



College of
Policing

Assessment Centre Success!

How to be unforgettable, in a good way!

An assessment centre (AC) is an approach to selecting people. It involves using a combination of different types of exercises and can last one or more days.

It focuses on the practical skills, values and behaviours required in a role. It does this by simulating situations encountered by people in that job. If you feel more comfortable showing what you can do, than just talking about it, an AC is for you!

Being ready to show your brilliance will take a little preparation. A useful start is to see our guidance on 'Application Success!' and 'Interview Success!'

BetterProfessionalsTM
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Success so far!

Getting as far as an AC is often a massive success itself. Well done! Those selecting think there is a strong indication that you may be able to do the role – they just want you to show how you would go about it.

And you're going to be ready to be top of the list of successful candidates!

What are you trying to achieve?

Here's the deal. ACs are used because they are more accurate than most other approaches to selecting people.

You know you can do this role. You've done your research about the role and organisation. You know what types of things you will be required to do if selected. You have one last piece of the jigsaw to put into place – the AC. And because it's more accurate, that's a good thing for you.

Your aim is to be the very best version of you that you can be on the day of the AC. You need to demonstrate that you are capable, confident and competent.

Right, here's how...

Mindset

The best version of you is about being yourself. Trying to be something or someone you are not is what those who bluff it have to do. But, that's not you! You can do this by being yourself. That's when you are at your best and who you are most practiced at being.

ACs are challenging. They need to be able to tell those who can't do the role from people, like you, who can. So, you will need to be self-aware and able to manage your reactions. It is difficult to know whether you have done well or not, so don't waste your energy reflecting on what's gone. Keep your positive focus on what is to come – that's where you can make a difference.

Think yourself into the role you have applied for – you need to own it! Doing everything at that level is what successful people do, and you're one of them!

Preparing

Being the very best version of yourself requires a little preparation.

Ahead of an AC, you are likely to receive information about what the AC will involve. This may come in several communications or one document. This may be called 'Candidate Guidance' or 'Candidate Overview', or similar. You have read this thoroughly and know what exercises there are and what values and behavioural competencies are measured in each exercise.

This is important – it tells you what the assessors will be looking for you to demonstrate in each exercise.

If you think about the role, and the challenges the organisation faces currently, and into the future, you may well be able to make a list of the types of issues that may appear in each exercise. OK, there's no guarantee, but you are just giving yourself the best chance of success.

It's not a role you've done before and, while you are confident you can do it, how do you prepare for things you may never have done? OK, here's how...

First, consider opportunities in your current role. Are there ways you can get involved in activities similar to the exercises? These could include 1-to-1 meetings, meetings with customers/stakeholders, analysing business information, creating a business case or creating performance improvement plans.

If your current role doesn't let you do this, see if you can arrange to shadow someone who does the role you have applied for – even if you are an external applicant, it's worth asking!

More than one chance to be brilliant!

While ACs can be varied, here are some common exercise types. Each gives you a chance to show just how great you would be in role!

Exercises have a common structure. There is a candidate briefing telling you what will happen, a set of candidate instructions and candidate materials. Then it's over to you to show how well you can do this.

Interactive exercises. Having prepared, you are required to meet someone, or a number of people. Those you meet may include those you manage, your manager(s), service users, stakeholders, media reporters or professionals from partner organisations.

The people you meet may be people in these actual roles, but more often they are actors.

Written exercises. These can take various formats. Often, you'll get business information that you are required to read and make sense of. Look out for the pieces of information that build on or contradict something elsewhere in the materials. This is not trying to catch you out – it represents what happens in real life.

You will be required to decide on key issues, priorities and produce ideas to address/solve organisational problems.

Group exercises. These take two forms. One is where a group is required to cooperate to solve a problem or address organisational challenges. The other is competitive, where there is a need to persuade and negotiate an outcome.

Often, the group is made up of other candidates.

Presentation. There are two variations. If the role involves presenting, this a simulation of that aspect of the role. Where the role doesn't involve giving presentations, the AC may still use a presentation as a way to gain your understanding of future organisational challenges and how you would address these. From this you will be able to think about the type of preparation that might help you.

Presentations are followed by questions. This is not an indication that you've missed something – it aims to gather a little more information on specific points. It's not to undermine you. It's another opportunity for you to shine and show what you can do!

Interview. Many ACs will include an interview. This is a structured way to gather evidence and examples of your past experience relative to the role. It also explores what you would do if you were in the role applied for. For more information on this, see our 'Interview Success!' guidance.

Linked exercises. Some exercises may be linked together. This involves you taking your outputs from one exercise into another. For instance, you may produce a written briefing note and then be required to present it, or meet a recipient/stakeholder within another exercise.

Setting

Exercises are a simulation giving you the chance to show what you can do. As activities, they simulate the role. When candidates can't be expected to know the intricacies of an organisation they are not in, the exercises may be set in other organisations. This is to give you confidence that you don't need to know all of the ins-and-outs of the organisation for the assessment. The issues and tasks in the exercise will still be relevant, however, to the role you've applied for.

On the day

You are prepared and ready to give it your all! You've read the materials sent to you – now it's time to deliver.

You are going to arrive in plenty of time. You are ready to do exactly what each task asks you to deliver (a common pitfall others may fall into, but not you!) and you are clear on what you are trying to demonstrate (values and behavioural competencies) in each exercise.

In exercises, it's better to show how you will go about things. Go beyond just saying what you would do – show them for real!

Today's going to be a great day, and the lead up to your new role!

About the College

We're the professional body for everyone who works for the police service in England and Wales. Our purpose is to provide those working in policing with the skills and knowledge necessary to prevent crime, protect the public and secure public trust.

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