



## GUIDANCE ON THE PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS PROCESS

### POINTERS FOR FILLING OUT THE APPLICATION FORM AND TAKING PART IN THE INTERVIEW

#### THE APPLICATION FORM

If you want to complete your application well you should do the following:

- avoid jargon and technical terms
- write for the reader who may not know your employer or job – assume that they don't
- include concise and specific examples of your having demonstrated the required skill or knowledge (see examples of criteria and guidance) and be sure you can expand on these at interview – examples can be drawn from everyday occurrences or from specific projects
- don't worry about using the same example more than once if it's very good and meets more than one of the criteria well
- don't worry about using examples that aren't from the workplace – examples can be drawn from your personal life too as long as they provide good evidence that you've met the criteria
- set out clearly your personal involvement in any examples that you give. It is how you actually carried out the piece of work that the panel is interested in
- provide more than one example if you can
- explain how frequently you did what you did and over what period
- explain how recently you did what you did
- explain what role were you in when you did what you did make sure the examples that you give are relevant to the criterion



## Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland

- focus on any positive outcome and relate it to your involvement
- don't be afraid to "blow your own trumpet"
- explain the level you were working at or the seniority of the people you were working with if that seems important for the role

Poor answers tend to share some or all of these features and should be avoided:

- Generalisations such as, "I am always X"
- Job descriptions reproduced as answers
- Too much detail on processes carried out – although the evidence you provide must include detail, too much will use up valuable space that could be better filled with other examples
- Assertions such as, "It is important to do X"
- Theoretical answers such as, "To achieve X, I would do Y". This is a common mistake made by applicants. There is a tendency to answer criteria in this way: "In order to X one must Y" when in fact to answer correctly the applicant should be writing "In order to X I did Y on A, B and C occasions" and then list the successful outcomes.
- Passive statements such as, "X occurred"
- Statements not related to the applicant's personal involvement such as, "We then X." Don't use the third person – say, "I did X", not "We did X"
- Paraphrasing of the criteria such as, "I work effectively as part of a team"





## THE INTERVIEW

- Firstly, confirm you'll be attending. Contact the person who wrote to you and use it as an opportunity to check practical issues like parking or directions to the place where your interview is to take place.
- Look at your application form again. Pick out points interviewers are likely to want to talk about or have you expand on. Think about how you'll deal with any weaknesses or gaps.
- Remember that the panel is there to test your skills, knowledge and personal qualities against the person specification. Your application form will have given you an opportunity to provide evidence that you have the required skills and knowledge. However, it may not have asked you to demonstrate personal qualities as these are often tested at interview. Check the person specification you were sent against the form you completed – identify any questions that you haven't yet answered and prepare for them – remember the pointers for completing the form as the advice there applies to how you answer questions at interviews too.
- You will be provided with the interviewers' names in your letter of invitation to interview. It's worth memorising these as it will help you make a connection when you are talking to them. Answer the person who asked you the question.
- Remember that the panel will only ask questions related to the person specification. The panel's decision has to be based on how well you meet the specification and nothing else.
- There are some exceptions to this – the panel will also ask you to confirm that you can meet the time commitment and about any potential conflicts of interest. You will also be questioned to ensure that you are aware of the standards of probity required of public appointees. You can find out more about this on the website of the Standards Commission for Scotland:

<http://www.standardscommissionscotland.org.uk/>

- Be a good listener – good communication skills are often asked for in the criteria for a role so you will let yourself down if you don't demonstrate them at interview.



## Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland

- Be honest – it's best to be yourself at interview; if you feel that you aren't as strong as you might be in a given area then say so – you will be assessed on your overall suitability for the role and not on just one or two areas.
- Be consistent
- Be positive
- Be sure that your answers relate to the person specification and the question you were asked.
- Be sure you understand what is being asked – if you don't, ask the interviewer to explain or rephrase the question. This won't count against you.
- Know what questions you want to ask if they're not answered during the course of the interview – you are interviewing the sponsor department and body to make sure that the role is right for you and this is your chance to make sure that it is before deciding.

