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*Promoting Quality in Teacher Education*

Recruitment processes in 2020/21

*We are collecting examples of how UCET members are conducting remote interviews for recruitment to ITE programmes next year, with particular challenges (e.g. in terms of observing applicants’ interactions with children, involving school partners etc.) identified, along with possible solutions.*

Institution 1

We are conducting all interviews via Zoom. This appears to be working well. Our secondary team are interviewing in pairs as a QA measure but we don’t have the capacity to do this for primary. One tutor has had very good feedback by having a telephone call with the candidate prior to the interview to give them a sense of what to expect and put them at their ease.

Institution 2

We are holding interviews remotely and are, as usual, involving a tutor and a school-based subject mentor. It has actually been easier to get mentors involved in some ways as they are more flexible with their time, don’t have to travel etc. Since we can’t insist on any time in school there is no school-based element to the interview process in any case. Candidates are being sent the pre-interview tasks that they would normally complete ‘in situ’ and any group tasks have been adapted to enable candidates to show their thinking, although what we are missing, of course, is a sense of interaction with others. All the necessary checks are being done remotely where necessary and will be verified pre-course, as and when things are relatively back to normal. To date we have not found these new arrangements to be problematic and we have very experienced and efficient admissions staff who have been able to adapt as appropriate.

Institution 3

We allocate approximately 30 - 40 mins per candidate and begin by sending them an invitation with an overview of what the interview will entail beforehand. Two members of staff jointly conduct the interview for ease of making notes & to gain a more rounded picture of the individual.

Within the information sent in the invitation is a request for them to ensure they have their birth certificate/ GCSE & or A level results to hand, DBS if they have one and any other documentation they wish to share. I have the individual's application to hand in order to draw on some points included within their personal statement and to ensure all the details noted are correct.

The interview begins with introductions from myself & a colleague, we then ask the applicant how things are with them in the current climate as to settle them into the conversation early on, we then ask the applicant to introduce themselves formally and to give us a brief overview of any experiences they have had that relate directly to the programme applied for. This gives us an indication of how much time they have spent in various settings/ schools - we then ask them to elaborate on these by highlighting the most rewarding & challenging of times. Following this we will ask some further questions involving current educational reforms, resources, influences etc.

The final part is assuring we have information regarding their identity DOB/ GCSE's etc and to substantiate if they have any needs that require adjustment on our behalf.

The applicants are then invited to ask any questions regarding the programme before the interview concludes.

The process has worked well for us as the individuals we interviewed over the past few weeks have all given positive feedback on the experience.

Institution 4

At xxx, we have tried to keep our recruitment processes as faithful to our normal process as possible for Secondary Core applicants. We have moved interviews online to Blackboard Collaborate, but our interview day takes near enough the same format as it otherwise would have, with a welcome presentation followed by the formal interview. The main change is that our mini-lesson activity would ordinarily have taken place with several interviewers and the other applicants, but we have had to fold this into the one-to-one interview time instead. We are still able to see the candidates’ ability to communicate effectively and display some basic pedagogic awareness, but we do lose elements of the personal interactions that we would otherwise get from the face-to-face experience. One thing we have noticed in conducting the mini-lesson this way is that several applicants treat it more like a presentation and say “if this were a lesson I would do…” rather than actually just doing it with the interviewer.

For Core, we do not use children as a test audience for the teaching, although our School Direct partners more often than not do. They have expressed difficulty in replicating that element of their recruitment process, although one of my tutees said that he successfully interviewed for an NQT post recently and was asked to teach a real class online – so it is not impossible with the right technology (and presumably the children were of key workers who were still allowed at school). From the limited number of people I’ve spoken to, the schools seem to have polarised into a risk-averse group who won’t take on anybody they’re not absolutely certain about, and a more pragmatic group who are just going to take a risk on anyone who otherwise performs reasonably at interview.

Our process also includes a written data comprehension task (as part of our fundamental skills audit) which our applicants complete in their own time and email back to us. This is only used formatively to determine support needs. We also send out a pre-reading task (a very short excerpt from a journal article) for discussion in the interview, which serves to identify candidates’ ability to engage with academic literature in a critical way as well as their ability to read and follow basic instructions.

Institution 5

We have two methods that we are trialling to see what produces the best outcomes:

* Primary –We send email briefings before the interview day, together with a pre-recorded podcast of providing an overview to the courses and our provision. We have adapted the interview process to be completed through Skype of Business, adapting activities to ensure that the best is brought out of the candidate whilst still allowing them to demonstrate their potential.  All candidates are followed up afterwards using Bonjoro video postcard messages.
* Secondary – We send email briefings before the interview day.  The overview of the course and a group discussion is facilitated through a BREO Collaborate webinar and a subsequent one to one interview in conducted using the same software.

Initial feedback from both tutors and candidates is very positive at this initial stage.  We intend to learn from the experience and see how we might use elements of it in the future.

Institution 6

Moving to online interviewing of applicants was a fairly straightforward process for most ITE courses, as we were able to adapt the process we already had in place for international students. Although there are slight variations between routes the process involves reading the applications (qualifications, personal statements and references), a 25 minute Skype interview with a university tutor, a presentation and a writing task. We have worked with our schools direct partners and those offering apprenticeships, to support them on how to adapt the process where an observation of the candidate's teaching would normally be part of the process. For example, two partners have asked candidate's to read a children's book as part of the interview and alongside this discuss the kinds of activities that could be used to support learning. Some partners have given candidates information about the specific needs of the class and asked how the suggested activities includes all learners or the specific needs of an individual.  The moderation and decision making process happens on TEAMs after interviews are conducted, enabling partners, tutors and the admissions team to ensure barriers to entry are removed whilst a rigorous process is upheld.

Institution 7

XXX have transitioned to running their Development Centre virtually using Zoom.  Assessors have the premium version of the account which have more functions enabled and allow for longer meetings.

The assessment activities have remained faithful to existing processes, with tweaks to enable a virtual assessment, these are detailed below:

* The interview
  + The DfE teacher recruitment guidelines and the NSPCC Safer Recruitment in Education both refer to ‘face to face’ assessment, which are upheld through video conferencing.
  + We have retained our safeguarding and child protection questions within this new format.
  + We have added a question related to interpersonal sensitivity, as there is a little less scope to assess these behaviours on a virtual platform; this provides further evidence for borderline cases where interaction may have been limited by the new medium
* The group exercise (case study)
  + We have amended our group task slightly to be based around a staff meeting to decide the content of an activity day for pupils.
  + Candidates are encouraged to use the gallery view within Zoom, which tessellates live video streams of all candidates allowing them to interact more naturally and observe facial expressions and body language.
  + Assessors turn off their videos and hide themselves from view to ensure that their presence does not distract or confuse candidates during the group task, making themselves visible only when giving instructions.
  + The screen sharing function is used to give task instructions and additional contextual information (to replace paper memos).
  + As before, we assess communication, team work and problem solving within this task.
* The teaching episodes
  + XXX has always used a simulated role play task to assess competence to teach given the volumes we recruit and the impracticality of running our assessments within real classrooms.  We have built on existing processes, which have been shown to be predictive alongside our other assessment methods – this may provide some reassurance to those embarking on this approach for the first time.
  + Candidates are asked to teach a short lesson centred around explaining a tricky concept.
  + Ahead of assessment, candidates are given a week to plan their lesson content and create a structured lesson with resources to support their delivery,
  + During the teaching episode, one assessor is in role as a pupil and one assessor observes.
    - The assessor in role as the pupil presents some task confusion and some low level disruption.
    - The assessor observing takes notes and provides feedback to the candidate after the teaching episode.
    - The candidate is given a short period of time to reflect on their feedback before the exercise is re-run
  + Use of the whiteboard function is enabled which the candidate can use as they would in a real classroom, the assessor in role can write or draw on this in response to questions.  Candidates are also able to share slides, video and audio content using the screen sharing function.
  + The assessor observing turns their video off so that they are not in view during the exercise.
  + As before, we assess the candidate’s ability to clearly communicate and break down complex concepts, their ability to positively interact, their ability to plan engaging content and their ability to respond positively to challenge.

Institution 8

Interview Candidates are given an interview date and an afternoon time slot.

In advance of the interview, candidates are sent a short maths investigation, suitable for a year 6 child. They must complete this investigation and return it via email before the interview begins. This is to check their positive engagement with mathematics. A module leader from the maths team checks this work.

On the morning of their interview they are emailed the question  "How do you suppose that reflective practice will impact on your success as a trainee teacher?". They need to handwrite an answer to this question and scan or take a photo of it, and return it to us by the afternoon. This is to check their handwriting, spelling, and ability to write at the required level. A module leader from the English team reads this work.

When their interview time slot begins, candidates are sent a short 30 minute introductory video to the course and the campus produced by the course leader.

They are then invited to speak to a member of the interviewing staff 1:1 via Google Hangout. Staff used for this part of the process are all very experienced Module Leaders or Co-Teachers on the current PGCE programme. Each staff member asks the same questions:

1. Tell me about any schools you have visited or worked in recently.

2. Tell me about a teacher who has impressed you.

3. How do good teachers help children to learn?

4. Tell me about how you approached the written task today.

5. Tell me about your approach for the maths investigation.

6. Can you think of a time when you were really challenged in your life and tell me about it?  
7. What qualities do you think you will bring to teaching?  
8. Imagine you are applying for a job in a school. Tell me about personal interests or achievements that you think will contribute to school life.  
9. What are you most looking forward to about working in a school?

The staff member has a pro-forma to note down their responses, and then gives an overall recommendation of outstanding / good / suitable with potential to become good / unsuitable.

Following the interview the Admissions Tutor collects the English, maths and interview task feedback, and uses these alongside the UCAS form and references, to make a decision.

Institution 9

We had been doing SKYPE interviews before the lockdown (used mainly for international candidates), so that process was extended. However, we did notice some issues with candidates being able to access SKYPE on a larger scale so have moved to using TEAMS, with very few problems by comparison. This approach applies to primary, early years and secondary.

We have a discrete guide on online interviewing and have made all documentation / presentations applicable to this online approach.  We have also adapted tracking systems and organisation to adjust quickly and effectively to the new arrangements.  Potential issues include risk of correspondence to candidates going to ‘junk mail’ folders so we have tried to highlight this risk in early correspondence.

We are interviewing with 2 colleagues to 1 applicant. We are hoping to include School partners but access to TEAMS has proven a little tricky for 'guest' access. Quality of connections is also a potential issue but again TEAMS seems more reliable than SKYPE. We are working with IT colleagues to resolve these issues.  Concerns about ZOOM and security have meant that I have been reluctant to recommend this tool to colleagues although it might solve group access issues.

ID checks are made via the video link; scanned copies are requested with originals to be checked at start of programme in person.  Literacy and numeracy checks will also be completed during the course of the programme.

Interview process/activities proceed in line with ‘normal’ protocol, apart from group activities as these are not feasible.  Candidates are asked to share their activity related work and to scan / photograph it and send to us at the conclusion of the interview.

Following the interview, colleagues discuss their judgements and paperwork is completed as usual but is now electronic allowing for quick return to admission colleagues for processing.

The overall feeling is that the interview process takes a little longer than face to face would. However, we have not noticed any significant delay in the overall time from receiving applications to making a decision and communicating this to candidates.

For secondary, there is opportunity for a subject knowledge test if necessary. Where a candidate requires a SKE they are still being directed towards the appropriate SKE course. Our own face-to-face SKE courses are being run online and so are still accessible.​

So far feedback from candidates has been more positive than negative. Equivalency testing has been a sticking point but between our own efforts and other online sources this seems to be reaching point where this will be solved and options be available for candidates.

Institution 10

Our admissions team and our PGCE(M) tutors have been working successfully together to arrange and carry out interviews. For the admissions team, this involves corresponding with applicants by email. On the morning of an interview, the admissions team email the candidate with an admissions pack. Within the pack are the details of the written task, which the candidate must complete and return by 4pm, on the day of the interview. The candidate also receives a link to a video of our introductory talk. This contains instructions about the interview process itself, as well as additional information about the course. A further link (to the Blackboard Collaborate function) takes candidates to a virtual interview room, where they are interviewed by two members of our PGCE(M) team. The interview includes a short presentation, by the candidate, of a children’s book (PY)/a short presentation, by the candidate, based on a current educational topic relevant to secondary education (SY). After the interview, tutors review the written task and complete an online version of our existing interview forms. Once a decision has been made, interviewers notify the admissions team and the admissions tutor, to allow for final processing to be completed and candidate to be notified of the result. As yet, we have not been able to involve interviewers from the partnership in the process, but this is something under review.

Institution 11

Candidates are emailed the day before the interview and the following information is included:

* A presentation about the course – at the end candidates are reminded to write down any questions they want to ask
* Candidates to be prepared to discuss a current educational issue of their choice with the interviewer
* Brief details of the written task
* Subject audit for secondary candidates
* Candidates need to have photo ID
* A reminder to find a quiet space

On the day of the interview:

* Candidates sent access to the online task that includes a short embedded video of a lesson that they watch and then write a reflection on the lesson. The reflection will be returned within an hour.

The interview will include:

* Discussion of the lesson abstract
* Discussion of prepared current issue
* Questions linked to safeguarding issues, role of the teacher, subject audit etc
* Screen shot of candidate with photo ID

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