

WHAT TO EXPECT AT AN ASSESSMENT CENTRE

WHAT YOU'LL BE ASKED AND HOW TO SUCCEED.

While employers can certainly ask questions about your skills and experience at interview, seeing you use your skills during simulated work-based tasks gives them a real sense of your abilities. Whether you are given a single written exercise following an interview or a range of different activities over an entire day (or two), having impressed them with your application you now have the opportunity to show what you have to offer in action!

Tasks are likely to be related to the job or industry you are applying to. An engineering firm could ask you to complete a practical task (see the building example below) or for a marketing role you could be asked to write a press release or marketing plan. Keep in mind though that recruiters are looking for the skills you demonstrate along the way such as negotiation, problem solving and decision making, as well as your ability to interpret the task and the information you are given.

Potential scenarios

- **Develop a proposal about how a budget should be spent.** The scenario could be anything from devising a sales plan, choosing resources for a hospital, or deciding between various projects to fund. You might be tasked with presenting your findings as a group or negotiating with the other team(s) to reach a final decision. This type of exercise could also be given as an individual written task.
- **Provide recommendations on a business concern** such as where to open a new office, what to do about a failing company, or which products to invest in or discontinue for example. You must base your plan on the information provided – typically reports, charts and statistics. This type of exercise could also be given as an individual written or case study interview task, or as a team exercise.
- **As a group, build a tower or bridge** for example using spaghetti and marshmallows or newspapers and tape. You could then be asked to **calculate a cost and profit forecast** for a full-scale version of your tower, using pricing information given, and present the findings to the group.
- You are provided with a list of scenarios and have to **decide the likelihood of each item and the potential cost** (and any other impact) that it might have. You could be asked to **justify your answers** (as an individual or a group) in written form or in a presentation.

Think about the objective of the task. Is it to deliver value for money, improve quality or make a process more efficient?

Prepare for the unexpected! It is common that half way through a task you are provided with additional information, which could impact your answer. Here recruiters are looking to see your problem solving skills and how you respond to a change in situation.

How to behave

The assessment centre starts the moment you walk in the building, so be polite and friendly to everyone you meet, including reception and security staff! Although you may be nervous, try and enjoy the day and remember everyone there is in the same position. Don't dwell on what you could have done differently in the previous task, but stay positive and do the best you can. Afterwards take a note of what happened during the day to help you prepare effectively for future assessment centres.

While it is important to listen to everyone, if you find that you are going around in circles and not making progress, reflect this back to the group and remind them it is important to come to a decision.

Never make a point at the expense of another candidate personally. It won't go down well with other students or the assessors.

As part of the day, you may well be asked to take a psychometric test – possibly the same one you took at application stage (just to prove you took the test originally and not a friend on your behalf). For advice on psychometrics please turn to page 43. **L**

Stuck for words? Try these...

Active listening

Acknowledge the views of other team members
'As Neela said, we must consider...'

Collaboration

Build on other people's ideas
'I agree with Jack's suggestion and would like to add...'

Encouragement

Involve others, especially quieter team members
'Is there anything else we should consider?'

Clarification

Summarise decisions 'Have we reached an agreement to choose option B as our first choice?'