



## REMOTE INTERVIEWING

# Conducting Interviews by Telephone or Online

## Aim of this guidance

As restrictions have been put in place for personal interviews as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is increasingly likely that interviews for either recruitment, HR, vetting purposes or even line managers will be required to be undertaken via a telephone or online (eg Skype, Facetime etc).

There is a perception that face to face interviews are far more effective than ones conducted by a telephone or online. However, research comparing the effectiveness of both types of interviewing is inconclusive at this moment. There are things interviewers can remember to ensure that they are getting the best results out of their telephone/online interview.

The following guidance is designed to make interviewers aware of tried and tested best practice, as well as recommendations from latest academic research.

## 1 Background

### 1.1

It is clear that face to face interviews provide the interviewer with a unique opportunity to observe the interviewee at first hand; to see how they react to certain conditions and whether their behaviour changes in response to particular questions. This might be lost when the interview is over a telephone. However, some academic research suggests that there is no difference in the content or level of information provided between face to face interviews or any other.

### 1.2

Meeting the interviewee in person also ensures that they are not being influenced or being fed answers by a third party. One can never guarantee who else is in the room with the interviewee.

### 1.3

Research suggests that interviewees feel far more comfortable in surroundings they are familiar with, when on a telephone or PC, rather than in a more formal face to face interview setting. They are more disposed to provide information because they feel relaxed doing so. Interviewees who are in more informal settings, of their choice, are more willing to discuss personal aspects that relate to them.

## 1.4

Academia also indicates that as the use of mobile devices increases, more people are happier to use these as a matter of course, rather than commit to face to face interviews.

## 1.5

The most important thing to remember is that the key to a good interview is the ability to listen. Therefore, a telephone interview provides you with the opportunity to avoid any other distractions and concentrate on what is being said.

# 2 Best practice

## 2.1

The following points will ensure the interviewer gets the best out of a telephone/online interview. Like any interview some practice may be more appropriate than others. The interviewer is the best judge of when to use certain tools and techniques, suitable to the situation; and the interviewer's experience is invaluable when making this assessment. The following, however, are based on academic research, as well as tried and tested methods:

### Planning

- As with face to face interviews, pre-planning is essential. The interviewer should have all the available information to hand and know exactly what questions they need to ask before starting the call;
- Always pre-arrange with the interviewee the time you will call and ensure that you do so at that time;
- When starting the interview you should:
  - Tell the interviewee how long the interview will last, even if it is an approximation. This will prepare the interviewee if they have other plans. If the suggested time is too long for the interviewee, agree on a set of smaller time periods;
  - confirm where the interviewee is ie at home, in their workplace – are there going to be any distractions or possible interruptions;
  - establish if they are alone, or if there is someone nearby enough to hear the interview;
  - make it clear to the interviewee that there is a possibility of a follow up interview, either by telephone/online or even face to face;

### Engage/Interact

- Ask if they have experience of a telephone or online interview before, what did they think of it?
  - if they had any negative experiences, try to reassure them this will not happen in your interview;
  - establishing when the interviewee feels they may need a break, especially if expecting a long interview;

- Ask as many in depth and probing questions as you can. Don't feel that a telephone or online interview inhibits your ability to ask fuller questions;

## Reflect

- elicit as much accurate information as possible by using the usual open questions you would in a face to face interview and ensure you listen to the responses;
- Do bear in mind that interviewing can be tiring and seems even more so when undertaken by telephone or online. Try to gauge when the interviewee is becoming tired, so you know when best to think about finishing;
- Sometimes technology is not as reliable as we would like. If the call is not clear - ie you cannot hear them, and they cannot hear you, or the WiFi connection is erratic - then suggest postponing the interview and rescheduling for another time. Make a note of what was achieved and record the fact that you had to postpone the interview;
- If you feel that the telephone or online interview did not go as well as you expected or there was something about it that was not right, ensure you make a note of it in your write up. This allows you and other readers to make a balanced assessment of the accuracy and value of the interview. Also take the opportunity to consider what you thought went well and not so well in how you conducted the interview, so you can ensure that you learn from this experience.

## 3 Summary

### 3.1

While it would be preferable to carry on using face to face interviews, our response to the COVID-19 pandemic means that we have to think of alternative means of interviewing. While there are challenges with telephone or online interviewing, interviewers can overcome them with good planning, ensuring the interviewee is comfortable and eliciting as much verifiable detail as possible.

### 3.2

This guidance will be updated with any further advice when it becomes available. In the meantime, if you have any questions relating to Remote Interviewing please contact NPSA on [NPSA-enquiries@npsa.gov.uk](mailto:NPSA-enquiries@npsa.gov.uk).

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