

GUIDANCE: ASSESSMENT CENTRES/ DAYS AND INTERVIEWS

PLANNING OF THE ASSESSMENT/INTERVIEW: CONSIDER THE TIMING/FORMAT

Often, on-site versus remote assessments and interviews are the most stressful for autistic candidates and they should be scheduled at a time when the autistic candidate is most resilient, for example mid-morning, when they have had the least stressful commute to the interview location and good night of rest the day before. Remember that all candidates will be different, however and ask the candidates input as to what the best time of day for them would be to attend an interview or assessment such as this and be as flexible as possible.

You should be able to offer a remote interview or assessment if on-site attendance is too overwhelming. If a person needs a remote process, it does not necessarily mean they won't be able to attend on-site for work if they accept a role. All candidates are especially anxious during assessments and interviews and struggling to prevent overwhelm. For autistic people who tend to have a much more intense anxiety response, being asked to attend on-site can mean the difference between them applying or not applying.

PREPARING FOR THE ASSESSMENT/INTERVIEW: BRIEFING STAFF

Ensure that you brief all the relevant staff, including interviewers, assessors, security, reception, facilities and catering staff for on-site assessments and interviews, that you will likely have autistic candidates attending. Schedule briefing or training sessions so that they can adjust their communication and support candidates that may be feeling overwhelmed, to calm down or direct to a quiet room.

Some autistic people really benefit from being able to ask questions in the chat area during remote meetings, or 'raising a hand' to signal that they want to interject or need assistance. Ensure that all staff are prepared for this in good time. Also, many autistic candidates will benefit greatly from the option to be able to turn their camera off after initially joining and introducing themselves, to manage their focus and anxiety.

Ensure that interviewers are highly disciplined about ensuring that their background environments are quiet and calm and that they keep their microphones muted whenever they are not speaking.

1 WEEK BEFORE: PROVIDE STRUCTURE & FORMAT

Provide clear, visual (images and text) supporting information. Explain what time the interview or assessment will start and finish, what will happen at each stage of the assessment or interview (provide a clear and detailed agenda).

Include details of the interviewers or assessors, with their short bio's, photographs, and information about their roles during the interview or assessment (e.g., note taker, technical questioning, helper etc.).

Include any floor plans, photographs or 360° video tours of on-site interviews and assessments, and mark-up the key locations relevant for the candidate such as waiting areas, toilets, refreshments, quiet rooms and how and where to ask for assistance. If you don't already have this visual information prepared then you should create it.

Don't forget to clearly state:

'Please contact (named contact email and phone number), to talk about any reasonable adjustments we may be able to make for you'

on all documents and communications, to encourage early, effective and positive disclosure. Give some examples wherever you can of standard adjustments that you offer for autistic candidates, or ones that you have tailored for autistic candidates in the past.

1 WEEK BEFORE: PROVIDE A REMOTE PLATFORM TEST OR AN ON-SITE PRE-TOUR AND CLEAR ACCESS INFORMATION

For remote interviews or assessments, provide a platform test to help the candidate manage their anxieties about whether they will be able to join on the day, and prepare and communicate a contingency plan for on the day, if connection is lost.

Remind the candidate that they may be accompanied by someone who regularly provides communication or anxiety support.

Provide travel information for on-site attendance, in different media such as google maps links as well as in text and using map extracts and images. Include specific details on where and who they should report to when they arrive at the interview location, and what will happen after they initially check in.

Often autistic people struggle at the first hurdle, usually at the reception or entrance to buildings, so do ensure that all staff that will be initially receiving autistic candidates, including security and reception staff are well prepared and briefed/trained in autism-friendly communication and support.

3-5 DAYS BEFORE: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/ASSESSMENT INSTRUCTIONS

This is not providing autistic candidates with an advantage but is removing the common barriers they have to answering unpredictable interview questions 'on the spot'. Autistic candidates often need more time to translate the literal meaning of questions and prepare to answer questions, and additionally experience much higher levels of anxiety in interview situations than their non-autistic counterparts. This means that many autistic candidates 'freeze' completely and are unable to speak or reply meaningfully to questions that they easily know the answer to, or they may over-talk and completely lose the 'thread' of what they are saying and appear disorganised in their thoughts when they are not.

ON THE DAY: ALLOW EXTRA PROCESSING TIME & PROMPT TO REFER TO NOTES OR TAKE A BREAK

A good guide is to ask one question, or make one point only at a time, and then allow a full 5 seconds before prompting or rephrasing a question or point.

If there is still no response you should wait a further 5-seconds then prompt to refer to notes.

If there is still no response after another 10 seconds, ask if the candidate would like you to proceed to the next question or take a brief 2-3 minute break before continuing.

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