

Assessment centres

Assessment centres are part of the selection process for some jobs - typically those where you might be managing a team or will have direct contact with patients.

If you've applied and then been shortlisted for a vacancy, check to see if you'll need to attend an assessment centre as part of the process.

Door sign

No-one likes the idea of spending a whole day being assessed, but a selection [assessment] centre can be a more equitable process than an individual interview. You'll be seen by a greater number of selectors and have a longer period of time to demonstrate you have the knowledge, skills and values they are looking for.

What can I expect at an assessment centre?

An assessment day can include any of the following:

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Information sessions/informal events

This is a chance to meet other candidates and the selectors. It's a good idea to prepare some questions in advance but don't ask them if your questions have already been answered by an information session. Even if a session is informal, be aware that you are probably being assessed.

Practical tests

You may have to demonstrate your skills in a clinical simulation through a practical simulation in a clinical environment using a mannequin or verbal clinical simulation – a hypothetical scenario where you talk through the steps of a procedure.

Numeracy tests

A wide range of numeracy tests are used including drug calculations which might be used in a hypothetical scenario. For example, you may be asked how many tablets you should give a particular patient, or how much of an IV drug.

The key to success is identifying what kind of calculation is being asked for: addition, subtraction, division or multiplication. And it is worth practising these tests in advance as there is a higher failure rate for drug calculations than any other assessment centre test.

Literacy tests

You may be given a situation to write about, such as describing how you would dispense and administer a drug. It's important to be legible and accurate and show clear logical steps. Grammar and spelling may also be assessed.

Group exercises

These can be:

- a clinical simulation which has to be worked through as a team
- a formal topic-based discussion such as the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC ^[1]) code of conduct for nurses and midwives or current healthcare topics in the media
- an informal team exercise

Tips for doing well in group exercises

- the most important thing to do is contribute
- in all cases assessors will be watching how you interact with other candidates
- if you're a confident person make sure you do not dominate, ensure others have their say and encourage those who are not saying very much
- try to speak clearly and articulately
- show you can work in a team, can negotiate and are good at problem solving
- ensure you can talk about the current hot topics in healthcare, particularly in relation to the specific profession you are applying for and the likely pressures faced by healthcare workers

Multiple-mini interviews

These are generally used for recruitment to health courses rather than jobs, but some trusts are piloting their use for healthcare staff recruitment.

Multiple mini interviews involve candidates moving around a number of stations where they will spend a short amount of time in each. You can expect interview questions, drug calculations, scenarios or dilemmas, task-based activities or role-play interactions. Each station will measure one competency or aim to assess a personality trait or value.

Pre-assessment day tests

More and more NHS organisations are asking applicants to complete multiple choice tests on-line which you may need to pass to get to assessment centre stage.

• Preparing for an assessment centre

Individual employing organisations may visit your university to give a presentation on what to expect at an assessment centre and may give examples of test formats.

Alternatively look out for open days at local trusts and other health providers. These may include application workshops and mock assessment centre techniques.

Here are some tips to get the most from an assessment day:

How to prepare

- make sure you know exactly which organisation you are applying to and which position!
- on the day, know where you are going and allow plenty of time. You are unlikely to be successful if you turn up late
- show why you want to join a particular employer - research their website to identify values and clinical specialties
- re-read the job description and person specification and be clear about the skills and qualities the organisation is looking for
- re-read your original application
- prepare some examples of work-related and non work-related situations to demonstrate your skills and values.
- continual reflection will help you prepare for interview. Sit in front of a mirror and practice reflecting on what you have done on placement
- be aware of current issues relating to the job, the health sector (and the NHS and specific trust if you're applying to an NHS organisation)
- remember to demonstrate you understand the basics of patient care and safety, for example handwashing.
- make sure you can confidently explain why you need to do something in a certain way. Making use of your placements to ask why procedures are done a certain way is a good idea so you have examples to call on

Performing well on the day

- first impressions really do count, so follow any instructions on how to dress and remember that handshakes, eye contact and smiling are important
- be yourself – assessors need to be able to see the real you

"Don't hide in the corner. When you arrive, introduce yourself to other candidates and take opportunities to speak to people, including assessors, throughout the day."

Matthew Richards, recruitment, King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

- show enthusiasm
- remember, from the moment you enter the building you are being assessed, including possibly by the person on reception
- listen carefully to questions and ask for clarification if needed
- join in discussions but don't dominate
- show you are interested in other candidates and listen to and consider their views
- keep to time in timed exercises
- don't panic if you make a mistake and most importantly don't give up. Your overall performance is what matters

Source URL:<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/career-planning/study-and-training/considering-or-university/support-university/your-first-job-after-university/assessment-centres>

Links

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#NMC>