

Preparing for **interview**

Interviews work **both ways**. The first thing to remember that an interview is a two-way process.

The firm or company interviewing you will want to find out whether you are suitable for the position and the firm but it is equally as important for you to find out if the firm and position are right for you. You should therefore prepare plenty of questions in advance of the meeting so you are as well informed as possible.

✂ **Of course**, there will be the opportunity for you to ask questions and delve further into the firm and the role after the initial first stage meeting, but the more information you collate the better. Ultimately, you want to be in a position when it comes to making a decision that you are certain it is the right one.

✂ The best way to go about this is to really sit down and have a think about what you want to get from the meeting, and what you want from your next move. This can be in relation to things such as progression, development, training, flexibility, quality of work etc. – whatever is important to you. You can then use this to frame your line of questioning to the interviewers and your questions will stem from this, because these are the things which are important to you. Sometimes it helps to write these questions down and tick them off once you have them answered during the interview. Chances are a lot of your questions will be answered as your interview progresses, but this just acts as a reminder.

✂ It is important to be honest and transparent in the interview, in terms of what you are looking for in your next role and your career as a whole. If you are not yourself, and aren't honest with your views, you may be hired on the premise of what was discussed in the interview and not what you actually want. Such preparation will reassure the interviewers that you have thought about the meeting beforehand and that your career matters to you. It should also ensure that you have the information needed when making any future decisions. However, if they have answered all of the questions you had during the meeting don't be afraid to say so. It's much better than asking inappropriate questions.

Some example questions are:

- What is the culture of the practice/company?
- What is the approach to flexible and home-working?
- What is the strategy for the practice's / department's development?
- What is the set-up of the team like?
- What is the training / development programme for Solicitors both within the practice / company and the specific department?
- How busy is the firm, the department in general and where would you sit within all of that? What are their growth plans?
- Do you have Professional Support Lawyers (PSLs) within this department?
- What are the prospects for progression in this role?
- What are the opportunities like for getting involved in marketing / business development?
- How much administrative support do your lawyers get in relation to IT, time recording etc?
- How are your lawyers targeted and / or reviewed?
- Is there the need / opportunity to work from other offices / travel to see clients?
- How did the firm handle Covid and how has the firm grown since?

✂ **Preperation**

Whether you are having a face to face interview or a video interview you should know a good deal about the firm you are prospectively joining, the role you're applying for and the people who are interviewing you. You should also feel confident that you can both describe your skills and demonstrate your suitability for the position. If you can achieve these goals you will be well prepared and able to give the best account of yourself.

✂ Information about the employer

There are multiple ways you can go about this – speak to the consultant you are working with on the role who will be able to give you unrivalled insight into the firm from information built on years upon years of relationship building and understanding the firms they act for. You can also do research online – there is plenty of information on the firm's website about them but also from other sources online. It is definitely worth looking into the people who you are meeting specifically, whether that be their pages on the law firm's website or their LinkedIn pages. Further information can also be collated from sources such as the firm's website as well as legal publications like the Legal 500. But the best and most up to date information you will be able to attain is by speaking with the consultant who has arranged the interview for you.

✂ Video Interviews

One thing that we have been asked quite frequently recently is what should I wear? Most people are comfortable with what to wear for a face to face meeting but are less so with a video interview. If you are working with a recruiter, check if their clients have any expectations, 90% of the time smart casual is the order of the day, but it is worth checking. Do ensure that you feel smart as this can easily impact on your confidence and therefore on your performance. Whilst it may sound very basic, when you are video interviewing make sure that you are in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed and that the internet connection is strong (keep the kids off Netflix if need be)! We have had feedback that people find it more difficult to deal with any gaps in the conversation when on a video interview, this means that it can take a little longer to settle into the meeting than with face to face meetings. Don't rush, don't worry about taking your time to think through any answer as you would in a normal interview, as the meeting progresses people do usually settle into them and find them easier.

✂ Job Specifications

Specific details on the role are often difficult to obtain. In fact, most of the roles Sacco Mann work as a business do not come with a job specification but more through regular conversations between Consultants and prospective law firms. Some positions will come with a job description, but even these are subject to change. The description of the role can often be rather vague, becoming more specific as the skills, attributes and desires of a suitable candidate are taken into account. More often than not, firms are a lot more flexible with the type of person they look to bring in than what may be described in the job specification. The job specification is geared towards the perfect candidate, but in many of these cases the candidate who ticks every single box isn't on the market – so firms are flexible.

Your consultant will be a useful source of information. They can not only provide technical information on a client but should also offer insight into the character of the firm and department, the areas of expertise they have, the reason why they are recruiting and why you are of interest. If you do see a job specification, and your consultant approaches you about the role, it is because they genuinely think the firm would consider someone of your background and profile and it could be worth a chat with them. Use the interview as an opportunity to find out more about the role, how it could work for you, what support and training you might need and how you can both work together to make the role work.

✕ Self-Analysis

This is the most important part of interview preparation. Spend time examining your own expertise and experience and have a clear understanding of the levels of expertise you have in the areas likely to be discussed. Think through and demonstrate particular experience or responsibility.

Spend time considering the skills that make you a success in your current position. Don't be afraid to emphasise your strong points; it is important for an interviewer to be able to visualise the strengths you offer (both for the firm and for their clients). Identifying these skills to yourself in advance will help you to bring them out more naturally and comfortably in the meeting.

An interviewer does not expect a candidate to know everything, but will be impressed by a candidate who can articulately and concisely give a confident and accurate account of their abilities. When technical questions are included in interviews, they aren't designed to trick you. They are designed to gauge where you are at technically so that they can provide you with adequate support should you join the firm.

✕ Anticipate questions from the interviewer

Read your CV again. You must be familiar with it and be able to answer honestly and concisely any questions that may be asked. Think about why you are looking to move on. If you are a trainee there may simply be no role on qualification, but you should also have a positive reason for applying to that particular firm and role. Whatever your level of qualification, whatever the reason, it is important not to be overly negative about your current employer.

Once you have considered possible questions make your anticipated answers specific to that firm. For example, if you are interviewing with a national practice and refer to their training programme as being a particular attraction, try to find out and include something specific to their training programme and not just common to the training at all national practices.

It is sometimes common for interviewers to ask competency-based questions, especially at a junior level. The best way to prepare for this is to have a think about the kind of skills the employer is looking for in a role and pre-determine examples of how you have dealt with these in past roles. If there is a job specification this is always an excellent way of identifying what kind of skills your potential employer is looking for. There is a simple but effective way of structuring the answers – the STAR approach – it stands for Situation, Task, Action, Result. It really helps break down what you are trying to get across in a concise way. It will also show your potential employer that you have put a lot of thought into your answers which will always come across well.

Once you have undertaken the steps above you will be well prepared for any interview, giving yourself the best possible opportunity to respond confidently and articulately to most of the questions presented. This will ensure your full range of skills are demonstrated to the interviewer.

Make use of your consultant - they should be able to use their experience, market knowledge and expertise to guide you.