**How to interview remotely**

# What is remote interviewing?

Remote interviewing is when an interview process is carried out where at least one of the parties is away from the usual place of work. For example, a manager may conduct a video interview with a candidate for a role instead of inviting the candidate in for a face-to-face meeting. Although remote interviewing has been around for some time, it is something that your company is more likely to consider in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

During a remote interview, you will need to facilitate a viable and reliable method of communication with the candidate in question. You will also need to carefully plan the process of conducting the interview, making sure to still provide a fair and open process. It is perfectly lawful to conduct an interview remotely, provided you do not breach laws on discrimination.

# Benefits of interviewing remotely

The 2020 coronavirus pandemic has resulted in companies having to make many changes to how they manage daily activities, due to the need to take steps to implement social distancing and reduce the rate of virus transmission. To this end, remote interviewing can be a highly effective way of minimising contact between individuals whilst still allowing interviewing to take place. You can also use it as a way of avoiding having to take additional COVID-secure measures if an individual is invited into interview, such as making sure social distancing can be preserved whilst still having a panel conduct it.

Even outside of the pandemic, remote interviewing can offer numerous other benefits, both to the company and to candidates. Without having to plan around the availability of the workplace, there is much more freedom for both parties to set a time in which to conduct the interview. Candidates may therefore be able to avoid having to take time away from their current job, meaning you do can avoid having to schedule round their availability, whilst management may be able to conduct the interview out of work hours and not lose any additional time.

Under the Equality Act 2010, you need to take all possible steps to make reasonable adjustments designed to enable all candidates to attend the interview and ensure they are not put at a disadvantage due to their disability (physical or mental impairment). Remote interviewing can help remove problems that disabled candidates may face when journeying into, and whilst being inside, the workplace.

# Types of remote interviewing

There are varied methods to conduct a recruitment process remotely and you should carefully consider what would be the best method for your company. These are outlined below:

**Video calls**

These are where, using software such as Microsoft Teams or Skype, interviews are conducted through the use of a webcam and microphone. With video calling technology continuously improving, we are now at a stage where such an arrangement can be as efficient as speaking to someone in a face-to-face meeting.

**Phone calls**

Many employers often conduct initial phone conversations before inviting staff into the office for a follow-up interview. You could therefore consider making a phone call the main interview process, which could avoid the need to source, and put to use, video conferencing software. Whilst using a phone, you would still be able to ask all the same questions you intended before.

**Online assessments**

This is where candidates are asked to complete assessments, or certain tasks, remotely, to ascertain their suitability for a role. For many employers, this can be a good indication of how individuals respond to certain situations and candidates may be asked to complete an assessment alongside conducting an interview.

# Being prepared

Before inviting any employee to be interviewed remotely, it is important that you set up efficient, and easy to use, software. Not only can getting this wrong cause issues in your ability to fairly interview a candidate, but it can also call into question the professional nature of your business to promising interviewees.

When making video calls, it is highly advisable to use software that candidates are more likely to be able to easily access. For example, Microsoft Teams is available on internet browsers free of charge, whilst Skype can also be downloaded for free. Deliberately picking a more well-known piece of software is likely to make the process run smoother.

It is important to regularly run tests with the software to make sure it is working. This should ideally be done before each round of interviewing. Remember that good internet connection is vital – if one of your managers intends to interview from home but has regular connectivity issues, it may be necessary to consider an alternative option.

If you intend to conduct the interview via phone, you should again make sure there are no connectivity issues. To give another example, the manager may struggle to get good signal from their home, or from in the office, and may need to go elsewhere.

# Preparing the candidate

You should clearly outline to the candidate how they are going to be interviewed and what they will need to do to prepare for it. This may involve instructions on how to download and utilise the correct software, alongside information on what the candidate will be expected to wear if they are going to be on webcam. At this stage, it should be confirmed if the candidate does have access to the internet and if they will be able to be interviewed in this manner. If not, you should consider alternative options, such as a phone interview.

It is important to remember that not all candidates may be familiar with the software you choose or may struggle to use it. You should therefore keep in constant communication with all those who you wish to remotely interview and ask if there are any measures you can take to assist them, such as sending them further instructions for how to get the software working on a personal computer. It may be that you need to consider alternatives, such as a phone call, or conceding that a face-to-face interview is necessary.

Immediately prior to the interview, it is advisable to remind the candidate of the date and time they are expected to be available and to ensure that everything is charged up and working correctly. They should also be reminded to avoid any distractions, such as anyone else who could be in the household at the time of the interview and switching off their mobile phones.

# The interview itself

At the commencement of the call, you should make sure to be approachable and clearly outline how the interview is going to be structured. You should also be calm, inviting, and professional.

When conducting a video call, it may be that there is a delay between the parties speaking and hearing each other. To avoid you missing what the candidate says, try to pause for a few seconds after answering questions. This should be sufficient to combat any lag that may arise whilst also providing the candidate fair opportunity to think about the question they have been asked.

During the video call, you should address your questions directly to the camera. Avoid staring at yourself or the candidate unless the candidate is answering a question.

# Implementing a back-up plan

During a remote interview, there is the possibility that something may go wrong. For example, connectivity issues may end the call suddenly, or phone batteries may die. It is therefore crucial to have a back-up plan in place for if this situation arises. For example, if video calling is not working, you should have previously exchanged contact numbers so the interview can be done over the phone. Alternatively, the interview could be extended in order to provide a longer period of time to identify an issue and fix it. Alternatively, you may consider switching the webcam off and continuing the call purely by sound, as this can help with struggling internet connections.

If there are issues with connectivity that cannot be solved on the day, you should make sure to reschedule the interview as soon as is reasonably possible, particularly if the issue is on your end. If the issue has arisen due to a problem with the candidate’s phone or connectivity, you should try to be as understanding as possible. Internet connection issues do not automatically mean that a candidate is not a good fit for the role.