

WHITE PAPER

## GRADUATE ASSESSMENT

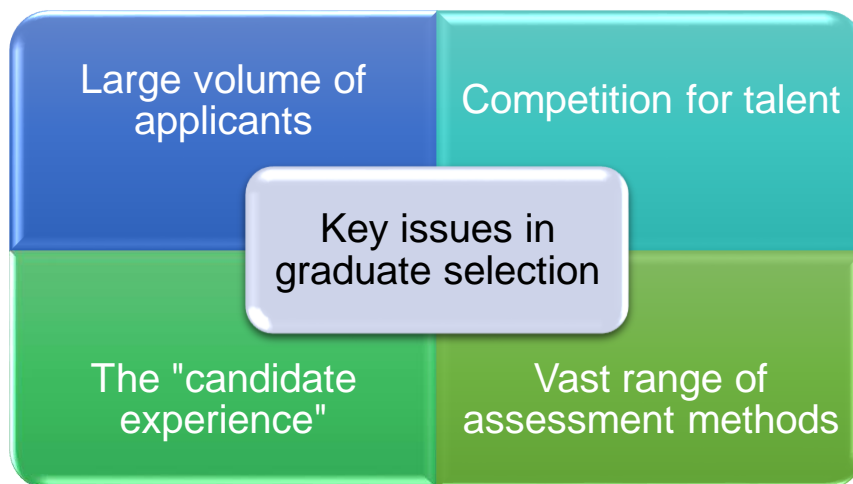
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### *Innovation and Best Practice*

February 2018

## Introduction

Graduate programs are a pivotal source of talent in enterprise organisations, with graduates often seen as the **'future leaders' of the organisation**. However, selecting these future leaders can be an extremely demanding and intense process, not least due to the tens of thousands of graduate applicants on the market each year. Graduate employers must also compete with one another for the best graduates from the same talent pool, not to mention that graduates will often apply to several graduate programs in order to maximise their chances of employment. Hence, the selection process for each graduate employer needs to also be engaging, relevant and enjoyable enough to retain the graduate and pique their interest until the program starts in the following year.



As graduates are potential future leaders, graduate employers need accurate selection methods that provide a holistic understanding about how each graduate might perform on the job. However, there are a wide range of graduate selection methods on the market, and the exponential rate of innovation in graduate assessment over the past 30 years has made it increasingly challenging for graduate program managers, HR specialists and internal recruiters to keep up with what's validated, what's trendy, and what simply doesn't work.

Based on our expertise as organisational psychologists, this paper will address the advantages and disadvantages of some of these recent innovations in selecting candidates, as well as in some of the more traditional methods that can be used in choosing the best graduates for your organisation from the applicant pool.

## Summary of selection methods

Below are the graduate selection methods that are addressed in more detail in this paper.

Assessment	When To Use	Be Aware
<b>Cognitive Ability Tests</b>	<p>Understand what a candidate “can do”.</p> <p>Screen out candidates based on an appropriate and relevant cut off mark.</p>	<p>Cognitive testing is the best predictor of future job performance, however, it isn’t the ‘be all and end all’. It is best to use cognitive ability tests in conjunction with structured interviews and personality measures.</p>
<b>Personality Profiling</b>	<p>To understand what a candidate “will do”.</p> <p>Get a well-rounded picture of the candidate’s personality attributes, e.g., team orientation, leadership style, planning and organisation, achievement drive, self-awareness, etc.</p>	<p>Generally, personality is stable over time, although some attributes may change with life events and we can adapt our behaviour to fit the situation, despite our preferences.</p> <p>Candidates may already have strategies in place to manage their ‘development areas’ while at work.</p>
<b>Structured Interview</b>	<p>To assess candidates on the same competency-related questions.</p> <p>Gain insight into how candidates have managed situations in the past.</p>	<p>Ensure you ask all candidates the same behavioural questions and use behaviourally anchored rating scales.</p> <p>Video interviewing may be more time efficient than face-to-face interviews.</p>
<b>Gamification</b>	<p>Depending on test, can provide both cognitive and personality information.</p> <p>A mode of test delivery with which graduates can identify.</p> <p>When assessing graduates for a fun and innovative workplace.</p>	<p>May give the wrong impression of the culture for some workplaces.</p> <p>As it is a relatively new method, validity and reliability is limited and tends to be vendor-led.</p>
<b>Situational Judgement Test (SJT)</b>	<p>Understand what candidates think are effective responses to realistic work scenarios.</p>	<p>As different SJTs assess different competencies, conduct a job analysis to choose the SJT that assesses the specific competencies needed.</p>
<b>Ability to Identify Criteria (ATIC)</b>	<p>An easily scored measure of graduate competencies.</p> <p>Resistant to faking.</p> <p>Can be used in your online application form.</p>	<p>Even if you don’t include ATIC questions, be aware that candidates’ ATIC affects their performance in interviews, ACs, and later on the job. Try not to let candidates know what competency you are assessing in each question or activity.</p>
<b>Multiple Mini Interview (MMI)</b>	<p>An innovative, engaging and time efficient alternative to the assessment centre.</p>	<p>Requires more assessors and training than the traditional assessment centre</p>

## Choosing the right assessment methods

These days, many organisations have competency frameworks that outline the **knowledge, skills and attributes** that are required to succeed at different levels of the organisation. These competency frameworks are then used in conjunction with position descriptions when making hiring decisions throughout an organisation. Whether your organisation has a competency framework in place, or not, it is important to keep in mind that graduate applicants should also be assessed against competencies that are critical for the role. In the case where a graduate employer doesn't have a competency framework, graduate competencies can be determined using job analysis techniques, such as reading position descriptions, observing the work of a graduate employee, and speaking to both employees and their managers about the knowledge, skills and attributes that are important for strong performance.

### Job-person and organisation-person fit



When selecting graduates, the '**fit**' between the graduate and the tasks that they perform at work (*person-job fit*), and with the culture of the organisation (*organisation-person fit*) are important to their success. A close fit between an individual and the requirements of their role has been shown to result in higher levels of job satisfaction, mental and physical wellbeing, increased pro-social behaviour, stronger teamwork, more positive energy and attitudes about the workplace, and lower turnover<sup>1 2</sup>. Hence, effective graduate selection methods should assess how well the graduate will fit with the organisation and their role, not only in the graduate program but in their future career with the organisation.



## Competency x method matrix

A **competency x method matrix** is a structured method to help you determine the most effective way to measure each of the competencies you need in your graduates. Creating a competency x method matrix also helps to determine whether you are using too few methods of assessing competencies, or too many.

Best practice is to try to **measure each competency at least three times**, for example, as below, measuring analytical problem solving through:

1. A behavioural question in the online application form
2. Cognitive ability assessment and
3. An activity in the assessment centre, e.g., a business analysis task

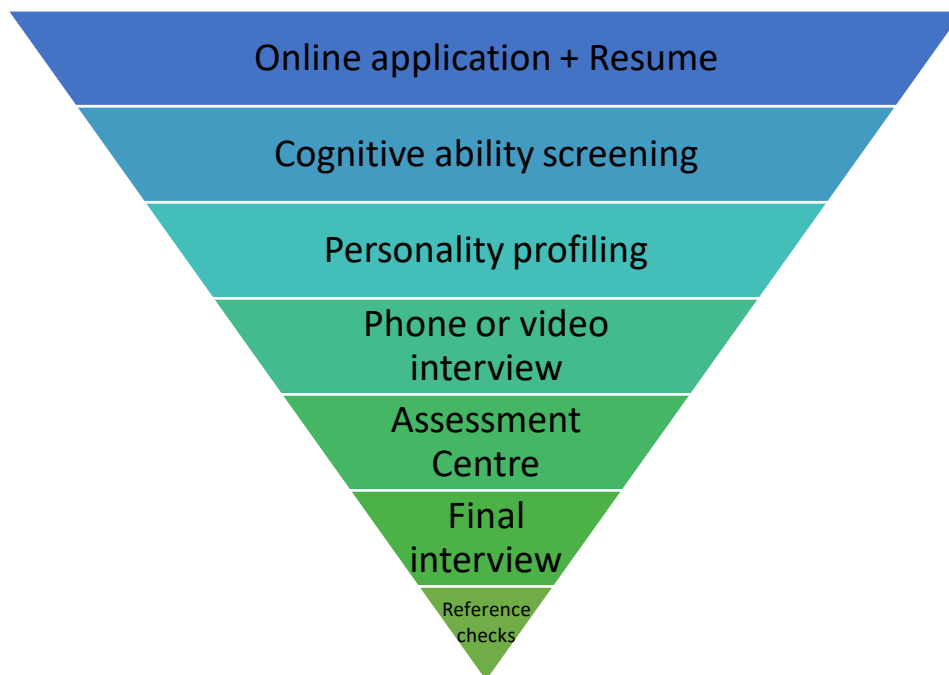
Competency	Assessment Method						
	Application Form	Cognitive Ability	Video Interview	Personality Profile	SJT	Assessment Centre	Resilience Test
Analytical Problem-solving	X	X				X	
Interpersonal Effectiveness				X	X	X	
Team work	X		X	X		X	
Creativity			X	X		X	
Resilience			X	X			X
Conscientiousness	X				X		

## Screening vs selection

In choosing assessment methods, one should also consider contextual factors such as the potential size of the candidate pool, budget, and the resources needed for each assessment method, etc. It is also worth considering which methods will be used to screen candidates out of the talent pool, versus which methods will be used to select candidates into the program. Then, you can start to think about the assessments that are right for your graduate program. We suggest that you look first to the enduring measures that are backed by decades of research (e.g., cognitive ability, structured behavioural interviewing, personality profiling), and then to recent innovations in testing.

## Current methods of screening and selection

Although there is some variability in the approach that graduate employers take to the screening and selection of graduates, there is also a lot of consistency across approaches. Typically, candidates are asked to complete an online application form and submit their résumé. From there, applicants are screened using cognitive ability testing and personality profiling. Those candidates who pass the screening process are then invited to a telephone or video interview, then an assessment centre, a final interview and reference checking.



There is a diverse range of views on the value of different elements of the above process, particularly regarding cognitive ability assessment and personality profiling in graduate applicants. This is generally due to concerns about the potential for faking in personality profiling and the fact that performance on the job is not just down to a person's intelligence. However, as we will explore below, there is strong evidence to suggest that best practice graduate selection assessment includes both cognitive ability testing and personality profiling.

## Cognitive ability testing

Despite popular opinions to the contrary, overwhelming scientific evidence indicates that cognitive ability testing remains the most powerful predictor of performance on the job<sup>3 4</sup> and, along with assessment centres and interviews, is one of the most common methods of selecting strong graduates.

Cognitive ability tests measure a person's ability to problem-solve, analyse, understand and adapt to new situations or challenges. Common types of cognitive testing include general mental ability, verbal reasoning, numerical reasoning, and abstract reasoning (which encompasses diagrammatic, inductive and deductive reasoning).

The benefit of using cognitive ability tests is that they are usually fairly quick to complete, can be completed online, and they allow you to compare candidates with graduate comparison groups. Thus, we recommend cognitive ability testing as an efficient tool used early in the graduate selection process to screen out candidates using cut off scores that are fair and relevant to the role.

That said, while we acknowledge the importance of cognitive ability in predicting performance on the job (particularly for more complex roles), in order to get the most well-rounded picture of the applicants for a graduate program, there are additional methods of graduate assessment that can provide further information to help select the best graduates for an organisation.



## Personality Profiling

Personality profiling has been used in employee selection for over a century. However, due to the perception that personality profiling can be ‘faked’, it was not always utilised in high volume and high stakes recruitment, such as in the selection of graduates. That being said, innovations in interpretation and usage of personality profiling have brought this method of assessment back into favour as a viable and helpful tool for graduate employers.



The most important reason that personality profiling has regained its place in employee selection in recent times is the research that shows that personality predicts job performance when the attributes assessed in the candidate align with those required in the roles. The personality attributes that are likely to be relevant in graduate recruitment may include, but are not limited to, attention to detail, assertiveness, team and leadership style, change orientation, compliance, resilience, and achievement drive. The advantage of including personality profiling is that you are able to build a well-rounded picture of an applicant. Thus, you can see not only what candidates *can* do (cognitive testing), but what they *will* do (personality profiling).

### Examples of personality profiling questions

*Please rate yourself on the following statements*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
I often plan ahead	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy meeting new people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
I sometimes take comments personally	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The inclusion of personality profiling helps to create a more holistic picture of graduate applicants which enables better predictions about how they are likely to behave in the workplace. It allows graduate program managers, HR specialists and recruiters to see where candidates’ personal strengths lie, and where they may require development. For example, a graduate applicant may have the technical skills they require and the capacity to learn quickly but may be less inclined towards team work and relationship building. Behavioural interviewing and reference checking questions can then be tailored to explore personal attributes that may require development on the job or could undermine their success. The broader benefit of using personality profiling is that onboarding and development can also be targeted for each candidate, making it a worthwhile long-term investment for the business.



## Structured interviewing

Employment interviews are the second most commonly used method of applicant screening, after resumes and application forms<sup>7</sup>. They are often used as a way to get to know a candidate, and for the candidate to get to know the organisation.

There are lots of different elements of interviews that can affect how valid an interview is, and how well it predicts job performance:

- Format: Structured vs unstructured
- Questions: Situational vs behavioural vs technical knowledge vs general
- Annotations: Descriptively anchored rating scales vs interviewer notes



The most effective interviews are those that are **structured**, use **behavioural questions**, and have **anchored rating scales** for each question. In fact, a combination of cognitive ability testing and structured interviews is one of the strongest assessment methods in predicting future job performances<sup>8</sup>.

In **structured interviews** each candidate is asked the same set of questions, thereby assessing all candidates on the same competencies. Structured interviews are more valid in predicting job performance criteria than unstructured interviews<sup>9</sup>.

There are various types of questions that can be asked in interviews. An interviewer might start with some **general** questions about the candidate to build rapport and to help the candidate. They might also ask specific **technical** questions regarding the knowledge or technical skills that a graduate is likely to need in the role. Both of these question types are relevant for graduate selection, although one needs to be aware of how rapport-building questions can bias an interviewer's perspective of a candidate<sup>10</sup>.

In addition to general and technical questions, situational and behavioural questions may be used to further understand how a candidate behaves on-the-job. **Behavioural** questions ask candidates about their past behaviour in a situation, and **situational** questions ask about what a candidate might do if they were faced with a particular situation in the future. Behavioural questions are more valid than situational questions in predicting future job performance<sup>11</sup>.

### Interview question examples

General question: *"What appeals to you about a graduate role with us at X?"*

Technical question: *"Describe your skill level at working with Excel"*

Behavioural question: *"Can you think of a time when...? What was the situation? What did you do? What was the outcome?"*

Situational question: *"Assume you were faced with the following situation... what would you do?"*

Finally, the notes taken during an interview with a candidate can also affect the validity of the assessment method, as these are often referred back to when making hiring decisions. Hiring managers might jot down notes about a candidate’s answers, verbal and non-verbal cues, etc, some of which may be relevant to the job, and others may be less relevant. In order to make interviews a fair and valid assessment measure that allow you to directly compare candidates, research suggests the use of **anchored rating scales** to assess answers to every interview question<sup>12</sup>.

**Example of a behaviourally anchored rating scale**

<i>Tell me about a time when you had to overcome difficult challenges to complete a piece of work? What were the challenges? What did you do? Were you successful?</i>				
1	2	3	4	5
Very Ineffective	Ineffective	Adequate	Effective	Very effective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Describes challenges</li> <li>– Discusses some impacts on self (and others)</li> <li>– Mentions how the challenge/s were tackled</li> <li>– Ineffective behaviours shown</li> <li>– Mentions the final outcome</li> </ul>	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Describes challenges</li> <li>– Discusses impact on self (and others)</li> <li>– Mentions their role in overcoming the challenge/s</li> <li>– Effective behaviours shown</li> <li>– Describes the final outcome</li> </ul>	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Describes challenges</li> <li>– Details impact on self (and others)</li> <li>– Specific about their role in overcoming the challenge/s</li> <li>– Highly effective behaviours shown</li> <li>– Describes final outcome</li> <li>– Mentions what they learned or would do differently</li> </ul>
Notes				Rating

## Innovations in graduate assessment

### Gamification

Gamification is a huge trend in assessment at the moment, particularly for graduate recruitment,<sup>13</sup> with several testing companies and some graduate employers creating their own gamified assessments. Gamified or game-based psychometric assessment is the application of typical elements of game-playing (e.g. competition, graphics, storyline, point scoring) to psychometric assessment, to assist with selecting candidates for a role. The aim is to change the candidate experience from a serious test to a fun game, thus engaging candidates and improving employer branding, while still assessing attributes that are relevant to the role.



For an example of a game-based psychometric assessment, check out the *Australian Secret Intelligence Service's* new assessment at [www.morehumanintelligence.com.au](http://www.morehumanintelligence.com.au)

Gamification is still 'young' in the world of psychometric assessments. Although graduate employers who have designed bespoke gamified psychometric assessments or use off-the-shelf products have provided evidence of their validity and value in their unique contexts, there is currently very little published evidence to suggest that they accurately measure cognitive ability and/or personality, and predict performance on the job.<sup>14 15</sup> In addition, the research that is available appears to have been led by the test publishing companies.

Not only is the research on game-based psychometric assessments extremely sparse, but specific guidelines of best practice are still being developed as the field learns about this novel approach. Furthermore, a job application is an important process, and there is some feedback to suggest that, while some applicants might prefer the 'fun' experience of a game-based assessment, if the job or work culture is 'serious' then it may be sending out the wrong message to candidates, as candidates should always be given a realistic preview of a role<sup>16</sup>. It's an exciting new field though, and the next few years will surely see advances in this type of testing.

## Situational Judgement Tests

Although situational judgement tests have been around since WWII, it is only more recently that they have started to become popular in graduate selection. They are designed to predict non-cognitive aspects of job performance such as service orientation, ethical decision-making, resilience, interpersonal awareness, or managerial style.



Situational judgement tests provide candidates with realistic, hypothetical scenarios that are similar to those they would encounter on the job. For each scenario, the candidate chooses the most effective response, or ranks the responses in order of effectiveness. Rather than being a subjective measure of behaviour, such as personality profiling, situational judgement tests have correct and incorrect responses. Thus, the situational judgement test assesses how an individual is likely to behave in certain work situations, based on their answers to the scenarios.

### Example situational judgement question

*You are working in a project team and, when presenting in front of the client, another team member takes credit for the large amount of important work that you have done.*

*Using the below scale, rate how effective the following courses of action are:*

	Highly Ineffective	Ineffective	Effective	Highly Effective
Raising the issue in front of the client	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not raising the issue with anyone	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Speaking to the team member later on	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Speaking to your manager about the issue	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

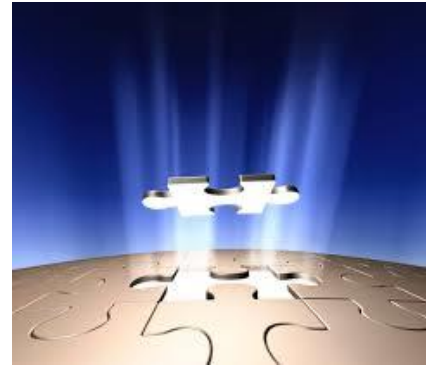
Situational judgement tests are standardised, objective measures that are easy to administer, can be completed online, can be readily scored, and are a good predictor of job performance<sup>17</sup>. They are a cost-effective method of objectively assessing a broad range of candidate attributes in large-scale recruitment programs. In addition, they are less amenable to faking or distortion than interviews or personality questionnaires, for example, because there are correct and incorrect responses<sup>18</sup>. Candidates are also able to see the relevance of the scenarios to the job. Consider how situational judgement tests could fit into your graduate selection process or be used as a development tool during the graduate program.

## Ability to Identify Criteria (ATIC)

The Ability to Identify Criteria (ATIC) refers to the candidate's ability to correctly perceive the attributes or competencies that are required on the job and being measured by a particular method of selection, such as assessment centre exercises or questions in an interview.

Research indicates that candidates who can accurately identify the attribute being assessed by an interview question or assessment task also score highly on that attribute in the particular selection method<sup>19</sup>. That is, if you know what you are being assessed on, you tend to score more highly on it.

More importantly, there is emerging evidence to show that ATIC is a job-relevant ability. That is, candidates' capacity to identify the attributes measured in various selection procedures predicts not only their performance in the selection procedure, but also predicts their performance on the job<sup>20</sup>.



### ATIC example question

*From the list below, please select the competency that you think was being assessed in the previous interview question.*

- Building relationships
- Negotiation
- Assertiveness

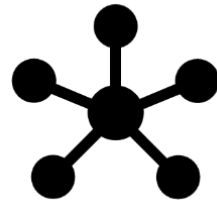
(The correct answer is determined in advance and would vary depending on the role and organisation.)

Like the Multiple Mini Interview approach to assessment centres, which is discussed next, ATIC measures have been of particular interest in the selection of medical students. ATIC also seems to have potential applications in other high volume, high stakes recruitment assignments, such as graduate recruitment.

ATIC questions are a cost-effective screening method that can be designed specifically for an organisation's graduate program. They can be incorporated into the initial online application form or into an assessment centre.

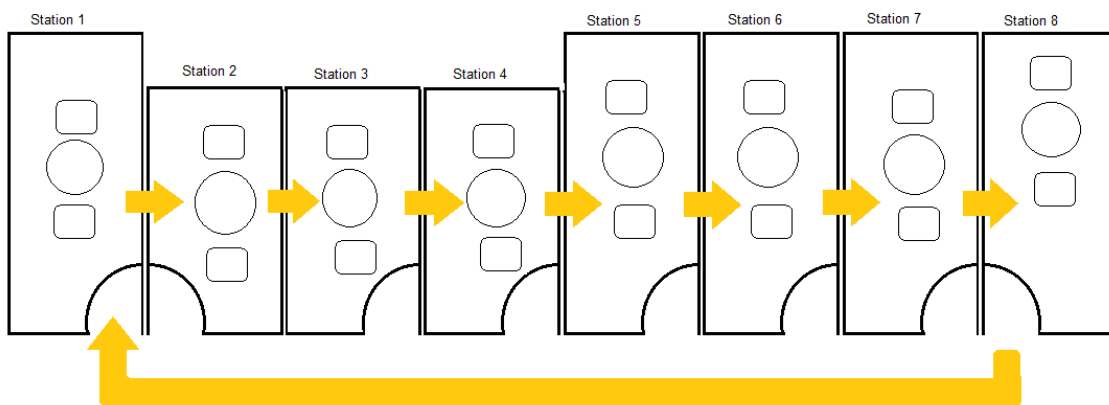
## Multiple Mini Interviews (MMI) – an alternative to the traditional assessment centre

The Multiple Mini Interview (MMI) is best thought of as a modified assessment centre, rather than an interview. The MMI consists of a series of brief interview or activity stations through which candidates cycle one after the other, a little like 'speed dating'. Each station assesses a different competency using either an interview question or an activity (e.g. a role play, an analytical task, a work simulation). A typical MMI can comprise 9-10 stations lasting around 5-10 minutes each. Once all candidates have completed all stations, the results are integrated, and selection decisions are made.



Developed initially at McMaster University in Canada as a more efficient and reliable alternative to the panel interview, the MMI is now used worldwide for selection in various medical and healthcare fields. This method of assessment has demonstrated reliability and validity as a predictor of job and training performance<sup>21</sup> and is acceptable to both candidates and assessors.

### Example MMI flow



Because the MMI comprises a range of interview or activity stations, it can be considered as an alternative method to the traditional assessment centre (group activity, role play and interview). It is less time consuming than a traditional assessment centre, assessors find it less tiring and onerous, candidates like the fact that they can recover after a poor performance in one station and start afresh with a different observer in the next, and it seems to be a fair method of assessment for a diverse candidate pool<sup>22</sup>. For an innovative approach, consider incorporating MMI to graduate assessment centres.

## Conclusion

Selecting graduates is an important part of an organisation's long-term success. It presents unique challenges but can also be very rewarding, as the graduates grow as professionals within your organisation. The inclusion of a valid and reliable assessment process, that is both best-practice and innovative, can help to ensure that the graduates you select are the best fit for the role and will perform well in your organisation.

If you're interested in engaging advisory services for graduate selection, reach out to our team at Allworth Juniper Organisational Psychologists for a complimentary graduate selection consultation on [office@allworthjuniper.com.au](mailto:office@allworthjuniper.com.au) or +61 2 9223 2774.



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# Allworth Juniper

organisational psychologists

## About us

We aim to be Australia's centre of excellence in psychological assessment and testing for employee selection and development. We work with our clients to minimise the risk of mis-hiring by designing and implementing rigorous selection techniques and services. We also help build the skill and confidence of managers and supervisors to communicate performance feedback effectively, to coach for performance and career development, and to conduct effective behavioural interviews.

Allworth Juniper Organisational Psychologists was established by Elizabeth Allworth PhD and Kate Juniper in 1997. In the years since then, Allworth Juniper has built a reputation as a provider of high quality psychological assessment and occupational testing services.

With a select team of high calibre psychologists, and with both a national and global reach, and the Allworth Juniper team share a commitment to supporting organisations in their selection decisions and the development of their people using best in class assessments and methodologies.

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