

Role Play Assessment

Library Services

King's College London

About the organization

Organisation: King's College London

Department: Library Services

Industry Sector: Higher Education

Role Play assessments were introduced as part of our recruitment process for Library Assistants and Senior Library Assistants in 2012. This was at a time of significant culture change within Library Services which centred on developing the level of customer service we were providing and saw us achieving the Customer Service Excellence standard in 2014.

The role play assessment is used in conjunction with a traditional panel interview and is designed to assess how the candidate interacts with a customer based on how they demonstrate behaviours in line with our Quality Service values:

'Responsive, inclusive, knowledgeable and friendly

Proudly supporting the College community – every student, every colleague, every time'

The role play scenario [see Appendix 1 for an example] is designed to last approximately ten minutes and give the candidate plenty of opportunities to demonstrate these behaviours and their customer service skills. The role play is assessed by two members of Library Services staff of an appropriate grade, who observe the role play from the side of the room. Key aspects we look for include; how they greet and welcome the customer and put them at ease, how they take ownership of the enquiry and how they demonstrate listening and questioning skills and a sense of pride in the service they are offering and the institution they represent [see Appendix 2 for our full assessment criteria].

We clarify with the candidate that we are assessing their interaction rather than any factual information they impart so that they can feel confident in 'making-up' information. For some, this aspect of improvising can be quite nerve-wracking, however most candidates manage to put their nerves or feelings of being self-conscious aside enough for their natural customer service abilities to come through. Having a professional actor play the part of the customer really helps with this as they are able to make the scenario come to life in as realistic way as possible.

We use business actors from the company REACT [<http://www.react.co.uk/>] and discuss the scenario and our assessment criteria with them as they 'get into character'. The actor ensures a consistent approach for each candidate and also provides valuable feedback to the assessors after the role play on how they felt as a customer, often picking up on quite subtle details of their experience.

Through observing the role plays we have seen 'excellence' demonstrated in a very wide range of styles. We have found that once in post, staff appointed following this assessment have demonstrated confident customer service skills, an affinity with our values and a genuine desire to provide an excellent service.

Appendix 1 - Example Role Play Scenario

Quality Service Role - Play Assessment

Senior Library Assistant Scenario - Actor Brief

Background:

All staff within the Students & Education Directorate at King's College London commit to consistently providing a quality service in line with our quality service definition statement:

'Responsive, inclusive, knowledgeable and friendly

Proudly supporting the College community – every student, every colleague, every time'

The purpose of the role play is to assess how the candidate demonstrates behaviours in line with our quality service values:

- Responsive: React quickly and positively to needs and own them until fully resolved
- Inclusive: Recognise everyone as individuals, identifying and empathising with their needs
- Knowledgeable: Become an expert, continuously building your knowledge, sharing with others
- Friendly: Smile and acknowledge everyone, making them feel welcome
- Proud: Take pride in making a difference

Information:

You are Mr/Ms ... You are new student at King's College London. You have just arrived from the USA to start your undergraduate course and this is your first day on campus. You don't know anyone yet in London, you are feeling excited, nervous and a little bit stressed as you need to find a part time job to help support yourself. You have seen a job that you'd like to apply for but are unsure of the best way to complete the application form, back home you have always applied by sending off your resume. You come across the library and wonder if they might be able to offer you some advice.

The aim:

It would be ideal if the candidate welcomes you in a friendly manner, puts you at your ease and reassures you that they are there to help. They should demonstrate listening and questioning skills to understand exactly what you need help with and then offer advice on writing your application. It would be good if the candidate also picks up on you being new to London and offers advice on getting to know the campus, the area and makes suggestions about some of the options available at the university (e.g. clubs and society's, campus tours, welfare and careers advice).

The information given by the candidate does not need to be factual

Appendix 1 - Example Role Play Scenario

Quality Service Role - Play Assessment

Senior Library Assistant Scenario - Candidate Information

Brief:

You will be given 10 minutes to prepare for a meeting with the role player, who will be acting as a customer. The role-play will last for up to 10 minutes. Two Assessors will be present during the role-play to observe and take notes.

Background:

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The purpose of the role play is to assess how you demonstrate behaviours in line with our quality service values:

- Responsive: React quickly and positively to needs and own them until fully resolved
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The role-play situation:

You are working on the Enquiry Desk in the Library at King's College London. One aspect of your role is providing in-depth help, assistance and guidance to all library users. A new student comes up to the desk in need of your help with a job application. They look anxious and a bit lost.

The task:

You should use your listening and questioning skills to ensure you understand what they need help with and then provide relevant assistance, advice and guidance.

You do not need to be factual in the advice you give.

Appendix 2 - Role Play assessment criteria and score sheet

Competency and Positive Indicators
<p>Responsive</p> <p><i>Listens to the customer needs and responds thoughtfully to them</i></p> <p><i>Ensures that the problem is resolved to the customer's satisfaction and takes ownership of it</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probes to an appropriate level to understand the situation, and shows awareness of what this is for the context • Elicits additional information from the customer by recognising that help may be needed beyond the initial query and by asking appropriate questions • Reassures the customer that issues will be dealt with and clarifies expectation and timescale • Explains what will happen by when if additional research or referral is suggested
<p>Inclusive</p> <p><i>Recognises the customer as an individual</i></p> <p><i>Listens to the actual problem and does not make assumptions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is sensitive to what customer <i>isn't</i> saying, or is reluctant to say. Elicits information without embarrassing the customer • Shows flexibility of thought; asks customer what preferred outcome would be • Handles the enquiry with fresh attitude and avoids making the customer feel like they are asking an obvious or common question • Suggests more than one plausible solution and has an awareness that arriving at the best answer requires working collaboratively with the customer
<p>Knowledgeable</p> <p><i>Understands the information that needs to be provided even if they don't have the immediate answer</i></p> <p><i>Gives accurate information and checks or offers to check it where required</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands when and what jargon is appropriate; summarises as part of communication • Shows a calm confidence and command of situation and tools available, even if unfamiliar or suggesting a referral • Is able to apply general knowledge to allow customer to supply specialised information

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Appendix 2 - Role Play assessment criteria and score sheet (Continued)

Friendly

Smiles at the customer

Appears welcoming and approachable, demonstrated through open body language

- Doesn't rush/interrupt customer
- Smiles, shows eye contact and has a relaxed and comfortable welcoming demeanour
- Is able to remain calm under pressure or when surprised by situation; responds appropriately to frustration/irritation
- Is able to put embarrassed/reticent customer at ease via a friendly approach eliciting trust

Proud

Enjoys interacting with the customer

Engages with the customer beyond asking basic questions

- Shows that they feel invested in a positive outcome by demonstrating a genuine interest
- Does not take a transactional attitude to transactional queries
- Acknowledges role as representative of institution; recognises value of developing long-term customer relationship
- Recognises that interest in the customer and their query shouldn't be forced, exaggerated or appear insincere, and has an awareness of the opposite effect these can have