on your application form.

Think about yourself and how you match up to the job specification. Most Line Managers will indicate the particular skills they want for an individual post and, in addition, there are core skills which every employer is looking for.

Do not undersell yourself. You can identify your skills by considering the various areas of your life, such as your education, work experience, interests, sport and voluntary work, and
then listing which skills you may have developed in each. This will help you to prepare evidence and think about your answers to the competency-based questions you may be asked at interview. Remember use examples of what you have done not the team you may have worked in, it is all about you and what you have achieved.

Prepare your answers, also remember to prepare any questions you have to ask the board, this is your chance to find out more about the job or department.

Knowledge about the job

It is important that you know as much as possible about the job which you are being interviewed for. If possible, speak to the Line Manager or the person already doing the job. A broad understanding of the types of activities involved in the job will help you. Refer to the job advertisement, job description or specific person noted in the advert.

It will also prepare you for answering questions at interview, and help you to think of some questions to ask the interviewer. Many interviewers will expect you to display some understanding of their business.

Preparation is key - the internet and media means there is no excuse for not knowing about the MOD, its commitments and departments.

Current affairs

We have mentioned the competency based interviews earlier in this document. It is also good to have an overview or general awareness of what is going on in the world, and also locally. What is happening within the Unit, BFC Cyprus and the MOD, etc.

Disability

If you have a disability, remind the interview board of this, they should check the physical access to the premises. If you do not need any special arrangements, it may or may not be appropriate to disclose your disability to your prospective interviewer before or at the interview, although this should have been declared on your Health Declaration Form, when you registered with CPP.

Additional Preparation

You should feel confident and positive, about your upcoming interview, however, do not worry if you feel nervous or apprehensive. Most people feel nervous in these situations and it manifests itself in different ways in different people, which may include a dry mouth, shaky
hands, a fast-beating heart, sleeplessness, sweating, a squeaky voice, or several trips to the loo!

The interviewers will be looking at your potential, they want to find out whether you have the ability, knowledge and motivation to fit into their organisation and make a valid contribution.

Whilst some nerves may be inevitable, there are things you can do to prepare yourself:

- Go through some typical questions and answers with a friend.
- Try to get a good night’s sleep the night before your interview.
- Eat breakfast on the morning of your interview, even if your stomach feels like a washing machine! The food should ultimately help to settle your nerves.
- Try to drink plenty of water throughout the day, which will be better for you than stimulants such as tea and coffee.
- Breathe! Try taking a deep breath in, holding it for a few seconds, and then exhaling fully, and then repeat this as necessary.
- Think happy thoughts! These may be about your friends, your partner, your family, anything that makes you smile and puts you in a positive frame of mind.
- Remember that interviewers know candidates will be nervous, and they are trained to ease you into the interview with casual conversation and some initial icebreaker questions. They will want you to be relaxed and be yourself, so that they can get a better overall impression of you. Above all, try to stay positive and remember that any experiences you have as part of a recruitment process are an opportunity for you to learn and to develop.

Your application form or CV has already impressed the employer or Line Manager. The next step is to sell yourself in person.

**Making a Good Impression**

It is not just what you say but how you say it that reinforces the message you are giving and creates an overall impression of your suitability. Here are some tips for making a good initial impression:

- Make sure you arrive on time. If something unexpected occurs that is beyond your control, contact the telephone number on your letter as soon as possible to explain that you may be delayed.
- Arriving a few minutes early will give you time to collect your thoughts. If you arrive too early, it is better to go for a coffee and relax rather than presenting yourself long before the interview time.

As the interview progresses, you will continue to make a positive impression if you:
- Listen carefully to the current question, and try to give concise answers supported with relevant examples;
- Avoid answering simply ‘yes’ or ‘no’;
- Are not afraid to ask for clarification if a question is not clear;
- Speak clearly and loudly enough for the interviewer(s) to hear, and try not to speak too fast. This can be difficult when you are nervous, but take a deep breath before you start to answer a question and work on keeping your answers concise.

**Body language**

Be aware of what your body language is saying:

- Shake hands with the interviewer(s) at the beginning and end of the interview.
- Good posture and a friendly expression will indicate that you have a positive approach.
- Relax into your chair, but without slouching.
- Maintain good eye contact. If you have more than one person interviewing you, look at the person asking the question when you reply but glance at the other interviewers from time to time.
- Try to smile from time to time where appropriate.

**Interview Questions**

If you have prepared thoroughly, you will be in a good position to respond effectively to questions. The key thing to remember is that there are no trick questions, and interviewers are not trying to trip you up. It costs a lot of time and money to set up interviews, and they want to get the best out of you so that they make a good decision.

Most interviewers make notes, so do not worry if they write while you are speaking.

Typical competency-based questions may include:

- This role involves working as part of a Team. Can you give an example of when you’ve worked as part of a team to achieve a task?
- Within the office, there is lots of interaction with personnel from other departments. Can you give me an example of when you’ve needed to explain something to someone?
- Can you give me an example of when you’ve used your problem-solving skills?
- Tell me about a time when you last implemented a change in your work place?
A strategy for answering competency-based questions concisely is to use the **STAR** Technique:

- **Situation** - Briefly describe the where/when/who.
- **Task** - Outline the task or objective (what you hoped to achieve).
- **Action** - Describe what you did - focus on your role and your input.
- **Result** - Tell the interviewer what the outcome was, and what skills you developed as a result.

As a general rule, remember:

- The key to responding successfully to interview questions is to listen and concentrate on the current question.
- There is no such thing a ‘perfect’ interview!
- If you feel you answered a question badly, or could not answer it at all, do not dwell on it - move on, and do your best in the other questions.
- An employer will be looking at the interview as a whole, and will not focus on the odd slip.

**Challenging questions**

You may find some questions difficult to answer, or you may wish they had not come up at all. Be prepared for these, and feel free to take a little time to consider the question before launching into your reply.

Examples of questions are:

- Tell me about a time when you have worked in a team.
- Talk me through how you dealt with the member of your team who was not doing what was asked of them.

Remember - these are not trick questions. Interviewers are trained to probe gaps in your application form and to find out as much about you as they can. The key is to answer as honestly as you can, without being defensive or blaming others. Try to turn your answer into a positive statement with a successful outcome and place weaknesses and other problems in the past, clearly stating what you learned from overcoming any difficulties.

**Personal Questions**

Recruiters must not discriminate on the grounds of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, age or disability. If you feel uncomfortable about a particular question or line of questioning, you could say, ‘I’m sorry but I don’t feel comfortable answering that question.’ If you feel uneasy you can end the interview politely. If you feel that you have been discriminated
against or that your personal safety has been compromised, discuss this with CPP as soon as possible.

Your questions

Remember that an interview is a two-way conversation, so you can ask any relevant questions. You might want to ask a question for example, about the working hours. Don't just ask a question for the sake of it.

Ending your Interview

Your interviewer(s) may tell you during the course of the interview when you should expect to receive a decision from CPP on the outcome of the interview. Remember to thank the interviewer(s). Always end the interview on a positive note.

What next?

If you have been told you will be contacted by a certain date, you should not chase CPP for information before then. However, if you have not heard anything from CPP by the date stipulated, it is good to contact them by phone or email to enquire about the status of your application. There may simply be a delay in their procedures.

Interview Problems

Not getting interviews?

If you have been applying for jobs for which you meet the minimum criteria, it is probably time to take another look at your application form. If you cannot identify a problem ask a friend or family member to have a look also, additional advice can be sort from CPP.

Are you making the most of your experiences and achievements? You cannot afford to undersell yourself at the application stage, as the information you provide is all the employer has to go on when making a decision about who to shortlist for interview.

Getting to interviews, but not getting job offers?

Remember that if you are not successful in being offered a job, this may have nothing to do with your performance or answers at interview or an assessment centre. It may simply reflect that you are not what that particular department is looking for. It should be possible to get some feedback from the board to clarify the reasons for their decision.
After interviews, it is important to review how things went and to learn from the experience for the next occasion. You could prepare some notes on how you think you performed, asking yourself questions such as:

- Was I as prepared as I could have been for the interview?
- Did I remain interested and positive?
- Did I focus sufficiently on my personal skills, strengths and abilities?
- Was I able to relate my previous experience to the position for which I was being interviewed or assessed?
- Did I avoid generalities and provide specific examples?
- Did I downgrade anything by using ‘only’ in my examples? 'Yes, I’ve worked as part of a team, but it was only a bar job during my vacation.'
- Did I demonstrate a good knowledge of the organisation and the position?

Thinking about these things can help you to evaluate your performance and improve on it. These questions can also serve as useful prompts in future interview preparation.

Good Luck!