

# **THE MANAGING ASSESSMENT CENTRES POCKETBOOK**

By John Sponton & Stewart Wright

*Drawings by Phil Hailstone*

"An exceptionally practical guide to the complex business of designing and running assessment centres – each step is clearly explained with plenty of hints and tips along the way."

**Pauline Garnett, Group HR Manager, ASD Metal Services**

"A really useful and practical guide – comprehensive, concise and clear. The information is very accessible. It is as relevant, as a reminder of good practice, for those who have run assessment centres before, as it is for anyone considering an assessment centre approach for the first time."

**Sophie Pickup, HR & Development Manager, Northumbrian Water Limited**

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## ADVANCE PLANNING

# THE ROLE OF THE ORGANISER



As the organiser, your role will be critical to the success of the assessment centre.

The organiser's role is a large one – planning the event and ensuring it runs smoothly on the day.

An important consideration for the organiser is whether to appoint a separate individual to act as an event administrator at the assessment centre. The event administrator can meet and greet candidates, circulate appropriate paperwork to candidates/assessors and then collect and collate completed paperwork.

The organiser can also be an assessor, and/or act as an event administrator. However, the organiser should be careful not to overburden him or herself with assessment duties, and so allow sufficient time to undertake the management role.

## ADVANCE PLANNING

# GETTING STARTED



As the organiser of the assessment centre, leave nothing to C-H-A-N-C-E:

**C**andidates – have been told where the assessment centre is running, what it will consist of, what they need to do beforehand and what to bring with them.

**H**andouts and paperwork – all documents have been designed, checked and printed off ready for the day.

**A**ssessors – have been trained in the Observe, Record, Classify and Evaluate (ORCE) process, are familiar with any exercises in which they are involved, clear about their roles and legal responsibilities and know where they need to be and when.

**N**asty surprises – you are prepared for worst-case scenarios.

**C**atering and venue – break times and meals are fully catered for, the venue has been booked and rooms checked for suitability.

**E**quipment – external materials and/or equipment have been ordered and are ready for use.

## ADVANCE PLANNING

### SETTING TIMESCALES



As the organiser, you also need to plan:

- When does the assessment centre need to take place? Remember that availability of assessors, as well as venue, will be a factor
- When and how do assessors need to be booked and trained? Ideally their training should be carried out shortly before the first assessment centre takes place
- When and how will candidates be told that they are being invited to attend?
- How long will candidates need to complete any online assessment exercises prior to the event?
- When and how can candidates expect to receive news about the outcome and receive feedback on the results?

## ADVANCE PLANNING

### SETTING TIMESCALES



Top tips for the organiser:

- Make up a master plan which captures all the details (you could use project management software or a spreadsheet program) so that you are clear exactly what needs to happen and by when
- Make sure that your plan covers the requirements of candidates, assessors, exercise suppliers, the venue and any consultants who might be involved
- 'Walk through' your plan from the perspective of each of these groups to check that you have not missed anything



## ADVANCE PLANNING

# DRAFTING A GOOD TIMETABLE



A good assessment centre needs a good timetable which takes account of:

- How long each individual exercise needs to be introduced, administered and run and with which candidates and which assessors. Be particularly careful with allowing time for any open-ended or non-timed exercises such as certain psychometric exercises – err upon more generous estimated completion times
- How long each individual exercise needs for scoring
- What other events or activities need to take place, such as any presentations to the candidates
- Venue constraints such as the number and sizes of available rooms and equipment limitations
- Break times



## ADVANCE PLANNING

### TOP TIPS FOR A GOOD TIMETABLE



- Try to keep it simple; factor in some slippage time for unexpected events such as a candidate or an assessor running late
- Avoid group exercises first thing in the morning – allow the candidates a little time to relax in each other’s company. The best time for a group exercise is late morning or just before or after lunch – the latter keeps up candidates’ energy levels in the early afternoon!
- At the start of the day, include an overview of the day’s schedule and (if appropriate) a company presentation. As well as sharing useful information, this helps candidates relax and allows them to get used to the venue and each other
- Make sure that the exercises which take longest to score, eg in-tray/analysis exercises, are given early on, to make full use of available assessor scoring time
- Psychometric exercises generally involve a single assessor to administer, and are good to use when candidates might otherwise be unoccupied
- Some ‘break’ periods during the timetable are acceptable but avoid prolonged periods of inactivity for candidates

## ADVANCE PLANNING

### CHECKING THE DRAFT TIMETABLE



Now test your draft timetable thoroughly. Make sure that it works from all the different perspectives:

- Candidates
- Assessors – they need time to review and classify their assessor observation forms and develop their evaluations. Also, after a group exercise, allow time for them to discuss their findings before the main review session, enabling scores to be fine-tuned and calibrated. This is particularly relevant for scoring group exercises, where an individual candidate's behaviour often needs to be seen in the context of what others did or said at the time
- Rooms
- Catering and break times

Make sure that no candidate is unduly advantaged or disadvantaged by the timetable – for example, any candidate planning time or 'waiting' time should be evenly distributed.

## ADVANCE PLANNING

### VENUE CHOICE



A well-designed assessment centre can easily be let down by poor venue facilities. Firstly, weigh up the pros and cons of using in-house facilities against external facilities. Running the event in your organisation's premises may be cheaper but challenge yourself as to the suitability of these.

- How might these facilities appear to candidates?
- Will your assessors concentrate as much as they should at the assessment centre if work-based distractions are present?



## ADVANCE PLANNING

# VENUE SPECIFICATION



When choosing a venue, check that:

- The rooms to be used are suitable, particularly with regard to lighting, noise-proofing and technology facilities, and preferably are positioned close together
- Early access to the rooms can be gained on the day
- Public or shared waiting areas are suitable for use by the candidates
- It has been clearly agreed beforehand who is supplying any equipment – the venue organisers or you
- Any fire drill arrangements and alarm-testing times will cause minimal disruption
- The needs of any candidates with special requirements will be met

## ADVANCE PLANNING

# PREPARING THE CANDIDATES



Even before short-listing takes place, candidates should be told about the need, if short-listed, to attend an assessment centre and about possible dates. Those who are subsequently short-listed need to be told the chosen date as soon as possible.

When communicating with candidates, imagine that they are all customers of your organisation. Make sure any information sent out is crystal-clear and of a high quality. Put yourself in their shoes and identify what information you would like to receive if you were a candidate, and how you would like to be treated.

The information and contact process with the candidate is an opportunity to present the organisation in a positive light – one that is committed to best practice in assessment.

## ADVANCE PLANNING

### BRIEFING THE CANDIDATES



As soon as you can, send the short-listed candidates information about the assessment centre. This should contain, as print-outs, attachments or micro-site links:

- A note of congratulations for reaching this stage
- Where and when they need to attend, with maps and accommodation arrangements if necessary
- The broad format of the assessment centre, descriptions of the exercises and how they can prepare
- Company information or background briefing
- The job and person specification
- Organisational policy on travel expense reimbursement to avoid misunderstandings at a later stage



## ADVANCE PLANNING

# BRIEFING THE CANDIDATES



You should also cover:

- Clear instructions on the means by which and the date by when they should confirm their attendance
- What they should bring – eg, examination proofs of achievement or copies of presentations
- What they should do beforehand – eg, whether any online assessment exercises need to be completed or presentations prepared for
- Dress code information
- Whom they should contact in the event of any special requirements which may require adjustments to the exercises, and how to do this

## ADVANCE PLANNING

## FINAL PREPARATION



A day or two before the assessment centre is due to take place, the organiser should:

- Confirm everyone's attendance at the event – this is particularly necessary with candidates who may be in high demand from other employers
- Double-check that all materials are available and assessors are briefed
- Confirm that the venue has full details of your booking and of your particular requirements

As nothing is left to C-H-A-N-C-E, the assessment centre is now ready to happen, like an orchestra ready to play!



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