Competency-based interview

Transcript

Introduction

The competency-based interview gives the apprentice the opportunity to expand further on areas of their portfolio thereby demonstrating both their learning and the opportunities they have had to apply that learning to the workplace. The interview will last a maximum of 50 minutes.

Prior to the discussion, the apprentice should:

- be clear that the interview will last a maximum of 50 minutes
  - the examples provided should relate to the period of the apprenticeship.

- have a series of appropriate examples relating to both knowledge of relevant theory/practice/tools and how they have applied that knowledge in the workplace

- understand the various assessment verbs that may be used by the independent end-point assessor (IEPA) and that it is the responses to these assessment verbs that can distinguish a Level 5 apprentice. Commonly used assessment verbs include:
  - **analyse** – the apprentice is expected to examine something in some detail, considering key components and/or essential features in order to try and establish cause and effect;
  - **evaluate** – this involves examining complex issues in detail, it could include a comparative element and would normally come to a conclusion or end by making a recommendation.

- understand that this is their opportunity to talk about themselves and how they have demonstrated the skills they have acquired/developed/evolved in the workplace, throughout the duration of the apprenticeship:
  - in business we tend to refer to 'we', eg when giving credit to the team rather than taking the credit ourselves individually;
  - the interview is focused on the apprentice and how they have applied their skills in the workplace, therefore it is helpful to be specific about what skills they have applied, what they have done themselves;
  - apprentices should refer directly to 'I' where appropriate and be prepared to be specific about what they have done, as well as explain their role in various activities.

- have the opportunity to practise in an appropriate environment:
  - when undertaking the actual professional discussion, the IEPA will ask questions in order to start and direct the discussion;
  - the IEPA will not give feedback or provide 'the answer'/clues to the answer;
  - the IEPA will not be able to prompt the apprentice about relevant aspects of an example that they have failed to mention;
  - the IEPA will not be able to remind the apprentice of relevant examples.

When giving the apprentice the opportunity to practise, it is important that the tutor/mentor/coach doesn't feed the answer to the apprentice. The coach should also not mislead the apprentice by saying:

- that their answers are excellent when they lack detail

- that their answer fully addressed the question and the apprentice was asked to evaluate but only described
- that they gave a good example, when the answer was general and it was unclear how it directly related to the apprentice.

The IEPA will not be able to prompt the apprentice about relevant aspects of an example that they have failed to mention. Nor will the IEPA be able to remind the apprentice of relevant examples.

General advice

The IEPA will indicate which part of the standard each question relates to and answers should directly relate to that context.

More wide-ranging portfolios can help provide a strong basis for the competency-based interview as they comprehensively address the standard. However, apprentices should be aware that the aim isn't to simply repeat the evidence contained within the portfolio but to be able to expand further on their evidence. They must clearly demonstrate an appropriate level of competency at Level 5 by selecting relevant theory to base an answer upon, and be able to analyse/evaluate the appropriateness of that theory as required.

It is important that employees have given the apprentice the right level of learning and development opportunities within the organisation. If such opportunities aren't inherent within the apprentice's current role, they could be made available by allowing them to complete secondments, project work etc.

It is also helpful if the apprentices are encouraged to identify opportunities for undertaking appropriate activities/projects and they can rationalise their involvement.

Ensure the apprentice is aware of all the basics:

- That they have relevant appropriate photographic ID available at the start of the assessments.
- That there is support available to enable them to access the webinar/video call should they need it.
- That the IEPA is likely to access the webinar a few minutes prior to the start of the meeting, to ensure the apprentice is able to access the microphone and webcam.
- How to present documents onscreen should they wish to.
- That they can access their notes at any time should they wish to.

Finally, it is important that the apprentice is aware that the IEPA wants to hear about them and their learning and development experiences during their apprenticeship and this is an opportunity for them to demonstrate that their learning and development has been appropriate for Level 5. They should also be able to discuss and show that their skills are informed by relevant theory, practice and tools, and that they have had relevant opportunities to apply their skills in the workplace.

Example competency-based interview: pass grade

Note: the IEPA will have given a general introduction to all three assessments (competency-based interview (CBI), presentation and professional discussion) at the beginning of the CBI.

Speaker	Interview
IEPA	Are you okay and ready for me to start the recording? Once I start it, I will need to complete a couple of checks and will provide you with details of what to expect during today's assessments.
Apprentice	That's fine, please start.
IEPA	Hello and welcome. My name is Sandra Dunbar and I am your ILM independent end-point assessor. Before we begin, do you have some photographic ID that you could hold to the camera for me please?
Apprentice	Yes – are you able to see this?
IEPA	Yes, I can see that fine. Thanks. I need to complete a couple of checks regarding your room. Firstly, is the room comfortable for you are you happy to proceed?
Apprentice	Yes the room is fine and I am happy to proceed.
IEPA	And can you confirm there is nobody in the room with you?
Apprentice	That's right, nobody's in the room with me.
IEPA	Now I need to check that we are not expecting any distractions – no fire alarms or anything like that?
Apprentice	No – nothing like that is due to happen.
IEPA	Good, okay. So, I'm going to give you an overview of what will happen today. Our first session is your competency-based interview, and this will last a maximum of 50 minutes. Next is your presentation, which will last 30 minutes. You will have 15 minutes for your actual presentation and 15 minutes for question and answers. Finally, we have the professional discussion and that will last a maximum of 40 minutes. Just to confirm, the clock hasn't started yet for this interview stage and I will let you know when this will happen.

	All the sessions will be recorded and I will be taking a few notes. The recording is for assessment and quality assurance purposes, but we do look to maintain confidentiality. You can refer to your portfolio or share information on the screen at any time, should you wish to. You can also refer to any notes you have made that you think will be useful. My role is to ask you some questions that will enable you to explore and add richness to your portfolio. I will let you know which part of the standard each question relates to. Do you have any questions before we begin?
Apprentice	No that's all fine with me, I'm happy to begin.
IEPA	Okay. Let's start with Leading People. Focusing on leadership styles – I am interested in hearing about how you would evaluate different leadership styles according to one or more recognised models?
Apprentice	We learnt about quite a few different leadership styles in one of the workshops. One that stayed in my mind is Situational Leadership. I found that model useful as it contains a number of different leadership styles encouraging you to choose the one most relevant to the situation including the people you are leading – hence the name I suppose. So, according to the situation you could choose to take on more of a 'delegating', 'participating', 'selling' or 'telling' style. The names sort of give it away that, for example, with a 'participating' style you would be more supportive and not as directional – it's really more about building a relationship with the people you are leading. You can compare that with a 'telling' style, where you are outright telling people what to do – you're not really interested in building a relationship. You just want to get the job done. The model is generally shown as a matrix and one consideration is about how much you are focused on the task and how much you are focused on building a relationship. Actually, they are good ways of thinking about it. If you want to build a relationship, being supportive, and if that is at least as important as getting the task done, then you will adopt a participative style. I tell you what, I've got a diagram here. I'll just put that on the screen so it's easier to talk about if you can see it? Now it's easier to contrast that with a telling style when you, well you just tell people what to do – you don't care about developing a relationship – there's a deadline and things just have to be done. There are some clear links with other views on leadership: a telling style is pretty much the same as an autocratic leadership style and a participative leadership style is similar to a democratic leadership style.

	What I find interesting and useful about the situational leadership model is that it shows that you don't need to use the same leadership style all the time – and maybe in reality you can't. As much as you might want to be participating, there are times when you just need to get a particular task done. But I would hope that I have built a good enough relationship with the team that they will understand if I need to adopt a telling style, and they will understand that I will go back to a more supportive style as soon as I can.
IEPA	Can you give me some examples of how that has applied to you?
Apprentice	Well given the nature of the work we do I generally adopt a participative style. We are a small communications team so I need the team to be creative, to contribute ideas, and feel that they work in an environment that inspires them. So a participative style, for me, is the way to enable that. You can't just tell someone to be creative – you have to enable them to be creative. But we do have to cope with some emergencies from time to time and a participative style just isn't really appropriate then. With emergencies there just isn't the time; you have to be able to act quickly and decisively. Working for a university, we do have some problems to deal with. For example, we very sadly had a student who passed away. I won't go into detail, but they were attacked on a night out. We have a rota for 24-hour coverage and I was on duty that night so I had to start dealing with press enquiries straight away. When the team got in the next morning, I had no option but to adopt a telling mode – we had to be ready for press enquiries and had to ensure that they were all handled appropriately. After holding a team briefing I had to allocate tasks really quickly. I know the team well and so was able to delegate the right tasks to the right people. However, because we were inundated by the press and TV news, someone had to be responsible for the more low-level tasks such as making sure we got something to eat and drink without having to leave the office. By the end of the day the number of enquiries had lessened and I was able to assure the team that things would get back to normal – but there just wasn't the time to be participative or democratic while it was all kicking off.
IEPA	Okay, thank you. Now let's move on to Managing People. I'm interested in hearing about performance management, how you manage performance in your job role and the analysis of techniques that you use.
Apprentice	Oh, that's an interesting area given the work my team does and there are two sides to it, really. There's the press release and social media type of work. That's all about getting what we send to the various media outlets published – the fewer changes made to what is sent out, the better!

	Then there's the internal communication, such as updates and newsletters, where we can be more planned. So, in terms of managing performance in relation to social media and press releases, it's all about what is sent out for publication versus how close the original messaging is to what's finally published. I would look for a typical communications exec within my team to get 70% of what they send out published, and about 70% of what's published to directly reflect what we send out. We keep a really close eye on that, as it is really key to the success of the university that we get the name of the university seen in the right places for the right reasons. Every week it is the responsibility of one of the junior execs to monitor the figures and for each executive to see how well they have done. So, 70:70 is what is expected. If someone does better than that, I have introduced a series of badges that I can award them. For example, if they reach 100:100 they get a platinum badge that buys them lunch for two at the canteen, or if they reach over 70:70 on a really difficult story that took a lot of hard work. There are also gold, silver and bronze badges – all with some form of reward to them. None of the rewards are that valuable in themselves, but the team are well paid, so that isn't what would really motivate them. What I found motivates them is being able to share their success with someone; hence the free lunch for two. The execs are really proud if they are able to invite someone to a free lunch because they have done a good job – and what's really good to see, is that they often invite someone who was involved with the story from another department. So not only is my team member motivated, but it helps to build relationships with other departments too. It was after reading about Maslow and his Hierarchy of Needs that I hit on the idea. As I said, the team are well paid so money in itself wouldn't be that big a motivator. The office is a really pleasant environment to work in, so for the team I thought it was likely to be all about belongingness and self-esteem. I believe that the badging scheme does that, as all the rewards enable the execs to share their successes with others. I even got the senior management to recognise the badges, so they can be referred to within appraisals and added to internal job applications – they now have real currency within the university! They do seem to have been effective in that I am handing out a lot more platinum badges this year than I did at the end of last year. I have also had some other managers ask about the scheme and they are thinking about introducing something similar. It's always hard to tell if another approach would have worked better and I am aware that bits of the scheme need some tweaking but people are always changing aren't they, so it would be wrong not to regularly review the scheme. I am thinking of adding it to our next team meeting to get the view of the team. I did think about asking the team members individually but they

	have all achieved at least one platinum badge. Therefore, I think it'll be appropriate to discuss it in a meeting with everyone. And thinking about it, that is a real measure of success isn't it? The fact they have all got at least one platinum badge. I can't remember a time before the badges when we got that sort of coverage.
IEPA	Thank you. Staying with Managing People, can you tell me how you enable the development of teams in the workplace?
Apprentice	Yes. Well, not 'teams' as such – I can only really focus on my team. Actually… thinking about it, I can talk about teams. I'll start with mine though. I do monthly one-to-ones with everyone in the team and that's our time to look at how we have been doing, what we want to be doing and how I can enable that to happen. So, for example, if the team needs to go on a training course to acquire a certain skill then I will do my best to arrange that for them. Some courses are expensive and I may have to make some decisions about which skills are really essential rather than 'nice to have'. Often with what we do though it can be a case of enabling an exec to spend some time in the faculty they are working with or having the chance to get some mentoring or coaching support. I am conscious that it's not really good practice for me to mentor someone, but I do as much as I can in terms of coaching. And I do try and find mentors if it would help. In terms of other forms of development, I rotate the execs around the different faculties every couple of years. This helps them to see other ways of working, and can also help develop their interpersonal skills, as they have to work to build new relationships and get them exposed to different media and journalists. It's also consistent with Hertzberg so it helps general motivation as well.
IEPA	You tended to focus on the individuals there – what about the overall team?
Apprentice	As I mentioned, I do look at the skills base of the team in total – to see if we have the skills and competencies we need as a group. In terms of developing a sense of team we have weekly meetings and a monthly 'Friday afternoon review'. So, we take a couple of hours out on the last Friday of each month to catch up with each other and regroup before the next month. I was the one who introduced this idea and it's proven to be a good opportunity for the team to support each other. Also, thinking about Tuckman's team development model, it keeps the team performing. They support each other really well. When we catch up about what we think the next month will be like and swap experiences, offer to help each other, as well as generally support each other – it's been so good to see.
IEPA	Moving on to Communication Skills now. I am interested in hearing how you would evaluate the contribution interpersonal skills make to effective working relationships.

	So, let's start with the different sort of interpersonal skills you could use in your job and why?
Apprentice	Well – this is a bit ironic given that I work in communications! Effective communication is the life and soul of what I do really. In terms of interpersonal skills, I have to work collaboratively with various departments throughout the university. They are the people that provide the stories, occasions and points of interest that me and my department are able to communication internally and externally. So, I, and the rest of the team have to invest a lot of time in listening, being appreciative for the information and showing that we work hard to get the information through to the right people. Listening is really important. It often takes colleagues a long time to really get to the point of what it is that interesting or newsworthy. And often it's not the story that they first contact us about that is the most interesting. Really listening to what they have to say and being patient will often uncover an extra bit of information that makes the story special. Or a story that the other person may not think is that interesting ends up being something that we know a particular publication is looking for. So, we all need to be good listeners. For me good listening needs the right body language to go with it. You can't be a good listener unless you are really focused on the person you're listening to. If you don't reinforce your interest in what is being said with nods and smiles, for example, the person giving you the story will soon stop as they will get the sense that you simply aren't interested in what they're saying. I feel it's important for myself and the team to also show that we have a really good work ethic and to make sure that comes across. It is easy for other departments and the lecturers to think that all we do for a living is chat to journalists and have nice lunches. We have to let them know that we work really hard on their behalf and that we are professionals. Writing press releases isn't easy and writing them in a way that means that they will be published word for word is even harder. Social media is hard work – say the wrong word and it can cause mayhem and with social media people expect a quick response. One way we can let it be known that we work hard is to make sure we give colleagues feedback on where their story has appeared and we try and add something in that means we get some sense of how people have reacted to it. For example, ringing in for more information or entering into a prize draw. It all helps to show the tangibility of what we do. A big part of a good work ethic is being dependable. We have to let others know that they can depend on us. If they have a book launch, for example, we will get the right people there and give the right information to promote the book. I think we also need to ensure we build trust – both with internal colleagues and the media. If we don't, it can really affect our work. I spend a lot of my time talking to the media finding out what sort of story they are interested in but also letting them know the experts we have that they can call upon if they need them. Within the lecturers we have

	some world class experts on things like climate change and sustainability. They can help the local media no end. Overall good interpersonal skills are essential to me and the team every day in every way. As I said, without good relationships with colleagues we don't have anything to say, without good relationships with the media we don't have anyone to spread the news for us! We are a small department in a large university. All internal and external communications have to come through us. If a colleague wants to (or if they don't trust us, or don't think that we are doing a good job as a team), they could go to the media directly. There are real potential problems and risks with that! If a journalist knows someone isn't that skilled with the media they may ask some difficult questions. Equally, the lecturer may not get their point over as well as we could have done. It's best that they want to come through us and good interpersonal skills on our part can mean that not only they want to, but that they look forward to being able to bring us a story. After all, they want relevant audiences to know about the work they do and we can help get that word out there.
IEPA	Staying with communication – can you tell me about me how you have chaired a meeting?
Apprentice	Sure, any particular meeting?
IEPA	Any that you feel was relevant.
Apprentice	I chair the quarterly central services meeting on a rotating basis – there are three of us and we take it in turns to chair.
IEPA	What's the purpose of the meeting?
Apprentice	It's really our opportunity to coordinate what we do. So as comms, we can coordinate with the admissions department, for example, to make sure that if we have a big piece of work coming through there will be enough people available to take the calls.
IEPA	So what skills do you think you need to chair a meeting from start to finish?
Apprentice	I think you have to have good time management skills and be a good multi-tasker, too. No-one nowadays has endless time to sit in meetings generally chatting things over. We are all under pressure and as chair it's my role to make sure we get through all the agenda items during the meeting. Well, really that starts when I compile the agenda, in that I should check then that we will be able to complete everything in the time we have. And if not I have to decide if there are items that can be dropped or deferred to the next meeting.
IEPA	So, how do you do that?

Apprentice	I am firm but fair. I like to give everyone the chance to speak but if I don't think that what is being said is particularly relevant or helpful, I will move things on. This is where the multi-tasking comes in – being able to take part in the meeting but at the same time keeping an eye on the agenda and how the time is going, so that I can make sure that everything gets done. When I am the chair it does all get done. If anything it's getting easier, as people tend now to only speak if what they have to say is directly relevant. I don't take the minutes of the meeting (we have an admin assistant that comes in and does that for us) but it's my responsibility to check those through. I am very conscious in terms of ensuring the minutes are clear about who needs to do what before the next meeting. That way we get things done.
IEPA	Thank you. Moving onto Building Relationships now. Can you analyse how you manage conflict in your job role and the sort of approaches you could take?
Apprentice	Sadly yes, I have had to manage conflict a few times in the last year – both internally and externally. I won't go into too much detail but there was one relating to a promotion. A member of the team applied for a higher-banded job within the team but someone from outside the team also applied and it was that person who got the job. Well, that didn't go down well and the person within the team asked for feedback which was given. They then challenged the feedback they were given and made a formal complaint. The first thing I did was to go to HR and ask for their advice – it's very difficult having to work with someone you know has filed a complaint against you – and the new person was starting in a week and I knew that wasn't going to help. I remembered a model we had studied in one of the workshops that was specifically about managing conflict. It was called the Thomas-Kilmann model and it gives you five approaches you can use. I'll put a copy of the model on the screen again if that's okay? It'll make it easier to talk about.
IEPA	Please do.
Apprentice	Thanks. There you can see the five approaches. I picked my approach by process of elimination really. Competing wasn't an option – we weren't in competition with each other, as such. If anything, the competition was between the team member and the person that didn't get the job. Collaborating means working together to come to a solution that meets both parties' needs. We couldn't really collaborate because the job had been awarded to someone else and there's unlikely to be another opportunity in the near future. Also, to be honest, while the team

	member is good at what they do they just aren't ready for a promotion and I don't think that they will be anytime soon. Similar with accommodating – I made the decision after the interview that they weren't the best candidate and I'm the manager. So I had to stand by the decision I made. I couldn't avoid the situation or the person – it was really stressful having to work with them every day. That just left me with compromising. None of this was easy and I wanted to get it sorted as soon as possible, it made the atmosphere in the office really unpleasant. HR were very supportive and helped me to cope. Fortunately, it was all dealt with within 10 days. After a lengthy meeting the team member did finally accept that they did not yet have the experience, or the breadth of knowledge needed for the job. It was a such a shame that they chose to go the formal complaint route – I would like to think it didn't damage our relationship but it has. It is difficult to think about them in the same way as I did before. Others in the team were affected by it too and struggled with the atmosphere it created. I think that knowing about the model helped as I hate conflict and left to myself I would have probably gone more down the avoiding route. But this situation wasn't going away and it was much better that the model made me deal with it.
IEPA	You also mentioned that there were external examples of times you've managed conflict?
Apprentice	Just once, fortunately.
IEPA	Could you tell me about that?
Apprentice	Yes. That was a situation when a printer had printed a booklet for one of the team. The team member was working with the art and design lecturers for an exhibition in the main building. The lecturers had asked us to arrange for some postcards to be printed showing a cross-section of their work. When the cards turned up, one of the images was upside down. Not that you or I would notice, but of course the artist did and was horrified – to the extent that they wouldn't allow the cards to be used. The comms exec came to me really upset. They were not only upset about the cards being wrong but by how much they had upset the lecturer when they asked, in all innocence, if it really mattered. In terms of Thomas-Kilmann this was a lot easier to deal with because we were the printer's customer. We checked through all the paperwork and my team member's original instructions were clear and correct, so I was able to be much more assertive with the supplier. It was their mistake and so it was their responsibility to put things right by printing them again free of charge overnight. The supplier didn't question it and although it was me that spoke to them, the comms exec did listen in so I hope it will give them confidence to be more assertive when they have clear evidence that they are in the right .

	I find it works really well to just be straight with people and get to the point. Having a good audit trail that clearly shows who is in the right and who's in the wrong is also helpful. It's much more difficult for someone to argue with objective evidence and I think that was a good learning point for the exec, how much easier it made everything that they had kept good records.
IEPA	Thank you. Staying with Building Relationships – can you tell me about how you have built trust within the team?
Apprentice	Yes, within the team it's been a bit difficult lately, given the conflict I mentioned earlier. That didn't help. Generally, though, I find it's been important to be consistent and reliable and for the team to know that I have their backs. Unless we pay for advertising we can't ultimately make publications print things and it can take a long time to build a relationship with a publication. It's important for the execs to feel that I will gladly contact the publication on their behalf if it will help them. In terms of being consistent, something that the self-awareness part of the apprenticeship has taught me is that it really doesn't and shouldn't matter if I have problems at home, or if I'm having a bad day to the team – I need to be to be consistent and ready to support them. I shouldn't support them one day and snap their heads off the next. You can't trust someone like that. Also, keeping confidences is really important in terms of building trust. Thinking about it, I suppose that's one way that the conflict was helpful. I never said a word about it to anyone in the team, including the person involved, unless it was in a formal meeting about it with HR present. I think some of the team feel, from the odd thing they have said to me, that they appreciated that. It was difficult enough for them as it was and I think they trust me now in that they know I won't ask them to take sides, or put them in the middle of anything.
IEPA	How important do you think knowing the individual team members and what's important to them is when building trust?
Apprentice	Very important. I do still feel quite badly affected by the conflict and it showed me that you can think you know someone, but you don't really. It taught me that things like the Friday afternoon catch up type of opportunities are really important, as they enable me to get to know the individual members of the team a bit better. It can take a long time to build trust and I think that the conflict example taught me that it can all go in minutes if you're not careful, if you don't know those within the team well.
IEPA	Okay, thank you. Moving on to Operations Management now, I'm interested in how you have supported and managed change in the workplace. Can you tell me a bit about that?
Apprentice	Oh, things are changing all the time for us. But probably the biggest change in the last 12 months has been the change in structure. The

	university decided to restructure, so instead of eight faculties there are now five. Each of the five has a new dean. The change saw a lot of the existing academic staff leave – a number of them were coming up for retirement anyway and saw it as an opportunity to go sooner rather than later. Some just didn't agree with the way some of the faculties were merged together and decided to look for a new job. So we were left with five rather than eight faculties and only a few existing members of staff left. Given what I said earlier about how much we need the lecturers to provide us with the stories we need to work with, it is important that we know the academics and that they know us and that they understand what we can do to help them. I decided that the best thing to do was to ask each Dean if I and the comms exec responsible for their faculty could have a 10-minute spot at one of their faculty meetings, so that I could give a brief presentation on the work we have done that relates to the new faculty in the past. I would also present insights into the work we do in general, how we have worked with the various faculties to date, and end by asking for feedback about how the faculty would like us to work with them going forward. All of the new faculties agreed and by the end of the month we had managed to get a slot at all of their faculty meetings. It has turned out to be the best thing we have done! It let the new faculties know that we were conscious of the change and were prepared to adapt the way we worked – that we sort of respected the change, really. The presentation also generally impressed the various faculties – I hadn't really thought about it before but while the individual lecturers knew what we had done for them, we hadn't really let the faculty as a whole know just how much work we had done for them altogether. That was the main thing I took away from the meetings – that I need to be more of a leader in terms of letting each faculty know just what a good job we were doing for them. Each faculty has now agreed for me and the relevant comms exec to attend the faculty meeting once a quarter to give an overview of what's happened in the last month, as well as what we are expecting to come through in the next month. So we went to the first one just last week. Not only was it good for the profile of my team, but it sparked lots of new ideas with academics seeing what others in the faculty were doing and feeling inspired by it. The Dean was also really supportive. Often we feel like us and the academics are on different sides – we see them as not appreciating what we do and them seeing us as giving them extra work to do, but after the meeting it felt like we were all on the same side – the side of the university.
IEPA	Moving on now to Project Management. As you know, I have had the opportunity to take a look at your presentation as part of your portfolio.

	What I am interested in hearing more about is how you used relevant project management tools during the delivery of your project.
Apprentice	My project was one of the largest bits of work I've ever done. Rebranding the University is a massive responsibility and it needed so many different people in so many other departments and facilities to do their bit at the right time. At the beginning, even trying to think of everything that needed to be done felt completely overwhelming. We'd been introduced to a number of different project management tools in the workshop we had on projects. There were project initiation forms, critical path analysers and Gantt charts. I really liked the Gantt charts – I am a visual person and really liked the 'at a glance' aspect. But also, they make you think about all the different tasks that need to done, when they need to be done by, who needs to do them and any associated costs. Well, once I got started I thought I would never stop. So many different tasks that needed to be done – more than I thought. After I had first listed the tasks and decided which faculty/department should be responsible, I went to see the relevant manager or academic and went through things with them. Most of the time I ended up with a longer list than I started with – but that was generally a good thing in that it stopped there being any grey areas or black holes! Also it meant that the different departments had agreed what they would take responsibility for; so, going back to leadership styles, it meant that it was a more participative approach which paid dividends. By the time I had finally finished the chart and emailed it out, everyone involved was happy to take responsibility for the tasks assigned to them – and with just the odd exception they all delivered. I colour-coded the tasks by department or faculty, so it was easy for everyone to see what they were responsible for, and I got feedback about that working really well. It was such a massive piece of work to get it done – but I reckon that overall it was really efficient. Without investing that time, I think some things would have been forgotten or just wouldn't have been done, as everyone would be sitting back expecting someone else to do it. The rebranding was something that needed to all go to plan. There was a launch party with all the senior management and local dignitaries there, and everything needed to be done: the signs on the gates, the road signs, the prospectus, the new uniforms for the reception staff – the whole lot. And I was really relieved that everything went to plan… some of it was a bit close for comfort but nothing major! The only weakness with a Gantt chart is that it doesn't always stand out as clearly as it could if one activity is dependent on others having been completed. So if I was giving any advice I would say do the Gantt chart but then do a critical path analysis. This would act as a test or check to make sure that all your timings work, and you may well identify where there is a bit of slack in the timings which is also helpful to do.

	So if you use both those approaches, you'll have a bit of a checks-and-balance effect in that one may help you identify something you may have missed by only doing one.
IEPA	Thanks. Let's move on to Finance. Can you tell me about how you monitor agreed budgets within the University?
Apprentice	Absolutely. I get an annual budget for the team. It's not as big as I'd like – but everyone feels like that don't they! The budget is generally based on what we got the previous year plus an uplift of about, on average, a couple of per cent. For big projects like the rebranding we get a separate budget allocation. As soon as I get the budget, I make up a spread sheet on Excel. With the spread sheet I make sure that monies are reserved for all the regular activity we do. For example, printing new leaflets for the stands in reception – we try to print as few as we can now and distribute PDFs instead but we still need some printed copies. Once I have done that, I have a much clearer view of what monies we have left. I do a subtotal against budget every month, so I can keep a check on things. I have to deliver within 1.5% of the budget at the end of the year and so keeping a monthly check helps keep me on course. I don't have to report the figures monthly myself, as the accounts team does that. Everything we do gets coded to our budget on an electronic purchase order and invoicing system. But the accounting system is a bit crude in that it just divides the budget by 12 and assumes that the same amount will be spent each month, which just isn't the case. Also, the accounts system only looks back on what we have spent – whereas my spread sheet gives a better view of where we stand financially now in relation to what we need to do throughout the rest of the year. While I don't report on the spreadsheet, it is really useful. For example, if I am at a faculty meeting and they are thinking about a project, I can tell them straight away if we are going to be able to support it from the existing budget, or if we will need to apply for additional funding – it's really helpful to be able to know that there and then.
IEPA	And that was my final question. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences with me. To give you some context – it will take 20 working days for the results to be sent through to your training provider. Your next stage is the presentation – scheduled for 2.15pm. What will happen is that I will bring your training provider and manager into the webinar and briefing them for a couple of minutes first. Then I will bring you into the webinar and make sure you are ready before we begin. Any questions before we take a short break?
Apprentice	No thank you, I'm all good.

IEPA	Well in that case, we'll call a halt to the interview and I'll see you again shortly.

Note: If the apprentice is unclear how to share their screen and run the presentation using the webinar system subject to time constraints there is an opportunity to ask for a few minutes to practise before ending this session.

Commentary

This example interview demonstrates a range of strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths

- The apprentice generally gives full answers.
- When the apprentice does give examples, they tend to be detailed and specific.
- The apprentice responds to follow-on questions directly and in some detail.
- The apprentice readily refers to and applies some relevant theory, although there were more opportunities to do so.

Weaknesses

- The apprentice tends to need prompting at times to give actual examples.
- The apprentice tends to 'describe' rather than 'evaluate' – it would have been good to see more evaluation coming through.
- There was some analysis but relatively little – it would have been good to see more analysis informed by relevant theory.
- The apprentice tends to refer to 'we' – a clearer focus on what they specifically do themselves could have been helpful.
- There is a lack of focus on the question at times, for example, referring to individuals when asked about teams.