

Assessment Centres

This information has been written to help you understand the various selection methods used by employers, in particular the activities involved in Assessment Centres.

We have also included a detailed section on Psychometric Testing.

We suggest that you read it and if you have any further queries, book an appointment with a Career Development Adviser. We may also be running an Assessment Centre workshop – check on our website - www.careers.brad.ac.uk - for further details.

This leaflet can be downloaded in pdf format from our website – www.careers.brad.ac.uk. If you require this leaflet in any other format, please ask at the help desk in the Careers Service.

What is an Assessment Centre?

An Assessment Centre is not really a place.....but usually an extended, focussed and objective process for selecting candidates for jobs whereby a number of candidates are brought together by an employer.

The process of selection may involve:-

- A range of assessment techniques (such as interviews, psychometric testing, individual and group exercises) allowing the assessors to see you handling different situations and to give you the scope to shine in some areas even if you are not so good in others. It therefore takes a holistic view of the whole person rather than an isolated subjective snapshot, which interviews tend to.
- Assessment on a number of competencies or skills such as leadership ability, team working/interpersonal skills, communication and problem solving.
- A number of assessors or observers – this is seen as a fairer process where the decision to appoint is based on consensus.
- Several candidates being observed together thus making the selection process more meaningful as candidates are assessed in a variety of ways as an individual or as part of a group.

Being chosen to attend an Assessment Centre means that you are a very strong candidate! Assessment Centres are expensive to run, and only a very small proportion of applicants get through to this stage.

Probably you have already shown that you have many of the skills and qualities the employer is looking for, and now the Assessment Centre could be the last round in the recruitment procedure. You are now closer to getting that job offer! However, organisations vary and some put the Assessment Centre in the early stages of the selection process, in which case you may have to undergo further selection (e.g. another interview) before the final decision is made.

What lies ahead at the Assessment Centre will usually stretch you, give you a new experience and provide you with the opportunity to show the selectors your strengths for the particular role. On the whole, candidates leave Assessment Centres feeling exhausted, but at the same time on a high. They may be glad it's all over but have usually had a great time and learnt something about themselves in the process.

Do I really need to prepare?

“To fail to prepare.... is to prepare to fail.....”

Preparation is vital and a key factor to performing successfully at the Assessment Centre. You should leave nothing to chance. If you are going to convince the selector(s) that you are the right person for the job, you first need to convince yourself. In an Assessment Centre, you are **“SELLING”** yourself – your knowledge, skills, experiences, abilities and personal qualities – to an employer. In order to do this effectively, you must find out as much as you can about the organisation and their needs and how you match their criteria.

But do remember, this selection method is also a two-way process which should help you decide whether you feel you are well suited for, and would want to work for, the particular organisation.

- What does the job entail? Some organisations provide a detailed job description/person specification (e.g. public sector organisations) whilst other organisations (e.g. private sector) tend to provide a list of the required competencies.
- Research the organisation or company by looking at their website, looking at local and national newspapers and business directories and reading their annual report, if available. You could also do a web search to find out what is said about them by other organisations.
- “At The Assessment Centre” – AGCAS new Web video - available for viewing on our website. You will need to use your Bradford e-mail login as this resource is for our students only. It is highly recommended that you watch.

- Check in our Information Room to see if any previous students have completed a report form on the company's Assessment Centre. (We have a reference file of "Interviews and Assessment Centres Report Forms").
- Read one or more of our reference books about Assessment Centres and think about how you are likely to react if you have to participate. A list of resources is given at the end of this leaflet and on our website.
- Ensure you read all the details sent to you about the Assessment Centre to get a feel for the event.
- Always confirm your attendance in advance, make travel plans (giving yourself contingency time in case of delays) and get a good night's sleep the night before.

Practicalities – How do I know what to expect?

Where are Assessment Centres held?

The setting for your Assessment Centre will normally be a company training centre or a hotel, so that there are comfortable surroundings, a variety of rooms for the activities and peace and quiet away from the demands of the normal working environment.

However, depending on the job you applied for, you may be asked to attend an Assessment Centre at the most relevant location (e.g. at the local retail store for graduate trainees in retail management).

How long is the Assessment Centre?

Assessment Centres are focused events lasting from a short session of up to 3 hours to 2 full days. Some could be longer!

How many candidates are invited?

Many organisations with a large number of graduate vacancies to fill will have cut down their applicants to a much smaller number than the original total that applied. Typically, you will be invited to attend an Assessment Centre with up to about 30 other candidates, but you may be divided up into small groups for particular exercises.

Some employers only invite a very small number to their Assessment Centre on each occasion, for instance 8 or 9 candidates and will have a whole series of different dates on which their Assessment Centres are running.

What do I wear?

Unless told otherwise, dress as you would if you were attending an interview. Obviously, if you have an overnight stay, you would take a change of shirt etc. Some organisations, e.g. the armed forces and the police, may have physical/outdoor exercises and will tell you what to bring with you. Make sure you read your joining instructions carefully.

How do I behave during "social events"?

From the moment that you report to reception until you leave, you will be under scrutiny as part of the selection procedure – therefore the way you behave at all times is important, so act naturally but be aware of the need for good manners, polite behaviour and to act in a pleasant and friendly way towards other candidates and company personnel.

You will be expected to cope with general socialising with other candidates as well as with management and you are likely to be observed at meal times and when “relaxing” in the bar (generally referred to as “social events”) and after, or in-between activities. Assessors sometimes ask for the opinions of other company personnel who have met you!

If alcohol is available, don't overdo it, otherwise you may regret it the next day and your excesses will probably have been noticed!

Do they pay travelling expenses?

The payment of travelling expenses is normally mentioned in the letter/email sent inviting you for the Assessment Centre. Make sure you keep receipts as generally expenses are paid on production of receipts.

Some organisations impose a spending limit i.e. second class rail or the cost of petrol plus hotel accommodation of up to £80. If expenses are not covered, it is perfectly acceptable to make enquiries!

What if I have a disability?

If you have a disability, you can make the employer aware of any needs you have so that appropriate adjustments can be made. These could include extra time given to candidates with dyslexia to complete activities, adjustments to the physical environment, specialist equipment, materials in alternative formats etc.

Contact the recruiter as soon as possible to discuss your individual requirements.

What will happen at the Assessment Centre?

It would be common for you to arrive at the Assessment Centre location ready to start work, particularly if it's a half day event i.e. you might be pitched straight in, after a brief introduction, to a group exercise or even a psychometric test. The programme, as well as the number of activities you will be participating in, will obviously vary from company to company. If it's a longer event (e.g. 2 days) you might have an easy first evening with an employer presentation and a chance to mix informally with company managers and recent graduates. Usually there is information sent in advance so you should have prior warning – but if in doubt, be ready for anything!

Although programmes vary, our advice is that you may encounter any combination of activities detailed in the next section. Many of them will be strictly timed so you will need to keep an eye on the clock. Don't worry, though, you won't have to do all of them – probably just up to four or five.

The main thing to remember is that the activities are meant to test your competencies in the various skills required for the role (specific) or company (generic). Competency is about the way we do things or “behaviours” we use. If you are successful at ‘Team Working’, you will demonstrate positive behaviours that will contribute to the effectiveness of the team-working situation. For example, an effective team worker will demonstrate or display characteristics such as communicating openly with colleagues, sharing information, supporting one another and continuously displaying good team spirit.

Competencies describe these behaviours and are the result of a mixture of skills, abilities and knowledge. It is therefore important for you to know and understand the definition of each of the competencies required and the effective behavioural characteristics related to each competency, as you will be assessed and observed on these at the Assessment Centres. Some jobs may not provide details of the competencies but understanding the job role and responsibilities may give you an indication as to what competencies are required.

What types of activities am I expected to participate in?

As mentioned above, you might encounter any combination of the following activities. These may be assessed individually or as a group. In some activities, particularly group activities, you may encounter a “messenger”, delivering more information whilst you are in the midst of discussion (either to make the discussion more realistic or to assess how you work under pressure).

Presentation by the employer

Often, the Assessment Centre will start with a presentation by the employer describing the organisation, their graduate scheme and career progression opportunities. Generally, you are not assessed during this activity but pay close attention to what is said as it may be useful to you at a later stage (perhaps during one of the activities). Look interested and ask questions too.

Ice-breaker exercises

As the name implies, these are initially exercises to “break the ice” and to get everyone working together (being prepared to contribute and getting involved in the activity is important). These might involve:-

- Building a tower of Lego bricks or doing something very practical in a physical, rather than theoretical, way (e.g. devising a poster for a product launch). Although the practical problem may be straightforward, there are usually some restrictive rules such as you can't directly touch something but have to use communication skills with others to get them to follow your instructions.
- A short presentation lasting one to two minutes where you stand up one at a time to introduce yourself to the group. Alternatively, you may be asked to find out as much as possible about the candidate next to you and then introduce them to the group.

Possible competencies being assessed – Verbal communication, leadership, assertiveness, teamwork, co-operation, creativity, initiative and time management.

Practical problem-solving exercises

These exercises are usually done in groups. The group is given a problem to solve with a specific objective – it usually isn't straightforward and every approach may have disadvantages as well as advantages. The assessors want to see how you can think under pressure, how creative you can be and how effective you are in getting your ideas across. The outcome is to aim for an agreed plan of action defined by the end of the exercise, so negotiation and compromise are important. You may have to present your findings in an individual or group presentation at the end of the session.

Exercises can be undertaken both indoors and out. A typical indoor exercise is for the group to be given various materials and be given a task of constructing a bridge. The outdoor version may typically involve bridging a gap over an actual river.

Make sure you understand the task you are being asked to do and approach the problem in a logical way. Decide and agree on the goals to be achieved. Consider allocating tasks to different members so that the time is used effectively. Establish priorities i.e. agree on the order in which you should complete parts of the task. Use the skills and expertise of individual members – you should have got to know one another through the initial introduction!

Possible competencies being assessed – Working under pressure, creativity, initiative, analytical/clarity of thinking, verbal communication, numeracy, time management, business/commercial awareness and strategy/action planning

Discussion exercise

This exercise is usually done in a group whereby you are given a current topic and told to discuss it. No particular outcome is specified but again the assessors are looking at what and how you contribute and how others listen to you and take your ideas on board.

It is important to show your capacity to listen to others and to build upon good ideas – particularly if they are put forward by less confident candidates, who therefore need some support. Can you also show your skills in moving a discussion forward if this is needed? Depending on the type of job you are being considered for, it may be necessary to demonstrate that you have the potential to lead others. Make sure you achieve a balance between assertiveness and receptiveness to other candidates' views.

As in the problem solving exercise above, you may have to present your findings in an individual or group presentation at the end of the session.

Possible competencies being assessed – Verbal communication, leadership, assertiveness, confidence, co-operation/interpersonal relationship, listening, negotiation, analytical/problem solving and business/commercial awareness.

Role play

If a group exercise, candidates are assigned specific roles, which they have to adopt, and then come together with the others to argue a case. Assessors are looking for the capacity to identify with a viewpoint or position even if you don't personally agree. For this type of activity, compromise is vital but effectiveness in putting your case to the group is also essential.

The role-play is often based on the organisation and the type of work you have applied for. Sometimes this kind of exercise is a one-to-one activity with an actor or one of the assessors playing the other part. E.g. if you are applying for a trainee management vacancy, there could be a meeting between yourself as a junior manager and another manager from a different department in which you are negotiating changes to working practices. The other manager will probably have very different priorities to yours and your challenge could be to gain agreement to as many of the issues on your agenda as possible while maintaining a good relationship with your colleague. Your skills in persuading and influencing will clearly be of great importance here!

Possible competencies being assessed – Confidence, initiative, verbal communication, “thinking on your feet”, negotiation/persuasion, judgement and business/commercial awareness.

Committee exercise

Similar to a role play, usually with group members having designated roles but the task may look for a consensus plan that the committee puts forward. In this case the topic might be very vague so the discussion has to be kept focused if the committee is to achieve something.

Possible competencies being assessed – Team working, cooperation/interpersonal relationship, communication, negotiation, time management, planning and organising and working under pressure.

In-tray / E-tray exercise

A very different individual exercise – this is designed to simulate the administrative features of a job. E.g. you are given a pile of papers representing someone's post tray after a few days absence (e.g. emails, faxes, memos, letters, telephone messages, reports and computer printouts). Your task is to sort the papers into related piles, to assess the relative importance of each item and to evaluate how quickly to act.

Some actions could be delegated, some actioned by a phone call or email, some by a letter or a paper proposal – and some just demand immediate priority.

Above all, don't just work from the top down. The exercise can often be complicated by a messenger, calling at your “office” every few minutes or so, delivering more material.

E-tray exercises are an electronic version of the above, and, of course, you have to respond to the contents of your e-tray on your computer.

Possible competencies being assessed – Planning and organising/prioritising, judgement, time management, written communication and working under pressure.

Case Study

This could be a group or individual exercise (see further comments on Report Writing below). Usually you are given official reports, tables of figures, newspaper cuttings, memos, etc. and a problem to solve.

Alternatively, the group may be given a business case study, which has to be analysed and understood before making suggestions for subsequent action. The case study is usually based on a real life situation so the ideas that you propose may well have been implemented.

You may be asked to make a presentation about the key issues and suggested strategy, demonstrating that you or the group can respond well to assessors posing questions.

There is often not one clear cut “correct” answer in this exercise. Recruiters are assessing your ability to analyse problems, prioritise tasks and put forward effective arguments with clarity and tact.

Possible competencies being assessed – Analytical/clarity of thinking, planning and organising, time management, working under pressure and business/commercial awareness.

Report Writing / Essay

Some case study problems require you to individually analyse the problems and then present your summary and findings in a written report or essay form.

The essence here is to think clearly. You will be assessed on how you use your skills to present focused information that others will understand, the reasoning for your decisions and to test you on your written skills (spelling, grammar, etc.)

Alternatively, e.g. based on the information presented, you may be asked to write a letter (clearly and tactfully!) to a customer explaining why you will not extend their contract to supply a specific product or service.

Possible competencies being assessed: Information handling, written communication, analytical/clarity of thinking, reasoning, business/commercial awareness, initiative, judgement and customer service.

Presentation

This may be about a case study as above or about a specific topic given to you either on the day (with a short time to prepare) or prior to the day (in which case you will be given a brief in advance). If an individual presentation is one of the activities required of you on the day, but no specific presentation subject/topic given, it's always worth having a topic of your choice worked up into a presentation framework before attending an Assessment Centre.

Remember that technical information is difficult to put across in a presentation and you also need to choose a topic that would be of wide interest to others. If you know that the subject for your presentation won't be given until you are at the Assessment Centre, you can at least think about how to structure a presentation and consider what type of visual aids you are most comfortable with.

Thorough preparation is needed and you will need to give some thought to any visual aids you wish to use – make sure you find out what resources are available to you at the Assessment Centre.

Think about your audience – don't use technical jargon if they are not familiar with the terminology. Make sure your presentation has a clear structure and be careful about telling jokes – not everyone may appreciate your sense of humour. Speak clearly and stick to the time limit!

Be prepared to answer questions posed by the assessors at the end of your presentation – use this as a chance to clarify aspects of your presentation in more detail.

Possible competencies being assessed: Verbal communication, confidence, time management, information handling, 'thinking on your feet' and initiative.

Psychometric Tests

Psychometric testing describes a range of exercises used by employers to gauge an individual's aptitude or personality (*a detailed section on Psychometric Testing can be found at the end of this leaflet*).

Aptitude

A series of timed tests in examination conditions typically designed to assess verbal or numerical reasoning skills. In some job areas (usually computing and engineering), they may include diagrammatic reasoning. It may be that you have already completed some aptitude tests at an earlier stage in the selection process (more likely to be an online test).

Most tests are timed and designed so that you will be unlikely both to complete them and to get everything right; however, if you are unable to answer many questions, it will be difficult to achieve a high score.

You need to work as quickly and accurately as possible and avoid guessing just in case negative marking is used!

Other types of tests used (e.g. brainstorming, critical reasoning, project management and technical tests) depend on the role for which you are being assessed.

Possible competencies being assessed: Verbal, numerical and diagrammatic reasoning, working under pressure and analysing information, but can vary depending on the role.

Personality Questionnaires

A questionnaire designed to find out your preferred style of behaviour – how you might tend to act in certain situations.

The exercises are often used to help to determine if you would be suited to the organisation's culture and the particular role you have applied for, as different roles require different attributes (i.e. it wouldn't make much sense recruiting a very shy person to carry out a sales role).

You could answer questionnaires of this type in exactly the same way for different employers and be acceptable to one and not another. The thing to remember is not to try to anticipate the employer's requirements. There are built-in checks to ensure your answers are consistent. Answer honestly – there are no right or wrong answers!

Interviews

Usually all Assessment Centres include an interview and this may be either one-to-one or with a panel (our accompanying information on "Interviews" gives in-depth information about this subject – you are recommended to read it in conjunction with this information).

Go over the content of any previous interviews with the organisation and remind yourself of tricky questions and think about what they didn't ask! On this occasion there could be a specialist who does the kind of work you are applying for as well as Human Resources staff, so there may be more in-depth questions about the functional role.

The competencies the recruiters have identified as being important for the job will usually provide a framework for the interview. Be prepared to have your answers challenged as the interviewer(s) probe you further, and test out your ability to think on your feet and articulate your ideas effectively.

Possible competencies being assessed can vary depending on the job role.

How can I make the most of group exercises?

There are two aspects to most types of group exercise – what you contribute in terms of completing the task set, and the way in which you contribute to the group overall. Each of these is important, with the latter often being the most critical part of the group selection process.

Play to your strengths

The selectors are not expecting you to be an expert on the subject under discussion or the task to be completed, but they do want to see evidence that you can make an effective contribution to the group. It is important to get involved but avoid the temptation to dominate the group. You can make an effective contribution by:

- Including others in the discussions and addressing them by their name, if possible.
- Making sure the group keeps to time and completes the task in hand.
- Coming up with creative ideas.
- Organising people.
- Checking details.

It is often an ineffective use of resources in a group if you all try to do the same things thus wasting time and causing unnecessary duplication. Split up large tasks and allocate different parts to those best suited to them. Using the diverse strengths of the group members and delegating tasks can often achieve quicker, better results and is an important part of effective team work!

Make a really positive impact

You can improve your chances of scoring highly in a group activity by the impact you make.

Think about the way you interact with others, how you can influence them and how you can ensure the group achieves its goal, even if your personal approach would have been different.

- *Keep your contributions short and concise* – your point is more likely to be understood and to make an impact.
- *Avoid interrupting others to make your contribution and do not let others interrupt you* – listen to other candidates' points of view and if you disagree, be firm but polite in putting your ideas across.
- *Keep your non-verbal behaviour assertive* – both the volume and tone of voice are important. If you speak too quietly there is the danger of not being heard or being interrupted by others. Use eye contact to catch the chairperson's eyes (but include others as well) or direct it to the most relevant member(s).
- *Timing of your contribution* – if you want to influence a discussion, it is not just what you say that counts but also when you say it. Raise points at the relevant time for maximum impact.
- Don't wait until the last minute before airing an opposing view – this may irritate the group when they are just about to make the final decision!
- *Getting a reaction to your contribution* – you are more likely to get a reaction if you time your contribution effectively as mentioned above. However, if no one reacts, ask the group or an individual for comments.
- *Changing your mind* – This is a valid thing to do, especially in light of new information or better ideas. Be honest and open about it (not apologetic!).
- *Not falling in with an apparent majority* – you have a responsibility to make your doubts and disagreements known. It is important not to let the discussion be dominated by others whose point of view may be less valid than your own.

- *Falling in with the majority* – however, if after exploring all the options you find yourself holding a “minority” point of view and time is pressing, it can be wise to “fall in” with the majority rather than prevent the meeting from progressing.
- *Deciding which issues to make a stand on* – if you find yourself out of line with the majority view, there will be many issues on which you can make a stand. If you do this on every issue, it will become counter productive and you may be labelled awkward and argumentative.

Make sure you know what you are talking about if you decide to make an individual stand on an issue and remember that there may be a time limit within which a decision has to be made. Sometimes agreement has to be reached in order to meet a deadline!

How will I be evaluated?

In each exercise, every candidate is assessed against specific criteria. In group activities, none, one or all of you may be selected, in which case the other group members are not in competition with you; but you are assessed on your ability to get on with the others.

Assessors normally rotate so that they never assess the same candidate twice. The assessors usually position themselves discretely in corners of the room so it shouldn't be obvious who is assessing whom.

After each exercise, assessors submit their detailed notes to the Assessment Centre Administrator who will compile a summary on each candidate. However, this information is not disclosed to other assessors until a final meeting so there is no undue influence.

The final meeting (usually after you have left) gives assessors chance to discuss the overall performance and relative merits of each candidate before the final decision.

You are likely to do better at some activities than others and a weaker performance in one area can be offset by a strong performance in another. Although there may be a minimum score set for each of the competencies the employer is looking for, you don't have to do brilliantly in everything to be selected!

What selection criteria are used at Assessment Centres?

Employers obviously vary in their requirements when selecting graduate employees, however at least **some** of the following criteria usually feature among the recruiters' list of skills and qualities they are looking for (source: Association of Graduate Recruiters):

Communication	Commitment/motivation
Leadership	Interpersonal skills
Teamwork	Commercial awareness
Initiative and problem solving	Planning and organisation
Flexibility and adaptability	Time management
Customer Focus	Numeracy/IT knowledge

How can I be effective and successful at an Assessment Centre?

There is no magic formula for being successful but you need to leave feeling that you have done yourself justice. The following tips might help you avoid the biggest pitfalls:

- Always pay careful attention to any instructions, if in doubt ask for clarification.
- Don't lose concentration – try to remain focused on the task in hand and the objective.
- Give everything your best shot – get fully involved in group activities, be assertive and persuasive but diplomatic too.
- Show that you are listening to what others say, by smiling, nodding and maintaining eye contact.
- Acknowledge and build on good points made by other group members as well as arguing your own case.
- Keep your sense of humour!
- Friendly conversation with other candidates will help you to relax – all of you may be successful at this particular Assessment Centre or none of you.

When will I get to know the result?

Well, again this varies. It may be the same day, it may be an e-mail or phone call within 24 hours, or if you attend one of the early centres it may be a few weeks. Usually though, the decision is rapid so you know where you stand.

If you get a job offer, remember that you need to be sure it's what you want before you accept.

If you don't get an offer, learn from the experience, think about what you did, particularly things that went wrong, and maybe contact the company for some feedback – at this stage in the recruitment process, particularly because the numbers are relatively small, employers will often provide feedback if asked.

What do I do after the Assessment Centre?

Remember, your Assessment Centre finishes only when you leave the organisation, so be professional at all times.

Finally, reflect on how it went. Highlight what went well and what could have been improved on, and then think what action you can take to improve in future.

If your Assessment Centre has gone well and you are very keen on the organisation, you may want to consider sending an email telling the recruiter how much you enjoyed the experience.

If you do send an email, make sure it is formally and professionally written (i.e. in full sentences; do not use abbreviation/short form, as though you are “texting” your friends!). Remember, you want to make the right impression here.

Psychometric Tests

One of the most frequent enquiries we get in Career Development Services is about psychometric tests, which are often used by employers as part of the selection process.

This information will dispel some myths, clarify some misconceptions and give you some pointers so you are more informed.

The thought of taking a psychometric test often causes a great deal of anxiety, and even the name of the tests can be confusing as people ask about psychological tests, psychoanalytical tests, selection tests, aptitude tests and personality tests.

So once the name of these tests is sorted out, the next question is usually “Have you got some tests that I can look at so that I can do them when I get to the test centre or interview”? Unfortunately it is not that easy and although we do have various psychometric tests, there are none that you can just look at, or even have a go at that will guarantee you success when you take the tests.

So read on as we briefly explain some of the mysteries of psychometric tests, and hopefully give you the confidence to tackle them in the future.

What are psychometric tests?

Psychometric test is the proper terminology for tests of ability and tests of aptitude. It is also used to refer to behavioural, attitudinal or personality questionnaires – although these last three are not tests but measures (see section on Personality Questionnaires).

An ability or aptitude test is something that has clear right or wrong answers, is taken under exam conditions and is strictly timed. In graduate recruitment, psychometric tests are used by organisations at various stages of selection.

You often have to complete a test or series of tests before you get to interview (increasingly online), or it may come as part of an Assessment Centre.

There are many types of psychometric tests on the market, but those most commonly used tests for general graduate selection comprise of:

- *Verbal Reasoning* – the ability to interpret and understand the logic of written argument.
- *Numerical Reasoning* – the ability to interpret and understand complex data laid out in tables and charts.
- *Diagrammatic Reasoning* – the ability to extract and apply logical rules from a series of diagrams and symbols. This test is particularly used for IT and engineering jobs.
- Other tests used (e.g. brainstorming, critical reasoning, project management, systems navigation, technical tests etc.) depend on the role for which you are applying.

What worries people most is not knowing what to expect and a fear that, unless they practise, (like revising for an exam), they will perform badly. There is much debate about whether practise does affect results, and there is no definitive conclusion.

However, knowing what is required of you, anticipating a test conducted under examination conditions, in strictly timed situations, and mentally focusing yourself should help eliminate some of your fears.

How are tests of ability and aptitude used in the selection procedure?

The part that these tests play in getting you the job will vary greatly. For some employers, test scores have major significance whilst others look at candidates' test scores alongside other evidence (e.g. at Assessment Centres).

The earlier in the selection procedure you are asked to sit a test, the more influential it will be to your eventual selection. Increasingly, employers are using online psychometric testing as a means of selecting candidates to progress to the next stage of the recruitment process.

Before you get too excited about having the opportunity of asking someone to help you do the tests online, please remember that you **WILL** be asked to sit the same (or similar) tests in person at a later stage (e.g. at an Assessment Centre). It is therefore advisable for you to be honest and do the online test on your own!

Your results (or number of correct scores) are compared to a norm group – a group of people who have similar educational attainment to you. Depending on the number of correct scores you get, you may fall within 5 different groups of the norm – well above average, above average, average, below average and well below average (as per Kenexa Practice tests).

Some employers may use test scores to either select only the high scoring applicants (e.g. well above average) whilst for many others it may be enough for your scores to fall within, or slightly below, the average group.

So what can I do?

Kenexa online Practice Verbal and Numerical Tests with instant feedback, are available for students of the University of Bradford.

This is an opportunity to try full-length numerical and verbal tests currently used by employers. On completion of the tests you will receive a comprehensive feedback report on your performance via e-mail, with practical advice about how you might achieve better scores.

To request access to these online practice tests please contact r.christian@bradford.ac.uk. You will need use your Bradford e-mail account or include your UB number in your e-mail.

Improve your understanding of psychometric tests by checking our reference books (see list at the end of the leaflet). You will also find other titles in good bookshops.

Why can't I just look at some REAL tests?

Test administrators have to be professionally trained, operate to exacting standards and hold a licence to test.

A number of Career Development Advisers are qualified in the use of psychometric tests and so adhere to these professional standards.

We cannot therefore give you a real test to look at, so you will need to make arrangements to attend one of the practice test sessions.

What about personality tests?

These really shouldn't be called tests, because there are no right or wrong answers and they are not timed. Personality questionnaires ask you a lot of questions about how you think you act, or may act, in particular situations. They are trying to establish your preferred style of behaviour, to ensure that you would fit into the company culture and job role.

Many people think they should answer these questionnaires in the way they think the employer wants – and so may not be truthful. You could answer questionnaires of this type in exactly the same way for different employers and be acceptable to one and not another, hence the thing to remember is not to try to anticipate the employer's requirements. There are built-in checks to ensure your answers are consistent. Answer honestly – there are no right or wrong answers!

One of the most respected personality measures is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). We occasionally hold workshops where you can do this exercise and receive feedback. Check our website for details <http://www.careers.brad.ac.uk>

If you would like to have a look at a typical personality measure, an internet search will bring you many examples. As a starter, try <http://www.keirsey.com> (the Keirsey Temperament Sorter is similar to the MBTI) and <http://www.teamtechnology.co.uk>

What if I have a disability?

If you have a disability, you can make the employer aware of any needs you have so that appropriate adjustments can be made. These could include extra time given to candidates with dyslexia to complete activities, adjustments to the physical environment, specialist equipment, materials in alternative formats (e.g. for the visually or hearing impaired, etc).

Contact the recruiter as soon as possible to discuss your individual requirements.

And finally...

If after taking all the steps suggested to find out about psychometric tests you are still worried, make an appointment to see a Career Development Adviser, who will be able to suggest strategies you may find helpful.

Further resources in Career Development Services

Appointment with Advisers

You can discuss your Assessment Centre and Psychometric Testing techniques at an appointment with a Career Development Adviser. You need to book a few days in advance by telephoning the Information Desk on 01274 234991, calling into Career Development Services or emailing careers@bradford.ac.uk

Information Room

We have a wide range of Assessment Centres and Psychometric Tests resources in our Information Room including:

Leaflets

- *Interviews* – CDS Job Seeking Leaflets Series
- Going for Interviews – AGCAS booklet

Books

A wide range of reference books covering all aspects of tests including:

- Verbal Reasoning Tests
- Advanced Numeracy Tests
- Psychometric Tests
- Aptitude Personality & Motivation Tests
- Civil Service Qualifying Tests - Mike Byron
- Clinical Aptitude Tests for entry to medicine
- Assessment Centres

DVDs/CD Rom

- “At The Assessment Centre” – AGCAS new Web video available to view at <http://www.careers.brad.ac.uk/destinations/units/assessment-centres.shtml>
- “Making an Impact – the graduate job interview” – Web video. Includes extracts of interviews with various companies (ERAC, KPMG and Winning Moves Creative Agency) including an extract of a telephone interview.
- Times Psychometric Tests CD Rom

Internet (for Psychometric Tests)

- University of Bradford students can access the Kenexa online Practice Verbal and Numerical Tests. To request access to these online practice tests please contact r.christian@bradford.ac.uk. You will need use your Bradford e-mail account or include your UB number in your e-mail.
- www.careers.brad.ac.uk - useful information on Assessment Centres, and an employability skills section containing information on what recruiters look for in a candidate.
- www.careers.brad.ac.uk/destinations - great resources for helping you with your interviews and Assessment Centres. (Note: you will need to use your Bradford e-mail login as this resource is for our students only).
- www.prospects.ac.uk – check the ‘interview tips’ and ‘interview tests and exercises’ pages
- **The British Psychological Society** has a website which has a lot of useful information including answers to frequently asked questions about selection testing, <http://www.psychtesting.org.uk/>.

Below are a range of practice aptitude/ability test sites for you to try out, either in preparation for the real thing or just to find out more about yourself and your abilities:

- Try the online tests available on <http://practicetests.cubiks.com>

- Try examples of ability tests found in the Morrisby Profile tests – check <http://www.morrisby.com>
- Practice aptitude tests from one of the UK's largest test publishers – check <http://www.shldirect.com/>
- Try <http://targetjobs.co.uk/> – click on 'Careers advice' then 'Psychometric Tests'
- Visit the Prospects website at <http://www.prospects.ac.uk/> – click on 'Careers advice' then 'Interview tests and exercises' then 'Psychometric Tests'

Below are a range of **practice personality assessment** sites for you to try out:

- Practice personality assessment from one of the UK's largest test publishers at <http://www.shldirect.com/>
- Complete the online personality questionnaires: Keirsey Character Sorter and Keirsey Temperament Sorter at <http://www.keirsey.com>
- Access a range of tests at <http://www.psychometrixltd.com/>
- Access the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a commonly used questionnaire to discover a personality type at <http://www.teamtechnology.co.uk/myersbriggs.html>
- The website <http://peoplemaps.com/> provides a free personality report.

Workshops and Talks/Presentations

We also regularly run workshops on a wide range of topics including Assessment Centres. Visit our website to view the current workshop programme.

Equality and Diversity

- The employability section of our website has resources and information on a range of equality issues – www.careers.brad.ac.uk/employability.