Public Sector Resourcing
Be part of something bigger

How to Stand Out at Interview with the UK Government

This guide supports candidates preparing for interviews for permanent roles in the UK Government or Civil Service. It outlines how interviews are assessed and how you can make a strong, positive impression.

Know the Interview Format

Most interviews follow the Success Profiles framework and assess behaviours, strengths, and experience. Panels score only what you say, so clarity and specificity are essential.

Prepare High-Quality Behaviour Examples

Behaviour questions often start with:

- "Tell us about a time when…"
- "Describe an example of…"

Use the STAR method to structure responses:

- **Situation** – the context
- **Task** – what you needed to achieve
- **Action** – what you did (the most important part)
- **Result** – the outcome and what you learned

Highlight Your Personal Contribution

Panels need to understand your individual impact. Avoid defaulting to "we". Be explicit about your actions, decisions, and judgement, even when describing teamwork.

Demonstrate a Public Service Mindset

Show you understand public sector values such as:

- Fairness and inclusion
- Accountability
- Value for money
- Risk management
- Impact on citizens or service users

Integrating these naturally into your answers helps you stand out.

Answer the Question Directly

Listen carefully and tailor your answer to the specific question. It's fine to pause briefly or ask for the question to be repeated.

Be Clear and Structured

Strong answers are easy to follow. Use signposting, for example:

- "The situation was…"
- "My key actions were…"
- "The outcome was…"

Prepare for Strengths Questions

Strengths questions explore how you naturally prefer to work.

Keep answers honest, positive and concise, using short examples where relevant.

Show Motivation for a Permanent Role

Be ready to explain:

- Why you want a permanent Civil Service role
- What motivates you about this department's or organisation's purpose

Panels value candidates who want to contribute long-term.

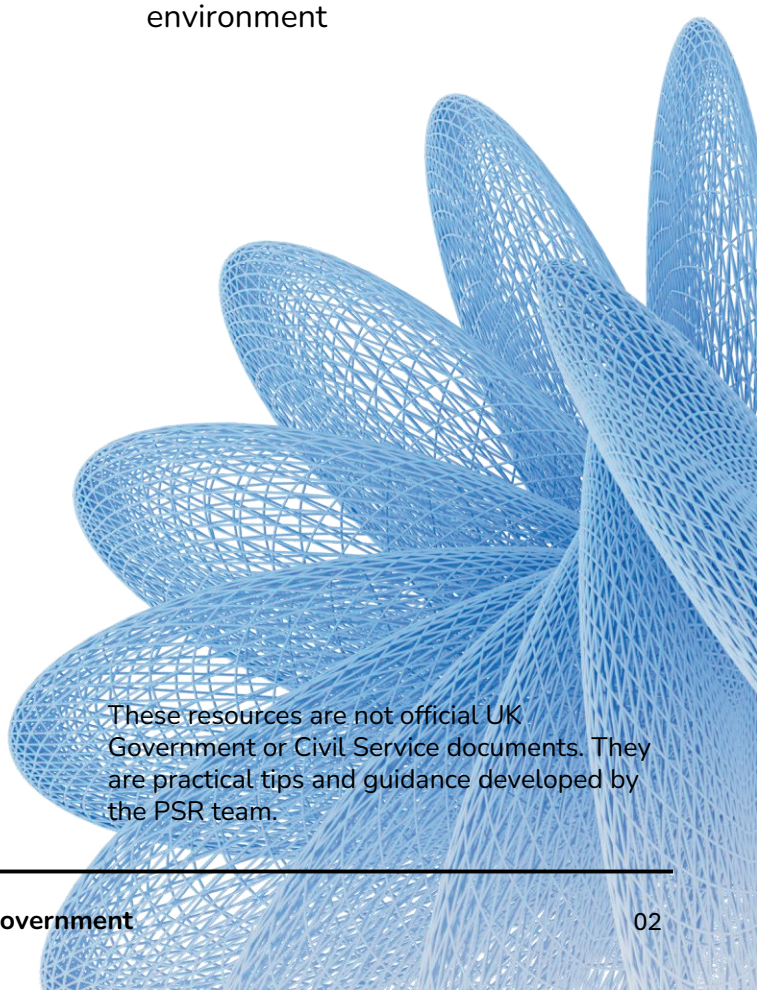
Ask Thoughtful Questions

Use your opportunity at the end to show interest and insight. Effective topics include:

- Team priorities
- Learning and development opportunities
- How success will be measured

Practical Tips

- Prepare and practise your key examples
- Manage your time, don't rush to the result
- Speak clearly and at a steady pace
- For virtual interviews: test technology, camera, audio, and environment



These resources are not official UK Government or Civil Service documents. They are practical tips and guidance developed by the PSR team.