

# ACTPS Recruitment Policy and Guidelines



## Tool 8 – Examples of evidence-based interview questions

Evidence-based interview questions should reflect the essential requirements for the position, and should allow applicants to draw from past experiences to explain what they *did, said, thought* and *felt* about a particular situation or event that they have chosen to talk about. It is also an opportunity for them to provide details about *how* they performed and *why* they behaved in a certain way. Past experience is an excellent indicator of future performance and behaviour, and asking evidence-based interview questions is an effective way to understand how an applicant is likely to meet the performance objectives in the new role.

For further information relating to assessment methods, please refer to:  
**Tool 7 – A Guide to Assessment Methods**

The following examples of evidence-based questions can be used as a guide for developing interview questions to be used in a structured interview. Remember to consider the classification level and type of position when drafting the questions. Please consult your Directorate HR team for further assistance.

Five questions have been provided as **examples** for each of the listed capabilities. Under each of the five questions there are also generally three ‘prompt’ questions. These prompt questions should be used as a guide to ask the right follow-up questions to obtain more information from the applicant if they haven’t already provided it in their initial response to the question. The prompt questions can also help the applicant focus on providing the most useful information.

The follow-up questions should follow the **“STAR” method**, and can be used to obtain more information about the:

- The **“S”**ituation, context, background, problem being solved
- The **“T”**ask, specifics of what was required, by who, when, what?
- The **“A”**ctions, what the applicant personally did, skills used, approach taken
- The **“R”**esult, outcome, what was achieved? what impact did it have?

# Example Questions

The questions listed below are intended as a guide only. They may need to be changed to suit the specific capability and how it is required to be applied in the position.

The categories below reflect capabilities that may need to be assessed:

- Written communications skills
- Client service orientation
- Problem solving
- Project management
- Decision-making
- Presentation skills
- Persuasion and influencing skills
- Leadership skills
- Strategic thinking
- Organisational awareness
- Business focus
- Building productive working relationships
- Teamwork
- Flexibility
- Drive & Commitment
- Initiative

## Written communication skills

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*Capability definition: write in a clear, fluent and concise manner; produce written communications that are appropriate and readily understood by the intended audience; organise information in a logical sequence.*

1. Can you provide a recent example of when you have ***had to write an important document (e.g. report, memo, letter)*** to a client or stakeholder?
  - What was the purpose of the document?
  - How did you ensure that it was clear for the reader?
  - What feedback did you receive about your document?
2. Describe a situation when you ***chose to communicate in writing***.
  - What were the circumstances?
  - Why did you choose to write?
  - How effective was this as a way of getting your view across?
3. Describe an example of when you ***had to adapt*** a standard document ***to suit a particular audience*** (e.g. a client or stakeholder).
  - What was the document about?
  - How did you change it?
  - What would you do differently next time?
4. Tell us about a written document where you ***needed to organise information in a logical sequence***.
  - Why did it need to be in a logical sequence?
  - How did you check for clarity?

- What was the most difficult part of producing this document?
5. Tell us about a **written document** you have **produced** which used a **style** very **different** from what you would normally use.
- What were the stylistic differences?
  - What led you to produce the document in this style?
  - What was the impact of it?

## Client service orientation

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*Definition: provide a prompt, efficient and personalised service to clients; respond flexibly to client needs; committed to delivering a high-quality output to clients.*

1. Give us an example of a time when you have **put the needs of a client first** (e.g. over your own needs).
  - Why was this necessary?
  - How well did you manage to meet their needs?
  - What sacrifices did you need to make in order to ensure that their needs were met?
2. Tell us about the last time that a **client made an unreasonable or unrealistic demand** to you.
  - What was it that made you think that it was unreasonable or excessive?
  - How much effort and time did this take?
  - What was the outcome?
3. What, in your view, makes it **difficult to relate well to certain clients**?
  - What types of people are particularly difficult to get to know?
  - What have you done to improve poor relationships with other people in the past?
  - How are those relationships now?
4. Describe a situation where you **had to deal with a particularly angry or frustrated client**.
  - Why were they angry or frustrated?
  - How did you begin to calm them down?
  - If you were in a similar situation again, what would you do differently?
5. Tell me about a time when you were **unable to satisfy a client's demands**.
  - What did they ask of you?
  - Why were you unable to meet their needs?
  - How did this make you feel?
  - Is there anything else you could have done differently?

# Problem solving

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*Definition: seek all relevant information for problem solving; probe for the facts; analyse issues from different perspectives; is analytically agile; draw sound inferences from information available.*

1. Tell us about a recent time when you ***had to identify the key cause of a problem.***
  - How did you work out the cause?
  - How did you solve the problem?
  - What lessons did you learn?
2. Can you give us a recent example of when you ***came up with*** several ***different solutions to a problem?***
  - What suggestions did you come up with? Why did you need several?
  - What did others think of your ideas?
  - How well did they work in practice?
3. Describe a ***complex problem, which*** you ***solved*** recently for someone (e.g. a stakeholder).
  - What made it so challenging?
  - How did you handle it?
  - What was the outcome?
4. Tell us about the last time you were ***able to anticipate a problem.***
  - How did you know that the problem was likely to occur?
  - What did you do?
  - How effective was your action?
5. Could you give us an example of when you ***analysed a problem from different perspectives?***
  - Did this help solve the problem?
  - How did you think of what perspectives to take?
  - How did you ensure that you covered the most important perspectives?

# Project management

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*Definition: schedule activities to ensure optimal use of time and resources; consult and liaise with key stakeholders; monitor performance against objectives; produce detailed project plans where objectives are clearly defined and action steps for achieving them are clearly specified; ensure that key project objectives are met.*

1. Tell us about a ***project*** that you were ***responsible for that required a lot of planning.***
  - What aspects of the project meant that a lot of planning was required?

- How did you decide on priorities?
  - How successful were you in achieving the objectives of the project?
2. Describe a time when you ***needed to complete*** a piece of work ***to a specified deadline***.
    - Why was this activity so important?
    - What steps did you take to ensure that the deadline could be reached?
    - What would you do differently next time?
  3. Tell us about a time when you ***had to liaise*** with a ***wide variety of people*** when ***planning work***.
    - What was the work?
    - What feature of this project required you to liaise extensively?
    - How did you choose whom to involve?
  4. There are always elements of project management and planning that individuals do well and less well. What would you ***describe*** as your particular ***skills in planning***?
    - Describe a time when you had to use these skills?
    - What could you do better in terms of project planning?
    - Tell me about a planning or project management skill that it is not a strength of yours. Then tell me about how you have overcome a weakness in your project management/planning skill base.
  5. Tell us about a time when you ***had to put a detailed project plan together*** for other people to follow.
    - How did you go about producing the plan?
    - How did you ensure that others stuck to the deadlines and milestones you set?
    - What feedback did you receive on the clarity of your plan?

## Decision-making

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*Definition: make rational and sound decisions based on a consideration of the facts and alternatives available; make quick decisions where required; commit to definite courses of action.*

1. Tell us about a ***difficult decision*** that you ***needed to make*** recently.
  - What was the situation?
  - What made the situation difficult?
  - How quickly were you able to make the decision? How did you weigh up the options?
2. We all make ***incorrect decisions*** from time to time. Tell us about the ***last time*** that this ***happened to you***.
  - When did you realise that it was the wrong decision?
  - What was the impact?
  - What did you learn from this experience?

3. Tell us about the last time that you ***needed to commit*** to a ***definite course of action***.
  - What was the situation?
  - Why was it important for you to commit to action?
  - How did you demonstrate this commitment?
4. Tell us about a ***decision*** you ***made*** that first ***required significant data gathering***.
  - How did you gather the facts you needed?
  - What was it about this particular decision that led you to seek a lot of information?
  - Where did you seek this information?
5. When have you ***had to make a decision*** on the ***basis of conflicting or ambiguous information***?
  - What was the decision that was required?
  - In what way did the data you have conflict?
  - How did you feel about this?
  - How did you eventually reconcile the information you had and make a decision?

## Presentation skills

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*Definition: make an immediate positive impression on others; come across with presence and credibility; communicate orally in a manner which is clear, fluent and which holds the audience's attention.*

1. Provide an example of a situation when it was ***important for you*** to ***appear confident*** when talking to others.
  - Why was it important?
  - How did you feel?
  - What steps did you take to boost your confidence?
2. ***Describe a talk or presentation*** that you have ***given recently***.
  - How did you tailor it to suit the audience?
  - Roughly how many people were in the audience?
  - How did the audience react?
3. Tell us about a time when you ***found it difficult*** to ***keep someone's attention***.
  - Why was it so difficult?
  - What did you do?
  - How well did this work?
4. Tell us about a time where you ***needed to make an immediate impression*** on someone.
  - Why was this?
  - What steps did you take to maximise the impression that you conveyed?
  - How successful were you?

5. Give us an example of when you **had to explain something difficult** to someone.
  - What information did you need to get across?
  - What was the most difficult thing about the conversation?
  - How would you act differently next time?

## Persuasion and influencing skills

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*Definition: is able to create consensus and gain agreement to proposals and ideas; is able to stand ground in the face of opposition; produce written communication which is clear, concise and is readily understood by the intended audience; is skilful at negotiating.*

1. Tell us about the last time that you **persuaded someone** of your point of view.
  - How did you put across your ideas?
  - What kind of agreement did you reach?
  - On reflection, what would you do differently next time?
2. Give us an example of when you were **unable to persuade someone** around to your point of view.
  - What did you do?
  - Why didn't it work?
  - What feedback did you receive about your approach?
3. Give us an example of when you have **had to respond to** someone's **objections**.
  - What were those objections?
  - How did you challenge their views?
  - How effective were you?
4. Tell us about the last time that you **won a group of people** around to **your way of thinking**.
  - What was your opinion?
  - How did this contrast with the group's original position?
  - What were the key things that you did which persuaded the group?
5. Describe an occasion when you **had to negotiate a compromise solution**.
  - What did you have to compromise on?
  - How did you decide what you were prepared to negotiate on?
  - How did this affect the ongoing relationship between the groups?

# Leadership skills

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*Definition: provide the team with a clear sense of direction; inspire a positive attitude to work; inspire a strong desire to succeed among team members; steer others towards successful goal and task accomplishment; promotes diversity in the team.*

1. Give us an example of when you **had to lead your team** in pursuit of a **significant organisational or division objective**.
  - What did you do?
  - What did the project involve?
  - How did you know that you had been effective?
  - How did you ensure that the team's individual objectives were met?
2. Give us an example of when you **experienced difficulty or problems** in **getting a team to accept your leadership**.
  - What did you do to overcome this?
  - How were you sure that you had successfully overcome the difficulties?
  - What feedback did you receive from the team?
3. Give us an example of when you have **needed to motivate people** to achieve difficult results **and also keep them feeling positive**?
  - What did you do to ensure your team remained positive?
  - How did you balance the needs of the individual team members with organisational requirements?
  - What feedback did you receive from individuals involved?
4. Tell us about a time you **made use of the different skills** or approaches of team members.
  - What made you aware of the different skills in the team?
  - What benefits did you feel this offered you?
  - How did you take advantage of these benefits?
5. Give us an example of **how you operationalised an organisational strategy** to your team?
  - What components of the overall strategy did you focus on? Why?
  - How did you check your team's understanding?
  - Is there anything that you would do differently next time?

# Strategic thinking

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*Definition: think at a big picture level; take a long-term view; entertain wide-ranging possibilities in developing a vision for the future.*



1. Tell us about a time that you worked on something and ***had to consider its longer-term consequences.***
  - What factors did you take into account?
  - What was the outcome of this?
  - What would you do differently next time?
2. We cannot always 'keep tabs' on everything that's happening in the outside world. ***When have you been surprised*** and perhaps caught unaware by ***something that happened outside*** the organisation?
  - How do you usually keep abreast of outside trends?
  - On reflection, what might you have done to keep tabs on this? To prevent from being caught unaware?
  - How did you react?
  - What was the final outcome?
3. Tell us about a time when it was ***necessary*** for you ***to plan for several alternatives in response to changes*** facing the organisation.
  - How did you evaluate the alternatives?
  - What factors did you take into consideration?
  - What was the outcome?
4. Tell us about a time you ***had to take a broad view of a problem*** rather than get stuck in the detail.
  - What was the problem?
  - How did you ensure you did not get lost in the detail?
  - What was the outcome of this?
5. What are the ***key issues likely to affect the future of your work*** or department/agency?
  - How is your role likely to change in response to these issues?
  - What will you need to do to meet these challenges?
  - What, if anything, can you do now to prepare for those changes?

## Organisational awareness

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*Definition: is attuned to changing organisational dynamics; forge links with other teams and business areas; take account of different functions in developing plans and activities.*

1. Which other ***teams do/did you liaise with*** in your job?
  - How are/were they similar to and different from your own team?
  - What things did/do you need to take account of in co-operating with them?
  - How did/do you know who to liaise with?

2. It can be difficult to keep yourself fully aware of the wider organisational environment in which your team operates. When did ***something you did not know about***, in another division or part of the department, ***limit your ability to achieve an outcome?***
  - What did you learn?
  - How did you deal with this differently next time?
3. How do you ***keep up with*** your colleagues about issues in ***other parts of the organisation?***
  - Give me an example of when this was especially important.
  - How did you ensure you spoke to the right people?
  - What was the outcome?
4. How do you ***find out about what is happening*** in other parts of your organisation?
  - How would you compare your knowledge in this area to those of your colleagues?
  - What do they know more about than you?
  - What do you know more than them?
5. When have you ***had to take account of another area's responsibilities*** when working or planning work?
  - Why was this important?
  - How did you ensure their needs were addressed?
  - What feedback have you received on this?

## Business focus

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*Definition: is knowledgeable about financial issues and responsibilities; is focused on knowing the business of the organisation; is focused on delivering the best outcome using the resources available; proactively seek more efficient ways of doing things; focus on activities and projects that will bring the best business return for the team/organisation.*

1. When have you ***changed a process*** or system to make it more ***efficient?***
  - How did the idea for the change come to you?
  - How did you go about making the change?
  - What was the impact of this?
2. Provide a recent example of when you have ***evaluated and tracked*** the ***cost*** of a particular activity.
  - How did this feed into future planning?
  - To what extent did you share this information to others?
  - What would you do differently next time?
3. Provide an example where you have ***needed to be across financial issues*** in your team and function?

- How would you compare your knowledge of financial issues to your colleagues?
  - Where could your knowledge be improved?
  - What steps have you already taken to improve your knowledge in this area?
4. What **experience** do you have **of budgetary and cost control** in your role?
- Who sets the parameters?
  - How do you oversee the implementation?
  - What feedback have you had about your skills in this area?
  - (For those with no direct experience: What part do you play in your team to minimise costs or overheads?)
5. **How have you** been able to **enhance your organisation's functions efficiency** during the past 12 months? (*Listen for sense of responsibility and awareness to work within budgets or minimise costs*)
- What did you do?
  - Why did you focus on this area?
  - What feedback did you get?

## Building productive working relationships

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*Definition: able to establish and maintain relationships with people at all levels; promote harmony and consensus through diplomatic handling of disagreements; is able to forge useful partnerships with people across business areas, functions and organisations.*

1. To what extent do you **have to meet new people** in your work? Give us an **example of when you had to do this?**
  - How did you build an effective relationship with them?
  - What were the challenges?
  - What would you do differently next time?
2. With **which kinds of people** have you found it **difficult to develop relationships?**
  - Can you tell me why?
  - Can you give me an example?
  - What steps have you taken to enhance your effectiveness in this area?
3. When have you **needed to put other people at their ease?**
  - Why was it important that you took the lead in doing this?
  - How did you do this?
  - What could you have done to make them feel even more comfortable?
4. Tell us about a time when you **had to manage conflict** between two people.
  - What was the conflict about?
  - How did you manage this?

- What was the outcome?
5. Who are the ***most senior and junior people you need to build relationships with?***
    - Tell me how you built these relationships.
    - In what way was your approach different, given the different seniority levels of the individuals?
    - What steps could you take to increase your effectiveness in this area?

## Teamwork

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*Definition: cooperate and work well with others in the pursuit of team goals; share information; support others; show consideration, concern and respect for others' feelings and ideas; accommodate and work well with the different working styles of others.*

1. Provide an example of ***when you had to support others in a team.***
  - Why did they require support?
  - How did you identify what kind of support they needed?
  - What was the outcome?
2. Tell me about the ***last time that you worked as part of a team.***
  - What elements of the team environment did you most enjoy?
  - How did you get the team members to cooperate?
  - What elements of the team environment did you enjoy least? Why?
3. Tell us about a time recently when you have ***had to work with people with very different styles.***
  - How did you accommodate for these differences?
  - Which style did you find it easiest to work with?
  - What would you do differently next time?
4. Tell us when someone has ***come to you for support,*** but you have been ***too busy*** to offer it.
  - Why did they come to you?
  - What support, if any, were you able to offer?
  - What was the outcome?
5. Give us an example of when you have had to ***put aside personal differences*** in order ***to achieve*** a team goal.
  - Why was the team goal more important?
  - How did you deal with the personal differences?
  - What impact did this have on your longer-term working relationship?

# Flexibility

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*Definition: adaptable; receptive to new ideas; respond and adjust easily to changing work demands and circumstances; not bound by old ways of doing things.*

1. Tell us about a time when you **needed to plan an alternative course of action** in response to a change in circumstances or demands.
  - How did you evaluate the alternatives?
  - What factors did you take into consideration?
  - What was the outcome?
2. It can be frustrating when the **goal posts change**. Can you describe a time when have you been working towards a goal **when this happened?**
  - What did you do about it?
  - How did you feel?
  - What would you do differently next time?
3. Give us an example of when you have **needed to adapt your existing knowledge or skills** to a novel situation. *(Listen for proactivity, approach to change)*
  - What was the situation?
  - Why was it novel?
  - What was the outcome?
4. Tell us about a situation where your **manager suggested a change in the way in which you do something**.
  - How do you feel about this? How much do you question it?
  - What did you do about it?
  - What was the outcome?
5. Tell us about the **most radical idea** or **new approach** someone has **suggested to you**.
  - How did you react to it?
  - Did you accept the idea? If not, what feedback did you give the individual who suggested it?
  - What did you learn from this situation?

# Drive and commitment

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*Definition: demonstrates capacity for sustained effort and hard work; is enthusiastic and committed; sets high standards of performance for self and others.*

1. Tell us about a **time when you had to work very hard**.
  - What caused this?

- How did you sustain your energy and motivation?
  - How did you feel during this time?
2. Sometimes the ***end result of work we do does not show the amount of effort*** and hard work put in. ***When has this happened*** to you?
    - What happened?
    - How did you react?
    - How did you feel?
  3. Tell us about a time when you ***needed to maintain your enthusiasm and others' enthusiasm*** for a challenging project.
    - Why was it important?
    - What did you do to maintain your enthusiasm?
    - What did you do to maintain the enthusiasm of others?
    - What feedback did you receive about how successful you were?
  4. Provide an example that describes ***how you set work standards for yourself***.
    - How do these compare with your colleagues?
    - Where would you say your standards are higher?
    - Where are the standards of your peers likely to be higher?
  5. Provide an example that describes ***how you set work standards for others***.
    - How does this compare with your colleagues?
    - Where would you say you set higher standards?

## Initiative

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*Definition: proactive and self-starting; seize opportunities and act upon them; originate action and actively influence events.*

1. Tell us about a recent example of a ***time where you showed initiative***.
  - What were the circumstances?
  - In what way did you show initiative?
  - What was the outcome?
2. Give us an example of when you ***had to work without any guidance*** in an unusual situation.
  - What kinds of decisions did you have to make?
  - How did you cope?
  - What feedback did you receive?

3. Tell us about a time when you **went to more senior people for help**.
  - What was the background?
  - Why did you need help?
  - To what extent do you still seek advice in this area?
  
4. Tell us about a time when you **took on some work outside your usual responsibilities**.
  - What motivated you to take on these extra tasks?
  - What were the consequences of this?
  - What feedback did you receive on this?
  
5. Tell us about a time you **saw an opportunity and drove it forward**.
  - How did you spot the opportunity?
  - How did you decide whether to pursue the opportunity or not?

## Review

This document is an attachment to the ACTPS Recruitment Policy and Guidelines 2020 and is due for review in line with the policy.

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