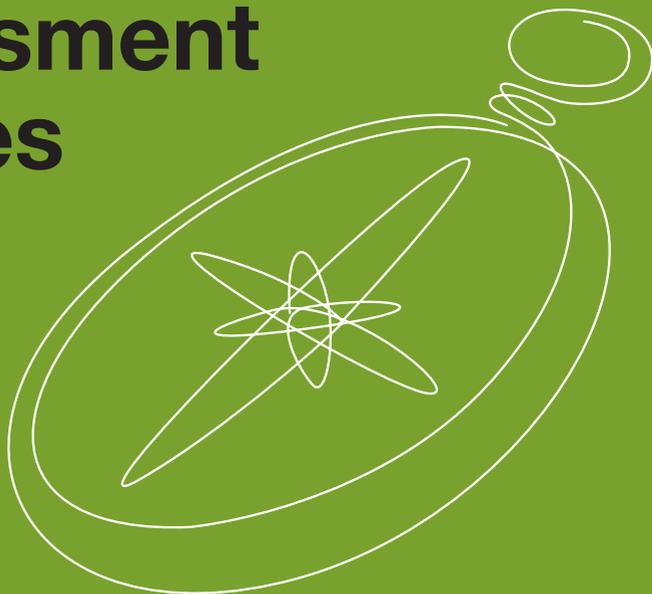


Nurses Thinking about your career: Assessment Centres



Member Support Services



Royal College of Nursing

Professional care for
caring professionals

Assessment Centres

As part of the recruitment process, organisations use assessment centres to assess job applicants' suitability for a post, along with an interview. Employers will often use this method of selection when they are recruiting from a large pool of applicants, such as newly qualified nurses, or in response to a recruitment campaign. Assessment centres are now being used more frequently for all recruitment.

What is an assessment centre?

An assessment centre consists of one or more activities to enable the selection panel to decide who best meets the requirements of the job.

These centres look for:

Communication

Able to demonstrate knowledge clearly and concisely, does not interrupt others, listens attentively, demonstrates positive body language and good eye contact, contributes ideas, facilitates the contribution of others.

Adaptability

Demonstrates leadership potential, enthusiasm and determination along with the ability to deal with new situations and resolve problems with confidence.

Clinical understanding

Able to prioritise and identify appropriate clinical actions and demonstrate knowledge of theory, able to be factually accurate.

What to expect



An assessment centre can last for up to four hours, with breaks between activities. You may meet the other candidates and undertake joint activities with them, although some centres will focus more on individual exercises. An assessment centre may be used as an initial screening exercise, prior to progression to interview. Or you may need to pass a certain element, such as a numeracy test, before you can progress further.

Tests of numeracy and literacy skills

Numeracy tests often include drug calculations. Literacy tests may include a written comprehension of a text, where candidates are tested on their ability to understand and summarise information and write clearly.

Written scenarios/case study exercises

These often test clinical competences and nursing knowledge. For example, you may be given a clinical scenario and a series of questions to answer, or a care planning exercise.

Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE)

This is an assessment of clinical competence, where components of the competence are tested individually. Often simulation techniques are used with mannequins. For example, you may be asked to demonstrate how you would safely assess and manage a patient presenting with a specific problem.

Presentations

You may be asked to present on a topic, either sent in advance of the assessment date or given on the day, with time allowed to prepare the presentation beforehand.

Group discussion about a topic

You may be given a topic to discuss, or a problem to solve. Often employers are testing communication skills, checking that you interact well with others, listen to them and contribute, to the task. Success depends on contributing enough, without dominating and interrupting the discussion. It is helpful to stay positive throughout and to reflect on what has been discussed periodically.

Role-play exercises

You may be asked to work with other candidates to show how you would respond to a professional scenario. Sometimes actors or one of the assessors will play the role of a patient or client. You will usually be provided with briefing information and preparation time and you should behave as you normally would in your nursing role.

Psychometric tests

Psychometric tests are structured assessment methods. They may include aptitude or ability tests, personality questionnaires, or a combination of both. Employers may be keen to look for certain values or attitudes which are necessary for providing compassionate, dignified care.

Scoring schemes

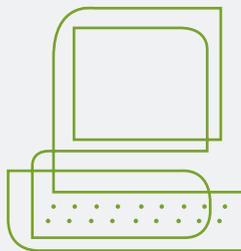
You will usually be rated on your performance in each of the component sections of the assessment. Employers will select the candidate(s) with the two highest overall score(s). Some tests may have a right or wrong answer. In other tests, employers will mark against a scale according to specific criteria.

Sample scoring scheme



Assessment centre tips

- You will be assessed against the criteria outlined in the job description and person specification, so it is important that you know these documents well.
- Read the guidance notes carefully. Make sure you take stationery if asked.
- Visit the employer's website so you know as much about the organisation as possible.
- Reflect on your own style and its impact on potential group activities. If you are naturally very talkative, remind yourself that you may need to focus more on listening. If you are very quiet, remember that you will need to speak up to make an impact on the assessors.
- Reflect on your "best self". Think of a time when you have worked really well in a team or when your contribution was valued by colleagues or patients. Think about the skills you used in that situation and the behaviours you displayed.
- If you have a disability that may affect your performance in any activities, make sure you let the employer know beforehand.
- Plan your outfit and make sure you look clean, smart and professional.
- Make sure you plan your journey and how long it will take, allowing for delays.
- Get plenty of rest the day before as it will be quite tiring.
- Be positive and enthusiastic, but don't act. Try not to see the other candidates as competitors.
- Assume that you are being assessed at all times.
- Have good eye contact with the people you meet and smile when appropriate.
- Make sure you read all of the information relevant to each task and listen carefully to any instructions. If there is anything you are not clear about, ask one of the facilitators.
- Take opportunities to have a break and take refreshments, where offered, as these will help keep up your stamina throughout the day.



Useful resources

RCN Direct

www.rcn.org.uk/direct

RCN Direct is the gateway to the RCN and provides comprehensive information and advice on a whole range of issues including:

- careers
- employment
- nursing
- membership
- journal subscriptions.

Advice: 8.30am-8.30pm, seven days a week, 365 days a year

Membership: 8.30am-8.30pm, Monday-Friday (excluding bank holidays)

Tel: 0345 772 6100 **Overseas:** 00 44 20 7647 3456

RCN online

www.rcn.org.uk/advice

www.rcn.org.uk/guides

www.twitter.com/thercn

The RCN Learning Zone can help you improve your numeracy skills.

See www.rcn.org.uk/learningzone

The RCN Library has several drug calculation and numeracy skills books which RCN members can borrow: www.rcn.org.uk/development/library

The Graduate Careers web site, Prospects, provides guidance on preparing for assessment centres at: www.prospects.ac.uk/assessment_centres.htm

Careers support An RCN guide for health care assistants and assistant practitioners.

See: www.rcn.org.uk/publications

See: www.rcn.org.uk/careers for more information, resources and advice on careers.

Visit RCNi at www.rcni.com for continuing professional development (CPD) resources, articles, online training and more.

Country specific careers services

England www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk

Wales www.careerswales.com

Scotland www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk

Northern Ireland www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/

