



Survey of Applicants in the 2019 Competition

Introduction

1. This note reports on the results of the survey of applicants in the 2019 competition. We used Survey Monkey to survey all 258 applicants in the 2019 competition. Different versions of the survey went to successful applicants; those who were unsuccessful after interview; and those who were filtered out.

Response Rate

2. We received responses from 149 applicants. The response rate was thus 58%. That is a good response rate for surveys of this sort, and an improvement on the 52% last year. Perhaps not surprisingly, successful applicants were more likely to respond. We heard from 77 (68%) of them, compared with 31 (46%) of those who were unsuccessful after interview and 41 (53%) of those filtered out.

Survey Results

3. The results of the survey are set out in the following tables.

1 How did you find the guidance to applicants?

Response	Total	Successful	Unsuccessful	Filtered Out	Men	Women	No gender specified	BAME	White	No Ethnicity specified
Very helpful	88	57	15	16	61	19	8	14	66	8
Acceptable	55	20	15	20	33	11	11	6	39	10
Too long / unhelpful	6	0	1	5	4	0	2	0	4	2

2 Approximately how long did it take you to complete the application form?

Response	Total	Successful	Unsuccessful	Filtered Out	Men	Women	No gender specified	BAME	White	No Ethnicity specified
Less than 16 hours	10	2	2	6	6	0	4	2	4	4
16-24 hours	19	11	4	4	14	4	1	3	15	1
24-32 hours	29	18	6	5	17	5	7	6	16	7
More than 32 hours	91	46	19	26	61	21	9	9	74	8

3 Did you consider that the application form sought the right amount of information?

Response	Total	Successful	Unsuccessful	Filtered Out	Men	Women	No gender specified	BAME	White	No Ethnicity specified
Too much information	34	5	12	17	18	5	11	2	22	10
About the right amount	102	68	16	18	69	24	9	15	78	9
Too little information	13	4	3	6	11	1	1	3	9	1

4 Allowing for the amount of information required, did you find the form?

Response	Total	Successful	Unsuccessful	Filtered Out	Men	Women	No gender specified	BAME	White	No Ethnicity specified
Reasonably easy to complete	33	18	5	10	27	1	5	7	21	5
Acceptable	85	53	16	16	55	23	7	13	66	6
Unnecessarily difficult to complete	31	6	10	15	16	6	9	0	22	9

5 How did you find the information sent before the interview?

Response	Total	Successful	Unsuccessful	Filtered Out	Men	Women	No gender specified	BAME	White	No Ethnicity specified
Helpful	74	51	23		49	22	3	10	61	3
Acceptable	21	21	0		15	4	2	5	14	2
Unhelpful or valueless	6	2	4		4	2	0	0	6	0
Did not answer	7	3	4		0	0	7	0	0	7
Not applicable: Filtered Out	41			41	30	2	9	5	28	8

6 Did you consider the interview tested competencies relevant to QC appointment?

Response	Total	Successful	Unsuccessful	Filtered Out	Men	Women	No gender specified	BAME	White	No Ethnicity specified
To a considerable extent	46	45	1		32	12	2	10	34	2
To a reasonable extent	41	26	15		27	13	1	3	37	1
To a small extent at most	14	3	11		9	3	2	2	10	2
Did not answer	7	3	4		0	0	7	0	0	7
Not applicable: Filtered Out	41			41	30	2	9	5	28	8

7 How did you find the interview as a whole?

Response	Total	Successful	Unsuccessful	Filtered Out	Men	Women	No gender specified	BAME	White	No Ethnicity specified
More testing than expected	17	9	8		14	3	0	3	14	0
As expected	60	46	14		39	17	4	8	48	4
More straightforward than expected	24	19	5		15	8	1	4	19	1
Blanks	7	3	4		0	0	7	0	0	7
Not applicable: Filtered Out	41			41	30	2	9	5	28	8

8 How did you find the interview questions?

Response	Total	Successful	Unsuccessful	Filtered Out	Men	Women	No gender specified	BAME	White	No Ethnicity specified
It was generally clear what information the interviewers wanted	70	63	7		47	19	4	12	54	4
I found some questions unclear or ambiguous	28	11	17		18	9	1	2	25	1
It was rarely clear what information the interviewers wanted	3	0	3		3	0	0	1	2	0
Did not answer	7	3	4		0	0	7	0	0	7
Not applicable: Filtered Out	0			41	30	2	9	5	28	8

9 Did you find your feedback letter?

Response	Total	Successful	Unsuccessful	Filtered Out	Men	Women	No gender specified	BAME	White	No Ethnicity specified
Reasonably helpful in the circumstances	29		13	16	21	4	4	3	25	4
Acceptable	16		7	9	13	1	2	3	15	1
Unhelpful of valueless	22		7	15	14	4	4	2	18	4
Did not answer	5		4	1	0	0	5	0	0	5
Not applicable: Successful	77	77			50	21	6	12	59	6

10 Approach to notification of applicants

Response	Total	Successful	Unsuccessful	Filtered Out	Men	Women	No gender specified	BAME	White	No Ethnicity specified
To await the public announcement before notifying applicants.	8	5	3		4	3	1	0	7	1
To notify applicants in confidence in advance of the public announcement as done this year.	93	69	24		64	25	4	15	74	4
Did not answer	7	3	4		0	0	7	0	0	7
Not applicable: Filtered Out	41			41	30	2	9	5	28	8

Commentary on the Survey Results

4. The main points I would note from the responses to the questions in the survey are:

- As usual successful applicants were much more positive about the process than the unsuccessful.
- The guidance is generally pretty highly regarded. Indeed, this year saw an increase (from 50% to 59%) in those considering it “very helpful”, and a decrease (from 9% to 4%) in the proportion considering it to be too long or unhelpful.
- Completing the application form took well over 90% of applicants two full working days or more, and it took almost 61% of applicants at least four days. In the circumstances it is encouraging that 68% thought we sought the right amount of information.
- The application form was considered unnecessarily difficult to complete by 21% of respondents, a decrease on the 26% last year (and 23% the previous year). It may be that the new application form has helped so far as ease of completion is concerned.
- The information sent before interview continues to be quite well regarded – indeed there was an increase from 53% to 73% in the proportion finding it helpful.
- More respondents thought the interview tested the competencies “to a considerable degree” (45%) than “to a reasonable extent”(40%). This is a reversal of the pattern in the previous three years. There was also a small decline (from 18% to 14%) in the proportion who thought the competencies were tested “to a small extent at most.” As usual, successful applicants were much more positive than unsuccessful ones.
- There was a disappointing decrease from 76% to 69% in the proportion of respondents who found the interview questions “generally clear.” However, as last year only three applicants thought it rarely clear what information the interviewers wanted.
- Views on the feedback were very similar to last year.
- The overwhelming majority of applicants (92%, including almost 90% even of unsuccessful applicants) preferred “unofficial” notification before Christmas to having to wait until the public announcement.

Comments on the Interview

5. The comments on the interview follow a similar pattern to previous years, with reservations rather than significant criticism from successful applicants, but much greater criticism from the unsuccessful. However, it is worth noting (from the responses to question 6) that there was an improvement in applicants’ perception of the extent to which the questions tested the competencies.
6. Some unsuccessful applicants consider that it ought to be possible for the interviewers to indicate the main area(s) of doubt about the applicant and to concentrate on those areas in the interview. However, as with last year’s suggestion for interim feedback before the interview, that would not be easy. In the first place, it will often be the case that an applicant is not certain to make the grade on **any** competency

prior to the interview, and telling applicants that would hardly help. Furthermore, even where there appeared to be only limited areas of doubt, telling the applicant that might effectively bind the Panel to consider the applicant to have made the grade on everything else and yet information can arise at interview which casts doubt even on apparently strong assessments.

Suggestions for Improvement

7. Some applicants express concern that the process is not well-attuned to those specialising in areas of work which do not often lead to a contested court hearing; and that it would be desirable for the legal interviewer to be knowledgeable about the applicant's field of practice. Given there are only five lawyers on the Selection Panel that would be difficult to achieve quite apart from the difficulties in arranging interviews arising from recusals and interviewer and applicant unavailability.
8. There continues to be a very strong wish to have a fixed day for announcement of the outcome of the competition. However, we have thus far been unable to persuade the Ministry of Justice on this.
9. There is some concern about what is meant by the need to keep the notification of the Selection Panel's recommendation confidential, and about precisely who can be told. The principle cannot be very different from the position with judicial appointments, but we will spell it out in future if we need to notify applicants in advance of the official announcement.

Queen's Counsel Appointments March 2020