Assessment Centres
The Careers and Employability Service will support you throughout your course and after graduation

**EmployableMe:** Our innovative and fresh approach to careers and employability at the University of Huddersfield is about taking control of your own career planning—with support from your professionally qualified and experienced award-winning careers team. Look out for the green EmployableME character around campus and particularly within the careers centre in Student Central.

**MyCareer:** MyCareer is the hub of everything you do within careers. From here you can access everything! Including:

- JobShop
- The Huddersfield Graduate Programme
- Careers events on campus
- Resources

You can access MyCareer through the Student Hub via the Jobs and Careers tab.

**Career Resources:** The Careers and Employability Service provides you with access to personalised career resources. You can create a CV, listen to experts discussing job interviews, explore career options and test your skills through online assessments before facing the real thing. You will be able to find:

- CV Builder
- Interview training
- Preparation for assessment centres
- Practice psychometric tests
- Short videos to help you with applications

You can access these resources from your MyCareer platform.

**Grad Jobs Bureau:** The Careers and Employability Service is here to help you with your future; whether that be moving into a graduate job, exploring postgraduate study options or training for a particular career. We continue to support you after you have finished your course to aid your transition from final year student to graduate of the University of Huddersfield.

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Introduction:

Receiving an invitation to attend an Assessment Centre can feel quite daunting. Yet it is an important stage of the recruitment process and it’s evidence that an employer is taking you seriously as a candidate.

So although assessments can feel intimidating they’re actually a chance for you to shine, to reinforce the fact that you are a strong contender and to show that you have the potential needed for the job.

This booklet aims to show you what to expect, how to prepare and also how you can practise assessments prior to facing the real thing. Remember too that you can practise assessments online through the MyCareer site within the Student Portal. At the Careers and Employability Service we also run regular workshops to help you to prepare for the real thing.

Common assessment methods

1. Group activities
2. Written eg psychometric tests
3. Interviews
4. Social activities
5. Presentations

This list isn’t exhaustive; in fact new assessment centre methods are being devised all the time especially by companies that have a creative or quirky image such as Google.

Why employers use assessment centres

Recruitment processes are designed to deliver the best candidates by using the fairest methods and assessment centres are seen as a reliable, impartial and even scientific way of achieving this since the same tests and criteria are applied to everyone who attends.

It’s important to understand that no two assessment centres are ever the same. Employers can choose from a wide variety of activities; some are run only by a particular employer, others are standardised and used throughout many businesses.

They all aim to assess whether or not you are a suitable match to the role for which you’re applying. They also measure you against key competencies. Competencies are specific skills, knowledge and abilities that are essential to perform certain tasks for example: teamwork, communication, problem solving, planning, enthusiasm and motivation, decision making, initiative and listening skills. Look back to the job specification, job advertisement and company website to remind yourself of the competencies required for the role.

Location

Assessment centres could be:
- At the employer’s head office
- In a purpose built training facility
- Within a hotel
- At a conference centre
- On campus

The location could even be an element of the assessment process for example the employer might select a hotel in order to see how you react in social scenarios as well as in work based situations.
1. Group activities

A group based assessment will be measuring your interaction with other people; you’ll be watched by at least one assessor who will have a list of skills or competencies against which to judge your performance.

There are several types of group activity such as:

Group tasks – where a small number of candidates are set an activity to achieve. Examples range from practical, where you might be outdoors building a solution to a problem, to role play where you may have to deal for example with a problematic customer.

Group discussions – these can resemble large meetings where you may either need to formulate a solution to a problem as a team, or you could be asked to debate an issue relevant to the company.

You could be assessed on: your communication skills; how and what you contribute to the exercise; how you analyse information; problem solving; time management; your ability to identify and summarise key points; your open mindedness and of course your team working skills.

Group exercises will vary between different employers but all are designed to show how well you work in a group, how effective your contribution is, and how well you can think and communicate.

It is certainly not about who can shout the loudest or have all the right answers.

Tips on dealing with group activities

- During group exercises contribute but don’t dominate. Show respect and understanding for others in the group.
- Wear a watch: and keep a note of the time available.
- Try to think clearly and logically and think before you speak.
- Think about assigning ‘roles’ if the task is complex.
- Don’t avoid a ‘managing’ role but if you take that role then do be supportive of others within the group.
- Be clear about your role in the group.
- Look beyond an initial task: does it have any relevance around the employer’s business?
- Ensure that you are clear about the objectives of the group and exercise so that you can contribute effectively. Read the details provided yourself don’t rely on someone else in the group to get it right for you.
- Be assertive but also diplomatic. Ensure that you contribute but do not try to take over.
- Your aim is to work together as a team to achieve the goals – be positive and encouraging of others and listen to their contributions.
- Don’t be afraid to be persuasive if you feel you have a good point to put across.

2. Written eg psychometric tests

Written tests are used by employers to assess whether candidates have the necessary levels of ability for the job and to gather information about their skills and sometimes personal attributes.

Psychometric tests

These are similar to examinations in that you may need to complete them in silence and with a limited amount of time. Some employers also use them as part of an initial online application process and then ask you to repeat them at the Assessment Centre.

There are two main types of psychometric tests: aptitude and personality. Aptitude tests measure areas such as verbal reasoning, numerical reasoning and diagrammatic/spatial reasoning whilst personality questionnaires ask questions about aspects of your own personality which are relevant to the workplace.

For example your response to a question about how you behave at a party can indicate about your ability to work in teams. The information collected on you is collated into what becomes known as your ‘personality profile’.

A personality test is different from the aptitude tests:

- A personality test has no right or wrong answer.
- A personality test is not timed.

You can practice some of these tests through MyCareer.

In-tray exercises

An employer might want an idea about how you would react if you were based in a real office. For example how would you decide which emails to focus on? Or how could you prioritise if you had several tasks to do within a set time period? In tray exercises look at your ability to work under pressure, set yourself targets, prioritise work and also they check your administrative communication skills – and that could include looking at your use of language, grammar and spelling.

Continued on next page
2. Written eg psychometric tests continued

3. Interviews

Case studies
It can be important for an employer to see how quickly you can extract information from reports and glean key facts from data. A case study assessment will present you with a series of documents for example an excel spreadsheet, a report, memos and emails, and ask you to draw specific conclusions and make recommendations based on your findings.

Again time management is a key skill; approach a case study by allowing time for an initial scan over all the material and ensure that you fully understand the task that has been set for you – ask for clarification if required.

Other written assessment
You can be assessed on job specific tasks if there is a major administrative element to a role: examples of these assessment tasks include drafting a letter, writing a blog, devising tweets to promote a product through social media and creating a press release. All of these tasks will be looking not only at your communication skills but also evidence of your tact, judgement and ability to express yourself in English.

At the assessment centre you might face several types of interviews including:

- Individual, one to one interviews.
- Panel interviews with several interviewers present.

For more information on the different types of interviews, and how to prepare for them, you can read our Interviews booklet and use MyCareer.

4. Social activities

It can seem slightly unfair to invite you to a meal or a bar in a hotel and then to not allow you to relax enough to be able to enjoy it! Yet that disarming aspect of a social activity is deliberately designed to assess your skills when you are most likely to be off your guard. Your attitude and behaviour in situations like these could be an important aspect of a job particularly if you are likely to be in a position where you represent the employer around customers, clients or fellow business professionals.

Try to:

- Talk: social activities are networking events. Be confident about yourself, chat professionally to both the assessors / employers and to your fellow applicants.
- Drink moderately: free alcohol might appear to be wonderful in principle but remember that this is just one stage of the assessment process and that you want to come across as a professional.
- Carry a pen, and something to write on: you could well find yourself talking to someone who wants your contact details or email address and having a pen is a very useful.
- Consider having your business cards.
- Lastly, if all this sounds too much, pretend! As long as you smile, talk and act with confidence then you can easily appear confident even if you are actually quite nervous.

5. Presentations

At an assessment you may be asked to give a presentation relating to the role that you are applying for. Employers are testing you in terms of your research and preparation, your communication skills and your confidence levels. Some employers will give you the topic for presentation on the day and just give you a short time to prepare for it; others may give it in advance.

Bear in mind that most employers will allow you to use PowerPoint but don’t be afraid to use other presentation tools such as Prezi if you feel that you are a confident user. Some employers may wish you to present with neither props nor technology.

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5. Presentations Continued

Our top tips for presenting at an assessment centre

- Know your topic: confirm that you definitely understand the question you’re addressing. It’s easy to get this wrong. For example are you being asked to answer a question or discuss an issue? Failure to get this right can lead to a poor assessment.

- Know your audience: research the company before hand, make sure you know what you’re talking about.

- Have a presentation plan: make sure you allow time for an introduction, opening comments, conclusions and a summary plus time for questions.

- If possible, practise your presentation - you can work on the areas where you sounded weak, and strengthen them.

- Visual aids: make them big and bold – remember that graphics are more memorable than text, so if you can use pictures or graphics to get your message across – do so!

- Find out what facilities are available to you before the presentation, this will inform your method of presentation, for example, PowerPoint, a laptop, or on flip chart paper.

- Have a technology back up – take your presentation on a USB stick and also email it to yourself.

- Body language: be aware of your posture: you need to stand confidently and project yourself well to the audience. Use positive body language and make eye contact with your audience.

- Time keeping: always keep to the allotted time. 15 minutes means 15 minutes NOT 20 or 25! More often than not you will be stopped once the time limit is reached so you may miss out on the opportunity to deliver your dazzling conclusion.

On the assessment day

It is essential that you make a good first impression with everyone you meet, they may be asked to provide feedback on you. You are expected to have done your research about the organisation prior to the assessment day – you may be assessed on your knowledge of the organisation and sector. A basic understanding of what the company does, who it works with and its main business aims and competitors, are important. You are not, however, expected to be an expert.

Introduce yourself confidently, talk to selectors, members of staff and other candidates, show an interest and ask relevant questions. Try and ‘break the ice’, it will help you feel more confident when it comes to the actual assessment activities.

If the selection centre involves an overnight stay; dinner and discussions in the bar offer candidates the opportunity to meet and talk with selectors and other members of staff. Relax and enjoy yourself but be aware that you are still being assessed at this point so remain professional.

Make sure that you pay attention during the introduction to the day. The introduction will explain what will happen during the day. It is important that you are clear about the details of what will happen and when; once the assessment centre is under way, everything moves very quickly and it is easy to get ‘lost’.

A debrief will give candidates the opportunity to reflect on the whole process; to find out what it has been like for them (enjoyable, challenging, tiring); how candidates feel about what was asked of them; and how they think they have performed.

Feedback – if you attend an assessment centre but are unsuccessful, always try to obtain feedback from the employer. Not only will you find out why you were unsuccessful on this occasion but you can also use the feedback to help you prepare for future assessments.

Lastly our top five assessment centre tips:

1. Practise, practise, practise: use MyCareer but don’t forget that careers advisers can help to prepare you too.

2. Switch off your phone and put it away: it can and will distract you, but it’s also unprofessional to use it whilst networking.

3. Bad habits? Put them on hold. Smoking is probably the worst offender here. You don’t need to pretend that you’ve never smoked but don’t let your habit eat into your time allotted to assessment centre tasks.

4. Dress like you’ve got the job: in other words, professionally. You can never dress too smartly.

5. Stay alert: assessments may be designed to catch you off guard so always be aware of your behaviour.
This publication is also available online - should you like to have it in an alternative format please contact us.

**Careers and Employability Service**

Telephone: 01484 472124  
Email: careers@hud.ac.uk  
Twitter: HudUniCareers  
Facebook: HuddCareers  
Website: www.hud.ac.uk/careers