

INTERVIEWING STUDENT APPLICANTS POLICY



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Summary: This documents provides University policy and guidance for tutors and those involved in the undergraduate and taught postgraduate interviews for student applicants.	

INTERVIEWING STUDENT APPLICANTS

Guidance for Tutors and those Involved in Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Interviewing

1. INTRODUCTION

The University is committed to a policy of equality of opportunity and aims to provide a working, learning and social environment that is free from unfair discrimination. It aims to ensure that applicants, students, staff and all others associated with the University are treated with dignity, respect and equity, regardless of inappropriate distinctions, such as gender, race, nationality, ethnic identity or national origin, socioeconomic status, or role within the University, religious or political beliefs, disability, age, marital status, family circumstance or sexual orientation.

For the majority of programmes, the University does not require candidates to be interviewed as part of its recruitment process. However, where applicants are to be interviewed, then the processes and reasons for doing so must be transparent to all such applicants, including the selection criteria used for assessment purposes. (This may be available through entry profiles, web based information or the printed prospectus). Guidance should be provided to applicants on the procedures for the interview. Any selection criteria or tests required should relate to the requirements of the programme and must be clearly published and related to the applicant BEFORE the interview. Applicants should be invited to provide details prior to the interview of any medical, special or cultural needs that should be taken into consideration.

The type and purpose of interviews need to be considered and may be one of the following:

- a) a subject-specific „selection“ interview prior to a decision being made
- b) an interview to differentiate between applicants who appear very similar on paper
- c) an interview to assess not just suitability to undertake the course or programme but also to seek evidence of ability for a particular profession
- d) a group interview to assess skills of interaction
- e) a multiple-mini interview (MMI)
- f) a semi-structured interview which can allow conversation to enable some interviewees to give a fuller account of themselves
- g) an interview where questions are not prescribed but interviewers have a clear set of themes or areas to explore

An information-giving activity (for example, students progressing within an institution or partnership from a Foundation degree or DipHE to a BA degree) must not be considered as an interview if it does not form part of the publicised selection criteria.

Interviews provide applicants with an opportunity to decide whether the particular institution and course or programme is right for them and applicants should also be informed that there will be a time for them to ask questions. Interview guidance for both interviewers and interviewees should be transparent on the University's website. This guidance should include information on access requirements and reasonable and anticipatory adjustments. Interview formats will vary but it is important to create a positive environment in which interviewees are given the opportunity to perform well. This can help to ensure the most appropriate applicants are admitted and that all applicants are given the opportunity for equal consideration and are not discriminated against. Whilst being formal and professional, interviews can also be friendly and a pleasant experience for interviewees.

2. PRIOR TO THE INTERVIEW

In the initial invitation to interview, applicants should be told how long they have to respond to confirm their attendance and what will happen if they fail to confirm or decline the invitation to interview.

- 2.1 Clear information should be made available to each applicant in sufficient time to enable travel arrangements to be made, any pre-interview material to be prepared so that they know what to expect on the day. Such information should include:
 - a) Details about how to prepare themselves for the interview – both practically and in terms of answering and asking questions and any activities to be undertaken on the day
 - b) Date, time, duration and location of the interview
 - c) Details of where to report to and a contact name and number on the day in case of queries, if they are late or become lost
 - d) Travel information, parking availability and a map which includes the specific building in which the interview will be held
- 2.2 Applicants should be informed that interviews held before a decision to make an offer are an important part of the admissions decision-making process and they should therefore carefully follow any specific or general guidance provided.
- 2.3 Applicants should be provided with information on who to contact if they have any access requirements or need for adjustments to equipment or other materials that will enable them to demonstrate their suitability for selection. Large print information or seating arrangements that allow the applicant to lip read may be required.
- 2.4 Information about the structure of the day. A programme of events may be attached to the interview day for the applicant, for visitors who come with the applicant, or both. This may include a campus/accommodation/ academic department/library tour, talks with current students, a presentation with questions and answers. If this is the case information should be provided in advance of the day.
- 2.5 Applicants should be informed whether they will be asked questions about a specific area of their studies or their personal statement, or whether the assessment is more to identify those with the most potential/ motivation for a particular profession e.g. teaching. If the interview concentrates on the specific course at the institution, applicants should be told that they will be expected to have undertaken appropriate research in advance of the interview.
- 2.6 Applicants should be told in advance if the interview will be challenging with questions designed to make them think. Applicants may be expected to apply existing knowledge to new situations by discussing problems, to demonstrate how they think rather than what they know, to be able to argue a particular position and to put forward their own point of view.
- 2.7 Applicants should be given details of any written work that has been or that will be sent to them to be completed in advance of the interview. If background reading is required applicants should be told this and if appropriate provided with example sources of relevant information.

- 2.8 Applicants should be given details of any written test that will form part of the interview process, or specific reading required prior to interview about which the applicant will answer questions at the interview. Applicants should be told of any particular features of the test in advance.
- 2.9 Applicants should be given details in advance of any documentation they should bring with them on the day e.g. documentation relating to their domicile code, birth certificate. The interview day may be used to check qualification certificates and to carry out health and/or requirements for processing criminal records checks or disclosure documentation. These processes should be kept separate from the interview process and administered accordingly.
- 2.10 If applicants are requested to send a photograph or bring one with them to interview, it should be made clear why this is required e.g. to satisfy a visual identity check (the signed photograph once checked may remain on file) or to enable interviewers to ensure they have the correct applicant in front of them. Clarity of purpose in this area is vital to ensure no bias on the basis of appearance could be perceived. If any specific arrangements need to be made for applicants wearing a facial covering, this should be made clear to applicants in advance of the interview.
- 2.11 If, as part of the interview, an audio recording is made, applicants should be told in advance and the reason for this outlined e.g. the recording may be referred to in the case of a query or complaint. Applicants should be given an opportunity to inform relevant staff if they do not wish their interview to be recorded.
- 2.12 Applicants should be made aware in advance of the consequence of non-attendance at an interview.

3. CONDUCT OF THE INTERVIEW

- 3.1. Interviews should normally be conducted by a minimum of two trained interviewers. If the interviews are for a programme which has professional requirements e.g. Teaching, Social Work, the interviewers should include an experienced external professional.
- 3.2 The interviewers used should reflect a balance of ethnicity, gender and academic interest wherever possible. Interviewers should be aware of the differences in educational experience that applicants may have and should not assume that an applicant has progressed via a particular educational route or pathway.
- 3.3 Interviews should be conducted in appropriate surroundings: in an accessible office or room; the layout of the interview room should be non-confrontational, for example chairs arranged at angles to one another and thought given to interviewers not sitting behind a desk; the room should be heated at an appropriate temperature and water should be available for both interviewees and interviewers; the room should be tidy and well-organised.
- 3.4 All efforts should be made to ensure the interview can be conducted without interruption. A notice should be placed on the door of the room stating that an interview is in progress. Any telephone or other equipment in the room should be diverted, switched to silent or switched off. Interviewers should ensure they switch off their mobile phones and ask the applicant to do the same before the interview begins.

- 3.5 The Chairperson should try to ensure interviews keep to time throughout the day so as not to cause unnecessary anxiety to interviewees.
- 3.6 The Chairperson should:
- a) Be aware of the institution's emergency procedures e.g. fire exits and drills and make interviewees aware of them
 - b) Welcome interviewees and introduce the interviewers at the start of the interview
 - c) Explain the structure of the interview i.e. number of questions, how long the interview will last and state that the applicant will have an opportunity at the end to ask any questions they may have.
 - d) Ensure that at least one of the interviewers will be able to answer general questions about the institution and its facilities and specific questions about the programme. If questions are asked which cannot be answered, interviewees should be referred to a relevant point or any question and answer session if these are available on the day, or to the relevant Admissions Officer
 - e) Explain that interviewers may make notes while the interview is in progress
 - f) Explain to interviewees what will happen after the interview i.e. how long it will be before they know the outcome and how this will be communicated to them.
- 3.7 Interviews should start with a question or questions designed to put interviewees at ease e.g. a subject about which the applicant expressed an interest in their personal statement.
- 3.8 Interviewers should ensure they are interested in interviewees and do not appear bored or rude. Interviewers should ensure that all questions cannot be construed as discriminatory and any humorous remarks should be appropriate. Examples of inappropriate interview questions/subjects are included as Appendix A. Interviewers should be courteous, respectful, culturally aware and should avoid stereotyping interviewees or making assumptions or presumptions. They should make good eye contact, smile and encourage interviewees to be themselves. If an interviewer thinks an interviewee has had a poor interview, this should not be communicated, either verbally or otherwise. Interviewees should feel they have had the opportunity to do themselves justice.
- 3.9 Interview questions may be scripted and prepared in advance; they should be open-ended and relevant to the interview purpose. The interview may be fully „structured“ with all interviewees being asked the same questions, or follow a „semi-structured“ format where interviewers follow up the interviewees“ answers.
- 3.10 If a written test forms part of the interview process, programmes should consider having the marking carried out by staff or others, rather than those conducting the interviews. If the test score is included in the overall interview score the percentage weighting should be made clear to applicants. Reasonable adjustments to written tests, such as extra time or alternative formats, should be provided as appropriate.
- 3.11 Interviewers should have seen examples of questions in advance and agreed which of them will ask which questions. Questions should be consistent between interviews to ensure fairness and while supplementary questions may be asked to draw out the interviewee if necessary, the interview should not lose its focus. Questions should flow well, be business-like, well-organised, logical, thorough and probing and should reflect the overall purpose of the interview. If an interviewee is in obvious difficulties all interviewers should be aware that they should move on.

- 3.12 If the recommendation is not to make an offer, the interviewers should agree this decision and provide details to help the institution give effective feedback to the applicant.
- 3.13 Interviewers should be aware that applicants may occasionally request feedback on their interview performance even if they are successful, for their future development and this will be dealt with in line with the University's applicant feedback policy.

4. AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- 4.1. A formal record of the interview (as agreed according to the selection criteria) should be taken and made available to Admissions in order that appropriate feedback can be given if requested.
- 4.2 Feedback on any interview is available to all candidates and any interview records compiled are subject to the Data Protection Act. Any written notes of the interview can be requested by applicants following an interview. It is important that care is taken in the wording of such notes.

5. APPLICANTS OUTSIDE THE UK

- 5.1 Applicants from outside the UK will be given the opportunity of a telephone or video-conference interview if they are unable to attend in person. In such cases, the applicants will be informed that responsibility for arranging the telephone or video-conference facility in their own country lies with them.
- 5.2 A video-conference interview should preferably involve the same interviewers that have conducted the in-person interviews for the programme. It is even more important in these situations to check the identity of the applicant to ensure the correct person is to be interviewed.
- 5.3 The guidelines within this document apply to applicants being interviewed by telephone or video-conference.

6. APPLICANTS REQUIRING SPECIAL NEEDS

- 6.1 Disabled applicants, those with health conditions and anyone requiring additional support should be given the opportunity to highlight any access needs in advance and should be given clear instructions as to their interview arrangements. Specific adjustments may need to be made to ensure that the interview complies with the University's equal opportunities and disability guidelines for applicants e.g. extra time, accessible venues or enabling equipment may need to be arranged for certain activities.
- 6.2 Applicants should be judged on their academic suitability for the programme, based on the entry criteria, competencies and any other relevant factors. Consideration relating to additional support requirements for undertaking the programme should remain separate. It is not the responsibility of interviewers to assess for possible reasonable adjustments. If a place is offered, disability support staff should discuss with the applicant what reasonable adjustments should be necessary. Interviewers should not reject an applicant based solely on a judgement of possible barriers to achievement specifically associated with the applicant's impairment or health condition as this would be unlawful.

- 6.3 Applicants should be advised that they can arrange to see the Disability Officer should they wish to discuss their particular requirements.
- 6.4 Interviewers have a responsibility to ensure that the University's Equal Opportunities Policy is observed at every stage of the selection process.

7 TRAINING

- 7.1 Interviewers employed by the University should undergo training and it is essential that one member of the interview panel has received such training. In some cases such as the health professions, Social Work and Teaching, staff should be trained to meet the needs of the profession as well as entry to the programme.
- 7.2 Interview training should be compulsory for all those who are new to interviewing applicants and experienced interviewers should attend continuing professional development sessions on interviewing on a regular basis.
- 7.3 Training will be carried out through the university's Staff Development Programme and should include guidance about: equal opportunities, child protection; criminal convictions; fairness, data protection and freedom of information requirements; interviewing disabled applicants or additional support requirements in line with the university's policies; interview techniques, cultural awareness and the use of language; verbal and non verbal signals, body language etc.
- 7.4 Interviewers must be trained to identify effective communication skills and to understand that hesitating or being shy does not necessarily indicate the applicant has poor communication skills

8 INTERVIEWING MINORS

- 8.1 A minimum of two trained interviewees should always be used and the interview should be in an appropriate location.
- 8.2 Any accidents or unusual incidents, including those which could be regarded as inappropriate, should be reported by completion of an Incident Report Form. Written records of such incidents help to protect interviewers should any allegations arise.
- 8.3 If an applicant under the age of 18 discloses information of abuse that has occurred prior to the interview, you have a legal obligation to report it. Any suspicions or allegations relating to the abuse should be brought to the attention of the Director of Student Services, who is required to liaise on the matter with the Social Services.
- 8.4 If an applicant will not be 18 by the December of their first year of study, the University may invite the applicant and his/her parent/guardian to visit. They will be given a tour of the institution, including accommodation and social areas. This provides the applicant and their parent or guardian with a clear picture of the adult environment into which the applicant is seeking to be admitted. The visit may also provide the institution with an opportunity to understand more of the applicant e.g. their expectations of student life, of managing money and living away from home.

8.5 All aspects of the interview process should comply with the University's Child Protection Policy.

APPENDIX A:

Examples of inappropriate interview questions/subjects

The University must ensure it meets the requirements of legislation with regard to equality of opportunity and provide environments within which unfair discrimination does not occur. Interview questions should fit within this environment and interviewers must ensure that no question asked at an interview could be construed as being discriminatory on grounds of gender, race, nationality, ethnic identity, social or economic background, religious or political beliefs, disability, age, family circumstances or sexual orientation.

In addition, no question should be contrary to the principles and requirements of the admissions process itself and questions should reflect a high level of knowledge and skill on the part of interviewers.

The following examples are of questions which are generally viewed as being unacceptable or inappropriate to ask at interview:

1. Questions about the other institutions or subject choices at other institutions the applicant has applied to

This information will not be known to interviewers as the UCAS principle of invisibility applies until applicants have replied to all offers they have received. To ask the question would compromise this principle and could cause anxiety to applicants.

2. Questions or discussion about the equivalence of qualifications

Unfamiliar qualifications should be researched by interviewers or by central admissions staff, good practice recommends this is done in advance of the interview, the applicant should not be asked about this.

3. Disabled applicants or those with support needs should not be asked questions about the nature of their disability or support required in an interview for a place on a course

However, interviewers should be aware of any special needs the applicant has which may affect their interview performance.

4. Questions that are, or could be, interpreted by the applicant as having a sexual, racial, social, political, gender, age or religious bias

For example, questions about marital, financial and/or parental status, ethnic origin, domicile, social status including parental occupation, childcare or other caring arrangements for applicants who have dependents.

5. Questions about family connections with particular professions

6. Closed questions where there is only one obvious answer

If closed questions with a yes or no answer are asked, they may be used to confirm a specific fact such as „did you take a gap year after your A levels?“ However interviewers should be aware they may need to seek further information by probing, open questions.

7. Un-focussed questions where the meaning could be unclear to the applicant

8. Lengthy, multi-part questions which could lead to the applicant becoming confused

9. Questions in which the interviewer includes what they regard as asides or witty remarks which could be misinterpreted

Such comments or questions could be interpreted by some applicants as discriminatory. Any remarks used as part of a question should be relevant and appropriate.

10. Interviewers should avoid careless comments which may give false expectations

For example, “we look forward to seeing you in September”.

11. Interviewers should not refer to the personal appearance of applicants.

Applicants should not be given any indication at the end of the interview about what the outcome is likely to be. The Chairperson should end the interview in a formal but pleasant manner, whatever the performance of the applicant, and should explain how and when the decision will be communicated.

Appendix B:
Sample interview report form/score sheet

All interview records are subject to the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts and as such any written notes of the interview can be requested by applicants following an interview. Factual rather than subjective comments should therefore be noted on any interview report form and/or score sheet.

The Chairperson should explain that information may be recorded by interviewers during the interview. Interviewers should complete the interview report form as soon as possible after the interview and before the next interview if time allows (this may be a brief note which is expanded upon later if the interview schedule is tight). Initial assessments should be made by each interviewer without consultation with the other interviewers. The scoring system and criteria should be applied equally for all applicants and the form should be used to record detailed comments about each applicant's performance in relation to the selection criteria.

The Chairperson should be clear about what happens to the written materials at the end of the interviews and should ensure these are securely stored or passed to the relevant member of staff in the admissions team for storage.

EXAMPLE INTERVIEW SCORING FORM FOR [PROGRAMME NAME] PAGE 1

Applicant Name: _____

Date: _____

Interviewer: _____

Instructions to interviewers

Please make your assessment as soon as possible after the interview and before the next interview if time allows (this may be a brief note which is expanded upon later if the interview schedule is tight). Without consultation with other interviewers score the applicant against each selection criterion provided on the form. Each applicant should be scored using the 3 (high) to 0 (low) scales, taking into account the specific examples provided for each of the scoring categories.

Communication Skills

The applicant should be scored based on evidence of personal attributes and an ability to relate well to others. Evidence of attributes may include initiative, enthusiasm, flexibility, attitudes towards others (including towards children for courses in teaching and a caring attitude and ethos for courses in medicine, dentistry, health and other caring professions).

- 3 very good and interesting communicator; engaged with interviewers; responded well to questions; very articulate; ability to argue a point
- 2 good communicator; responded satisfactorily to questions; reasonably articulate
- 1 limited communicator; poor engagement with interviewers; limited responses to questions; limited vocabulary
- 0 poor communicator; little or no engagement with interviewers; very limited vocabulary; significant difficulties.

Career Exploration*

The applicant should be scored based on evidence of suitability for the profession (this example is relevant for some interviews but not all). Evidence of suitability will depend upon the particular profession but the following examples may be relevant for some courses or programmes.

- 3 demonstrates understanding of profession in its broadest sense; evidence of directly relevant work experience; evidence of enthusiasm and passion for profession
- 2 evidence of some research into profession; enthusiastic in a general sense; some related work experience
- 1 little evidence of understanding of profession; uninformed enthusiasm; very little relevant work experience
- 0 no understanding of profession; no enthusiasm for profession; no relevant work experience.

Motivation to study at HE level

The applicant should be scored based on evidence of motivation to study at HE level and engage with their studies.

- 3 demonstrates understanding of the demands of HE study; clearly articulates reasons for going into HE; demonstrates evidence of self-motivation and completing work to deadlines
- 2 some understanding of demands of HE study; fairly clear about reasons for going into HE; some evidence of self-motivation and completing work to deadlines
- 1 little understanding of demands of HE study; lack of clarity about reasons for going into HE; little evidence of self-motivation and completing work to deadlines
- 0 no understanding of demands of HE study; cannot explain reasons for going into HE; no evidence of motivation or completing work to deadlines.

**This area of questioning may be more relevant for some interviews than others i.e. those for which there is a particular professional body requirement such as dentistry, medicine, nursing, social work, teaching.*

Additional Comments

Please record any comments which will be of value in providing feedback to the applicant.

Please follow the Chairperson's instructions at the end of the interviews in relation to the collection and storage of all interview forms and score sheets.

Decisions

Please tick the relevant box and supply additional information where relevant

Unsuccessful

Reason for decision including any relevant code(s)

If appropriate (In conjunction with Admissions)

Unconditional offer

Conditional offer

Conditions including any relevant code(s)
