



## New application methods for public appointments

If you are planning an appointment round, various application methods can now be used instead of the standard application form and interview. The aim is to provide a range of options, so you can choose the one best suited to the post you need to fill and the people you need to attract.

### What will this achieve?

By choosing the most appropriate method you can

- increase the number of people likely to apply
- improve applicants' experience of the appointments process
- help applicants to evidence their skills effectively, providing selection panels with the information they need to make their decisions
- provide ministers with a wider choice of suitable candidates
- provide boards with the skills, knowledge and experience they need
- help achieve the Scottish Government's national outcome of public services which are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs<sup>1</sup>
- help to meet the Scottish Government's commitment to implementing *Diversity Delivers*, our equal opportunities strategy for public appointments
- help meet the following principles of the OCPAS Code:<sup>2</sup>

#### Merit

*All public appointments are governed by the overriding principle of selection based on merit. Individuals selected will be those who have demonstrated that they best match the skills, knowledge and personal qualities required for the appointment in question.*

#### Proportionality

*The practices employed during each appointment round will be appropriate for the specific post and the nature and function of the public body concerned.*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/outcomes>

<sup>2</sup> Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland ('the Code'), Section 2: Principles of the Code



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### Equality

*Accessibility to appointments is a fundamental requirement and the appointments process will promote and demonstrate equality of opportunity and treatment to all applicants.*

### Ministerial Responsibility

*The ultimate responsibility for appointment and recommendation for appointment rests with Scottish Ministers, who will be provided with a choice of candidates from which to make the appointment.*

From now on, to comply with the Code you will need to consider which application method is the most appropriate. The early meeting of the selection panel and the sponsor team will be a good time to discuss this. Your OCPAS Assessor can help you weigh up the pros and cons of each method.

At the moment, you can only select one application method to use for your appointment round. All applicants must apply using the same method.

### Which application methods are available?

There are four options to choose from:

#### 1. Standard application form (question format)

The new standard form for public appointments provides a separate box for each criterion that will be tested in writing. (Some criteria might lend themselves to being tested at interview, rather than in writing.) The criterion appears at the top of the box, along with various questions to prompt the applicant, to help them provide the best evidence they can.

For example, the criterion might be **'the ability to make effective decisions under pressure'**. The box on the application form might read:

'Please give an example of a time when you have had to make an effective decision or series of decisions under considerable pressure

- What was the situation and why were you under considerable pressure?
- What factors did you consider when making your decision?
- What was the outcome?'



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### **Benefits:**

- helps applicants provide relevant detail and specific examples
- helps applicants address every aspect of each criterion
- produces evidence on which to base shortlist decisions
- makes it easier to compare and benchmark answers (as similar details should be provided by all applicants)
- helps the selection panel decide in advance what they are looking for in an answer
- reduces the need to approach applicants for further information to supplement their answers

### **Things to consider:**

- may favour applicants who are used to completing application forms (for example, those from a public sector background)

### **Useful for:**

- person specifications with complex, multi-faceted or commonly misinterpreted criteria (for example, 'knowledge of corporate governance')
- teasing out specific information, such as the level at which the skill was demonstrated or for how long (where this is important)
- helps applicants to demonstrate their merit effectively
- contributes to equality of opportunity in that all applicants know exactly what information is required

## **2. Shortened application form**

This form is very similar to the standard application form, but tests maybe 3 or 4 key essential criteria for the role. The selection panel may choose to probe these criteria further – and test additional criteria – at interview. In addition to the comments for the standard application form, this has the following benefits and advantages.



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### **Benefits:**

- focuses on the criteria which are key to effectiveness in the role
- encourages selection panels to distinguish between the skills, knowledge and qualities that an applicant must bring with them, and those which could be learned or developed once in the role
- enables applicants to devote their time to the key areas of interest to the selection panel
- enables selection panels to devote more time to assessing each criterion

### **Things to consider:**

- may be more difficult to distinguish between written applications, leading to longer shortlists and more interviews
- each interview must allow enough time to cover any additional criteria (not tested on the form) in detail
- interview questions must be carefully designed to draw out evidence, particularly for those criteria not tested on the form
- potential to be unduly influenced by candidates' style or appearance if criteria are assessed at interview alone (For example, panel members may be influenced by the way an answer is presented, or by the candidate's image, rather than the answer itself.)
- interviewees may be less focused in their answers for criteria that have not been tested in writing (The panel must make sure each candidate is questioned and guided appropriately to help them provide the best evidence they can.)

### **Useful for:**

- posts where it has proved difficult to attract applicants
- posts where it is possible to identify a core set of skills

### **3. CV in a tailored format**

A CV may be used instead of an application form, but must be in a specific format, tailored to the post in question. This makes it straightforward to compare the CV against the requirements of the person specification. It also makes sure applicants are not judged



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(even unconsciously) on the layout or style of their CV. For some posts it will be useful to know the level, length of time in post, size of organisation and scope of responsibility held in the recent past. These items may be included in the tailored CV template. Advice on tailoring a CV is available from Resourcing – Public Appointments.<sup>3</sup>

This format may be more appropriate for chair positions than member positions.

### **Benefits:**

- attracts applicants who may not apply if a form is used
- provides additional context about where and when skills and knowledge were gained and used

### **Things to consider:**

- may favour applicants who already have a CV (for example, those from a private sector background)
- may discourage those who have not followed a traditional career path
- care must be taken not to discourage those whose experience has been gained outside full-time employment (for example, someone who is a part-time chair of a voluntary organisation)
- may favour applicants who have held impressive, or well-known roles
- may have an adverse effect on diversity among applicants
- may lead to “cutting and pasting” from an existing CV without tailoring the information to the role applied for

### **Useful for:**

- attracting applicants from the private sector, particularly where these applicants have been hard to reach before
- posts where the pool of potential applicants is small or very specialised, in a field where CVs are commonly used
- posts where potential applicants might not apply if asked to complete a form (for example, Senators of the College of Justice or senior business people)

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<sup>3</sup> Please contact Avril Coats.



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- posts where specific recent experience is essential for the role (for example, a post requiring knowledge of current technology or industry practices)

### **4. No application form**

In some instances, it may be appropriate to invite expressions of interest for a post and go straight to the interview stage instead of assessing written applications. The expression of interest might ask for very basic information, for example, if there is a statutory requirement for the postholder to be a practising solicitor or advocate. All applicants who expressed an interest would be interviewed.

#### **Benefits:**

- attracts applicants who may not apply if a form is used (for example, people in very senior positions; people whose first language is not English; people not used to completing forms)
- shorter appointment round

#### **Things to consider:**

- not suitable where a large number of applications is likely
- every eligible applicant must be given a full interview
- interviews must allow enough time to cover all criteria in detail
- interview questions must be carefully designed and skilfully delivered in order to draw out evidence
- applicants may perform less well at interview without going through a written application stage which helps them decide how best to evidence their skills and knowledge (The panel must make sure each candidate is questioned and guided appropriately to help them provide the best evidence they can.)
- potential to be unduly influenced by candidates' style or appearance if criteria are assessed at interview alone (For example, panel members may be influenced by the way an answer is presented, or by the candidate's image, rather than the answer itself.)
- a full note must be taken of the interview and the selection panel's decisions, to make sure the process is open and transparent and can be audited



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### **Useful for:**

- posts where the pool of potential applicants is small or very specialised
- posts where potential applicants might not apply if asked to complete a form (for example, Senators of the College of Justice or serving Chief Constables)

The OCPAS Code of Practice currently requires an application form to be used. Until the Code is revised, sponsor teams who choose one of the options not involving an application form will be granted an exception to the Code.

If you would like more information about any of these four options, please contact Ian Bruce of OCPAS

OCPAS  
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