



Parliamentary
Counsel's Office

GUIDE FOR JOB APPLICANTS

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The Selection Process

The Parliamentary Counsel's Office (PCO) recruits employees based on merit. This means that from a field of applicants the assessment panel selects the person best suited to the requirements of the role and the needs of the PCO. To do this the assessment panel compares all candidates' skills, experience and abilities against the capabilities, knowledge and experience standards set for the role. The assessment panel uses different assessment methods, such as written applications, capability-based assessments, interviews and referee checks, to collect the evidence required to make a merit-based decision. Capability-based assessments are a key feature of the recruitment and selection framework.

Applicants should also refer to the New South Wales Public Service Commission website (www.psc.nsw.gov.au) for further information about the recruitment process. It includes a 'how to' guide called 'Applying for a role in the NSW Public Service' and information about the assessment process and the NSW Public Sector Capability Framework.

The assessment panel

The selection process is conducted by an assessment panel that is constituted to ensure the fairest consideration of all applicants.

The panel will be made up of at least two people of whom:

- at least one person comes from the area in which the job vacancy occurs (normally the convenor). They will be thoroughly familiar with the vacant role, its duties, its environment, and the knowledge, skills, attitude and aptitude required of the successful candidate,
- at least one independent member who does not hold a position at PCO.

Generally, the panel will consist of at least one male and one female.

The assessment panel cannot include any person who has a special relationship with an applicant as the assessment panel is responsible for choosing fairly the applicant who best satisfies the requirements set out in the job advertisement.

The job advertisement and choosing applicants for interview

A job advertisement will include a brief description of the role and the requirements and capabilities that you must meet in order to apply and be assigned to the role.

Generally, to apply candidates must submit:

- A short statement/cover letter (1-2 pages) in response to one or two targeted questions (to provide evidence of experience against required role capabilities).
- A resume/curriculum vitae (CV).
- Names of referees.

By clearly stating in your written application that you meet the requirements and capabilities (eg technical or educational qualifications, skills, knowledge, experience etc) and answering the targeted questions, you may be selected for an interview. If you do not answer the targeted questions or

demonstrate how you meet the capabilities, your application may not be able to be considered by the assessment panel.

The assessment panel is not required to interview all applicants. If a large number of applicants meet all the requirements, the assessment panel will choose applicants based on a comparative assessment. This means that if, compared to the other applicants, you are assessed as stronger on the requirements set out in the advertisement, you will be called for further assessments, including an interview. Those applicants who are weaker on one or more aspects of the advertised requirements will not be called.

Applicants with a disability

Suitably qualified applicants who have a disability are encouraged to apply and discuss any specific requirements with the contact officer.

The contact officer

You should always contact the person named in the advertisement to obtain further information and to discuss the role. The discussion will help you decide whether or not to submit an application and it will help you pinpoint the aspects of your qualifications and experience that you should emphasise in your application. Do not hesitate to approach the contact officer again if you wish to obtain more information.

Eligibility for appointment

A person is only eligible for employment on an ongoing (permanent) basis if they are:

- an Australian citizen, or
- a permanent Australian resident (this includes New Zealand citizens who are eligible to work and remain in Australia).

Prior to appointment, applicants will be required to provide evidence of Australian citizenship or residency (ie their birth certificate, current Australian passport, certificate of naturalisation or other relevant documentation).

People who are not Australian citizens or permanent residents are eligible for employment on a temporary basis only.

Preparing an application

Applications are submitted through www.iworkfor.nsw.gov.au, the official website for the advertising of NSW government jobs. For information on how to register, search and apply for jobs online, see that website.

It is important to prepare your application carefully since it will be relied on by the assessment panel to decide whether or not to grant you an interview. Before preparing your application, you should read through the information package, which includes a statement setting out the duties of the role and a description of the functions of PCO and/or the area in which the role is located. Understanding

the role, what is required and whether you have the right skills and experience are important in deciding whether to apply.

Your application will have a greater chance of success if you follow these principles:

- **Read the advertisement carefully**—All advertisements include a brief description of the role, information on how to apply and a closing date for applications. Keep a copy of the reference number for future enquiries.
- **Read the information package**—The advertisement gives you basic information, but it is important to read the information package from the link provided in the advertisement. Documents in the package may include a role description, organisational chart or other material to help you understand the role and the organisation.
- **Speak to the contact person**—After you read the information package, you will know more about the role and may have some questions. You can phone or email the contact person named in the advertisement to help find the answers. Talking to the contact person may also give you a better understanding of the role, whether it is right for you and what to emphasise in your application.
- **Other information**—Get as much extra information as you can to help you present a covering letter and resume with relevant information. You could look at the PCO's website, annual report or other publications.
- **Online application process**—The online application process is presented as a series of 'pages' that require information to be completed prior to submitting your application. Each page has a number of fields. All compulsory fields are identified with a red asterisk (*) and must be completed prior to the page being saved.
- **Submit your application prior to the closing date**—Give yourself enough time to complete and review your application in advance of the closing date.
- **Privacy Statement**—The privacy statement on www.iworkfor.nsw.gov.au describes how privacy principles are applied, how and why data is collected and how it is stored. It also outlines circumstances in which your information can be disclosed.

Tip

Keep your application short, succinct, and do not repeat information. Provide information for what is requested only.

Remember to check spelling, punctuation and grammar. The application itself indicates how well you can communicate and, if written well, can make a positive impression.

It is essential for you to give enough information to convince the assessment panel to call you for an interview and further assessments.

Submitting your application

Applications should be lodged online at www.iworkfor.nsw.gov.au by the closing date. If you are experiencing difficulties applying online, please phone or email the contact person listed in the advertisement.

Once all information has been entered into the system, you will be given an opportunity to review your application prior to submitting it. Take this opportunity to ensure all details are correct. When you have successfully submitted your application, you will receive an email from iworkfor.nsw acknowledging your submission.

Comparative assessment

Comparative assessment is the standard requirement for employment in the NSW Public Service. Any person employed in ongoing employment, or temporary or term employment of over six months, will need to undertake a comparative assessment.

A comparative assessment for a role is the process of assessing an individual's claim against the pre-established standards for the role and the claims of other people for the role.

The process generally includes:

- Pre-screening for essential requirements such as a qualification or licence.
- An application and resume review.
- At least three capability-based assessments, one of which is an interview.
- Referee checks against the pre-established standards for the role or role type.

The comparative assessments must be conducted by at least two assessors. The assessors will base their consideration of the candidates on the results of all phases of the process.

The interview and other assessments

If you are selected for an interview, you will be given 3 working days' notice before you are required to attend the interview. If you are unable to attend the interview at the scheduled time, it may be possible to organise another time on the same day, or a telephone interview.

Please note that PCO does not cover travel expenses to attend the interview.

If you have a disability and require some special arrangements at the interview, please discuss these with the contact officer.

You may be asked to bring documents that show your qualifications and you will be asked to complete two further capability assessments (a test or task) to demonstrate your skills for the role. These may be held in conjunction with the interview or at another time.

Before the interview, you should familiarise yourself with the work of PCO and the area where the job vacancy occurs. You can do this by looking at information on PCO's website (www.pco.nsw.gov.au).

What will they ask?

At the interview, you will be asked questions relating to the functions of the job and your skills, knowledge and experience. Before you attend the interview, it will help you to think of likely questions that may be asked by the assessment panel and how you could answer them.

It is important that you be able to talk about your skills, knowledge, experience etc on which you have based your application. Even if a member of the assessment panel knows you and your work, that panel member cannot raise matters concerning you that you did not raise. It is up to you to convince the assessment panel that you are the best person for the job. There are some tips for handling some problems you may face at the interview at the end of this document.

You will be given the chance to ask questions about the role. These questions will show your interest in the role and your understanding of the role. Questions about general conditions of employment (salary, leave, etc) can also be asked at the interview. This information is also readily available from the contact officer.

Tips for some problems you may face at the interview

The assessment panel will try to make the interview as pleasant and as unstressful as possible for you so do not hesitate to raise any problems you may be experiencing at the interview. For example, if you cannot hear the questions or the questions are being asked too quickly or the interview is being conducted in conditions that make the interview unpleasant (for example, glare from a window could be shining in your eyes), tell the assessment panel. The assessment panel will try to fix the problem.

Some of the common problems that may arise during the interview are:

You have no idea what the question means:

Ask for the question to be repeated or asked in a different way so that you are able to understand what the question is.

Your mind goes blank on a matter you know:

Raise the points you can remember and ask if you can return to the question at the end of the interview.

You remember something about an earlier question:

Refer to the earlier question at the end of the interview and provide the additional information.

You know a lot about a matter but you do not know how much detail is needed:

Summarise the main points, say that you know more about the matter and ask if there are any points you should expand upon.

Other comparative assessments

Candidates generally have to undertake a further two capability assessments in addition to the interview. The assessments will reflect the responsibilities or skills relating to the role.

Examples of capability based assessments include, but are not limited to:

- role play exercises *eg answering telephone calls and taking messages for a customer service role,*
- presentations *eg about a project the applicant has been involved with,*
- work sample tests *eg completing an editorial checking exercise for an editorial role, completing a drafting exercise for a drafter's role,*
- psychometric testing *eg verbal reasoning skills*

These assessments are often undertaken when the person attends for the interview but can be done at another time. In the case of psychometric testing, this is often completed online, and is usually undertaken prior to the interview. Where there is a particularly large field of high-quality applicants, the other assessments may be undertaken earlier in the process and used to further short-list candidates for interview.

Referee checks

As part of the comparative assessment process the assessment panel will contact persons you have named as referees to assist it in making a decision about your capabilities, or to confirm its impressions of you or to confirm information provided by you.

Panel's recommendation

After the selected applicants have been interviewed and assessed, the assessment panel will make a recommendation to the Parliamentary Counsel about the applicant the panel considers is the best person for the job. After an offer of appointment has been made to the recommended applicant, and accepted, all other applicants will be advised that they were unsuccessful in applying for the role.

If you are successful

Most ongoing appointments to the PCO are on a probationary basis. The purpose of the probationary period is to determine whether the appointee's conduct and work performance meet the standard of PCO officers. The performance of all new employees is regularly reviewed in accordance with PCO's Performance Management System.

On commencement, an appointee will be assigned to a role within a classification of work. Subject to certain conditions, an employee may be assigned to another role at a later time.

Some advertised vacancies in the PCO are temporary positions. Please note that continued temporary employment is subject to satisfactory work performance, as well as funds and work being available. In accordance with section 47 of the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013*, the services of a temporary employee may be terminated at any time. Also, you should be aware that staff engaged for specific periods and whose services are terminated, are not eligible for voluntary redundancy or retrenchment packages.

All appointments to the PCO are conditional on the production of documents confirming identification and citizenship or residency status, completion of a health declaration, completion of a satisfactory criminal records check and, where applicable, a qualifications check.

Please note that PCO generally does not cover any costs associated with relocating to Sydney to take up the role.

Workplace culture

All PCO employees are expected to act ethically and in the public interest. The NSW government sector has an Ethical Framework, which requires all government sector employees to conduct themselves in ways that demonstrate the core values of integrity, trust, service and accountability and the PCO has its own Code of Conduct (available at www.pco.nsw.gov.au)

It is essential that PCO staff demonstrate a standard of conduct and ethics in the performance of their duties that maintains confidence and trust.

If you are unsuccessful

If you are unsuccessful, it is important for you to understand that the assessment panel's decision to choose another applicant is no reflection on you. It just means that on the basis of the assessments, you were not, at that time, assessed as being the person best suited for the role.

You can ask to have a post-selection discussion with the convenor of the assessment panel. The convenor will comment on your application and presentation at the interview, which may assist you in making future applications.

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