

Familiarise yourself with a role-play - explanatory notes

This film shows a role-play that was used as part of the assessment of candidates for the post of Recorder sitting in the Family jurisdiction.

Role-play exercises simulate a Court or Tribunal environment, but this does not mean you have to have a detailed knowledge of the law in that area. You will be provided with the text of any statute and procedural rules you may need and you will be assessed on the behaviours you demonstrate, and how you absorb and use the information provided. It is this, rather than your legal knowledge, that we are interested in assessing.

This film is not intended to demonstrate a perfect role-play

A candidate's performance is assessed in the context of all the information before the panel. This film is not intended to demonstrate a perfect role-play. It includes examples where the candidate does things well, and where she does things less well. Use this film to familiarise yourself with what you can expect from a role-play. Each role-play is tailored to a particular selection exercise so this film is only for illustrative purposes.

The candidate in this example is played by an actor, and she plays the role of a Recorder sitting at the fictitious Boltchester County Court in November 2008. Professional actors play the other main roles, as they will do in a real role-play.

The candidate brief

Prior to the role-play the candidate is given a short brief to prepare from, which is available to download on this screen. The candidate brief outlines the known facts of the case to be dealt with in the scenario, and the time available to deal with the matter, which for this role-play is up to 30 minutes. This information may also be accompanied by relevant extracts of procedure, if it is necessary to ensure that all candidates, irrespective of background, have the information they need to participate.

Preparation time to read and absorb the brief immediately before the role-play will vary, depending on the amount of material provided. For this role-play candidates had 30 minutes preparation time and were provided with three supporting documents which are available to download.

The length of a role-play

Role-plays are held in one of a number of meeting rooms, usually in London. Each room differs slightly in layout and size. For example, if you were taking part in a role-play based in a criminal jurisdiction, there might be a dock in the room.

The role-play starts from the time you enter the room and ends when you depart, usually 20 - 25 minutes. This is made clear in your brief, but some candidates are still caught out. You do not need to use all the time available, but you should use it as a guide to ensure that you give yourself enough opportunities to demonstrate your suitability.

The length of a role-play may vary, depending on whether a single scenario is used or the role-play has several parts. In this role-play a single scenario is used and it was designed to last 30 minutes (not including reading time). By contrast, for the Deputy District Judge (Civil) exercise launched in October 2009, each candidate will participate in two different role-plays, with each scenario designed to last 15 - 20 minutes. It is more usual to be asked to participate in two role-plays than a single one.

The assessment panel

As well as the actors, members of the assessment panel will also be present in the room, although they do not appear in this film. There is no need to greet them on your arrival. Try not to let your attention be drawn to them during the role-play. They are there to observe and take notes in preparation for assessing your performance.

For a court related or tribunal legal role-play, each panel includes at least one Judge, normally with experience in the jurisdiction the vacancy is in, and independent lay members appointed by the Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC). For a role-play related to a non legal position in a tribunal, the Judge may be replaced by a relevant expert member. The role-play will also be sound-recorded.

Qualities and abilities

The role-play is intended to look at your skills and abilities in handling a variety of people and situations. You will be assessed on your behaviour, not your legal knowledge. It may be helpful to bear in mind the five qualities and related abilities that the JAC uses to define merit and bear these in mind during your role-play.

The five qualities are:

- Intellectual capacity
- Personal qualities
- An ability to understand and deal fairly
- Authority and communication skills
- Efficiency

Each quality has a number of related abilities, which are listed on the JAC website.

Further preparation

You may find it helpful to prepare yourself by visiting a jurisdiction for which you are applying, or by shadowing a relevant Judge, which can be arranged through the Judicial Office's Judge Shadowing Scheme – see their website for more details.

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