D62 A Comprehensive Competency-Based Process for the Recruitment of Forensic Scientists

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After attending this presentation, attendees will learn about progressive initiatives taken to strengthen the process of recruiting forensic biologists thereby ensuring the success of candidates with the skills and competencies most relevant to the position. The presentation will highlight aspects of the recruitment process including the evaluation and weighting of various components and will demonstrate how key competencies and technical skills are assessed through the selection process from the screening of applications to the job interview.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by demonstrating the use of effective tools and strategies to ensure the recruitment of appropriately qualified personnel into the forensic scientist position.

In the past 5 years, the Biology Section at Ontario's Centre of Forensic Sciences (CFS) has recruited over 30 biologists through annual competitions. The process, while aligned with Government of Ontario hiring standards, has evolved to a rigorous assessment of skills and competencies[1]. The forensic biologist position is responsible for managing scientific examinations in criminal cases, and includes acting as a scientific advisor for clients, performing or overseeing the screening of evidence items for body fluids, interpreting and reporting the results of both body fluid and DNA results, and providing expert testimony when required.

Between 200 and 300 applications are received for each competition. Applicants are selected for scrutiny on the strength of their cover letter and CV, insofar as it is aligned with the key qualifications of the position outlined in the job advertisement. Short-listed candidates are further screened through the on-site administration of a two-hour invigilated technical examination, assessing the underlying theoretical knowledge required during the application of all aspects of body fluid and DNA analysis. Only the top performers are subsequently invited to interview – at least three candidates are interviewed for each available position.

The interview is comprised of multiple components, in the following sequence, lasting a total of 3 hours.

• **Panel questions:** A three-member panel asks a series of questions, requiring the candidate to demonstrate examples of key competencies through reference to past behavior. This component focuses less on technical knowledge than on behavioral competencies.

• **Candidate oral presentation - with supporting tools:** Candidates are asked to prepare a 10-minute, time-limited PowerPoint presentation summarizing the key messages from a published paper concerning applicable research, sent to them a week ahead of time. This component establishes whether the candidate is capable of synthesizing a paper's technical content into a clear, concise, and effective presentation using a common software application. Candidates are also asked follow-up questions, dealing with the practical application of the paper's findings.

• **Candidate oral presentation – no supporting tools:** Candidates are sent a question regarding the field of forensic biology one week prior to the interview, and are asked to prepare a 10-minute, time-limited oral response with no visual aids or supporting notes. This component establishes whether the candidate is capable of researching the salient points required of the response and of conveying these effectively through clear, unassisted communication.

• **Mock case consultation role-play exercise:** The candidate is asked to play the role of a forensic biologist, and the interview panelists assume the roles of a regional supervising coroner, a police investigator, and a police forensic identification officer in the very early stages of a high-profile homicide investigation where the perpetrator remains at large. A case conference is held and in a dynamic and highly interactive process, the scientist is called upon to provide advice and guidance with respect to what scientific examinations may be undertaken. Additionally, the scientist is asked to prioritize the examinations and to commit to particular turnaround times, given immediate public safety concerns expressed by the police.

This component demonstrates the candidate's ability to establish and maintain focus in a high-pressure scenario, and to distil a large volume of information into a manageable and effective action plan that meets the needs of customers.

• **Court role-play exercise:** Candidates are provided with a brief case history, a sample of basic analytical data, and a report detailing basic forensic findings and conclusions. They are asked to adopt these materials as their own case file and are given 15 minutes to review them in preparation for a mock

court.

During the mock court, the candidate is asked to 'take the stand' in their capacity as an expert witness, while members of the panel assume the roles of judge, crown attorney, and defense counsel.

This component assesses the technical substance of answers to scripted questions dealing with the significance of results and aspects of quality assurance, as well as their style, objectivity, clarity, and simplicity.

The elements described above provide a sound basis for critically evaluating a candidate's potential for fulfilling the demanding role of the forensic scientist. Each new competition involves different questions/scenarios, while consistently targeting the appropriate competencies. While many candidates will not have the requisite experience and training to immediately act at the level of the position which the selection process contemplates, it is nevertheless structured to identify those with the key competencies and the technical acumen that combine as the foundation for the development of an excellent forensic scientist.

1 Jones, GP and S. Moore. 2001. A Behaviour Competency Model (BCM) for Forensic Scientists. Proceedings of the 53rd Annual Meeting of the AAFS, p. 130.

Forensic Scientist, Recruitment, Behavioral Competency

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