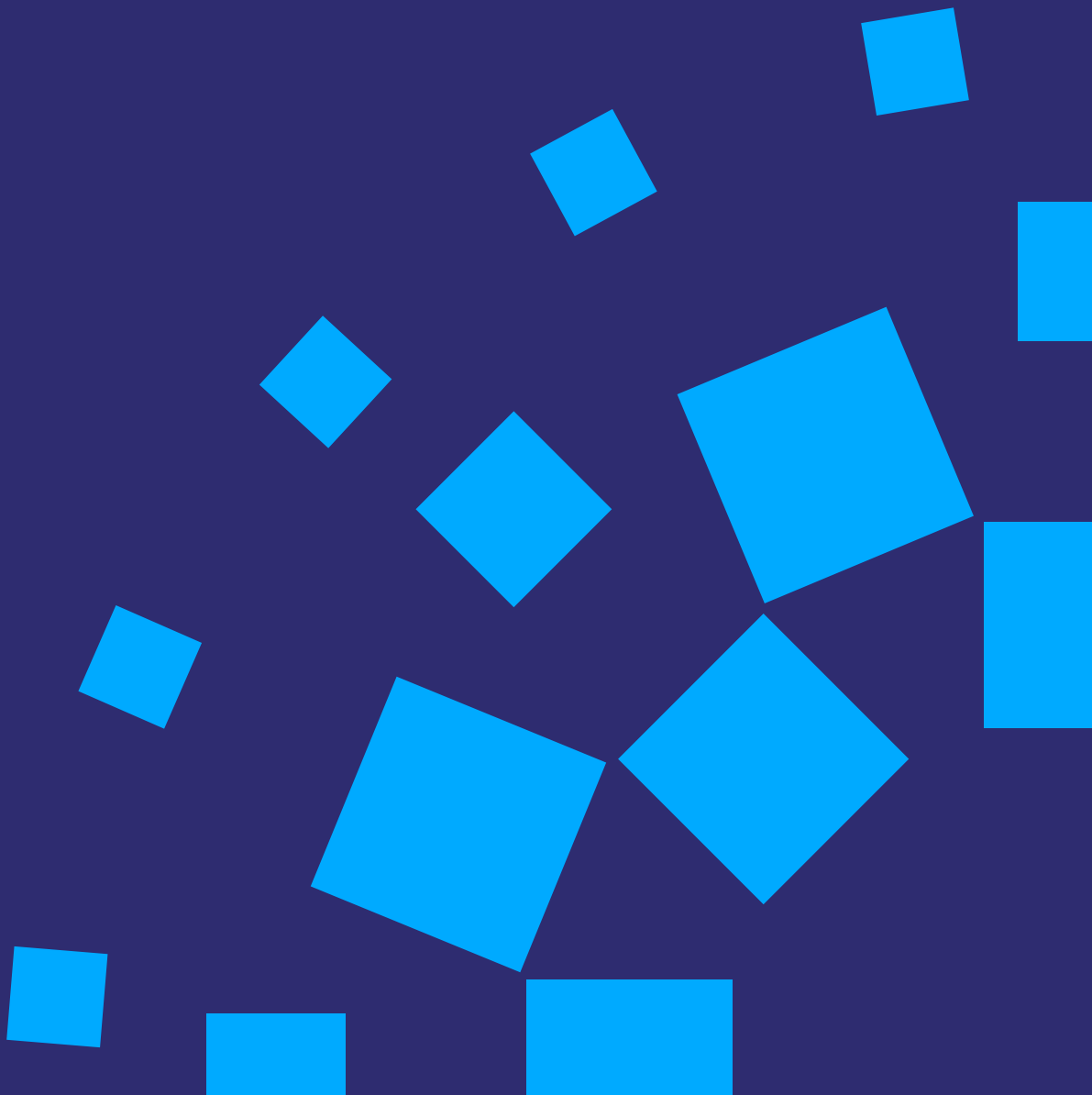




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# Guidance for assessing candidates at Step Three of the National Police Promotion Framework



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# Introduction

The National Police Promotion Framework (NPPF) is a four-step promotion process for all officers in England and Wales seeking promotion to the rank of sergeant or inspector.

At Step Three, forces are responsible for assessing candidates' potential to perform at the next rank against relevant competencies and values. The purpose of this part of the promotion process is to provide a robust and fair mechanism to broadly match the number of successful candidates to the number of expected vacancies at Step Four of the promotion process.

It's the responsibility of the force's senior management, in conjunction with their human resources specialists, to decide on the structure and techniques used at Step Three of the NPPF. This document has been produced by selection and assessment experts in the College of Policing to provide advice and guidance on how to design and deliver a process that withstands scrutiny and is fair, objective and valid.

# Good practice in assessment and selection

There are a number of principles that underpin the design and delivery of fair and effective selection processes that are robust and transparent in response to scrutiny. This section outlines what these principles are and how they can be embedded at Step Three to ensure you identify the right candidates to progress to Step Four of the NPPF.

## Merit, fairness and openness

The underpinning principles of merit, fairness and openness contribute to a robust selection process based on good practice.

Merit	Fairness	Openness
No one should be selected for a job unless they are competent to do it. The job should only be offered to those candidates who will do it best. Successful candidates should be chosen from a sufficiently strong and diverse pool of eligible applicants.	There should be no bias in assessing candidates, and processes must be objective, impartial and applied consistently.	Opportunities must be advertised in a transparent way with the aim of attracting a strong field of eligible applicants. Potential candidates should be given reasonable access to information about the job, its requirements and the selection process.

## The Code of Ethics and values-based recruitment

The Code of Ethics outlines the principles and standards of behaviour expected of all officers and staff in policing. It is important to embed the Code of Ethics at Step Three of the NPPF to ensure the workforce reflects these principles and standards of behaviour. This can be achieved by using values-based recruitment (VBR).

### Values-based recruitment

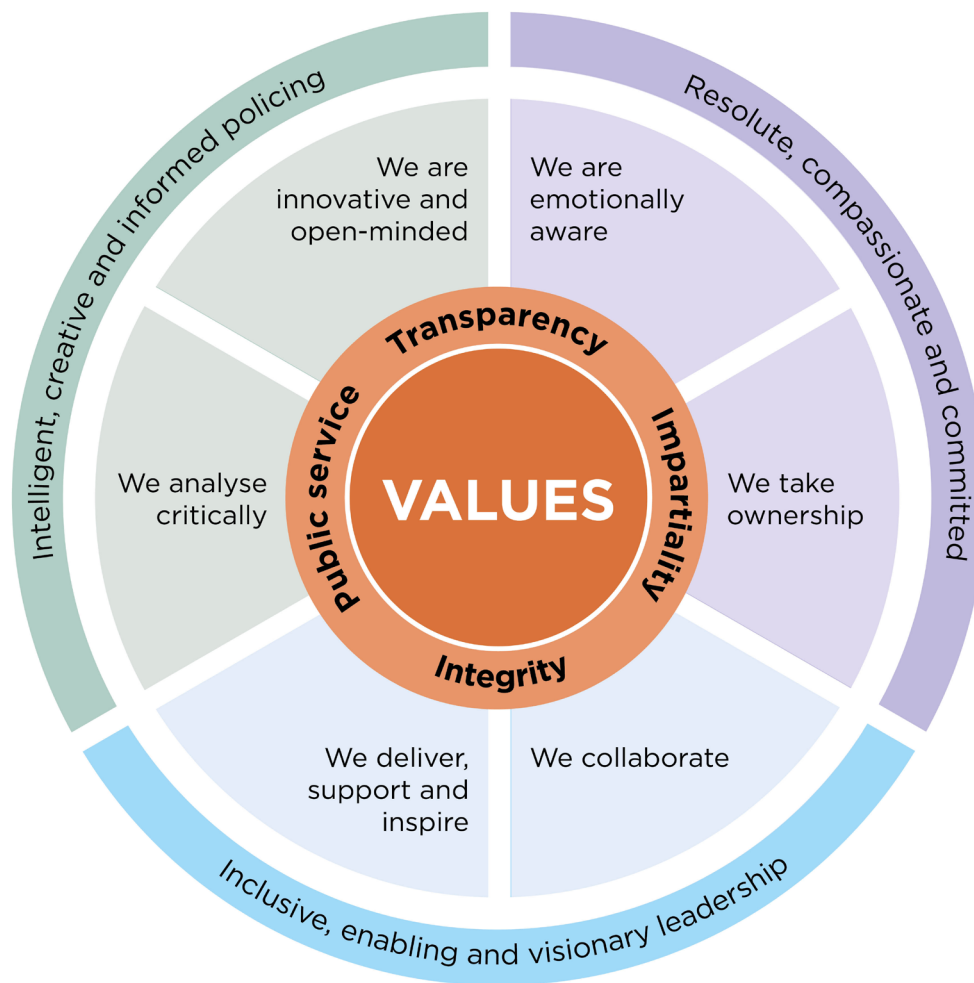
VBR focuses on ensuring that values are considered and assessed at every stage of a selection process, from attraction through to developing an application and assessment process and inducting the appointed person into their new role. There are a number of benefits of VBR, alongside assessing for competencies, because there is a wealth of research that suggests assessing and selecting a candidate based on their values and the extent to which these fit with the values of the organisation can lead to improvements in:

- perceived organisational support
- trust in managers
- performance
- organisational commitment
- job satisfaction
- co-worker satisfaction
- employee engagement

The first and most important step when introducing values into a selection process is to clearly define your organisation's values. It is then essential to identify the behaviours that demonstrate these values so they can be measured.

## Competency and Values Framework

The Competency and Values Framework (CVF) outlines the behaviours associated with effective and ethical performance in the police service. The CVF aims to support officers and staff and provides a consistent foundation on which Step Three of the NPPF can be based.



The framework consists of six competencies that have been clustered into three groups. Each competency includes a description and a list of behaviours that indicate whether a person is displaying that particular competency. Each competency is split into three levels, which are intended to be used flexibly to allow for a better fit with frontline and non-frontline policing roles, rather than ranks or work levels. The levels are

designed to be cumulative, so those working at higher levels should also demonstrate each preceding level's behaviours. The competency levels can broadly be matched to work levels as:

- level 1 – practitioner
- level 2 – supervisor/middle manager
- level 3 – senior manager/executive

The framework is underpinned by four values. These four values reflect the Code of Ethics and represent measurable behaviours.

## Assessment principles

Assessment principles address how a process is designed and delivered and how candidates are assessed and overall scores/results are agreed. The principles outlined here are important because they help to ensure that your process is fair and effective. They also enable you to have confidence in what you are measuring, that your candidates were assessed in the same way and that you have transparent and justifiable reasons why your successful candidates should progress to Step Four of the NPPF.

The main assessment principles that you must adhere to in order to fairly compare candidates and confidently select successful candidates are reliability and validity.

### Reliability

The extent to which an assessment is delivered in a standardised way can consistently produce the same results or behaviour.

To achieve reliability at Step Three you should consider:

- **Inter-rater reliability** – the extent to which assessors assess candidates in the same way and use the same assessment criteria and method to ensure consistent and fair assessments are made. This can be achieved by assessors benchmarking performance prior to beginning an assessment of candidates, for example discussing and confirming as a group of assessors what performance looks like at each point of



a rating scale. To further support this, the assessors could complete a trial run of the exercise to identify how they are assessing and ensure consistency during the live assessment of candidates.

- **Test-retest reliability** – the extent to which the method itself can consistently measure what it has been designed to measure each time it is delivered.

Standardisation is a key way of achieving reliability and addresses the consistency with which the process itself is delivered. A standardised process is one that ensures:

- all applicants undertake the same assessment in terms of instructions, information provided, preparation materials and environment
- the same assessment criteria are applied consistently across all candidates
- the same decision-making model is applied consistently across all candidates

## Validity

The accuracy of the selection method you are using and whether it measures what you think it is.

To ensure your Step Three assessment is valid, you must first know what you want to measure and then choose tools that provide the opportunity for candidates to display the evidence you have defined as being effective for the role. To achieve validity, you should consider:

- **face validity** – the extent to which the assessment looks like it measures what it says it is measuring. Will candidates feel they have been given a realistic opportunity to demonstrate evidence of their readiness for promotion?
- **content validity** – the extent to which an assessment measures the different aspects of the specific construct you are measuring. For example, to what extent is an interview question assessing a particular competency and how much of the candidate's response relates to something else?

- **predictive validity** – the extent to which an assessment can accurately predict the candidate's success in their promoted rank. Are the candidates who performed well at Step Three now performing well as temporary sergeants/inspectors?

## Unconscious bias

You can take steps to standardise the design and delivery of your selection process and ensure it is reliable. However, no assessment system is perfect. Human and environmental factors can and do influence the consistency with which assessors apply the assessment criteria and objectivity of their decision making.

Unconscious bias happens when our brains make incredibly quick judgements of people and situations without us being consciously aware of it happening. These unconscious biases are patterns, assumptions and interpretations that we have built up over time to help us process information quickly and efficiently.

Our brains are hard-wired to categorise people instinctively and we tend to use the most visible and obvious categories to do this (such as body weight, skin colour, age, gender). But we also use other categories that are less visible (such as education, social background, occupation). These categories automatically assign characteristics, good and bad, to anyone categorised as being from that group. This is an automatic process over which we have little control.

Our unconscious biases are developed and maintained by our experiences, background and cultural context, affecting our decisions and actions without us realising.

Research has identified a number of barriers to accurate assessment that exist within everyone to some extent, either conscious or unconscious. It is important that assessors understand them, can identify when they might be starting to influence their decisions and can take steps to remain as objective as possible.

There are three main points to be aware of in relation to unconscious bias:

**1 We all have unconscious biases**

Everyone has unconscious biases – it is part of being human. Our brains are constantly bombarded with information from what we see, hear and experience – having the ability to sift through, categorise and make quick judgements about information allows us to make sense of the world. From a survival perspective, bias is a positive and necessary trait – to survive we need to be able to make quick judgements about risk and whether to fight, flee or freeze. The ability to make judgements so fast that we are not consciously aware of them helps us to avoid risk (eg, animal with big sharp teeth = danger = run).

We all tend to have an unconscious bias of seeing similarity and familiarity as comfortable, valuable and safe, but difference and unfamiliarity as less valuable or even threatening. This may be beneficial from an evolutionary perspective, however this can negatively affect our decision making in an assessment and selection context without us even being aware of it. We have a tendency to like people who look like us, think like us and come from similar backgrounds to ours.

**Example: when assessing others, you may have an unconscious preference for someone who:**

- went to the same university as you
- has the same name as your child/mother/father
- resembles one of your friends
- comes from the same home town as you
- solves a problem the same way you would

**2 We find it hard to see our own biases**

When reading this section, you may have found yourself thinking ‘biases are something that affect other people – luckily I don’t have them!’ We all have a tendency to think like this: recognising the impact of biases on other people’s judgements but failing to see

our own. This is known as the 'bias blind spot'. We all like to think of ourselves as open-minded and objective but in fact the thought patterns and assumptions we have built up over our lifetime influence how we view and evaluate others and ourselves.

### 3 **Our biases affect our decisions more in certain contexts**

Unconscious biases operate automatically and take up very little attentional resource. For example, if someone asks you what colour grass is, you can almost automatically say 'green' – this feels easy. Other, slower, more rational and logical ways of thinking take up more mental effort. For example, if you try to work out the answer to  $579 \times 317$  in your head, this feels like a lot more effort and it can be hard to concentrate on anything else at the same time.

As unconscious biases are effortless, our brains will often employ them at times when our minds are overloaded and/or we have a limited time frame in which to make decisions. Because of this, unconscious biases affect our decision making most when we are busy, stressed, tired and our attention or memory is stretched to capacity.

Assessors have a difficult job. When they are assessing candidates, they listen to and observe a large amount of information that is demanding to cognitively process. At these points, assessors can begin to rely on short cuts and snap judgements to make decisions about a candidate's performance. In these circumstances, biases can begin to affect an assessor's ability to remain objective in their decision making. However, by reducing the cognitive load placed on assessors while assessing, you can reduce the likelihood that unconscious biases will affect their decision making. Assessors can also reduce the effect of their own biases by recognising that they have them and thinking about how they may affect their decisions.

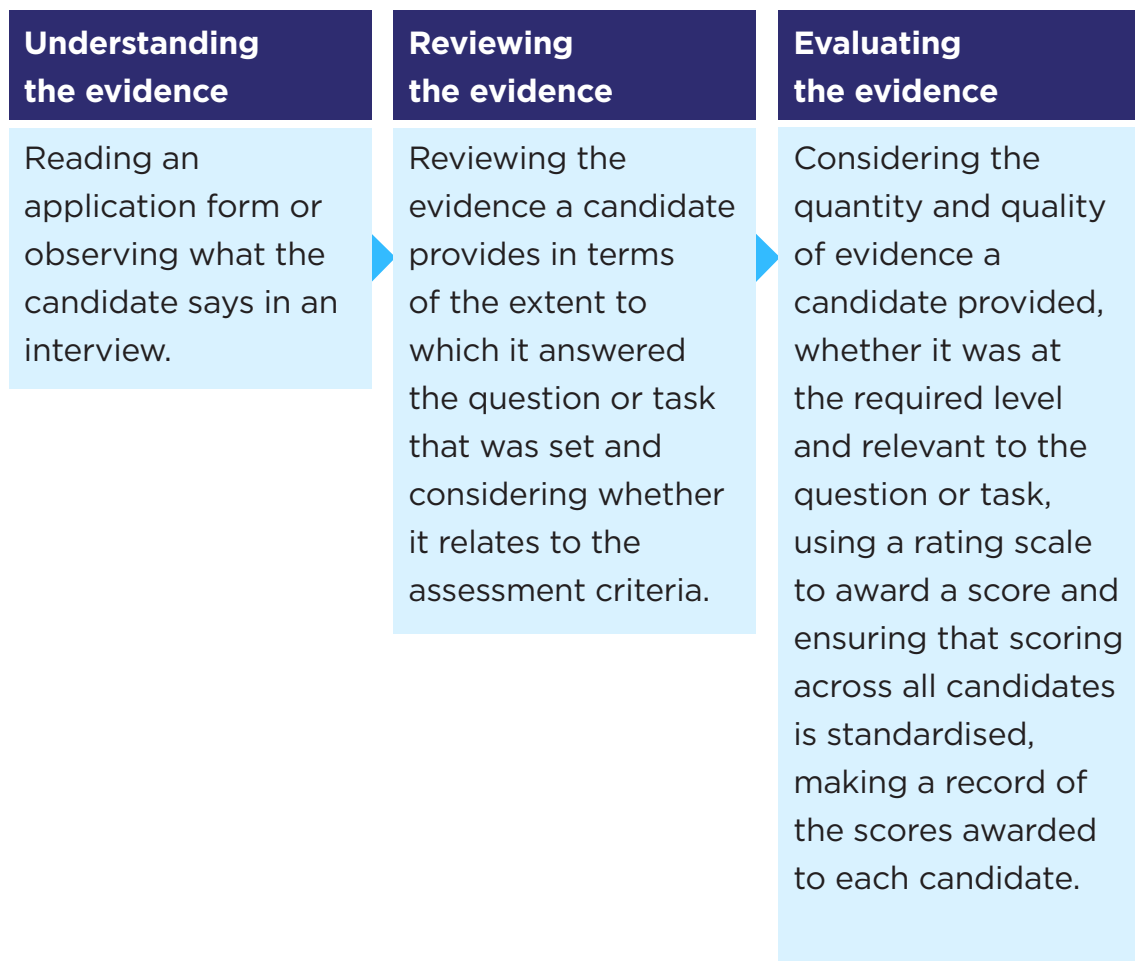
Assessors should receive some form of unconscious bias training to help them identify and minimise the effect of their biases on the assessment of candidates.

## Assessment methodology

Assessment must be consistent for all candidates throughout the Step Three assessment. A structured evidence-based assessment method is one way of avoiding biases and ensuring decisions made remain objective throughout.

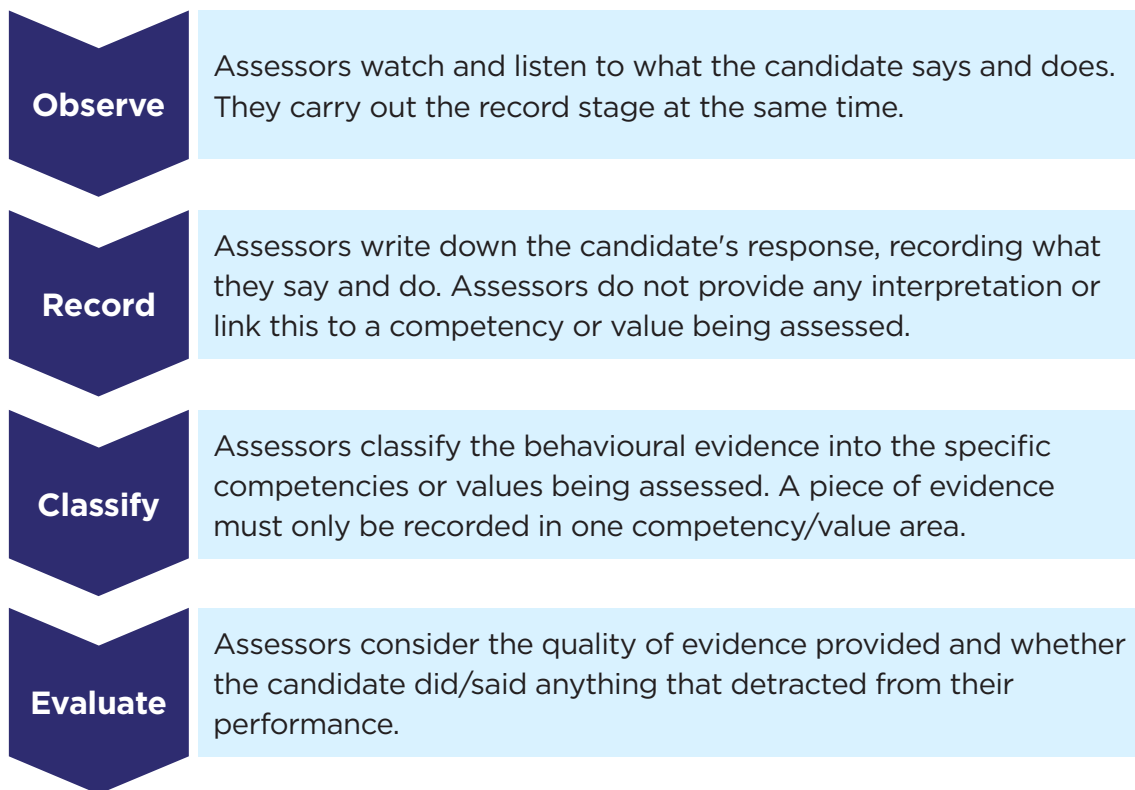
A structured evidence-based approach considers each individual stage in assessing the evidence a candidate has provided. By breaking down the assessment of candidates and their evidence into individual stages, a transparent audit trail is created that can identify where the evidence has come from, and why and how the final decision about whether they can progress to Step Four has been made.

The stages involved in a structured evidence-based assessment method can include:



## ORCE assessment model

A well-known example of a structured evidence-based method of assessment is the observe, record, classify and evaluate (ORCE) assessment model. The ORCE model is based on research into the role of the assessor and the cognitive processes that assessors use that may help or hinder the decisions they make. The ORCE model has four distinct sequential stages of assessment. This is effective in supporting objective decision-making as assessors are not required to undertake multiple tasks at once. Doing so requires greater cognitive effort and therefore presents a greater risk of decisions being influenced by unconscious biases.



Assessors complete each stage independently from any other assessors present and do not discuss the behaviour recorded before they have awarded their independent ratings.

# Key stages in your selection process

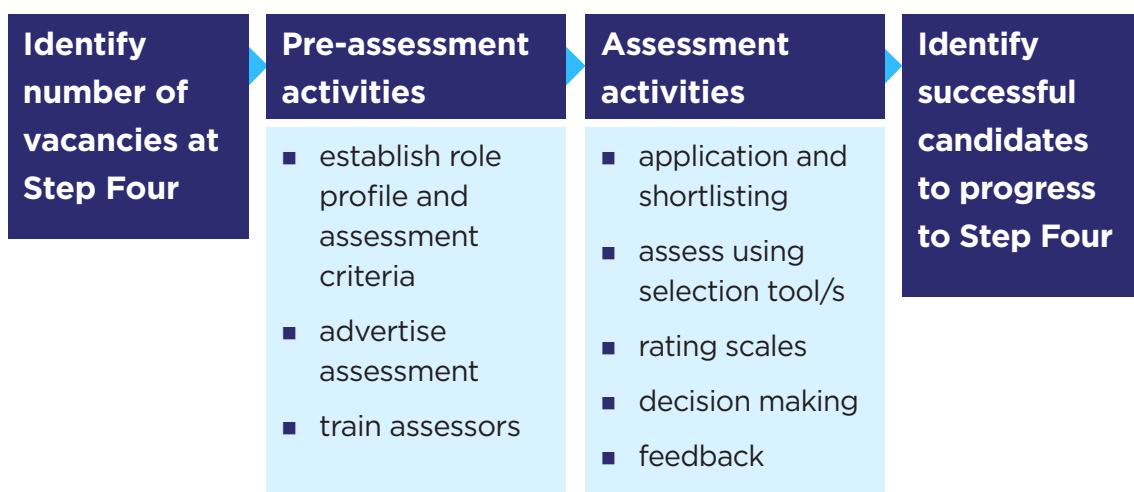
The main objective of the Step Three assessment is to identify the right candidates to progress to Step Four of the promotion process. How you do this can vary as there are a number of selection techniques you can use. This section describes the key things you should consider in planning your assessment at Step Three and the different techniques you could use.

## Planning

To deliver a fair and reliable promotion process, sufficient time must be allocated for planning and delivery. The diagram below highlights the key stages you should consider and could deliver to identify successful candidates to progress to Step Four of the NPPF.

In planning the date of an NPPF Step Three assessment process, you must take into consideration the five-year NPPF Step Two examination validity anniversary date. A Step Three assessment process held just after the anniversary date may unnecessarily exclude officers in the final year of their validity period.

## Pre-assessment activities



## Policing Professional Profiles

The College of Policing has engaged with key stakeholders to develop Policing Professional Profiles for all ranks, including sergeant and inspector. The role profiles define the skills, professional standards, and competencies and behaviours required for policing on a national basis. The professional profiles also indicate the required minimum CVF competency level for the ranks.

The role profiles are intended to capture the primary and nationally consistent elements of the specific role. However, the role profiles also provide an opportunity for you to define what you want from prospective candidates and to reflect the needs and values specific to your force. The role profiles can be used to develop a job description where locally specific requirements can be included. In doing so, it is advisable to liaise with key stakeholders to determine what specific or desirable requirements may need to be included and therefore reflected in your Step Three process.

## Assessment criteria

These are the criteria against which candidate assessments at Step Three will be made and on which applicants will base their evidence of suitability. The assessment criteria detail what is required for effective performance in the role and provide a benchmark for what candidates will be assessed against during the process. The assessment criteria are usually developed from the role profile, highlighting the key aspects required, and should be relevant to the rank aspired to. Referring to the CVF when identifying the assessment criteria to be used will help to ensure the assessment criteria are relevant and valid. It is essential that the force confirms the assessment criteria before launching the process.



## Advertising

The advert launching a Step Three process is an opportunity to promote the fairness and transparency of the process by ensuring it clearly states what you are looking for and how you are going to assess this. The advert may include the following information:

- remuneration
- post location
- force contact name and details
- dates outlining the main stages in the process, for example the application deadline
- key skills and attributes required or information outlining where an applicant can find further information about the role and key requirements

Consideration should be given to where and how the advert is published to ensure all eligible applicants are aware of the process.

## Identifying and training the assessor panel

Consideration should be given to who will assess candidates at Step Three of the NPPF. Good assessors:

- are familiar with the target role
- are objective and can focus on evidence
- are supportive of the assessment process
- have good listening and observation skills
- have good time management and organisational skills

Forces should ensure that those involved in assessing candidates at Step Three have recently undertaken appropriate briefing/training in selection and assessment practices. Ideally assessors will have some prior experience. Training can be completed in person or remotely. The time required to undertake appropriate training will depend on the assessor's experience. There are a number of key areas assessors should be briefed on, including:

Assessment principles	Assessment methodology	Assessment criteria and rating scales	Practicalities and logistics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Merit, fairness and openness</li><li>■ Standardisation</li><li>■ Unconscious bias</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ An overview of the structured assessment method being used to assess candidates</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ An overview of the assessment criteria</li><li>■ A discussion on what effective and ineffective performance looks like</li><li>■ A discussion on the rating scales to be used and standard required to progress</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Time commitment required of assessors</li><li>■ Paperwork to support assessment process</li></ul>

## Assessment methodology

The complexity of your assessment process will depend on a number of factors, including the number of potential candidates and the number of vacancies you have at Step Four. There are a number of stages that you could build into your Step Three assessment and tools that you could use to assess candidates.

## Application form

The application form is usually a written application, however you could consider alternative means, such as requesting expressions of interest or personal statements. The aim of an application form is to obtain information about the candidate relevant to the requirements set out in the role profile, for example eligibility and assessment criteria. The information gained is then used to determine the extent to which the applicant meets these requirements, to confirm their eligibility and whether they will progress to the next stage of the Step Three process.

The application is a further opportunity to reflect the force's values and create greater transparency in the process. To achieve this it is important to consider the purpose of the questions asked and how the information gained will be used. It is important that unnecessary, intrusive or inappropriate information is not asked for. The application form should therefore only include questions relevant to the role requirements and provide the applicant with the opportunity to confirm their eligibility, the extent to which they meet the assessment criteria and their experience and skills.

## Shortlisting

The assessor panel should review the application form against the eligibility requirements and predefined assessment criteria and identify suitable candidates to take forward to the next stage of the Step Three process.

The panel should use a structured assessment method to ensure standardisation at this stage. For example, ORCE can be applied here. The observe and record stages have already been completed by the applicant, so the assessors will begin at the classification stage and identify information recorded on the application form that is evidence of the assessment criteria. They would then evaluate the quality of the evidence provided using the rating scale discussed during training. Once completed, the assessors should discuss their individual scores and agree on which applicants to shortlist.

All candidates should be informed of the shortlisting outcome. Applicants who are not shortlisted should be informed as soon as possible and provided with feedback in a timely manner about where they did and did not meet the requirements of the role and any areas of development they can focus on as a result of their application.

The time needed for shortlisting will depend on the number of applicants and how familiar/experienced in selection and assessment assessors are. If sufficient time is not allocated to this stage, shortlisting assessments can be rushed. This can lead to biases affecting the objectivity and fairness of decisions.

## Selection methods

The selection methods chosen must be able to consistently identify and measure the assessment criteria required for effective performance in the role. In choosing relevant and valid selection methods, it is important to consider that they:

- reflect the role profile and assessment criteria
- provide the candidate with an opportunity to demonstrate the competencies and values that have been identified as important for the role
- mirror activities that are critical to the role as much as possible
- provide all candidates equality of opportunity to perform
- are not vulnerable to subjective biases
- allow assessors to differentiate across candidates in terms of performance

The table below outlines several selection methods that could be used at Step Three of the NPPF, whether by themselves or in combination with others. A description is provided of what they are and how they can be tailored to assess the specific needs of the role and force.

Selection method	Description
Presentation exercise	<p>Bespoke presentation topics can be developed that relate specifically to current and future challenges/priorities the force is likely to experience, ethical decision-making, and criteria that have been defined as essential to the role. The topic can also include an ethical dilemma or focus on the rationale for why a decision or action is taken, thereby providing an opportunity to assess the extent to which the candidate's values meet those required by the role and force.</p>
Structured and semi-structured interviews	<p>A structured interview ensures that all candidates are asked the same question in the same order, while a semi-structured interview allows for further exploration of a candidate's response. Questions can focus on past and future behaviour, enabling information to be gathered regarding a candidate's current ability and future potential.</p>
Panel exercise	<p>This is an opportunity for candidates to interact with others they will most likely be working with if appointed. The aim or task in a panel exercise can be focused on a key issue or challenge the force is experiencing or related to force priorities.</p>
Work sample exercise	<p>This is an assessment that reflects the task and role the candidate will actually be performing. A work sample exercise can be an interactive role play using role actors to mirror a real situation a candidate would be likely to work in.</p>

It is worthwhile spending time fully considering what selection methods to use as they provide a number of beneficial opportunities, such as the ability to:

- assess and differentiate between candidates and identify the right candidates in terms of competencies and values
- attract candidates to apply for promotion in their force
- assess candidates by what they would actually be doing in the role
- thoroughly assess the candidate and gain detailed, reliable and relevant information

If the selection methods are confirmed early in the process, this information should be highlighted to prospective candidates.

## Rating scales

The aim of a rating scale is to provide a means by which a candidate's performance can be evaluated objectively. This creates a consistent, fair, transparent and merit-based means of differentiating between candidate performances.

Each point on the rating scale must differentiate between different levels of performance to enable assessors to distinguish between effective and ineffective performance. Rating scales vary on the number of points used. Too few points and all of the candidates tend to be rated similarly with no differentiation possible. With too many rating points, it becomes difficult to meaningfully describe the differences. Generally a rating scale should not exceed a maximum of nine points, but often five or seven points is sufficient to allow for fair and reliable differentiation.

## Decision making

It is important to confirm the point on the rating scale that distinguishes between a candidate who has met the standard and a candidate who has not met the standard. If multiple selection methods are used, a way of collating the ratings from each assessment into an overall rating will be needed. These two points should be identified and confirmed prior to the process taking place.

The decision on who progresses to Step Four of the NPPF must be based on the final scores that have been agreed by the assessors and all the information that has been gained throughout the process. This is to ensure that the decision made is based on merit as identified by the information gained through a fair and open selection process.

## Feedback

Feedback should be provided to all successful and unsuccessful candidates. This can be completed either face to face, by telephone or in writing. Feedback should be provided in a clear and timely manner within a reasonable timeframe following the conclusion of the Step Three process. This is an important stage to consider as providing feedback can influence the reputation of the force and support individuals' development, regardless of whether a candidate was successful or not.

All those involved in the selection process must be informed that the observations they have recorded and the feedback/scores they have provided may be discussed directly with the candidate.

The purpose of feedback is to enable the candidate to understand how they performed against the assessment criteria and the selection decision made. Therefore, the content of the feedback must accurately reflect only what the candidate said or did.



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