



THE LONDON SCHOOL  
OF ECONOMICS AND  
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

RECRUITMENT TOOLKIT

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4

INTERVIEW AND  
ASSESSMENT

# A Guide to Competency Based Interviews

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## Welcome

Welcome to the LSE's **Guide to Competency Based Interviews**. This document builds on the School's *Recruitment and Selection Policy (Professional Services Salaried Staff)* and provides further practical guidance to help managers across the School recruit and select staff.

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## Competency Interviews

The following guidance has been prepared to help you, as a hiring manager, establish your questions to ask candidates at interview. The guidance uses the School's Effective Behaviours Framework and guidance on technical / skills based questions.

For further guidance and support, please contact your HR Adviser who can assist you with developing further questions, advice on interview techniques or incorporating behavioural attribute questions into your interviews.

### 1.1 What are competencies?

Competency-based selection methods are based on the assumption that past behaviour is the best predictor for future behaviour. It is not enough for a candidate to just say what they *can* offer; they need to provide evidence.

Competency-based questions (also referred to as **behavioural attribute** questions) can be used in applications and at interview. They are designed to

help candidates give evidence of the personal qualities which are needed to perform well in the role.

Usually, candidates are expected to give an example of how they have demonstrated particular qualities in the past.

#### EXAMPLE:

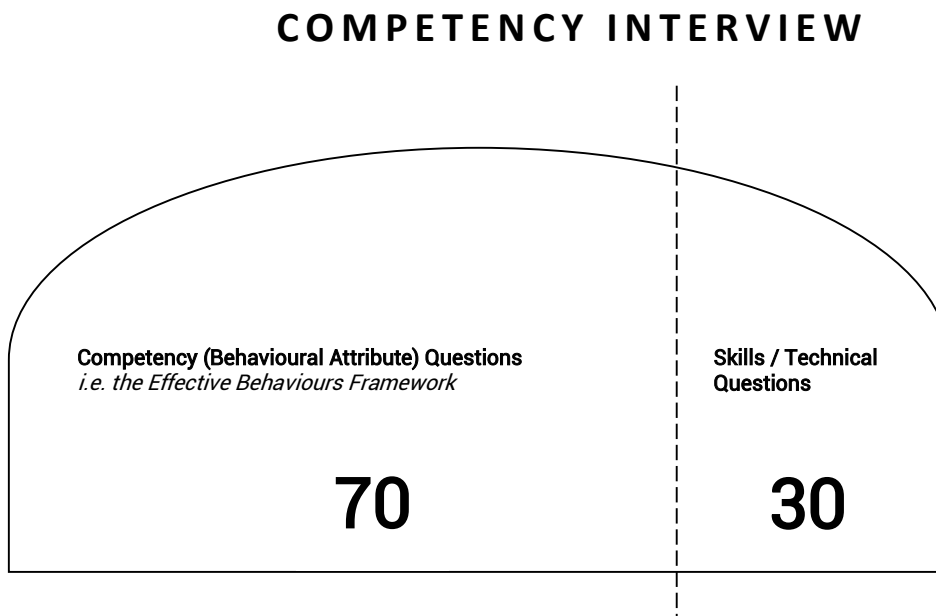
*Describe a situation where you had to ...*

- *show leadership*
- *make a difficult decision*
- *show initiative*
- *overcome a difficult obstacle*
- *refuse to compromise*

## 1.2 Competency interview example

It is recommended that your interview format should include a mix of **behavioural attribute questions** and **technical / skills based questions**.

As an example, your competency (**behavioural attribute**) questions could make up for around 70% of your interview questions with the remaining 30% covering the technical skills specific to the role.



## 1.3 What next

- How do I create competency (behavioural attribute) questions?
- How do I decide on skills based and technical questions?

Further information on these can be found in the remaining pages of this guidance document.

## The Effective Behaviours Framework

The Effective Behaviours Framework is based on the LSE Ethics Code, and is a set of six core **behavioural attributes** underpinning life at the LSE, that all staff are expected to show.

When assessing candidates at interview, the Effective Behaviours Framework is a useful tool to help you, as hiring manager decide on relevant competency (**behavioural attribute**) questions to assess whether candidates can demonstrate the relevant skills and experience to carry out the role.

It is recommended that your competency (**behavioural attribute**) questions make up for around 70% of your interview questions, with the remaining 30% covering the technical skills specific to the role.



Further information on the Effective Behaviours Framework can be found [here](#).

## LSE Behavioural Attributes Guide

This framework has been created to support managers in designing their interview questions.

This provides an overview of what the **Effective Behaviours** may look like at the different band levels in the School, and what behaviours you could expect to see evidenced from a candidate in their responses at interview.

Bands 1 – 3	Bands 4 - 6	Bands 7 - 9
<p><b>Communication</b></p> <p>The capacity to communicate effectively with others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to communicate effectively with others in both verbal and written form.</li> <li>• Able to listen and respect others' views and opinions.</li> <li>• Recognises the right of others to freedom of expression.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Communication</b></p> <p>The capacity to communicate effectively with others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly explains ideas to others in a way that is easy to understand.</li> <li>• Able to use a range of communication styles and channels to effectively convey messages.</li> <li>• Actively listens and respects others' views and opinions.</li> <li>• Recognises the right of others to freedom of expression.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Communication</b></p> <p>The capacity to communicate effectively with others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly and confidently explains ideas and complex issues in a way that is easy to understand.</li> <li>• Communicates ideas clearly and fluently, commanding attention and making a strong impact.</li> <li>• Actively listens and respects others' views and opinions.</li> <li>• Able to deliver difficult messages with tact and sensitivity as required.</li> <li>• Recognises the right of others to freedom of expression.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Working with People</b></p> <p>The ability to help and support others.</p>	<p><b>Working with People</b></p> <p>The capacity to collaborate with and motivate others in the combined achievement of objectives.</p>	<p><b>Working with People</b></p> <p>The capacity to lead and influence others in the achievement of their objectives.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively encourages others to contribute diverse ideas, opinions and suggestions.</li> <li>• Works collaboratively with others.</li> <li>• Motivates and support colleagues.</li> <li>• Plays a role in the team or departments success.</li> <li>• Acts sensitively, recognising the feelings and needs of others.</li> <li>• Listens with concentration and tact.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively promotes a climate of openness and trust to contribute their diverse ideas, opinions and suggestions.</li> <li>• Wins the co-operation of others through motivation and inspiration to get things done and deliver results</li> <li>• Clearly and confidently explains ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gets the best out of people by recognising their individual needs and personal and professional development aspirations.</li> <li>• Empathises with others, taking care to listen, and using summary clarification to ensure full understanding.</li> <li>• Motivates and inspires others, building their confidence in their own capacity to succeed.</li> <li>• Recognises and rewards good performance, and encourages colleagues to share their successes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Equity and Diversity</b></p> <p><b>The ability to work in line with the Schools' EDI principles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reports inappropriate behaviours, attitudes and languages towards others.</li> <li>• Demonstrates mutual respect, open mindedness, tolerance and integrity at all times.</li> <li>• Actively works in a way that fosters an inclusive environment which values equality of opportunity and diversity.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Equity and Diversity</b></p> <p><b>The capacity to champion the Schools' EDI principles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges where appropriate and reports inappropriate behaviours, attitudes and languages towards others.</li> <li>• Acknowledges and respects the broad range of social, cultural customs, beliefs and values within the law.</li> <li>• Promotes an inclusive environment which values equality of opportunity and diversity.</li> <li>• Actively encourages the exchange of views and opinions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Equity and Diversity</b></p> <p><b>The capacity to champion the Schools' EDI principles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotes an inclusive environment which values equality of opportunity and diversity.</li> <li>• Actively encourages the exchange of views and opinions, ensuring equitable access to development for all.</li> <li>• Engages proactively with legislation and School initiatives relating to EDI principles.</li> <li>• Leads by example and champions EDI behaviours.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Managing Self and Others</b></p> <p><b>The ability to manage time and workload effectively.</b></p>	<p><b>Managing Self and Others</b></p> <p><b>The ability to manage their own, and others' time and workload effectively.</b></p>	<p><b>Managing Self and Others</b></p> <p><b>The ability to manage time and workload effectively.</b></p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manages time effectively to ensure required tasks are completed on time.</li> <li>• Has a positive and 'can do' attitude towards work.</li> <li>• Seeks feedback from colleagues on performance and actively learn from the responses received.</li> <li>• Acts in accordance with the Ethics Code principles.</li> <li>• Accepts and demonstrate responsibility for health and safety, GDPR and statutory requirements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides clarity to colleagues and sets clear, effective and stretching objectives for others.</li> <li>• Shows an understanding of the links between individual, department/division/centre/institute and School objectives.</li> <li>• Creates momentum and enthusiasm with colleagues and empowers others to take person responsibility.</li> <li>• Sets an example in conduct to promote and support good ethical behaviour.</li> <li>• Acts in accordance with School policies and principles.</li> <li>• Accepts and demonstrates responsibility for health and safety, GDPR and statutory requirements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures that local work plans are consistent and in line with the objectives of the School.</li> <li>• Ability to manage themselves and others efficiently and effectively.</li> <li>• Gains trust and confidence through transparency and consistent decision making.</li> <li>• Stands by considered decisions, even if they prove unpopular among colleagues.</li> <li>• Collaborates effectively and develops and maintains personal networks of contacts across the School and externally.</li> <li>• Acts proactively to support succession planning and develop colleagues with high potential through meaningful and constructive Career Development Reviews (CDRs).</li> <li>• Accepts and demonstrates responsibility for health and safety, GDPR and statutory requirements.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Continuous Improvement</b></p> <p><b>The ability to self-reflect and seek feedback.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being open to new ideas and proposals and embracing and engaging change.</li> <li>• Actively reflecting on ways to improve and enhance the service delivered to customer groups (i.e. students and staff).</li> <li>• Shares learning experiences with others to help them.</li> <li>• Takes part in formal and informal L&amp;D opportunities.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Continuous Improvement</b></p> <p><b>The capacity to make improvements based on self-reflection and through feedback.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spotting opportunities for improvement and working to deliver these.</li> <li>• Identifying risks and any mitigation that can be put in place to limit them.</li> <li>• Encourages a diverse range of viewpoints.</li> <li>• Works with others to foster a culture of support when working with change.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Continuous Improvement</b></p> <p><b>The capacity to improve and innovate based from feedback and self-reflection.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fosters a culture that encourages others to take calculated risks in pursuing innovation.</li> <li>• Seeks input from the whole team.</li> <li>• Actively supports and drives a continuous improvement philosophy.</li> <li>• Able to adapt to changes outside of the School.</li> <li>• Coaches and guides other in</li> </ul>

		development improvement and innovation strategies and ways of working.
<p><b>Delivering Excellent Service</b></p> <p><b>The capacity to deliver excellent customer service.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strives to understand their role and the needs of customers across the School, whether they are students, alum, staff and/or external.</li> <li>• Listens to and engages with service users to properly understand their individual and varied needs.</li> <li>• Positively manages expectations and possible outcomes in order to deliver the best service and solution.</li> <li>• Takes responsibility to deal with customer queries within the scope of the role.</li> <li>• Resolves problems quickly in a cheerful, friendly manner.</li> <li>• Acts upon feedback from customers on their performance.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Delivering Excellent Service</b></p> <p><b>The capacity to think about customers' needs proactively</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shows an understanding of the School environment and varying customer needs within it.</li> <li>• Builds and maintains good working relationships with colleagues that fall within the scope of the role, such as students, alum, staff and/or external.</li> <li>• Gains confidence and trust by demonstrating expertise, commitment and empathy where required.</li> <li>• Proactively tailors communications to feed the needs of different audiences.</li> <li>• Adapts behaviors to suit diverse situations</li> <li>• Strives to exceed customer service delivery and expectations.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Delivering Excellent Service</b></p> <p><b>The capacity to consider customer needs proactively and deliver an excellent service.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops and maintains excellent working relationships with customers.</li> <li>• Gains trust and confidence in others by demonstrating expertise, insight, empathy and commitment.</li> <li>• Acts proactively to inform and influence.</li> <li>• Seeks to gain an understanding XXX.</li> <li>• Strives to measure and exceed customers' expectations, and improve their overall experience at the School.</li> </ul>

## 2.1 Example

The following example shows how the behavioural attributes framework can be used to help create interview questions against the person specification for a **Customer Support Adviser** (Band 4).

Person Specification Criteria	E / D	Competency Question Example
<b>Knowledge and Experience</b> – Strong negotiation experience	E	Describe a negotiating experience that you feel was particularly successful.  <i>OR</i>  Describe a time when you had to negotiate a compromise or had to help others arrive at a compromise.
<b>Communication</b> – Ability to convey important, and at times complex, information to customers.	E	Provide an example of where you have had to adapt your communication style to your audience in order to convey a message. What was the situation? What approach did you take?
<b>Initiative and Problem Solving</b> - Proven ability to resolve majority of customer enquiries, escalating where necessary	E	Tell me about a time when a problem arose and your manager was unavailable? How did you handle the situation, and how did things turn out?
<b>Teamwork and Motivation</b> - Examples of having participated in and contributed to a team	E	Tell me about a time when you worked with a group to complete a shared goal. What was your role?
<b>Planning and Organising Resources</b> - Proven ability to plan and organise and prioritise own workload	E	What does it mean to you to be organised? How do you prioritise you workload, what tools to you use?
<b>Planning and Organising Resources</b> - Ability to work to deadlines whilst maintaining attention to detail	E	Describe a time sensitive project or piece of work you worked on, that required close attention to detail.

*Please note that this list of questions is not exhaustive.*

## 2.2 Further Example Questions

The next few pages cover some examples of general and behaviour style questions, grouped by the **Effective Behaviours Framework** headings.

### COMMUNICATION

#### *COMMUNICATION*

- Give me an example of when you have written an important letter to a client / customer. How did you ensure it was clear to the reader? What feedback did you receive?
- Give me an example of when you had to explain something complex over the telephone. What was difficult? Would you act differently next time?
- Tell me about a time when you found it difficult to keep someone's attention. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you had to communicate a complicated idea to others. How did you go about this? How did you plan to communicate this so they understood? How did you check their understanding?
- Tell us about a time when you had to brief another person or team. How did you structure this communication? How did you plan to cope with queries or conflict? What did you learn from this?

#### *INFLUENCE*

- Tell me about a time when you had to persuade a colleague(s) to your point of view. What positive messages and benefits did you outline and why?
- Think of a time when you had to argue a case and outline the arguments. What arguments did you use to win the case and why? When developing lines or argument, to what extent do you involve others?
- Describe a time when you have had to develop a long term strategic influencing strategy. What did you do? Who was involved? How did you ensure success? What direct influencing methods did you use?
- Describe a situation where you had difficulty getting others to agree with your decisions. How did you handle it?

## WORKING WITH PEOPLE

### *ENERGY*

- Describe a time when you have been particularly motivated to achieve a goal.
- Tell me about a time when you went the "extra mile" before your employer.
- Tell me about a time when you had to demonstrate high levels of drive to achieve a goal.
- Have you ever had conflict with a colleague? How was it resolved?

### *COACHING AND MENTORING*

- Tell me about a person who, as a result of your coaching has improved their skills or performance.

### *TEAMWORK*

- Describe a time when you contributed to the success of a team.
- What do you like most about working with others? What least?
- Give me an example of how you have responded to a colleague who seemed overworked or stressed.
- Give me an example of when you had to support others in a team.
- Tell me about the best team you have worked in and why it stands out positively in your mind.
- Describe a time when you had to build a team. How did you go about building the team, and was it successful in achieving its goals?
- Tell me about a time when you worked with a colleague who was not completing their share of work. What did you do?
- How well do you work with others? What do the words "team player" mean to you?
- How important is recognition to you?

### *LEADERSHIP*

- Give me an example of how you have given clear direction to your staff and empowered them to achieve their objectives.
- Tell me about how you have communicated your organisation's vision and how you have encouraged others to work towards this.
- Can you give me an example of how you cascade information to your staff?
- Tell me about how you have successfully managed to balance organisation and local needs effectively.
- Provide an example of how you have taken responsibility for identifying and developing future leaders.
- Give me an example of a time that you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Describe your management style.
- What qualities do you feel a successful manager should have?

## EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

### *INTEGRITY*

- Describe a time where you challenged someone because they had broken or contravened the organisations values or policies.
- Can you tell me about a time when you were asked to do something that you did not agree with? Why, and what did you do?
- What is your definition or understanding of diversity? How would you promote diversity and inclusion?
- What do you see as the challenges of leading and managing a diverse workforce?
- How have you/would you handle a situation in which one of your colleagues made a discriminatory remark?
- What kind of experience have you had of working with others from a different cultural background than your own?
- What is your understanding of respect and dignity? How do you demonstrate respect and dignity?
- What do you understand by the term "reasonable adjustment"? How have you/ would you handle a situation where a reasonable adjustment of one employee is affecting the workloads of others / causing unrest in the team?

## MANAGING SELF AND OTHERS

### *INITIATIVE*

- Describe a time when you have sought new responsibility or volunteered to do something which was normally outside of your role.
- Describe a time when you have used your initiative to achieve a result.

### *RESILIENCE*

- Please provide an example of when time pressures prevented you spending a lot of time on a task. What implications did this have on your work?
- Describe a situation where you were faced with someone not providing you with what you needed. What did you do? What was the outcome?
- Give me a recent example of when you have experienced a set back.
- Give me an example of a high-pressure situation you have faced this past year and how you resolved it.
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or exceed it.
- Describe a situation where you had to work under pressure. How did you react?
- Give me an example of when you were unfairly criticised. How did you respond?
- Tell me about a time when you became disheartened with a task.

### *TASK MANAGEMENT*

- How important are details to you? Why or why not? What role do you think organisations play, or should play, in this position?
- What does it mean to you to be organised? How do you prioritise your workload? What tools or methods do you use?
- Give me an example of an important task you have had to plan and organise. What mechanisms did you put in place to ensure you met your targets / deadlines?
- Tell me about a time when a project you were in charge of fell behind schedule. What did you do about it?
- Tell me about a piece of work you have been responsible for from start to finish. How did you plan? What were your deadlines? How did you ensure you met your deadlines?
- Describe a time when you had to resolve a difficult problem on your own. How did you go about it?

## CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

### *ANALYSING AND PROBLEM SOLVING*

- Can you provide an example of when your manager was unavailable and you were forced to make a decision? What did you take into consideration? What alternatives did you consider? What was the effect of your decision?
- Tell me about a situation where you had to break down a problem into smaller parts. What did you do? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a situation where you had to adjust quickly to changes over which you had no control. What strategies did you use to handle the situation?

### *KNOWLEDGE AND CONTINUOUS LEARNING*

- What has been your greatest achievement / success to date?
- What specific training would you require if you were successful in this position?
- How do you exceed expectations in your current role?
- Give me an example of when you have taken active steps to improve your performance.
- Give me an example of how you have set your own objectives or development plan.
- Tell me about any ideas you have put forward to make your job more rewarding.
- Can you give me an example of how you have assessed the learning and development needs of your team?

### *INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING*

- Give me an example of a situation when you have thought of a new way of dealing with a problem at work. How did you go about this? How did you obtain support from colleagues and managers? What was the outcome?
- Can you give me an example of where you have improved existing systems / procedures?
- Describe a time when you made a conscious effort to share information or knowledge in order to help others to succeed.



## DELIVERING EXCELLENT SERVICE

### *CUSTOMER SERVICES*

- Tell me about a time where you have exceeded customer's expectations. What did you do? How did you know that it exceeded expectations?
- Tell me about a time where you had successful customer working relationships. Why was it successful? What did you do?
- Tell me about a particularly difficult situation with a customer. What did you find difficult to handle? How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?
- Give me an example of a time when you have gone out of your way to support / assist a customer. What did you do?
- What is the most difficult situation that you have been in with a client? Why, how did you deal with this, was the outcome satisfactory?
- Give an example of how you have used information on customer needs to make improvements to the service you provide.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to listen very carefully to a customer. How did you check whether you had all the information?
- Describe a time where you had to use a different approach to deal with a particular personality.
- What is your definition of 'excellent' customer service? Tell me about a time when you went beyond the call of duty to help a customer.

### *LIAISON AND NETWORKING*

- Give an example of when you made use of a contact in order to obtain something that you would not normally be able to obtain. What impact did this have on the outcome you were trying to achieve?
- Describe a situation that illustrates how you developed a positive relationship with a client.
- Describe a time when you made a conscious effort to share information or knowledge in order to help others succeed.

## OTHER QUESTIONS

- What are your salary expectations for this role?
- What is your notice period?
- Is there any reason why you would be unable to take on this role (e.g. skills / training gap, right to work etc.)
- If the role is for a fixed term, it is a good opportunity to remind candidates of this and the proposed duration of the role e.g. 12 months to cover parental leave.

As explored earlier in this section of the Recruitment Toolkit, interviews are also an **opportunity for candidates to establish whether the role and School are right for them.**

Be aware that candidates may have questions for you and the panel, so be prepared to answer these where you can.

Examples could include:

- What are the training opportunities available in the role?
- What do the next 3 / 6 / 12 months look like for the Department / Division / Institute / Centre?

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