
What to Expect At Specialty Assessment Centres

If you have been shortlisted on the basis of your application then you will be invited to a specialty selection centre. This selection centre allows consultants, in your specialty of choice, to meet you and assess your competencies, in a variety of areas. They are essentially assessing whether you will make a good trainee in that specialty. The following are suggestions of how to prepare for and perform at specialty training assessment centres.

What happens?

Assessment Centres can vary dramatically, depending on specialty, location, training level. You are normally asked to arrive approximately 15mins before the start of your assessment. You will then be registered and must provide the specified documentation (e.g. Graduation Certificates, Photo ID, Portfolio, GMC Registration, Proof of English Language) to the member of staff responsible for administration of the assessment. If you do not bring the required documentation, you may be refused assessment.

The assessment centre is normally broken down to a number of assessment stations. The stations may be set up in an open plan area, segregated by partitions. Others may be in a separate room or private, confidential area.

On average 2 to 3 Consultants will assess you in each station and a non-medical person will rotate between stations to make sure the process is equal and fair to all candidates.

Consultants may also rotate between stations every couple of hours. In total you may be assessed by 6 – 8 different consultants as you rotate through the stations.

You should be allowed equal time at each station, this could be between 10 -15 minutes. You will normally have 5 minutes between each station while consultants score candidates. When all stations have been completed, your documentation will be returned to you and you are free to leave.

Assessment Centre Stations

Structured Interview

Typically consists of 2 consultants asking set questions.

To prepare you should read again the Person Specification, paying particular attention to the selection criteria section. The person specification will help you anticipate the types of questions you may be asked and help you to understand the type of skills required for the specialty e.g. the ability to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. Prepare a variety of examples from your own experiences so you are able to answer the questions appropriately.

Familiarise yourself with the STAR technique it may help with structuring answers to possible questions. (STAR – see the leaflet on Questions at Interview for more information).

Are you up to date with wider NHS issues?

Portfolio

Your portfolio is an extremely valuable tool to help you prepare for an assessment centre but there may also be a portfolio station. Here you may be required to talk through your portfolio and how it has helped your professional and personal development. Even if there isn't a portfolio station the portfolio is a good starting point to generate ideas for examples to questions and helps illustrate your personal development to the interviewers. It should tell a story of personal and professional development. To prepare make sure it is laid out neatly and has a clear structure.

Some consultants have suggested that the inclusion of a brief 2 page CV is helpful in giving them a quick overview of the candidate. Put it after the contents page at the beginning of your portfolio or under extra information if you will be using your 'e' portfolio. By familiarising yourself with the content it will be easy for you to show and talk through relevant sections.

Clinical Scenarios – e.g. SimMan -*Simulated body*

You may be required to work on a simulator, which is operated by a computer. You may be given a scenario and clinical information to help you access the patient. You may also have help from fully trained nurses.

Role Play with a patient – You may be given a clinical scenario and asked to treat/assess a patient in a role-play format.

Suturing – You may be required to work on a prosthetic limb or actor and demonstrate knowledge and a range of competencies from the person specification.

Presentation

You may be asked to prepare and give a presentation in a limited amount of time. The topics can vary. Remember time management is important and it is important to get all your important points across in the time allocated.

Team Based Discussions

You may come across this in GP selection – You will be given a topic and asked to discuss it as a group

Non-clinical Scenarios

These may be used at interview and presentation stations. Instead of a question you are given a scenario and you have to describe what course of action you would take in that situation.

Finally

- Know the time of your interview and location.
- Bring the right documentation – you don't want to be refused interview.
- Ensure that you have evidence in your portfolio that matches your claims on your application form and that you can draw from when giving examples at the various stations e.g. presentation and interview station.
- Make good eye contact with each assessor.
- Pay attention to your body language, and try not to fidget, as this can be very distracting. If you are sitting try and sit up straight, leaning back in a chair, slouching

may give the impression that you are not interested. A well-timed smile can also help build rapport with the assessment panel.

- Speak slowly and clearly, think about the pace and tone. Try not to use “um” etc. this can be distracting. Within reason it will be ok to ask the assessor to rephrase a question if you don’t understand it.
- Take a few brief notes afterwards so you can reflect on the experience later and improve your performance in the future.

Further Help

See the AGCAS/DVD on ‘Selection Centres for Specialty Training’ available from the post graduate education centre at your trusts or on the (VLE) Virtual Learning Environment..

August 2015