

Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service

A Candidates Guide to Competency Based Selection



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Introduction

This guide aims to aid all candidates in the full recruitment process when applying for a role within the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. We recommend that you read this thoroughly prior to applying for a post.

1. Eligibility

Eligibility Criteria for all Appointments

The first stage of the pre sift process is checking whether applicants are eligible for appointment to the Civil Service. The HR Resource Team will check applications submitted to ensure they meet the following rules:

- COPFS is exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (1974) and will not usually accept applications from external candidates who have previous convictions relating to violence, dishonesty or drugs. (See Annex A for further details).
- COPFS must adhere to strict Civil Service Nationality rules – further details can be found on the [Civil Service](#) website
- Consideration will be given where candidates have a conflict of interest, secondary employment and any past or pending complaints by any professional body of which they are a member.

Eligibility for Internal Appointments

For all internal appointments the pre sift process includes checking whether applicants are eligible for application to specific posts. Again the HR Resource Team will check applications submitted to ensure they meet the following rules:

- Applicants have been recruited through fair and open competition (Note – agency staff, student placements, and fixed term contracts without fair and open competition do not satisfy this criteria)
- Applicants are current COPFS employees or Civil Service employees where applicable. (Note – staff on loan or secondment to COPFS are not normally eligible to apply for internal vacancies)
- Application for any post is based on the candidate's substantive grade
- Candidates must have received official written confirmation that they have passed their probation period
- All candidates applying on level transfer have completed two years within their current post.
- Live disciplinary warnings, including attendance management warnings, will normally preclude candidates from applying for any advertised post.



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- Applicants are not on a performance improvement notice
- Training Deputes applying for temporary or permanent promotion must first successfully achieve accreditation prior to applying.

Fixed Term employees recruited through fair and open competition will be eligible to apply for permanent level transfer within the two year rule, however probationary periods must first be concluded.

Internal applications must also be supported by an employee's reporting and countersigning officer.

Applicants who do not meet the requisite eligibility criteria will be sifted out by the HR Resource Team before their applications can proceed to the formal sifting/interviewing stages.

2. Guaranteed Interview Scheme

The Service is committed to valuing diversity and to equality of opportunity. Part of this commitment is that we guarantee an interview to any eligible candidate who has declared a disability as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act, provided that they meet the minimum criteria for the post in question. The essential minimum criteria is set out in the job advert and any supplementary recruitment documentation.

This is referred to as the "two ticks" scheme. For the purposes of the scheme, the minimum criteria to qualify for interview requires adequate demonstration of all 4 competences and to meet the essential criteria.

3. Completing Part B of your application

Part B, section 4 of the application form is where you must provide specific evidence of competency related behaviours in each of the key competencies detailed in the advert.

The Competency Framework details the levels for each Grade, a description for each competency and what behaviours are expected at each level. Please ensure you refer to the Framework and understand the level and behaviours expected of the role advertised.

Candidates must also remember that the Competency Framework is not exhaustive and provides an indication of the general level of working. Your evidence should also take account of your skills, the job role and its accountabilities.

The recruitment panel expect you to ensure that the examples given in your application form are concise and meet with the recommended word count of 250 words per competency. Answers in excess of 300 words will not be assessed



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beyond this count which will likely affect your score. You will be required to declare your word count at the end of each competency. (You can automatically calculate your word count in Microsoft Word by highlighting the example, selecting 'Tools' or 'Review' and then selecting 'Word Count').

The examples you provide will ideally be from a recent work-related context but might equally well be derived from other activities away from the workplace (e.g. voluntary work, outside interests) provided they are relevant. The Selection Panel will also consider the suitability of the example used (i.e. relevant and complexity) in assessing your application and/or performance at interview.

It may be useful to use the acronym **"STAR"** when detailing your specific examples. The evidence you provide on the application will be probed further at interview.

S – Situation

This part of your answer is to describe the scenario you are going to use. You will not score any points for this section. You must also remember to keep it non-technical. A brief overview is all that is necessary.

T – Task

Again, a brief sentence or two is all that is needed. The task will be your objective or goal and it may also be relevant to mention here if there are any consequences attached to you not achieving it.

A – Actions.

The Crux of your answer and the only place you will be able to score points. Actions must start with **"I"** and contain a specific action word – such as emailed, organised, telephoned, presented, researched, chaired. If you ever feel yourself wanting to say "liaise" or "communicated with" – you need to break this down again – think; *HOW* did you communicate with that person, what method did you use? (Email, face-to-face or over the phone)?

Actions must follow in a chronological order. Once you have reached your final point - stop there! You don't want to get carried away and start talking about a different scenario.

When preparing your answers at home, actions should read like bullet points.

R – Result

Like the situation and task, this should be kept brief.

4. Understanding the sift procedure

Where there is specific essential criteria or a post attracts more applicants than can reasonably be handled at interview, applications may be "sifted" and a shortlist produced. This formal action will be conducted by a Sift Panel who will



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usually (but not always) be the same as the Selection Panel. The information you provide in part 4 of the application will form the basis for the sift.

Candidates who have not passed the sift may appeal against non-selection for interview under specific conditions, please see section 8 below for further information.

5. The Interview and other Selection Methods

When at interview, the Selection Panel will try to put you at ease. The Chairperson will explain what is going to happen and who will ask the questions. You can also ask questions, seek clarification or add extra information at any time and will be given a specific opportunity to do so at the end.

The selection panel will comprise at least two members. If you find that your line manager (or someone with whom you are familiar) is interviewing you do not be surprised if they treat you formally, they must treat all candidates equitably and must not give you an unfair advantage through over-familiarity.

For any particular post, everyone's interview will be similar in that all candidates will be asked the same core questions. Any follow-up questions will depend on the answers you give and won't necessarily be the same as those for other candidates.

Interview Questions

Competency Based Selection is based on the underlying principle that past behaviours are the best predictor of future behaviour. If a candidate can demonstrate how they have faced challenges and achieved success with similar issues in the past, they will be able to apply these to the challenges of the new job in the future.

All questions for candidates will be designed to test suitability based on the knowledge, skills and understanding of the candidate in relation to the requirements of the role and the competencies associated with the vacancy. The candidates should then provide specific examples to demonstrate how they have met the competencies required.

You will be asked competency based questions and you will be expected to talk about how you actually tackled a real problem. The questions will relate to competencies and essential criteria stated in the advert, therefore the key is to prepare examples from your career that highlight the various skills that you would be required to show in your new job. You should also be prepared to answer questions about any desirable criteria which is stated within the advert.

In answering these questions, you should respond by giving a real specific example, ideally using the STAR method. Candidates are reminder to use 'I' not 'WE' so that the Board obtain a full understanding of what you did within a specific example.



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Candidates should be prepared to talk about their example in a lot of detail. The Selection Panel will ask you probing questions to ensure they fully understand the situation you are describing. The Panel will also be interested in the outcome of the situation and whether there was anything you learned from the experience.

There are things you can do to help yourself prepare for the competency interview:

- Read and understand the “STAR” method, this will help you to answer the question correctly, and maximise your score
- Prepare examples for each of the competencies. The perfect competency answer may be one element of a bigger picture. If you use too big an example you will just skim over the surface of the actions rather than providing the detailed answers they need to hear. It may be helpful to have an example of the following sorts of situations to hand:
 - A situation where you resolved conflict with a colleague
 - A time you worked to a pressured deadline
 - The performance or project you are most proud of
 - A time when something went wrong and what you did to resolve it
 - An example of working as a team to achieve a common goal
 - An example of motivating others, if relevant
 - Examples of showing specific skills relevant for the job you're going for
- Rehearse your answers in front of a friend or family member. Get them to take careful note of the amount of times the word “WE” is used and replace it with “I”. The word “WE” should not form any part of your answer.
- Don't use jargon unless you are absolutely sure all the members of the selection panel will understand.

By preparing in this way you will feel more comfortable with being able to perform at your best at interview. Focus and hone in on your own contribution and ensure that you show yourself in a good light, whilst of course being honest.

Candidate Notes

Candidates are advised that they may bring personal notes to their interview, however these should be used as reference material only. Where the board feel that a candidate is relying too heavily on personal notes, probing questions may be used to fully explore the example provided.

Further Assessment of Suitability

The board may decide in advance of the interviews that they require further evidence to assess candidates for specialist or senior positions in the Service. Further assessment may include presentation on a relevant topic at interview,



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the submission of a piece of written work prior to the interview, or completion of an online assessment.

Candidates will be informed if further selection methods will be implemented.

6. Assessing applicants at sift and interview

The same 3 point scale is used to score applications at the sift stage and candidates at the interview stage.

Score	Evidence
3	The candidate provided evidence that demonstrated highly effective behaviour against the requirements of the role and level of competence required.
2	The candidate provided evidence that demonstrated effective behaviour against the requirements of the role and level of competence required.
1	The candidate provided evidence that partially demonstrated effective behaviour against the requirements of the role and level of competence required, but there are a few minor gaps that can be investigated at interview or developed on the job.
0	The candidate failed to demonstrate that they meet the level of competence required.

Board members set the sift pass mark for each individual campaign however candidates will usually be required to obtain a score of at least '2' at each stage, although a score of '1' for a single essential competency should not rule a candidate out if scores are high for all other competencies. A similar method of scoring is used in competency based interviewing.

Applicants who score zero in any of the competences or essential skills/experience/qualifications will not be selected for appointment.

7. After the Interview

At the end of the interview you will be asked if you have any questions or whether there is anything else you want to add. If you realise you could have given a better answer to one of the earlier questions, tell them briefly what you meant to say. If there is some relevant information that you neglected to mention say so now. Ask any questions you would like answered that are relevant to the role and/or recruitment process.

You may ask for feedback on your performance although you are under no obligation to do so and COPFS is under no obligation to provide this. Any feedback you receive is designed to be constructive and will help you identify any development needs you may have and how to improve your performance in future interviews.



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8. Appeal

All candidates are entitled to the right of appeal against any selection decision (i.e. at sift or interview).

Appeals against selection decisions can be made on the following grounds:

- There has been a procedural irregularity that can be seen to have materially disadvantaged the individual candidate; and/or
- There has been an infringement of COPFS' equal opportunities policy causing actual disadvantage

Appeals out with these grounds will not be considered. The appeal must be submitted in writing, justifying the grounds, to the HR Resource Team within five working days of receiving the results or feedback (if available). Thereafter the timescales outlined in the COPFS [grievance appeal procedure](#) will be followed. Where an appeal is upheld, COPFS will take steps to remove disadvantage or compensate for actual loss.

Civil Service Commission – Making a Complaint

COPFS recruitment policy is founded on the principles of selection for appointment on merit on the basis of fair and open competition as stated in the Civil Service Commission [Recruitment Principles](#).

Where candidates believe that COPFS has breached these requirements, a complaint can be made to the [Civil Service Commission](#) directly. Candidates are required to raise the matter with COPFS in the first instance, however if they are unhappy with the response, they may make a complaint to the Commission.

Further information can be found on the Civil Service Commission website: <http://civilservicecommission.independent.gov.uk/>



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