

FACTSHEET

Guidance/support for helping students prepare for graduate level interviews

Aim: To support academic staff when carrying out tutorial activities related to helping students to prepare for interview.

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Student Futures, LJMU's Careers, Employability and Start-Up Service, have a range of resources and services to help students prepare for interviews these include:

'Preparing for Interviews Mini Guide'

- this detailed mini guide is available to download from the Student Futures website. It contains information about the different types of interview used by graduate recruiters such as competency-based interviews, strengths based interviews, values based interviews, video interviews etc. There are example questions, advice about researching employers and sectors, alongside advice about how to answer questions.

www.ljmu.ac.uk/studentfutures/online-guides-and-resources



'Preparing for Interviews for Teacher Training courses'

- this detailed mini guide is specifically for students who have submitted a successful application for a teacher training course and have been invited to an interview/assessment day.

www.ljmu.ac.uk/studentfutures/online-guides-and-resources



'Interview Preparation Checklist'

- this checklist is also available from the Student Futures website. This is a useful activity for any student to complete before attending an interview. www.ljmu.ac.uk/studentfutures/online-guides-and-resources

'Multiple Mini Interviews Guide' - this detailed guide is available to download from the Student Futures website.

Students who are applying for jobs within science or healthcare (such as the Scientist Training Programme) would be most likely to face MMIs. The multiple mini interview (MMI) is a type of interview students may face. It means essentially that a candidate will be interviewed by more than one interviewer. With this kind of format, candidates will usually rotate around different tables or 'stations' where at each station they will face different types of questions. Some MMIs (for example for dentistry or medicine) can include other types of exercises such as a role play or even a practical exercise.

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Careers Zone 24/7 - Students can register for Careers Zone 24/7 and then access a range of digital careers Apps and a jobs board. The platform features Interview360; this allows students to practice interviews from a huge range of interview experiences across a range of sectors. Their answers are recorded and played back so they can review them before moving on, and they are provided with video guidance along the way. Once completed, they will receive a detailed report with the steps they can take to improve the structure and content of answers as well as their communication skills. With more recruiters moving to online interviews and assessments, this is the perfect tool to ensure students head into any interview with confidence.

<https://careerszone247.careercentre.me/u/xnb01019>

Mock Interviews - if students have an interview coming up that they would like to prepare for they can book a one-to-one mock interview with a member of the LJMU Student Futures Team by telephoning 0151 231 2048 or emailing studentfutures@ljmu.ac.uk

Student Futures Team contact details:

Website: www.ljmu.ac.uk/studentfutures

Email: studentfutures@ljmu.ac.uk

Phone **0151 231 2048**

Instagram and Twitter: [@LJMUcareers](https://www.instagram.com/LJMUcareers)



Conducting mock interviews

Example Questions

Due to the diverse range of courses within the Faculty of Science and wide range of careers students go into it is not possible to cover all sectors/areas. Some key themes are covered below. Encourage students to look at the job description and/or the person specification and write down the skills and qualities required as this can help them predict the kind of questions they may face. It is also important to explore the employers' recruitment pages which may also indicate the type of interview the student will face (video, competency-based, strengths-based etc).

Students can also use our Interview360 App to practice their interview technique:

<https://careerszone247.careercentre.me/u/xevxxgi4>

Below are some example questions/starting points:

Tell me about yourself

- | What are your major strengths/weaknesses?
- | What aspects of your course have you liked/disliked the most?
- | What practical skills and theoretical knowledge have you gained from your course?
- | Why did you choose to study your degree subject?
- | What are your career aspirations?
- | What actions are you taking in order to better prepare for this career?
- | What is your most significant achievement?
- | What has been your biggest failure and how did you deal with it?

Competency Questions:

- | Describe a situation where you worked in a team
- | Tell us about a time when you had to plan and organise something
- | Give an example of where you had to communicate effectively
- | What is your greatest achievement and why?
- | Outline a situation in which you had to influence someone else to do something for you. How easy or difficult was this and why?
- | Give an example of a time when you had to cope with a difficult situation.
- | Given an example of a time when you have shown initiative.
- | Describe a time when you have faced a difficult problem and what steps did you take to solve it effectively.
- | Describe a time when you have had to persuade or influence others to achieve a positive outcome.

Strengths Based Questions

- | What energises you?
- | What makes a good day for you?
- | What activities come naturally to you?
- | What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?
- | Tell me about something you are particularly proud of.
- | What gets done on your 'to do' list?
- | What never gets done?
- | Do you prefer to start a task or finish a task?
- | What do you do when you find a task boring?
- | How do you stay motivated?
- | How do you manage your time and prioritise tasks?
- | What would you say is your biggest weakness?
- | When would your friends & family say you are at your happiest?
- | Tell me about an activity or task that comes easily to you.

Questions about projects, placements, vacation work:

- | What did you learn from these?
- | What did you contribute to them?

Questions about hobbies, interests, social life:

- | What sort of responsibilities do these involve?
- | What do you get out of them?
- | What do you contribute to them?

What sort of careers are you considering and why:

- | Why do you want to join this organisation?
- | Why have you chosen this type of work?
- | What do you think you would be able to contribute to this organisation/type of work?
- | What have you got to offer us?
- | How do you see your career progressing? Where do you see yourself in five years' time?
- | How do you feel your previous experience has helped prepare you for this career?

Tell me why I should employ you:

- | How ambitious are you - where do you see yourself in 5/10 years time?
- | What do you think you have to offer an employer that other candidates don't?
- | What major problems or disappointments have you encountered and how did you deal with them?
- | How would you cope if you were in disagreement with colleagues at work?
- | How do you go about motivating others/yourself?
- | How do you organise your time and assess your priorities?



Questions on current affairs:

- Topical questions about the company e.g. How do you think the merger with another organisation will affect our high street image?
- If the company has had a recent high profile in the press, you will be expected to have an opinion.
- How do you think the current economic climate may affect this industry?

Interviews for laboratory-based job roles

In an interview for a laboratory-based position, applicants may face some technical questions which could fall into the following categories:

Laboratory skills:

You may encounter questions about the types of instrumentation you are competent in using and which laboratory techniques you have experience in:

- What would you say your major laboratory skills are?
- What kind of equipment are you most confident in using?
- What experience do you have of analytical techniques?

Current course of study:

Try to consider how the laboratory skills you have gained from your degree are relevant to the role you are applying to:

- Tell us about what you have learnt from your degree course which makes you suitable for this job role?
- Tell us about a piece of scientific research you have been involved in? What were the outcomes?
- Please explain your choice of dissertation topic to us.
- Which relevant modules have you studied which relate to this job role?
- Tell us about a particularly relevant scientific article which you have read recently?

Scenario-based questions:

The interviewer may ask you to talk through how you would handle a particular scientific scenario:

- Describe one laboratory technique to me in detail and talk me through a situation when you may use it.
- Tell us about a scientific experiment you carried out which did not go as well as you expected. What did you learn from this?
- Give me an example of drug-drug interaction and explain with the mechanism of action what you would do to prevent it?

Knowledge of that job role and sector:

- What do you know about the products we produce?
- What methods do you think we employ in our laboratories to test samples?
- What interests you about natural products as opposed to modern pharmaceuticals?
- Who are our main competitors?
- How do you feel about the prospect of becoming a healthcare scientist?
- What do you think are the current issues facing the NHS?

About ethical issues:

You may face questions which test your awareness of ethical issues relating to the role you are applying to. There are often no 'right or wrong' answers to these questions, but you may need to show an understanding of the moral arguments surrounding certain dilemmas.

- What are your views on genetic testing?
- What do you think about organisations outside the NHS providing NHS Healthcare?
- Should the NHS fund fertility treatment for people over 40?

Do you have any questions?

Students should be encouraged to ask questions to employers, at the end of an interview. However, it is important for students to ask informed questions, to demonstrate that they have already done their research into the company. Some example questions are provided below:

- I am impressed by the different rotations around company departments which you allow your graduates to complete (as part of this graduate scheme). Can you tell me more about these please?
- What do you think is the most challenging part of this role?
- Can you please tell me more about the structure and background of the team which I will work in?
- What are some of the first projects I will be involved in?
- How often is a graduate's performance appraised?
- What are the travel requirements of this job?
- What development plans does this organisation have?
- What is a typical career path in this job?
- Can you tell me more about the training and development opportunities for graduates within your company?



Example mock interview form

Has the interviewee backed up his/her answers with evidence & examples? For example, students could draw upon experience which they have gained whilst at LJMU, examples from current/previous work experience or examples from extracurricular activities (e.g., club/society membership /voluntary work). There are some suggestions provided underneath each question given below, of how a student could substantiate their answer to that question.

Q1. Tell me a bit about yourself?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">I Degree programme, particular areas of interestI Work experienceI Extracurricular activitiesI Stand out achievementsI Career aspirations
Q2. What are your career aspirations?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">I Clear career objectivesI Evidence of career research i.e. what are entry requirements, how are they attaining these?I Experience in sector/role they are interested inI Passion and enthusiasm for sector/role
Q3. How do you feel your previous experience has helped prepare you for this career? (University, voluntary, paid work)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">I Discussion of experience from different settings (especially relevant fields)I Evidence of skills developed through experiencesI Clear understanding of skills necessary for future career i.e. discussing relevant skills developed
Q4. What actions are you taking in order to better prepare for this career?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">I Understanding of entry requirements for career i.e. further training, experience.I Evidence of proactive approach i.e. undertaking a number of actions.I SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely)
Q5. What do you think are your main strengths?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">I Related to industry they are interested inI Understanding of why skill/strength is importantI Recent and relevant evidence of where and when they have developed strengthsI Experience in industry setting
Q6. Describe a time when you needed to organise time and resources in order to complete a task.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">I Chooses one clear exampleI Example is recent and relevantI Uses the STAR* frameworkI Includes a number of specific examples of the actions taken when planning or organising e.g. Creating a timetable, setting milestones, delegating tasks, managing equipment or other resources, communicating with others.
Q7. Describe a time when you have faced a difficult problem and what steps did you take to solve it effectively.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">I Chooses one clear exampleI Example is recent and relevantI Uses the STAR* frameworkI Identifies a 'problem', evidences creative thinking, acts positively under time pressure, describes overcoming challenges.
Q8. Describe a time when you have had to persuade or influence others to achieve a positive outcome.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">I Chooses one clear exampleI Example is recent and relevantI Uses the STAR* frameworkI Describes why they had to persuade or negotiate with others, explaining in detail how you went about doing this e.g. verbal and non-verbal communication styles, putting forward information in an engaging manner, highlighting benefits etc.



Q9. Describe a situation when you were required to be flexible in response to changing circumstances. What did you do in order to ensure a successful outcome?

- ! Chooses one clear example
- ! Example is recent and relevant
- ! Uses the STAR* framework
- ! Provides information that justifies why they had to adapt. Discusses positive actions they took in order to adapt effectively. Demonstrates a positive reaction to change and discusses any positive outcomes from change.

Q.10 Discipline Specific/Scientific/Specialist knowledge questions

Staff could also ask a couple of discipline specific/specialist questions which they think students could face if going for an interview within a particular type of industry/sector.

Q11. What do you think you have to offer an employer that other candidates don't?

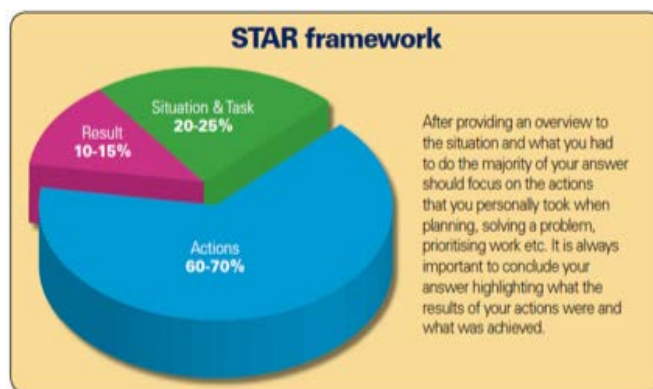
- ! A clearly identified strength
- ! Evidence of where and when this has been developed
- ! Persuasive discussion as to why it is of value/why other candidates would not possess it.

How to answer competency-based questions

The recommended way to answer competency-based questions is to use the STAR* framework which can help a candidate to provide a full overview of how he or she was able to use a particular skill or competency. The framework is recommended and used by employers and is useful when completing application forms or preparing for interviews.

STAR stands for:

- ! **Situation** –What was the context, situation or the setting?
- ! **Task** – What was to be achieved? What was the goal?
- ! **Actions** – What did you do to achieve the task?
- ! **Result** – What was the outcome or result?



Strengths-Based Interviews (SBIs)

Strengths based Interview (SBI) are increasingly used by some graduate employers. This type of interview is designed to look at what candidates enjoy doing and have a natural aptitude for, rather than specific skills which are usually assessed during a competency-based interview. The enjoyment of carrying out a task is believed to lead to a state of consciousness known as a “flow”. In this state the individual is believed to lose a sense of time as they become thoroughly engrossed in the project they are completing, and in turn perform to a higher standard. A SBI should result in the recruitment of those that enjoy doing the type of work necessary within their field, meaning that productivity for the company should be higher from this candidate, than from one hired on their preference for teamwork or problem-solving skills. During an interview situation, most people are likely to come across at their best when talking about what they enjoy, so it makes for a better interview experience for the candidate as well as the recruiter.

As the questions are less likely to be practiced it is also a more accurate indicator of later job performance, and so is beneficial for both the company recruiting, as well as the candidate. The style of strengths-based questions is different from the style of competency-based questions as they are more open-ended. Therefore, this type of question allows the candidate to draw on a variety of evidence rather than focussing on one specific example. In a strengths-based interview, the recruiter is looking to find out what kind of activities engage and energise the candidate.

Many recruiters believe it is impossible to prepare for a strength-based interview. However, this does not mean that candidates cannot prepare beforehand, by putting together a list of their strengths, and how they have utilised these in the past. It is also helpful for candidates to reflect upon how these strengths could be used at the organisation which they are applying to.

