

Guidelines for Members of Selection Boards in the

Recruitment of Administrative, Technical and Industrial staff

Scope

The Council of the University of Malta has a procedure to determine the composition of Selection Boards which are authorised to conduct a process of evaluation of the merits and suitability of candidates seeking to be recruited as members of staff. The Selection Boards are to present recommendations for employment for Council's final approval.

This document is intended to describe the selection process and to provide guidelines on how members of such Selection Boards shall conduct themselves. Similar documents exist which regulate the selection process of Resident Academics and of academic staff at the Junior College respectively.

Background

When a vacancy arises, the respective Head of Department, or where applicable, the Head of Division liaises with the Office for Human Resources Management and Development and a Call for Applications ("the Call") is drafted. Once the issuance of the Call is authorised by the Rector it is advertised in the local newspapers, the Government Gazette and on the University web-site.

At the close of the period allowed for receipt of applications, the Head of Department concerned is asked to preview the career profiles (*curriculum vitae*) of the applicants to determine if there are any candidates who do not meet the objective criteria specified in the Call, or if there is any other objective and valid reason on the basis of which a short-list for interviews can be drawn.

All internal calls for application for Administrative, Technical and Industrial Staff, will require the line management of each applicant to complete a performance appraisal report. The performance appraisal report will be made available to the Selection Board members.

The composition of Selection Boards for Administrative, Technical and Industrial staff for vacancies arising in Faculties, Centres and Institutes or in general administration is as follow:

1. Rector or his delegate (in the Chair);
2. The Head of Department/Division as applicable;
3. Three (3) members appointed by the Rector after consultation with the relevant officers of the University responsible for the departments or sections to which the appointments are to be made, provided that the members of the Selection Board so appointed shall be at least two grades above the particular post to which the

appointment is to be made. At least one member, not including the Chair, of any Selection Board for Administrative, Technical and Industrial Staff, must be from a different section or department than the applicants to be interviewed;

4. A member of Council who is not employed with the University; and
5. Any other technical expert/s appointed by the Rector at his discretion when such expertise is deemed beneficial to the selection process.

Once the Rector confirms the composition of a Selection Board in accordance with the above, and once a list of applicants eligible for interview is drawn by the respective Head of Department/Division as described, all members of the Selection Board are notified in advance about the date for interviews and every effort is made to ensure that all members of the Selection Board are present.

Should any member of a Selection Board be unable to attend due to unavoidable circumstances, the Chairperson of the Selection Board may decide to proceed with the interviews provided that he feels that the members present collectively have sufficient technical and administrative competence to conduct the interviews, and provided that no Selection Board conducting interviews is composed of less than four people. If the Chairperson chooses to proceed with the interviews, any member of a Selection Board who is absent for all or some of the interviews, automatically forfeits his participation in the selection process. In such a case, only the members of the Selection Board who were actually present for the interviews of all interviewed applicants are *de facto* the Selection Board for the post(s) in question.

Conflict of Interest

Any member of the Selection Board, who at any stage in the selection process feels that his/her ability to conduct his duty fairly has been compromised, or when a perceived conflict of interest may arise, should inform the Chairperson immediately. A conflict of interest may arise if a member of the Selection Board:

is the spouse, or is in or has been in an intimate relationship with, or is a close relative of an applicant;

is a business associate, has conducted business with, or has been an employer or employee of an applicant;

is currently in any litigation with, has had any serious dispute or conflict with, or is a rival of an applicant; or

has been coerced, solicited, or intimidated by any applicant or others acting on behalf of an applicant.

Conversely, the Chairperson has the prerogative to request a member of the Selection Board to withdraw from a selection process if in his/her judgement the person's behaviour can compromise the fair conduct of a selection process or if this constitutes a conflict of interest. In such cases, the Chairperson may request the Rector to appoint a suitable replacement to serve on the Selection Board.

If the Chairperson feels that he has a conflict of interest the Rector should be informed.

Interviewing Process

Endorsing short-list for interviews

When the Selection Board first meets to conduct interviews, the Chairperson should request the Head of Department/Division concerned to declare whether all applicants have been called for interview, and if not, the Head of Department/Division is expected to table a report clearly stating why applicants were not shortlisted, and this report must be unanimously accepted and endorsed by the Selection Board before interviews of short-listed candidates can proceed.

Candidates should be shortlisted for interviews, or otherwise, purely on objective grounds and in accordance with the Call. This said, the compilation of a short-list may also be guided by practical considerations.

If any member of the Selection Board disagrees with the shortlist drawn by the Head of Department/Division, then he may request that all applicants are interviewed, or for the criteria for the drawing up of the shortlist to be changed. If the Selection Board does not reach consensus on the shortlist, then all applicants must be interviewed as a matter of prudence.

Establishing the Selection Criteria

The selection process should be conducted in conformance with the conditions set out in the Call and in accordance with a set of agreed Selection Criteria. Prior to the commencement of interviews, the Selection Board shall establish the Selection Criteria and shall allocate a marking scheme on the lines described hereafter.

Typically, the following Selection Criteria may be used, namely:

- i. Relevant Academic Qualifications
- ii. Relevant Work Experience
- iii. Aptitude and Suitability; and

iv. Performance in Interview.

The University of Malta acknowledges that there is an element of objectivity and subjectivity in each of these criteria and therefore any marking scheme adopted should not be algorithmic and can never be reduced to an absolute and deterministic measure of a person's ability, suitability, and performance. Indeed, any attempt to rationalise the marking scheme to the point of radically reducing the subjective element in this judgement obviates the underlying rationale of such a selection process; it is precisely the subjective but informed judgement of upright peers drawing from their experience and expertise which constitutes the very essence of such a selection process.

i. *Relevant Work Experience*

When marking Relevant Academic Qualifications ideally one considers:

- the relevance of the qualifications concerned to the field targeted by the Call; and
- the performance in and where relevant the classification of each qualification.

ii. *Relevant Work Experience*

Determining the relevance of a person's work experience has to be done in the context of the scope of the Call – ultimately this is what determines relevance. There may be a very experienced candidate who despite his/her notable achievement does not score very highly on this criterion because that experience is deemed by the Selection Board as having been achieved in a field that is not particularly relevant to the one in the Call.

iii. *Aptitude and Suitability*

This criterion is intrinsically subjective, but this does not mean that it is totally arbitrary.

When determining a candidate's Aptitude and Suitability, a Selection Board ought to consider the following, amongst others:

Mastery of skills of interest: how confident, well-versed and authoritative a candidate is in the skills required for the job;

Team-work: how well disposed a candidate is to working with others or in a group;

Commitment: how determined a candidate is to excel in the job and to accommodate and adapt to the exigencies of the job; and

Communication skills: how well a candidate interacts with others – how well a candidate listens and conveys his opinion, knowledge, and beliefs.

The considerations above must be made in the light of the curriculum vitae and any other written statements submitted by the candidates; the references received on behalf of each candidate; and the information conveyed and opinions expressed by the candidates during the interview.

iv. Performance in Interview

This criterion goes beyond the substance of what is said in the Interview, but should concentrate mostly on the verbal and nonverbal communication of each candidate during the interview. Proficiency in language(s) and particularly in Maltese and English is essential, but, nonverbal communication is equally crucial, including body language, posture, and eye contact amongst others. A candidate is expected to convey confidence, but, not arrogance; to convey clarity of thought without being patronising or pedantic; to project a presence and to do so naturally; to be truthful; respectful; prepared to listen but also to defend his views with vigour and conviction.

A Selection Board may decide to ask interviewees to prepare a technical presentation, to sit for a qualifying test(s), or to submit some technical paper to facilitate short-listing or final selection. A Selection Board also has the prerogative to call candidates more than once for interview in the quest to making its final recommendation to Council.

Marking Scheme and Marking Procedure

On establishing the criteria for selection and before the interviewing process commences, the Selection Board ought to agree on a marking scheme.

for Relevant Academic Qualifications;
for Relevant Work Experience;
for Aptitude and Suitability; and
for Performance in Interview.

Ultimately, the credibility of the selection process depends intrinsically on the skills and competence of the people making up the Selection Board and on their combined range of expertise, acknowledging that some are better equipped to judge certain criteria than others, and relying on the collective experience to arrive to a fair and correct conclusion.

Once the criteria and respective marking scheme have been established, the interviewing process can begin; each member of the Selection Board is given the opportunity to ask questions during each interview and each is expected to mark each candidate after each interview. The Chairperson, as the moderator of the interviewing process, must ensure that the questions asked are fair and are intended to assist the Selection Board to evaluate the respective candidates in accordance with the set criteria.

At the end of the interviewing process, when all members of the Selection Board are satisfied that they are in possession of the information necessary to facilitate their judgement, each member is expected to rank the interviewed candidates in order of merit – this is referred to hereafter as the *initial marking* of the candidates.

The opinion expressed by each Selection Board member and the discussion that ensues, are intended to allow each member to refine and adjust their respective marks based on the perspectives and opinions of the fellow members of the Selection Board in case that there was something one may have overlooked during initial marking. At the end of this stage, the Board is expected to have agreed on which candidates are the most deserving/suitable for the post and if a natural consensus does not emerge on the ranking order¹ of the most deserving/suitable candidates, then the Chairman may invite further discussion to try and reach consensus amongst Board Members. Each member of the Selection Board should continue to update and refine their marks during this process to reflect their position at the final outcome of the discussion.

If consensus is not reached on the ranking of the most deserving/suitable candidates, and further information is required to assist with the decision, the Board may decide to call the most deserving/suitable candidates for further interviews. If consensus is still not reached and the process of discussion has been exhausted, the most deserving candidate is drawn by simple majority of Selection Board members. A Report with the Selection Board's recommendations should be drawn up. Any member of the Selection Board is free to write a minority report addressed to the President of Council should they feel that any matter of substance or procedure should be brought to the attention of Council when it is considering the Selection Board's recommendation.

¹ One needs to keep in mind that in a selection process the University is seeking to identify the most deserving candidate to fill a vacancy. In the case that more than one vacancy needs to be filled by the Call, the University need only identify as many candidates as there are vacancies at the time of the interviews. In other words, strictly speaking, there is no need for any ranking order of candidates to be established by the Selection Board and indeed many unsuccessful candidates are more aggrieved by a relatively lower ranking than by the fact they did not rank first. On the other hand, experience has shown that there are several occasions when a selected candidate/s end up not taking up the post when this is offered, this resulting in the loss of precious time if there isn't a "reserve" list to draw upon should this, or further vacancies, arise soon after the selection process. Thus, when consensus is reached on the ranking order of the most deserving/suitable candidates, Selection Boards may opt to issue this as a final formal ranking which determines the order in which these candidates will be offered a job subject to vacancies that may arise within the scope of the Call within a year.

The marks allotted to each candidate by individual members of the Selection Board during the course of the selection process are intended solely to guide each member of the Selection Board personally when expressing an opinion in the collective quest to determine the most deserving candidate(s). As described earlier, when the ranking of the most deserving/suitable candidates² is deemed possible and is desired, the ranking order allotted by individual members of the Selection Board contributes³ to the final formal ranking determined by the Selection Board as a whole, ideally reached through consensus. Each member of the Selection Board is free to retain or to discard the marks he allots to candidates in the selection process as these marks are not official and only serve as personal notes as described.

Guidelines for Selection Board members

The interviewing process is expected to appraise the competence and suitability of candidates. While any member of the Selection Board can ask any question or request any information which is intended to assess a candidate in terms of the predetermined criteria as described, members of the Selection Board should ensure that:

- candidates and other Board members are treated in a cordial and respectful manner;
- no questions are asked that are sexist; ageist; racist; or are unlawfully discriminatory in nature;
- no information regarding the outcome or proceedings of the selection process is divulged to third parties other than Council, as authorised by Council, or as required at law;
- no candidate is given an unfair advantage over others or is treated unfairly; and
- they report to the Chairperson any cases of solicitation, intimidation or any other cause that may hinder them from conducting their duty equitably, or which may be perceived to be a conflict of interest as described earlier.

² The marks allocated by individual members of the Selection Board are not intended to give an exhaustive ranking of all applicants as, for example, it may prove challenging for a Selection Committee to agree on who deserves to be ranked 8th rather than 9th in the ranking order when in either case such ranking is futile particularly in situations when there are many more applicants than there are posts available or envisaged to become vacant within a year, or when the applicants in question have been deemed unsuitable.

³ The marks allocated by individual members of the Selection Board are not intended to be mechanically aggregated or averaged out to determine a final ranking as, not all members of the Selection Board are equally in a position to assess all the criteria described, and it is precisely the blend of experience, perspectives, and technical knowhow of the Selection Board as a whole which brings forth the final recommendation of ranking of the most deserving/suitable candidates.

Council Approval

Recommendations of Selection Boards are presented to Council for approval, and if Council agrees, the selected candidate, or candidates when applicable, will be offered employment in accordance to the ranking order, when applicable, and subject to the number of vacancies at the time, or as may arise within a period of 12 months from the date of approval by Council.

Clarification Process

After being approved by Council the list of selected candidates for the post(s) available at the time, will be informed. An applicant who may wish to receive any clarification or to lodge a complaint about the outcome of his/her application is invited to write to the address indicated on the website clearly stating his/her query or basis for complaint within 10 working days from the date the results are posted. The University will reconvene the respective Selection Board as soon as possible to compile answers to any such queries and complaints received and will strive to reply within 30 working days from the date of posting of the results on the web-site.

Should such candidates not be satisfied with the University's answers, they are invited to lodge a complaint with the University Ombudsman.