Recruitment Advice and the COVID-19 Response

Frequently Asked Questions

This advice has been pulled together by CSEP, in partnership with the Civil Service Commission and Government Recruitment Service (GRS) to help assist you with your recruitment processes due to the changes to working practices as part of the COVID-19 response.

These questions are aimed to support all those involved in recruitment including Departmental teams, External suppliers, CoRE and other CSHR teams.

If you have any further questions or need additional advice please contact CSEP at contact.us@csep.gov.uk who will be able to help you. If you have any good practice which could be shared across government, please also get in touch via this email address.

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Continuation of Recruitment and events

1. Should recruitment go ahead at the moment?

Starting new recruitment: Departments/Vacancy Holders should weigh up the business criticality of the recruitment, and likelihood of all parties involved being available during the timelines being proposed, before committing to launching a campaign.

GRS users and SCS 3&4 via Executive recruitment team: GRS have reviewed their business continuity plans. Due to a combination of their ability to work both remotely and flexibly across the business, and the surge contracts they have in place, they expect to retain the capability to launch new campaigns.

Non-GRS users: Departments will need to consult with their recruitment teams and existing external suppliers to fully understand the scope and capacity of being able to carry out recruitment exercises in the current climate. For departments who need to prioritise other departmental activities, GRS may be able to offer recruitment service up to SCS2. Please contact Michelle Ellison (michelle.ellison@cabinetoffice.gov.uk) to discuss this further if required.

Continuing existing recruitment exercises: At this time we are not aware of any departments putting a blanket pause on recruitment, nor prioritising any roles or campaigns over others. Businesses may find it appropriate to suspend permanent recruitment in favour of carrying out core business. If necessary, temporary staff could be recruited to meet immediate needs to ensure the core business is delivered.

2. What should happen with planned face to face recruitment events?

If/where anyone still has plans for face-to-face events (e.g. careers/jobs fairs) then we would recommend that these should be postponed/cancelled.

Changes to Assessment Methods

3. Is it possible to alter the advertised selection criteria?

It is important to note that, although changes to the channels through which you assess are possible, you must be mindful not to alter the advertised selection criteria as this would be a breach of the Recruitment Principles.

4. Is it possible to change or remove part of the method of assessment, even if it was included in the advert or candidate pack?

If you need to reconsider whether you can offer all the stages of the process in a campaign, whether at assessment centre or otherwise, you can remove an advertised stage, for example an exercise/role play as long as that doesn't alter the advertised selection criteria. In the first instance you should explore the use of remote assessment technology to achieve consistency, if you are unable to facilitate you should disregard any scores you may already have given to candidates who have already gone through this part of the process (for example 'banked' scores) so that all candidates are assessed on the same criteria. The Civil Service Commission will not consider this to be a breach as long as what you have done, and the reason, is clearly documented.

Conducting Sifts and Interviews

5. If we carry on with our recruitment campaign how should we carry out the sift?

As far as departmental technology enables, sifting should be carried out remotely without the need for panels to meet in person. An overall record of scoring decisions should be kept which sets out a clear merit order.

6. How should we proceed with interviews already scheduled?

Any face to face interview that has already been scheduled will now need to be rearranged, if you still wish to recruit into the post. It may be possible to carry out interviews via video. Please see further guidance in questions 7, 8 and 9.

If the interview is already scheduled to take place via video, then as long as you still wish to recruit into this post, the interview can proceed as before, as long as candidates and panel members are still free and able to attend.

7. How should we carry out interviews during this period of social distancing?

Departments may wish to use video interviewing where appropriate. These have been trialled by GRS and they have found them equally as effective. If a department does not currently have the technology to support this, there are options available such as LaunchPad Recruits, VC Connect, Skype Business etc. As an alternative to purchasing specific software GRS may be able to assist through their existing contracts, or suppliers on Lot 6 & 7 of the Permanent Recruitment Framework will be able to provide this service.

Before moving to video solutions, recruiters must ensure that your preferred platform meets with your Departments internal security requirements, and in particular that the solution is not blocked by internal firewalls. Recruiters should also be confident that solutions will not be

impacted by either business or candidate internet connections (band width). This is especially important for those in certain geographical locations and rural settings.

8. Can we carry out interviews over video?

Yes, live video interviews replicate a face-to-face interview, with the interview conducted online as a virtual final interview panel where candidates and multiple panel members join the interview at a predetermined time. Interviews can be conducted in the same way as a face to face interview, but with panel members in multiple locations or the ability to record or view interviews live. It is of course important for the interview panel to prepare and to know, for example, who is leading on different questions.

It will be necessary to check that the chosen technology is available, accessible and compatible for all panel members and candidates taking part, if not, reasonable adjustments will need to be considered. HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) colleagues have produced some very helpful guidance, for both vacancy holders and managers, on carrying out video interviews. This can be found at Annex A.

9. Is it possible to carry out video interviews that aren't in 'real time' so are pre-recorded?

Yes, these are called asynchronous video interviews. Candidates are presented with pre-determined questions which they answer within set thinking and response times. Pre-recorded video interviews can be used to assess both behaviours and strengths.

Candidates log into the video interview platform and are presented with both video and text of questions. Prompts can be included to give the candidate an indication of what they should cover in their response to replace probing questions that would be used in a face to face or live video interview.

The candidate's responses are recorded on the platform, which assessors are able to access 24/7 to review and rate the candidate's performance.

Carrying out asynchronous video interviews would need specific software. There are options available such as LaunchPad Recruits, VC Connect, Skype Business etc. As an alternative to purchasing specific software GRS may be able to assist through their existing contracts, or suppliers on Lot 6 & 7 of the Permanent Recruitment Framework will be able to provide this service. Please ensure that reasonable adjustments are considered where required.

10. Are telephone interviews an option?

The first alternative to face to face interviews should be video, however, where this is not possible, telephone interviews are an option. If you are considering telephone interviews as an alternative, key considerations include:

- strengths-based assessment is not compatible with telephone interviews. This is because it is not possible to consider the full range of evidence related to the dimension of engagement (i.e. non-verbal behaviours)

- ID documentation, although not required for the interview to take place, will still need to be checked via other means (see question 23 on Pre Employment Checks).

11. Will I need to ensure that the interview method is the same for every candidate in the recruitment exercise?

Where possible, you should try to offer a consistent format for interviews to all candidates (i.e. all by video preferably or all by phone). If that is not possible for some candidates, due to the access of IT, take a reasoned approach, and ensure differences in that approach are documented. Whichever format they are carried out in, all interviews should remain consistent, and ask the same questions on the same behaviours or strengths. You should follow the information published in your candidate packs.

12. Is it possible to have a reduced number of panel members for carrying out interviews in different formats?

Best practice is to have a three person panel. The Civil Service Commission is hoping that this best practice can continue, however, the Recruitment Principles require there to be a minimum of two people on a panel. Please note that the panel and process for external exercises must be chaired by a civil servant (or CS Commissioner for external SCS2 and all SCS3 exercises), and the Commission will expect to see evidence that this has been observed at all times. You should also, still give due regard to the diversity of panels, for SCS roles a diverse panel in terms of ethnicity and disability is mandatory.

13. If a candidate refuses to attend the interview because of a change in the format what action can be taken?

In instances where candidates refuse alternative formats for interview, the offer can be withdrawn, unless the request is in relation to a reasonable adjustment, and in relation to a disability. We would expect you to offer candidates a reasonable amount of time in which to respond to communications, particularly where you are introducing changes.

14. Is it possible to run a recruitment campaign without carrying out any interviews?

There are some campaigns which could assess candidates using solely written evidence, and/or the results of online assessments. This is a decision for the department. You must be assured that you are able to make a sound judgement using the information available. You must have the same amount of evidence for each candidate and not consider anything else you may be aware of, for example, for internal candidates known to you or other panel members.

Other Assessment Methods

15. **If the candidate pack stated that there would be a presentation as part of the assessment, what would be the best way to do this?**

If technology allows the best way would be for the presentation to be given as part of the video interview. If this is not possible then you should consider asking the candidate to submit something in writing, to be discussed with the panel by phone or video conferencing.

16. **Will it still be possible to carry out role-play and simulation exercises as part of the assessment?**

Role-plays and simulation exercises are used to observe and evaluate primary behavioural evidence of a candidate performing the same or very similar tasks / interactions with others, and in the same or a very similar context to the job role. These exercises work best when they have a 'high fidelity' to the job being performed. Video interviewing technology / software (e.g. StarLeaf, Google Hangouts, Launchpad, Skype) may be an option for these types of exercises. You should however consider the following when determining whether this would be a suitable format for your assessment needs:

- Is video conferencing technology available, accessible and compatible for both the department and candidates taking part?

- Will it be essential for the candidates to interact with others in a face-to-face environment when executing their duties? (e.g. Health & Safety Inspector; Planning Inspector; Border Force Investigator).

- Is video conference technology / telephony routinely used (in part or in full) or an essential part of the role when individuals interact with others and/or perform their duties? (e.g. Contact Centre Customer Advisor)

- Can the pivotal aspects of the context / environment be fully simulated via remote means?

- Is the interaction one-to-one or with more than one person (i.e. actor) simultaneously? Some video conference software limits how many individuals can be 'seen' on screen at the same time (i.e. they may be hidden from view until they speak), which may influence interpersonal dynamics and performance (e.g. being able to notice non-verbal reactions).

- Similarly, can the simulation / role-play be recorded without the need for an assessor to be part of the live video conferencing (i.e. they can assess performance at a later time)? Otherwise, does the software allow the assessor to be hidden from the field of vision of the candidate on screen? [The alternative scenario is that the assessor's presence may be more obvious and potentially distracting, relative to a face-to-face where there may be more options to manoeuvre out of line of sight of the interaction between candidate and role-players].

- Any reasonable adjustments required by candidates.

If you conclude that video conferencing is not a viable option for effectively assessing the role requirements, or that it would represent a false economy going forward, you may need to consider either an alternative option (e.g. another assessment method; postponing assessment) or continuing while accepting any risks.

17. Will it still be possible to hold an assessment centre?

Assessment centres will likely include a combination of the assessment methods / exercises that have been referred to in other FAQs. This may mean that some, all or none of the assessment centre components would be immediately suitable for remote / virtual assessment - which may potentially mean you need to rethink the composition and running of the assessment centre. For detailed advice please contact the GRS Occupational Psychology Team (occupationalpsychologyteam@cabinetoffice.gov.uk).

Assessments specifically for SCS campaigns

18. Will already planned in SCS leadership assessments still continue?

Further detail is outlined in the questions below for specific SCS leadership assessments. Please be aware however that cancellation charges may still apply should any cancellation occur within the period stipulated by your recruitment supplier.

19. Will Independent Leadership Assessments (ILAs) and Alternative Leadership Assessments (ALAs) (self-report based personality profiling) still continue as normal?

The GRS approach is that ILAs and ALAs require candidates to remotely complete a number of online psychometric tools, and these can continue as per business as usual. The resulting one-to-one validation interview / feedback discussion with an Occupational Psychologist can be completed virtually, either via telephone - which is currently the standard mode for ALAs - or via video conferencing, if available. It should still achieve the necessary quality outcomes for the SCS interview panel (i.e. summary insights report with probing questions). If using other recruitment suppliers Departments will need to check that their processes are still able to continue.

20. Will it be possible to still carry out Staff Engagement Exercises (SEEs) and media exercises (primary behavioural evidence based)?

Many of the considerations outlined for role-plays and simulations would apply here, particularly for media exercises, which are effectively a simulation (see question 16 on role-plays and simulations).

At the moment, GRS have not extensively trialled the SEEs via video conferencing technology in recruitment campaigns. These have traditionally been conducted face-to-face under the rationale that this provides the optimal set-up to: [a] simulate typical 'stand-up' or focus-group type meetings between SCS and staff in their directorates; and [b] to observe the limits of a

candidate's ability to engage, with scope for a full range of non-verbal behaviours and group dynamics to play out in relation to their personal style [all within a snapshot of time]. GRS have however undertaken a brief pilot, with one 'candidate' interacting with a staff group and via three different video conferencing technologies - Microsoft Teams, StarLeaf and Google Hangouts. Following this pilot, we would offer the following guidance points for remote / virtual SEEs:

- SEEs can take place over video conferencing provided the technology is available, accessible and compatible for both the department and candidates taking part.

- Consideration should be given to whether video conferencing would be a possible, realistic and relevant means of interacting with staff in the directorate when operating in the role (i.e. if face-to-face interaction is essential, this may mean video conferencing a SEE would be less role-related).

- SEEs over video conferencing should use software that allows all individuals in the exercise to be visible on screen at the same time (i.e. not hidden or only revealed when they speak). It is important to ensure that non-verbal cues are visible at all times and in real-time to everyone involved, including the observing Occupational Psychologist. While not an exhaustive list, we are aware that StarLeaf, Skype and Google Hangouts allow this functionality, whereas Microsoft Teams may not. You should check your chosen tool before proceeding.

- The number of staff in the staff group should take into consideration the maximum number of individuals whose face can be 'seen' consistently on screen throughout the interaction (reference bullet point above), while also considering the guidance for face-to-face SEEs, which recommends 5-6 members of staff in the group. Be aware that you may need to reduce the number of staff depending on the limits of this aspect of the available software.

- Despite best efforts, software and technology can be affected by Internet / wifi signal and therefore [a] some prior testing should take place with the staff group and with shortlisted candidates to ensure compatibility (at least the day before, if not earlier); and [b] when timetabling virtual SEEs, some space should be built in to anticipate any emergent technical issues that may need to be addressed on the day.

- It is recommended that SEEs should not take place on a telephone call or telekit, where the candidate and staff group cannot see each other, as this omits important real-time non-verbal cues for candidates and staff.

21. What should we do if we decide the video conferencing is not a viable option for the SEE?

If you consider that video conferencing is not a viable option for the SEE to effectively assess the role requirements, or that it would represent a false economy going forward, this may mean considering an alternative option such as an ILA or an ALA. Should a vacancy holder or panel

determine that a SEE is critical to assessing a candidate for a role, but that video conferencing is not viable, then the next course of action may be to delay this part of the process until the Government advice on travel and social contact changes significantly.

Commissioner Led Process

22. If a commissioner is chairing the process, who will make the decision about how assessment is carried out?

Where a Commissioner is chairing a competition they should be consulted on all aspects and decisions should not be taken without their knowledge or prior agreement. You must make arrangements and agree with them on any IT based approach to ensure their IT has appropriate capability. You must discuss interview arrangements with the Commissioner in advance of the campaign launching.

Pre-Employment Checks

23. Will there be any change in the process to carry out pre-employment checks?

As of 19th March 2020, DBS have made temporary changes to ID checking guidelines for **Standard** and **Enhanced** DBS checks only. This means that with immediate effect DBS have removed the requirement to validate original identification documents face to face.

Please see the link below to the guidance that has been published on the Gov.uk website:

https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service

The changes communicated via the link above currently apply to the **Standard** and **Enhanced** identity guidance only. This is because the people applying for these checks are in safeguarding roles and/or will have a regulatory or legislative requirement for the check to be carried out.

It may be necessary to move critical staff across government and this group will require **Basic** checks. GRS have worked closely with DBS to agree that those government departments that submit **Basic** checks can follow the same process that has been agreed for Standard and Enhanced checks. This special dispensation has been given to government departments to ensure that we are able to respond quickly to the changing demands that COVID-19 brings.

HMCTS Guidance for Vacancy Holders for Carrying out Interviews via Video

Following the measures put in place by the government around taking precautions to socially distance from others, we appreciate this may create some challenges for some as to how interviews proceed.

Where all panel members feel able and happy to, face to face interviews can continue. We would recommend contacting candidates prior to the interview. Ideally, this would be by phone however we appreciate for volume campaigns email may be more efficient. This would allow you to advise of simple changes to process such as no shaking of hands, ensuring that candidates are 2 metres away, etc. During the call we would also advise candidates to follow all Covid-19 recommendations; not to attend if they are unwell and to establish if candidates have been outside of England in the last four weeks, if so, where and when; from this we could make the decision as to whether it would be appropriate to bring in the candidate for a face to face interview. Where a candidate cannot attend or where a panel elects to, we can use Skype.

Skype video is a suitable alternative to face to face Interviews which will enable us to continue with the interview process. To help those who would like to interview by Skype video we include some guidance both for the Panel members and for candidates.

Managers - Using Skype Video

Technology

- We should all be able to use Skype to interview. However, we suggest you check your technology prior to agreeing to interview by Skype
- To check, we that recommend that you work with a panel member or colleague who is willing to down load Skype for Business onto a personal device (It's free and relatively easy) and then use your HMCTS Skype account to Skype them. Please note that it does need to be Skype for Business.
- If you are using an interview room with a big screen then you can use the big screen by "inviting the room" when you book the room

Guidance for Managers

- You should call/email candidates ahead of a Skype interview to confirm the Skype video requirements. An example email is set out below
- We have compiled Guidance for candidates that you can issue to candidates to help them prepare for a Skype video interview
- Treat a Skype video interview as you would any other interview in turns of preparation, environment and conduct
  - Dress accordingly
  - Ensure that you are in a quiet room with no distractions
  - Switch off all phones
  - Be prepared to make accurate notes
- Set up Skype equipment and check technology well ahead of the interview
- Make sure you shut down all other programmes and applications on the device being used for the Skype interview
- Ensure you enter the Skype video call promptly
- You may consider allowing extra time between interviews to allow for any technology delays

- Ensure you have the candidate contact details to hand as you may need to contact them by phone
- Check what the candidate will see behind you, ideally no windows creating light problems and no posters etc, creating a distraction. You may if you wish, prior to interviews, check with a colleague from another location and Skype them in as you would the candidate to check everything will work well. This will enable you to check both technology, how the setting looks and whether the lighting works well. Establish where panel members will sit and how they will present themselves
- For a Skype panel, there needs to be additional preparation to make sure that everyone is clear of their roles in interviewing the candidate and avoid unnecessary pauses. For example, who is doing the introductions, who is explain strengths questions, who is asking each question. You should have the same panel for each Skype interview unless changes need to be made due to illness
- We would recommend a pre-interview phone call, or if this is not possible an email. In this call, you can check they have the technology to support Skype, explain to the candidate what you intend doing, reassure them that it will be treated the same way as a face to face interview and encourage them to do the same; dress accordingly, check their technology, prepare in the same manner and most importantly, to have their ID documents to hand, clear and able to show to the panel
- We would recommend, where it is possible to do so, that you have someone support and do some test runs with candidates to check that Skype will work for them. This is best done by arranging agreed times for the test and then Skyping candidates to carry out the test
- If all interviews are being held by Skype and candidates can use Skype interviews but one person refuses then Civil Service Commission allows us to withdraw them unless it is disability related, in which case, we need to consider each case individually. However, you may also wish to consider though if this is the right approach right now if a candidate does not have supporting technology. Our aim is to support all candidates through the process so please flag before withdrawing.
- As in face to face interviews, we will have candidates that don't show. We recommend that after 5 minutes you phone the candidate to see if there are any issues. If you cannot get hold of them then wait another 5 minutes and try again. If there is no contact within 15 minutes, then you may end the interview and proceed through the normal process of trying to contact the candidate to see ascertain the problem
- Finally, try to remember that the camera can be more harsh than real life and of course, loses some of the key cues of communication that we all sub-consciously rely on, so a little extra effort may be needed to relax, be reassuring and smile 😊 to help encourage the candidate to be open and help yourself be more natural

If you require any further guidance or have any questions, please contact us on hmctshrresourcing@justice.gov.uk

Email To candidate

Dear xxx

Following on from your conversation with our team today, I will be setting up a Skype Interview to replace your Face to Face Interview on xxxx

To be able to join this interview you will need to download **Skype for Business** to your device. Skype for Business can be downloaded free here for Windows or as an App from your appropriate App Store. You may already have Skype on your device but please note it does have to be Skype for Business.

You do not need to create an account but on joining the interview you will be able to sign in as a guest.

Civil Service HR

Optional **I will also arrange a test run for equipment purposes only for 3:15pm this afternoon.**

Please have all the Right to work documents that you are required to bring to interview to hand as you will need to present these during your interview.

Please ensure that you accept your invitation to interview and ensure that you are logged into the call a couple of minutes before it is due to start.

To help you with your interview, I have attached some Guidance notes for you.

I will also arrange a test run for equipment purposes only for 3:15pm this afternoon.

HMCTS Guidance for Candidate when attending an Interview via Video

Please ensure that you accept your invitation to interview and ensure that you are logged into the call a couple of minutes before it is due to start.

1. **Be on time**. Ensure that you are well prepared and join a few minutes before your scheduled interview time
2. **Right to work documents**. Please have all the Right to Work documents that you would bring to your interview with you. You will be asked to show these to the Interview panel by holding them up to the screen
3. **Hear and be heard**. Make sure that you have the volume and microphone set properly so the interviewers can hear you and you can hear them
4. **Dress appropriately**. Dress as you would for a face to face interview
5. **Consider your environment.** Is it quiet and distraction free?   Is the lighting good and visibility clear? What will the interviewers see behind you? Make sure you are the main focus with nothing distracting behind you
6. **Make sure that you won't be distracted.** Shut down other programmes on your device. Make sure there aren't any notifications that will make a noise. Switch off your phone
7. **Don't be disturbed.** If there are other people about let them know that you are being interviewed and don't want disruptions.   Ensure that you won't be disturbed by pets
8. **Using Notes.** You may use notes but make sure that they are short reminders so that you can keep your focus on your interviewers, this avoids them looking at the top of your head whilst you read
9. **Practice.** It's a good idea to practice with someone beforehand and get feedback on the environment, lighting, your posture and tone