Competition Committee Toolkit

for the Institute of Physical Chemistry,
Polish Academy of Sciences

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Abbreviations used in the text

CC – Competition Committee

IChF – the Institute of Physical Chemistry PAS

1) INTRODUCTION

This toolkit aims to support Competition Committee members in selecting the best talent under a consistent, fair and equitable recruitment process. These guidelines serve for shortlisting, interviewing, and selection proceedings clarification. We advise members of the Competition Committees to familiarise themselves with these guidelines before the start of the recruitment process.

Apart from the guidelines outlined in this toolkit, members of the Competition Committees should also follow the **"General Rules Governing Competitions for Research Posts at the Institute of Physical Chemistry, the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw"**.

2) CONFIDENTIALITY IN RECRUITMENT PROCESS

If you are a Competition Committee (CC) member, you should strictly apply confidentiality regarding all aspects of staff selection. Specifically, **you cannot**:

→ disclose any details of applicants or discuss the selection course with unauthorised persons within or external to IChF,

→ copy application documents or data to private computers, discs or other data carriers or send them to anyone outside of CC; it is also not advised to print them,

→ seek information on applicants from current or former employers or work colleagues if not authorised directly by a given candidate,

→ disclose to anyone the names of unselected persons, notably after the competition closure,

→ specifically for the recruitment purposes, don't use e-mail boxes opened under other than "@ichf.edu.pl" domains.

To safeguard personal data privacy, CC members should follow the rules described in the Director's ordinance no. 29/18. Notably, the candidates should send their application to a designated e-mail: rekrutacja@ichf.edu.pl. Collecting documents under other e-mail boxes may not safeguard their proper handling and sufficient protection against leaking or misuse. It is also against binding legal regulations. In the long run, failing to keep the information confidential can cause harm to an IChF's ability to attract top talent, reputational damage or even legal repercussions.

3) OBJECTIVITY AND IMPARTIALITY

Before assessing the candidates under the given competition, as a selection committee member, you must declare that **you are unbiased and fair and don't have any personal interest or conflicts with any candidates.** Below you will find some guidelines on how to stay impartial while recruiting:

→ **Demonstrate a genuine concern for the individuals** involved in the recruitment.

→ **Treat people with dignity and fairness** – try to treat everyone equally regardless of their country of origin, appearance, gender, political views, physical disabilities, etc.

→ **Assess the application on merits**. Don't presuppose from the application documents or based on how the candidate looks or behaves. Deal in facts and tangibles. Stay logic.

→ **Derive from your experiences but leave some space for alternative career paths** that may be equally beneficial for a position and planned tasks.

→ **If you feel personally involved**, consult your superior or colleagues to ensure your judgement will not be affected. If such a situation occurs, you may consider withdrawing from the CC.

→ **Be familiar with recruitment procedures in place at IChF and stick to them**.

4) APPLICATIONS SCREENING

Firstly, CC members screen the applications to check if **the candidates submitted all necessary documents and they meet the minimum criteria for the position. Remember that you may only consider the documents and eligibility criteria predefined in the Notice of Competition.** Ensure you are familiar with the criteria used for the competition before starting the screening.

For recruiting positions financed from statutory funds, you may use **the Competition Scorecard (section A)** containing predefined formal and eligibility criteria usually used in such recruitments (see appendix 1 for details).

Suppose CC discovers any required document is lacking or the information delivered is unclear. In that case, **CC should request the candidate to deliver supplements within a prescribed period of not less than seven days** (counting from the next day of sending such notice to the candidate). The deadline for supplementing documents can be extended if requested and duly justified by the given candidate (e.g., office closure due to Christmas break). However, **remember to treat all candidates equally, allowing for deadline extension for all persons affected by the same or similar circumstances**.

If the candidate fails to deliver supplements within the defined period, CC should evaluate the application as initially submitted. If no candidate fulfils the eligibility criteria, this ends the recruitment.

5) SHORTLISTING – SELECTION OF THE MOST QUALIFIED AND SUITABLE APPLICANTS

This process aims to select the best candidates to proceed to the next stage of the recruitment proceedings, i.e., interview or publicly present their research results at a seminar.

For recruiting positions financed from statutory funds, you may use **the Competition Scorecard (section B)** containing the list of shortlisting criteria (see appendix 1 for details). If the recruitment process is organised under the external regulations (i.e. set out by the funders of a project), the recruitment criteria should be appropriately adjusted.

During the shortlisting process, you **should focus on selection criteria and duties outlined in the position description**. Information that is irrelevant or pertaining to private matters (regardless of its source) should not be taken into account while ranking candidates. Specifically it relates to, e.g., marital status, age, gender, health-related issues, participation/membership of any organisations, clubs, or parties is not relevant to their ability to perform the job.

Important!

You should not judge applicants on the basis of:
- → disabilities, notably, assumptions regarding the candidate's ability to perform the full range of duties under the position,
- → assumptions of their English proficiency,
- → assumptions regarding pregnancy or caring responsibilities,
- → assumption that overqualified candidates will soon move on or will get bored with the job.

6) INTERVIEWS

6.1 Preparing Interview Questions

We usually use the same assessment criteria for interviews as for candidates' shortlisting (documents assessment), modifying the scoring accordingly. The selection criteria should form the basis for interview questions.

A set of questions prepared for the interview should be relevant, unambiguous and free from bias (unreasoned judgment for or against a candidate).

> Before the interview session, all members of the Competition Committee are encouraged to watch **this short animation introducing the fundamental concepts of unconscious bias** to make sure that they are aware of differences in how candidates may present themselves, how to recognise bias in themselves and others, how to recognise inappropriate advocacy or unreasoned judgement.

The questions should relate directly to a candidate's:

→ skills,
→ knowledge,
→ competencies,
→ motivation,

→ previous job and life experiences,
→ qualifications,
→ other position requirements.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS TO ASK

Behavioural questions: Behavioural interviewing assumes that a person's past actions indicate their future behaviour, so CC should inquire about a candidate's experiences instead of speculating on what they could or may do.

Example: *"Can you share an experience in which you had to manage conflicting priorities and explain how you identified and prioritised the most important one?"*

Scenario questions: Scenarios frame hypothetical situations posted to candidates to assess their decision-making process and thinking patterns, thereby enabling employers to gain insight into a candidate's problem-solving abilities.

Example: *"At times, this role can be pretty demanding, with many deadlines approaching and sudden requests from the head of the department, and you being the only employee in your team present. Can you share an experience where you encountered a comparable circumstance and elaborate on the techniques you employed to deal with it?"*

Motivation questions: Particularly in academia, we are looking for candidates ready to learn new things because they are interested in the given field/project. For this reason, CC needs to assess if the candidate has the self-motivation to thrive in the role and consistently perform at their best.

Example: *"Why do you want to work at IChF? Why do you want to be part of this research team/research?"*

Theoretical/knowledge/opinion questions: This type of questioning can be helpful when interviewing senior leaders or academic staff. These questions test the candidates' knowledge of the work environment and their experience with the subject matter.

Example: *"What are the most important recent advances in your field of research?"*

Open questions: Open-ended questions usually begin with "tell us", "what", "how" or "why" and they prompt candidates to reflect on their answers more deeply. These questions also help candidates feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts.

Example*: "Tell us about the most important project you have worked on in your current position".*

Follow-up questions: We use follow-up questions to ask for more details about the previous answer. These questions are not planned and are asked spontaneously.

Example: Candidate - *"I had some responsibility for the project".* Interviewer - *"What were the responsibilities you had?"*

Mirroring questions: Mirroring questions re-state the interviewee's words and ask them to provide additional details or information.

Example: Candidate - *"I had to motivate the team daily".* Interviewer - *"Did the project team require motivation?"*

TYPES OF QUESTIONS TO AVOID

Leading questions: Questions limiting original thinking that can make a candidate feel defensive.

Example: *"It seems that you don't like administrative duties in the project, do you?"*

Double-barrelled questions: The questions causing candidates confusion, showing that CC may not have prepared for the interview.

Example: *"Tell me about your current employment."*

Closed questions: Questions requiring a "yes" or "no" answer, offering little insight beyond establishing basic facts.

Example*: "Were you in charge of the research project?"*

Trick questions/stress tactics: The purpose of these questions is to put the applicant on the defensive in order to see how they perform under pressure. In fact these questions are counterproductive and similar information can obtained in more applicant-friendly way.

Example: *"Do you agree that you wouldn't challenge a manager you disagree with since you stated that you don't like conflicts?"*

Questions based on stereotypes or assumptions: It's inappropriate to ask questions about marital status, parenting, physical abilities, family makeup, or caretaking responsibilities during a job interview. While candidates may share personal information voluntarily, interviewers should not ask questions in these areas.

Example: *"Will you need to leave work early to pick up your kids from school?"*

6.2 Conducting an interview

a) Greeting the candidate

The chairperson should greet and introduce the candidates to the CC members.

b) Setting the scene

The chairperson should set a process for conducting interviews and communicate it clearly and thoroughly with CC members and candidates. Remarkably, the chairperson should advise the candidates that:

→ CC will ask questions about the candidates' background, experience, skills etc.
→ The candidate may ask questions and offer further information after the interview.

The chairperson should also provide a brief overview of the job and the workplace.

c) Questioning

The best tactic is to ask all candidates the same or very similar questions to allow CC members to compare the applicants for the position. Ultimately, CC and the applicant may discuss basic employment arrangements (availability period, expected remuneration and similar) or leave them for the subsequent meeting held between a successful candidate and CC.

d) Questions from an applicant

Following specific questions relating to the Institute/Department, CC can also expect more general questions from the candidate, e.g., the strategic direction of the Institute, training and development opportunities, work organisation and relocation assistance.

e) Closing the interview

The chairperson should advise all candidates on what will happen next, when and how they can expect to learn the competition outcome.

7) DELIBERATIONS

After the interviews, you should analyse all relevant information (included in the application and obtained during the interview) to select the most suitable candidate based on merits. Private information, hearsay, or information from outside or personal sources should not be introduced into discussion or consideration of the candidates' suitability. Differences of opinion should be seen as natural and helpful as, generally, a difference in opinion will result in a more thorough consideration of all information. Settling a joint resolution should be favoured upon voting.

HAZARDS IN SELECTION	
It is crucial to be aware of the following common hazards in the selection process and avoid an **unconscious bias** towards specific candidates.	
First impression	Initial impressions can cause a negative or positive attitude towards the candidate.
"Halo" effect	A CC member can be so impressed by one attribute of a candidate that they positively evaluate all qualities for all other criteria without evidence.
Leniency or strictness	A CC member can appraise a candidate either too leniently or too strictly.
Primacy and recency	A tendency to recall only the first few or last few candidates. The interview notes can prevent that.
"Outsiders"	A tendency to give a lower estimate to a candidate because they are not from "within" the organisation or because their current workplace or role is looked upon in less favourable terms.
Over-emphasis of the interview	Glean information on the entire selection criteria during interviews while not all capabilities are reliably and validly assessable at interviews. E.g., the applicant's efficiency and work standard.
Rushed final decision	CC fails to thoroughly discuss all applications and consider all available information leading to impressions-based hasty decisions. A similar effect can be obtained by voting where the majority prevails, and CC members cannot discuss their doubts.
The future capacity of the applicant is not considered	It is essential to avoid disproportionately emphasising a lack of skills that could be addressed through a brief period of on-the-job training. Suppose an applicant exhibits excellence in various aspects but lacks proficiency in a specific field. In that case, CC should assess whether a training period could adequately enhance the applicant's skills within a reasonable timeframe.

8) RESULTS AND FEEDBACK

The individual who has been offered the job should be notified either through email or by phone. If certain details were not finalized during the interview, the recruiting person or CC should arrange another meeting with the successful candidate to discuss aspects such as remuneration, responsibilities, working hours, and similar matters. In cases where the interview was conducted using video communication tools like Zoom or Teams, it is recommended to arrange an in-person meeting with the selected candidate.

Once an agreement is reached with the chosen candidate regarding the employment particulars, CC should communicate the final decision to the other applicants. This communication should be in writing and include feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of their applications. Moreover, unsuccessful candidates should be clearly informed about **their right to appeal and provided with the procedure to do so**.

Feedback serves as more than just a means to convey observations, opinions, and suggestions; it also functions as a valuable tool for fostering trust, alignment, and your and IChF's reputation. Through feedback, the candidates can gain insights into the strengths and weaknesses of their applications, while also identifying opportunities for growth and improvement. Additionally, feedback aids in learning from both successes and mistakes. Moreover, providing feedback showcases your support and expertise as a recruiter.

> **Delivering feedback stay honest and sensitive** as well. Experiencing job rejection can be disheartening and challenging. Therefore, it's crucial to handle interviewees with sensitivity, acknowledging that they might still be feeling the impact of their rejection. It is also advisable to balance strengths and weaknesses of the candidate in the evaluative input. Good feedback is also **meaningful for the candidate and instructive**. Notably, it offers advice to the candidates on how to improve in next recruitments.

Below, we present examples of good practices concerning feedback:

FEEDBACK INFORMATION – good practices
"While your educational background and research field aligns perfectly with the role, but we are currently seeking more independent candidates. Considering this, it could be beneficial to explore some postdoctoral fellowships before reapplication for a position similar to this one."
"You appeared thoroughly prepared for the interview and left us with the impression that you had a sincere interest in joining our organization. However, we think that you may not possess the required technical knowledge for this role."
"Given your extensive years of experience in this role, we regret to inform you that we are unable to provide a salary and growth opportunities under this position that would be commensurate with your skills and experience. With such an extensive curriculum, we would suggest to apply for more senior positions."
"We value a lot your expertise and level of ambition in this research topic. Nonetheless, your interview performance raised some concerns regarding your proficiency in the English language. As effective communication and collaboration are crucial in our international community, a strong command of English is essential."