Competency Based Recruitment and Selection

Centre for Professional Learning and Development

A Handbook for Managers 2010

NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

This guide is designed to aid you in conducting competency based interviews accurately, fairly and objectively. Example questions are provided in Appendix 2 and can be used to encourage consistency; you will see that the questions have differing levels of complexity to enable you to select the most appropriate ones for the role to which you are recruiting.

1. What are competencies?

The NTU Competency Framework is based on the behaviours and characteristics exhibited by high performers. It supports the University's Strategic Plan and provides a common language for the behaviours and approaches to work needed to deliver the Strategic Plan.

The Framework reflects behaviour patterns which distinguish highly effective performance in a role. There are nine behavioural competencies, split into three overarching groups: *Working with Others*, *Delivering Results* and *Focusing on the Future*. Each competency has a descriptor to give an overview of what it means. Each of the overarching areas contains three competencies, each split into four levels of achievement.

2. Why use competencies for recruitment and selection?

Experience with a range of organisations shows that, when combined with an assessment of knowledge and experience, using competencies improves accuracy in assessing people's suitability or potential for different jobs.

They help prevent interviewers and selectors from making hasty decisions or from assessing interviewees on the basis of characteristics that are not relevant to the job.

They can be used to help structure the selection process - interview and tests.

Assessing a candidate against specific competencies clarifies their strengths and weaknesses, making it easier to target any development that may be needed should they be appointed.

3. What differentiates skills and competencies?

Jobs have three components:

1.	Knowledge	This is necessary to do the job and tends to be job related. It includes professional knowledge, institutional knowledge (e.g. knowledge to be an accountant, academic, engineer, IT specialist etc.). This is <u>what</u> people need to know to do their jobs.
2.	Skills	Skills are needed to perform your functional role and include technical skills, management skills i.e. to manage resources and people (e.g. project management, time management, planning processes, budget management and appraisal).
3.	Competencies	These are the attitudes and behaviour patterns that underpin <u>how</u> people do their jobs. Competencies influence how well people apply their knowledge, technical and management skills. NTU's competency framework reflects the culture and values we expect staff to demonstrate in their roles.

To undertake PDC reviews you need to have knowledge of the NTU process, procedures and forms. You need good communication skills such as listening and questioning to facilitating discussion and you need to be competent at engaging an employee in reflecting on their performance and identifying areas of successful and where they may have room to develop.

4. Using competencies in the selection process

The key documents you need are the Job Description for the role and the Person Specification. These should already be available; Developing a Job Description involves gathering information about the nature of the job, thinking not only about the content (i.e. tasks) making up the job, but also the job's purpose, and how the post fits into the organisation's structure. It is also important to consider the skills and competencies needed to perform the role effectively. Please refer to the Recruitment & Selection Guidelines for Managers for further information on scoping a role and recruiting to it.

4.1. Job Description

Identifies the purpose, main responsibilities and tasks of the job

4.2. Person Specification

The person specification flows from the job description and answers the question "What skills and qualities would someone need to carry out this role?". The person specification identifies the qualifications, skills, experience and competencies needed for effective performance. Using competencies clarifies the personal qualities and workplace behaviours expected of the post holder. However, not all competencies are important in a role. A maximum of 5 core competencies would normally be identified as being appropriate. Some NTU Person Specifications already contain generic competencies or may contain competencies drawn from previous frameworks; you will need to check that these are still appropriate.

See Appendix 1: Example of a person specification

4.3. The Matrix

It is important to strike a balance between assessing every possible criterion on the Person Specification and the time and resources available for the recruitment process. It is good practice to identify the key criteria needed to carry out the role successfully and identify two possible areas of evidence to assess the suitability of candidates against each criterion.

The application form or CV will outline previous experience and qualifications; the interview and any other assessments will test for previous experience in relation to the job role, knowledge, skills and competencies. It is good practice to complete a matrix to identify which criteria will be assessed and how.

The following example is for the selection of a Cataloguer in Libraries and Learning Resources.

Matrix to Identify how the Person Specification will be Assessed During the Recruitment Process				
	Sources of Information			
CRITERIA	Application	Test	In tray Exercise	Panel Interview
Knowledge:				
▪ Thorough knowledge of cataloguing standards	x			x
▪ Understanding of principals of classification of materials using standard classification scheme		x		x
Skills:				
▪ Excellent verbal, written and interpersonal communication skills		x		x
▪ Good analytical and problem solving skills			x	
▪ Ability to work independently and as part of a team	x			
▪ Good personal organisation and time management skills			x	x
Experience of:				
▪ Online Cataloguing, preferably in an integrated LMS, using appropriate standards e.g. AACR2, MARC21 and Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)	x			x
▪ Classification of stock using internationally recognized classification scheme	x			x
▪ Experience of cataloguing using Aleph or similar integrated Library Management System				
Qualifications:				
▪ Professional Library/Information Science qualification at first degree level or above	x			
Competencies:				
Communicating & Influencing – Level 2 Communicates information effectively to a wide range of diverse stakeholders, influencing events.			x	x
Organisation and delivery – Level 1 Plans time effectively to achieve results in day to day work. Is organised and prioritises work appropriately.	x		x	
Team working – Level 1 Works effectively as a member of a team. Takes responsibility for getting things done as part of a team.	x			x
Adaptability – Level 2 Responds positively to change, supporting others in managing transition and being flexible in approaches to job role. Is aware of own strengths and areas for development. Seeks feedback on own work.	x			x

4.4. Advert

The wording of an advert is critical as it will influence the type and quality of candidates who will respond. There should be enough information in the advert to enable people to screen themselves out if they are not suitable candidates. A competency based advert for an Administrative Assistant would need to include skills and experience as well as competencies. It might include the following:

Key requirements of the job are:

Fast and accurate typing
Proficient in using Microsoft Office
Excellent administrative, organisational and delivery skills
Good communication and influencing skills
Ability to adapt to new situations
Good teamworker

4.5. Psychometric Tests and Questionnaires

Psychometric tests and exercises may be useful in recruiting to some roles. It should be noted that psychometric instruments are expensive and time consuming and are rarely used apart from recruiting to very senior roles. If psychometric tests, questionnaires or exercises are used as part of the selection process they must be related to the job and provide information that is relevant.

4.6. Assessment Exercises

Assessments can involve the use of a number of exercises and tests in order to build a more comprehensive picture of the candidates. Assessment centres have the highest predictive validity of all selection techniques. Typically an assessment centre will last a day – some may be longer, others (with online testing done in advance) may be shorter. Some of the exercises and tests can be brought together in a 'mini assessment centre', consisting of an exercise, a personality questionnaire, ability tests and interview. These are shorter and easier to run than a full scale assessment centre.

Exercises usually take about an hour. Some are group exercises; others are completed on an individual basis. The table below is an example of typical exercises and the competencies they can measure.

Assessment Centres can be expensive and require significant planning. Talk to your HR team if you wish to consider using an assessment centre as part of your recruitment and selection process.

	Fact Find Exercise	Analysis/Scheduling Exercise	In box/ In basket Exercise	Oral Presentation	Group Exercise	Interview Simulation
Team Working					x	
Customer Focus	x			x	x	x
Communicating and Influencing	x			x	x	x
Adaptability	x	x	x		x	x
Making Informed Decisions	x	x	x			
Creativity and Innovation	x				x	x

4.7. Competency Based Interviews

Familiarise yourself with the competencies to be assessed during the interview. The definitions and positive behavioural indicators are available in the NTU Competency Framework. Ensure you are familiar with questions in this guide and the suggested probes. These questions are examples you will need to add in context to annotate the question, you should develop further questions based on your expectations of the role. You may want to consider adding further probes of your own.

Remember the questions are purely a tool to help you to elicit relevant information. Therefore it is more important that you probe deeply around the examples to understand a candidate's behaviour and experience.

Part of the interview will be general information gathering and a discussion of experience, for example:

"Tell me about the responsibilities you have in your current role"
"Tell me about your experience of planning conferences"

Competency-based interviews (also called structured or behavioural interviews) are systematic, with each question targeting a specific skill or competency. Candidates are asked questions relating to their behaviour in specific circumstances, which they then need to back up with concrete examples. The interviewers will then dig further into the examples by asking for specific explanations about the candidate's behaviour or skills. They also give candidates plenty of opportunity to talk. Since the purpose of the interview is to obtain evidence from the candidate it follows that the candidates should do most of the talking. The candidate should be talking for 75% - 80% of the time.

Typically, competency based questions will ask candidates for examples of how they have dealt with situations in the past. The rationale in asking for past examples is that past behaviour is a strong predictor of future behaviour in similar situations. Hypothetical questions (such as "What would you do if …") should be avoided as they gather information that is a poor predictor of future behaviour.
Very often a candidate's answer to a question will give you some information but not enough to make an assessment of the competency you are assessing. What

is needed are probing questions to follow up the initial question. The funnel below shows how this can work:

Interviews should follow a clear structure, however the questions should not be followed slavishly as this will interrupt the flow of the interview. It is good practice to explain to the candidate how the interview will be structured, and that you will be asking for specific examples of when they have demonstrated the competencies required for the role. Ask them to bear in mind that you'll be interested in:

- Examples from their work life
- Recent examples preferably – the last 2-3 years
- What they specifically did or said, not the team as a whole (it's fine if they need time to think of an example.)

The questions and probes should be structured as follows:

- Situation – What is the example?
- Action-What did they do?
- Result-What was the outcome?
- Reflection-How did it go/what would they do differently?

See Appendix 2: Examples of competency based questions.

4.8. Assessing Candidates

As the panel asks their questions you should make your notes in the relevant area on the Interview Assessment Form. You are looking for evidence that the criteria have been met in the responses to the questions and the examples that candidates give.

It is important that there is no discussion between interviewers at this stage of the process.

Once all candidates have been interviewed and all interviewers have completed their interview assessment form they can share information and are ready to make a decision (see below).

4.9. Decision Making

At the end of the process there will be several sources of information about each candidate.

Each candidate should be discussed in detail, assessing experience, skills and competencies and the performance in any tests or exercises. Each interviewer will have his/her evidence to bring to the discussion. It is to be expected that panel members will have differences of views about the candidates. Discussions and judgements should be based on discussing the evidence of facts gathered during the selection process.

4.10. Evaluation

Once you have made the decision and given feedback to the candidates it is important to evaluate the whole process without delay. There are always areas where improvements can be made:

- Start with the competencies – are they still relevant and did the behavioural indicators help you to gather relevant evidence?
- The advert – was the placement right? Look at the number of responses and their quality
- Did the sifting of application forms/CVs go well? If not, why not?
- Did any psychometrics and tests / exercises provide the evidence you needed? Were they too easy or too difficult?
- The interview – did the questions work as well as intended? Do interviewers need more training? Are further questions needed?
- Finally, what did candidates (both successful and unsuccessful) think about the process? Was it too time consuming? Were they given the opportunity to show what they are capable of? What impression did they get of NTU? Would they apply again if another opportunity arose?

Equality & Diversity monitor the outcome of recruitment and selection processes for signs of adverse impact on sections of the population covered by equality and diversity legislation.

Person Specification

Post Title:	Subject Administrator	**Post No:**
Organisation Unit:		
Grade:		**Date Compiled:**

Attributes	Essential *	Desirable
Knowledge	Operational knowledge of Microsoft Office suite Extensive knowledge of using email and internet for communication Database maintenance	Knowledge of Quality Assurance processes Knowledge of University regulations and procedures
Skills	Excellent organisational skills with the ability to prioritise own workload and help others to meet their deadlines Excellent written and oral communication skills, giving and receiving information effectively, and an ability to communicate with staff both internal and external to the University Excellent minute writing skills Ability to work as a member of a team Proven ability to work using own initiative to complete tasks set Ability to multitask and complete tasks promptly and accurately Ability to provide a customer focus service to a range of customers Capable of developing high quality networks	An ability to empathise with staff and students and have an understanding of the issues affecting HE

Experience	Proven experience in an administrative environment working in a busy office preferably in an educational context		Experience of Higher Education Administration	
Qualifications			RSA Word Processing to level 2 or equivalent	
Competencies	**COMPETENCY**	**LEVEL**	**COMPETENCY**	**LEVEL**
	Team Working: Works effectively as a member of a team. Takes responsibility for getting things done as part of a team.	**1**		
	Customer Focus: Works to identify customer needs. Seeks feedback and develops service delivery accordingly. Influences and develops ideas to enhance customer satisfaction.	**2**		
	Communicating and Influencing: Communicates information effectively to a wide range of diverse stakeholders, influencing events.	**2**		
	Making Informed Decisions: Is aware of the data/information/research available to inform and develop areas of work. Keeps up to date with information and its quality in order to make judgements.	**1**		

	Organisation and Delivery: Plans time taking account of organisational priorities and other colleagues'' work roles to achieve results.	**2**		

Person Specification drawn up by:		**Date:**
Approved for department by:		**Date:**

*** Please note: in compliance with our obligations under the Immigration, Asylum & Nationality Act 2006, we will require to check original documentary proof of eligibility to work in the UK**

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See also PS Guidance Notes (internal use only)

Working with Others

Team working:
co-operates enthusiastically with others in own team and in other formal and informal teams

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Works effectively as a member of a team. Takes responsibility for getting things done as part of a team.	Contributes to team development, seeking and testing improvements to the team's outputs/service	Leads aspects of team work, seeking and implementing improvements to the team's outputs/service and developing colleagues within the team. Challenges colleagues.	Recognises and develops opportunities for team working at cross-University level, driving improvements to the teams' outputs/service and developing colleagues within the teams.

Examples of questions

Tell me about the last time you worked as part of a team
- What did you do?
- How did you encourage other team members to co-operate?

Give me an example of when you helped improve the performance of your team
- What improvement did you identify?
- How did this improve team performance?

Give me an example of how you have used your leadership skills to manage and improve team performance
- How did you get team buy in?
- How did you handle any difficult situations that arose amongst the team?
- What was the outcome?
- What, if anything, would you do differently next time?

Give me an example of when you have identified an opportunity to enhance a service/ practice by collaborating with another team
- How did you identify that this was an opportunity?
- What was your role in developing effective partnership working?
- How did the team benefit from this collaboration?

Customer focus:
provides the best quality services to internal and external customers, meeting their needs by working in partnership

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Is professional and polite in all dealings with customers, providing a quality service.	Works to identify customer needs. Seeks feedback and develops service delivery accordingly. Influences and develops ideas to enhance customer satisfaction	Provides a quality service that is regularly reviewed. Anticipates customer needs. Actively seeks feedback on services from customers and makes appropriate changes to service and to underpinning policy/strategy.	Anticipates the needs of customers, seeking evidence of demand from the market(s) and from stakeholders. Seeks out and manages long term relationships with stakeholders, develops strategic initiatives to ensure the delivery of a quality and valued service.

Examples of questions

Describe a time when you exceeded a customer's expectations

- How did you know you had exceeded?
- What did your actions achieve?

Describe a situation where you had to deal with a dissatisfied customer

- How did the customer respond to the actions you took?
- What did you do to ensure that the situation did not occur again with other customers?
- What was the outcome?

Describe a situation when you have sought feedback from your customers (internal or external)

- Why did you seek this feedback
- How did you gather the information?
- How did you use it to improve services?
- What have you learned about your organisation as a result of this?

Give us an example of when you have initiated the development of working relationships with external partners to develop strategies to enhance your service delivery.

- What strategies did you develop?
- How did your organisation benefit?
- How did you monitor the impact of these strategies on service delivery?

Communicating and influencing:
gives and receives information effectively, negotiates and persuades to achieve the best possible outcome

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Actively listens. Communicates information effectively	Communicates information effectively to a wide range of diverse stakeholders, influencing events.	Communicates effectively with a wide range of diverse internal and external stakeholders, influencing and negotiating change. Networks internally to keep ahead of developments.	Communicates and negotiates effectively with a range of stakeholders on complex matters which have future implications for the success of the University. Alert to internal and external dynamics of the organisation. Incorporates wider political factors into influencing strategy

Examples of questions:

Give me an example of an occasion when you have had to explain something difficult over the telephone

- What was the most difficult part of the conversation?
- How did you deal with this?

Tell me about a particularly difficult message that you had to communicate to an individual or group

- What steps did you take to ensure the message was clear?
- How did you ensure the message was understood?

Give an example of a time when you have had to influence a group of stakeholders to adopt your ideas on an important strategic issue?

- How did you persuade them to adopt your ideas?
- How did you handle any objections?
- What was the result?
- With hindsight, would you have approached it differently?

Give me an example of when you have had to gain support from stakeholders to implement a strategic decision that had potential to be controversial.

- How did you handle any objections?
- How did you get others on board?
- What were the political/personal sensitivities you had to deal with?
- What were the results?
- With hindsight, how could you have approached this differently?

Delivering Results

Making informed decisions *analyses problems and uses a range of means to make well informed decisions*			
Level 1	**Level 2**	**Level 3**	**Level 4**
Is aware of the data/information/research available to inform and develop areas of work. Keeps up to date with information and its quality in order to make judgements	Uses analyses, reports and data to test the validity of options and assess risk before taking decisions. Ensures optimum decisions are taken.	Uses a wide range of complex data to take controlled risks to achieve greater gain. Uses trends and data to establish controls and performance indicators	Identifies areas for development by reviewing current trends and data. Develops products, policy and strategy for the future.

Examples of questions:

What is the most difficult problem you have had to resolve in the last 12 months?

- What made it difficult?
- What processes did you use to resolve the problem?
- Who else did you involve?
- How satisfied are you with the outcome?

Tell me about a time when you took responsibility for making a key decision

- What was the decision?
- How did you defend your decision?
- What was the possible impact of a poor decision?
- What was the result?

Give me an example when you have collected and analysed complex data to inform you decision making?

- What approach did you take to analysing the data?
- What were the key issues you identified?
- How confident were you with the decisions made?

What management data or information do you collect and monitor to inform your future strategic plans and policies

- How do you use the data?
- What improvements to strategy or policy have your implemented as a result?
- What strategies do you employ to address underperformance?

Organisation and delivery
adopts a clear approach to planning, prioritising and organising work, making effective use of time and resources

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Plans time effectively to achieve results in day to day work. Is organized and prioritises work appropriately.	Plans time taking account of organisational priorities and other colleagues' work roles to achieve results.	Takes account of organisational priorities to ensure that operational and strategic plans are being implemented and achieved.	Adopts a long term view and plans resources accordingly. Develops local strategy in support of the Strategic Plan and develops resourcing models to underpin implementation.

Examples of questions:

How do you organize your day to day workload?
- What tools or methods do you use?
- How does this take account of interruptions and changes to your plans?

Give an example of when you have set a deadline and were unable to achieve it
- What issues did you anticipate?
- How did you plan for these?
- What was the result?
- What, if anything, would you do differently next time?

Describe an occasion when you have had to deliver a complex project on time and to budget.
- What were the objectives?
- What key stages did you work through?
- How did you get people on board?
- What were the difficulties you had to overcome?
- What were the results?

Describe an occasion when you have had to develop strategies to implement major organisational change
- What were you aiming to achieve?
- What was your approach to planning?
- How did you consult and involve relevant people?
- What were the results?
- If you were doing it again, what would you do differently?

Adaptability:
adapts to new situations and areas of work flexibly and with enthusiasm, including recognition of and work towards addressing own development needs and those of others

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Willingly takes on new tasks/adopts new approaches as required as appropriate to job role. Participates in PDR and takes responsibility for keeping professional skills and knowledge up to date.	Responds positively to change, supporting others in managing transition and being flexible in approaches to job role. Is aware of own strengths and areas for development. Seeks feedback on own work.	Embraces and manages change. Seeks opportunities for change, supporting colleagues in implementing new ways of working, effectively and supportively communicating the rationale for change.	Instigates and leads programmes of change, working in close collaboration with colleagues. Identifies resource implications of strategic developments and manages them accordingly.

Examples of questions:

What ideas have you identified to improve the way you work?

- How were these implemented?
- How did you ensure you had the appropriate knowledge and skills?
- What was the outcome?

Tell me about an occasion when you had to adapt to a major change

- Why was it important?
- How did you adapt?
- How did you use feedback to improve your work?

Give me an example of when you instigated a major change

- What was the catalyst for change?
- How did you manage the impact on people?
- How did you communicate the changes?
- How did you monitor the effectiveness of the implementation?

What key change programmes have you lead on?

- How did you resource the change programme?
- How did you involve and work with stakeholders?
- What strategies did you adopt to keep track of resources?

Focusing on the Future

Entrepreneurial and Commercial focus: *understands the financial and commercial environment at NTU, both internally and externally and takes account of this in decision making*			
Level 1	**Level 2**	**Level 3**	**Level 4**
Works to ensure that resources are used with care and due regard to cost and the environment.	Understands the financial context and budgets for expenditure and plans income accordingly.	Spots and progresses business opportunities and opportunities for collaborative working externally and internally. Challenges assumptions and the status quo in order to enhance competitive advantage. Tracks competitor activity.	Keeps up to date with the factors influencing the commercial context of Higher Education and actively seeks out opportunities for income generation, commercial exploitation, and to ensure that NTU retains a competitive edge within the sector.

Examples of questions:

How do you currently ensure that you manage your resources effectively?

- How do you consider costs to the organisation?
- What environmental factors do you take into account?

What factors do you need to take into account when setting your budgets?

- How do you plan your expenditure?
- How do you ensure you keep to your budget?
- Is there anything you can do to improve your financial forecasting?

How do you identify and capitalize on potential business opportunities?

- How did you identify your options?
- What were the commercial implications of this activity?
- How did you gain support for your ideas?

How do you keep yourself up to date with factors influencing the HE sector?

- How have you used this knowledge to ensure competitive advantage in your organisation?
- What were the commercial benefits of this activity?

Creativity and innovation: *adopts a creative approach to problem solving and seeks opportunities to innovate*			
Level 1	**Level 2**	**Level 3**	**Level 4**
Seeks out, reviews and integrates new ways of working into role	Seeks out, reviews and implements new ways of working to improve delivery of service	Reviews, tests and implements new concepts, models and approaches to practice in support of service development and delivery	Develops and implements new concepts, models, approaches to practice and products that have a significant impact on the longer term success of the University. Drives strategic thinking.

Examples of questions:

Give me an example of when you came up with a novel/different approach to a problem/situation

- What suggestions did you make?
- Which ideas were put into practice?
- What was the outcome?

Give me an example of when you changed your working practice to be more efficient

- How did you know that an improvement was necessary?
- What steps did you take?
- Was it successful?
- How did you measure the success?

Tell me about an occasion when you developed and implemented a new approach to organisational practices or processes

- What research did you undertake to inform your approach?
- What options did you identify?
- To what extent were you able to bring about change?

What ideas have you developed and implemented that have impacted on the long term strategic development of your organisation

- What were the challenges?
- What was the impact on your organisational strategies?
- How did you evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in the long term?

Leading and coaching:
motivates colleagues to achieve to the best of their abilities and to meet organisational need, leading by example

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Displays high personal standards, gives and receives feedback and ensures that colleagues are aware of their roles and responsibilities. Leads by example.	Builds a productive team environment. Delegates appropriate tasks and supports colleagues to deliver better results. Develops and coaches individuals to improve their skills. Takes responsibility for the team and manages performance.	Is visible and publicly champions initiatives to provide direction. Takes responsibility for an area of work and for its outputs. Makes time to get to know people and motivate them. Regularly reviews performance of self and others.	Takes responsibility for strategic developments, sets standards and direction. Takes responsibility for developing talent and succession planning. Is a role model for others.

Examples of questions:

Give me an example of when someone came to you for help or guidance

- Why did they need your support?
- What did you do to support / guide them?
- How did it help?
- How did this fit into your overall approach to developing your team?

Give me an example of when you have had to deal with poor performance.

- How did you approach the problem
- What were the political/personal sensitivities you had to deal with?
- What were the results?
- With hindsight, would you have approached this any differently?

Give an example of when you have lead a team on a major project

- How did you gain support for this activity beyond your immediate team?
- How did you ensure your people were engaged and motivated to perform?
- How did you measure success?

What strategies to you operate to identify and nurture talent in your organisation?

- How do you foster/encourage innovation?
- How do you ensure staff with potential are identified and developed?
- How has this benefited your organisation?

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