

## **Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service: Interview Tips**

The purpose of an interview is for the interviewers to get information from you that will enable them to feel confident about offering you a job. The more that you can help them to do that, the greater your chances of success.

You will be asked questions designed to find out how you have used personal qualities and attributes that are important for Firefighters:-

- Working with Others
- Commitment to Diversity & Integrity
- Commitment to Self Development
- Commitment to Excellence
- Communicating Effectively

Your interviewer will ask you to give examples of experiences where you could have used these qualities and attributes.

### **Before the interview**

Read the Practice Booklet – it tells you what kind of questions you are likely to be asked and how to answer them.

Think about your life experiences and how you have used the Personal Qualities and Attributes on each occasion – have a list fresh in your mind (some people find it helpful to write the list down and go over it just before the interview). The experiences can be drawn from anywhere - your work, home life, hobbies, college etc. The practice booklet talks about setting the context of the experience in your reply - think about how you would do this in a sentence or two, so that you don't waste valuable time.

First impressions count, so dress smartly. For men that means a shirt with a collar, a tie, smart trousers and clean shoes (not trainers). Most male candidates wear a suit. Women should aim for a similarly smart standard (if you wear a skirt, wear tights or stockings), with not too much jewellery. Hair should be tidy & fingernails clean, but don't over-do the perfume/aftershave. The aim is to show that you take this seriously enough to make an effort, but you don't want your appearance to be a distraction.

Be punctual. Aim to arrive in plenty of time to park, sign in at reception etc. Interview days are very long and tiring for interviewers, and they won't thank you for delaying things. If you are unavoidably delayed, phone the office and let us know.

It may seem totally obvious, but switch off your mobile or anything else (such as a pager or digital watch) that might make a noise.

### **Starting the interview**

If you are anxious about interviews, when you are actually called into the interview room take two or three slow, deep breaths to calm your nerves and your breathing.

As you are introduced to the interviewers, shake their hand firmly, look them in the eyes, and say that you are pleased to meet them. Although the interviewers will try to disregard any first impressions and be objective, they are only human! If you can manage a smile it will immediately give the interviewer a positive impression of you and it will help you to get over any feelings of nervousness or insecurity. Whatever you are feeling inside your face is communicating that you are comfortable and relaxed in your new surroundings.

## During the interview

When you are asked a question, start your reply with a very brief explanation of the situation and then focus on what you did, why you chose that course of action, and what the outcome was.

Make sure that you talk about what you said or did – if you were part of a team, make sure that it is clear what part you played as an individual.

Giving eye contact with your interviewers will communicate that you are interested in him/her, and gives the impression that you are an open, relaxed, direct and honest person. As a rule of thumb, aim to maintain eye contact for about two-thirds of the time. “Eye contact” is considered any contact in the “eye-nose” triangle - if you create a triangle from the two eyes to the nose of the client you create the “eye-nose” triangle. Looking away while you are talking may give your interviewer the impression that you are uncertain, sad, fearful or unhappy.

Answer the questions in a confident, firm voice. Don't mumble or rush. It's fine to take a few moments to think about your answer.

Answers should not be one word or one sentence, but equally should not go on too long. If you have a lot to say, having made the main points, you could finish by saying: *"I could expand upon that, if you wish"*. Don't waffle - if you don't know, say so. Never, ever lie.

Try to draw upon a range of experiences for your answers – it shows that you can function in more than one situation. It's OK to use situations that you have used in your application form, but if you have written one thing and say another, it won't do much for your credibility.

Listen to the questions. Politicians are very good at answering the question that they want to answer instead of the one that they've actually been asked, but that won't work in a job interview!

Be enthusiastic: allow your personality to shine through. Many candidates fail to show their enthusiasm because somehow they think it is cool to be an 'aloof candidate'. If you play an aloof candidate, you will leave the interviewer in doubt about your desire to do the job. Try not to say 'it's on my application form' in answer to a question, or display an arrogant or 'know it all' attitude.

Don't ever make derogatory remarks about your present or former employers or companies. It's bad form and it will not reflect well on you if you seem to have a chip on your shoulder or a negative attitude

There may be occasions when you will forget what you have just said, drop things or speak in a funny-sounding voice. It's all part of the process. Try to be honest with the people around you, admit that you feel nervous and move on.