

Making the Move to Virtual Assessment Centres

Challenges and Tips for Success

Insights on common challenges in moving to virtual AC's and how to overcome them to make sure your virtual assessment centre runs well.



Letting People Learn About The Job and Your Company

What is the challenge?

In the transition to virtual assessment centres, there is less opportunity for candidates to get to know about the job and company they are applying to.

How do I address this challenge?

- Design your exercises to reflect role requirements and organisational culture. Avoid off-the-shelf generic exercises or those that aren't directly related to the job.
- Integrate video footage into the assessment centre. Whether that be within the exercises, or as part of a welcome message for the event. The key is to show applicants where they will be working and who they will be working with.
- Schedule a chance to have informal discussions with current graduates into your virtual schedule. It's not all one-way: give your current graduates a chance to 'sell' the role and answer questions in the same way they might have done in coffee breaks in the past.

Questions to consider:

(Y)es, (N)o or
(P)artially

- Are your assessment centre materials reflective of the job requirements?
- Are your assessment centre materials reflective of your company culture and brand positioning?
- Do your assessment centre materials give an insight into the physical environment in which people will be performing their job?
- Does your assessment centre include the chance to meet current graduates?
- Do your assessment centre materials factor in future hybrid-format styles of working (i.e. a combination of remote/on-site work)? This can set expectations on what their work may look like if successful.

New Assessor Biases

What is the challenge?

Videoconferencing introduces a whole new set of potential sources of bias which could affect assessor judgements. Whether it is distracting backgrounds, glitchy connections or unanticipated interruptions from pets or unruly children: all of these were NOT present when we were face-to-face but now very much are. This can mean that judgements are reached on non-job relevant criteria (such as tidiness of room!) and this could result in unintentional adverse impact.

How do I address this challenge?

- Ensure that all assessors are trained, and that refresher training in assessor biases (and how to minimise in an online environment) is available.
- Send guidance to candidates about things such as backgrounds, notifying those they live with of the assessment taking place, not to interrupt and expected dress code (if there is one).
- Due to the ease of electronic communications it is important assessors are told not to discuss candidates prior to the integration session. Apart from the bias, it is a potential GDPR breach.
- Assessing virtually means there is temptation to try and reply to 'business as usual emails' in a way that is less likely at a face-to-face event. This is likely to prove draining for assessors and restrict their attention: all of which we know leads to more subjective decision making.

Questions to consider

(Y)es, (N)o or
(P)artially

- Have all of your assessors been trained in Fair Assessment and managing bias within the last 6 months?
- How clear are you on what to say to candidates to minimise the risk of them triggering unconscious bias themselves?
- How strict are you on assessors keeping their entire day free and focusing on the assessment centre alone?
- If all assessors are sourced through the business itself, has HR briefed their teams and other departments that this takes priority over their other commitments for the day?
- Are back-up assessors available in the event that someone drops out, or their technology fails on the day itself?

Technology!

What is the challenge?

Whilst a lot of logistical challenges associated with physical assessment centres are gone, the number one issue in successfully delivering virtual assessment centre is getting the technology right.

How do I address this challenge?

- Test, test, test. Brief assessors, candidates and any other stakeholders in how to access and use whatever technology platforms you have chosen to deliver the assessments. Giving candidates an opportunity to access the platform and 'play' with the tech before the AC will help to relax them and allow them to portray a more natural, true image.
- Speak to your IT team to explain what you are planning and see if they can foresee any issues (i.e. whether there are any security firewalls that stop tech from working effectively) and can support in the successful delivery.
- Have a back up plan. If the virtual assessment centre platform cannot be accessed on the day, is it possible to share assessment materials in a different way? Could video calls be moved to telephone calls (and is the procedure known and understood?) Are these details shared in the initial invitation itself to avoid last-minute scrambling?

Questions to consider

(Y)es, (N)o or
(P)artially

- How confident are you that your IT systems can handle hosting the event?
- Have you consulted with your IT team about your plans to move to virtual assessment centres?
- How clear are you on what you will do if any single aspect of the technology fails on the day?

Assessment format

What is the challenge?

In many cases, exercises that were designed for a face-to-face setting will not be directly transferable to a virtual environment without modifying them first.

How do I address this challenge?

- Administration of the materials needs to be considered: how will the candidate briefing materials be shared without compromising confidentiality? How will people know what they are doing when (and how will they be informed if this needs to change on the day)? How will assessor scores be collated and reviewed?
- Timetabling for the event will need to be reviewed. Zoom fatigue means that back-to-back exercises with little 'down-time' in-between will be exhausting for candidates and assessors alike. Potentially drop or shorten some of the exercises to accommodate this.
- The move online means that there is ample opportunity to make assessments more engaging. Whether it is including video within the exercises or as part of the welcome; consider how the assessment centre can be made more engaging.
- Exercise order may need to be reviewed to break up the potential monotony / fatigue of a lot of similar formats back-to-back. i.e. an individual case study exercise followed by a group discussion is preferable, as opposed to an individual analysis exercise followed by individual preparation for a presentation.

Questions to consider

(Y)es, (N)o or
(P)artially

- To what extent have you considered necessary changes to assessment materials as a result of moving online?
- Have you considered how the timetables will need to change as a result of moving online?
- Have you made full use of the new opportunities present to be engaging and immersive in moving the assessment online?
- How interactive is your feedback to candidates from a virtual assessment centre? How about on the day itself, how are they sent off at the end of the event? on the day itself?