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Case study scenario examples

Current undergraduate students

1. *You are in the process of applying to graduate schemes and identify an advert for an interesting entry-level role with a small marketing agency, which you are keen to apply for, based on the job description. You are feeling unsure about some of the wording about their values though. For example, they say things like: 'We are seeking an energetic, lively, person who naturally puts others at ease'....as well as saying, 'we have a work-hard, play-hard culture, striving for success, giving our all and celebrating our wins as we go on this journey together'. Finally, they talk about joining them to 'become part of our welcoming, fun-loving family'.*

Suggested guiding questions:

- *What concerns might you have as an applicant applying for this role and why?*
- *How could you find out more about the employer and their values?*

You may want to take a look at [this article](#) to support your discussion

2. *You are in the process of searching for summer internships and sandwich year opportunities and you are pleased to be offered a sandwich year role with an organisation you are keen on joining. During the process, you haven't discussed salary, but you are assuming it will be paid. You currently have a part time job, which is a vital source of income and would be giving this up to take on the placement. To your surprise, when the employer calls to make you the offer, they explain that as this is part of your degree (and you don't have very much relevant experience) the role would be on an unpaid basis, but there might be an opportunity for a paid position when you graduate if you impress them during your placement year. You can't afford to accept their offer as it stands but are worried you won't find something else.*

Suggested guiding questions:

- *How could you approach discussing your dilemma with the employer? Are there any options you could ask them about?*
- *Is there a problem with the position the employer is taking? (e.g., from a legal standpoint, an ethical standpoint or both)?*

You may want to take a look at [this article](#) to support your discussion

3. *You are looking into finding an overseas placement for your sandwich year and connect with an agency who are offering to match students with host companies in your preferred location, so you send them your CV. When you investigate further, you find out that the majority of placements they offer are unpaid. The agency also requires you to pay a substantial finder's fee before you start the selection process; and you would need to source your own accommodation and flights. They also provide a list of other costs you will need to cover yourself, including day-to-day living costs and insurance. When you phone the agency to query this, they advise that if you really want a placement (and with your background and small amount of experience in an office environment) you are not going to be able to compete for paid placement roles and may also struggle to find work when you graduate. They go on to say that it's very normal for students in your position to pay a fee to secure a placement as part of their degree studies; and you should seriously consider letting them sort it out for you. They also tell you that you need to decide in the next week, or it will be too late. They signpost you to reviews from happy placement students on their website and advise you not to delay your decision.*

Suggested guiding questions

- *The employer uses language to normalise the idea of paying to gain a placement. Is this normal?*
- *How do you feel about the way the employer is communicating?*

You may want to take a look at [this article](#) to support your discussion

4. *You are invited to an interview for a summer internship and call the recruitment coordinator at the company to let them know you require wheelchair access. They inform you that they are really sorry, but the hiring manager has decided they are only doing in-person interviews at the moment and that the room where they will be interviewing candidates unfortunately doesn't have step-free access. They don't believe there is a solution they are able to suggest at the moment and say they will have to get back to you once they have spoken to the hiring manager. You wait to hear from them the next day, but don't receive any follow-up.*

Suggested guiding questions

- *What adjustments could the recruitment coordinator look at to help you to attend the interview?*
- *How would you approach following up with them?*
- *If you are in the position of the applicant here, are there other choices you might decide to make in this situation?*

You may want to take a look at [this article](#) to support your discussion

5. *You are working in a part-time retail role at a large food retailer to earn some income alongside your studies. You are in a team meeting one week, when your manager asks for a volunteer to help with promotional materials they have been sent by head office to celebrate and raise awareness of Pride Month. You decide to volunteer and spend time ensuring the decorations are displayed in-store, along with information for the public on local community events. One week into Pride Month, you take some annual leave. When you return, you find the decorations and information materials have been removed. When you check in with your manager, she says that another team member had suggested taking them down as they had questioned whether they were on-brand and said they were worried about challenges and reactions from some of the regular customers. They also said another team member who had raised concerns had felt the decorations were starting to look messy.*

Suggested guiding questions

- *If you had to give this situation a name or a short description, what would you describe it as?*
- *What options do you have in this situation and how would you decide on the approach to take?*

You may want to take a look at [this article](#) to support your discussion

Finalist scenarios

6. *You attend a final round interview for a graduate level role and are excited to learn more about the team and meet some additional people you would be working with if you secured the position. The interview goes really well and at the end you are given a chance to ask some questions. You ask what the panel members most enjoy about their roles and what they find most challenging. This results in a lively and interesting discussion. One of the panel members jokes that she sometimes finds it challenging covering for colleagues who have other commitments (such as childcare) during busy periods and then follows up by asking you if you have children yourself.*

Suggested guiding questions

- *What concerns might you have in this situation?*
- *What options do you have as an applicant who faces this type of question at interview?*

You may want to take a look at this [government advice for employers](#) to support your discussion and/or [this advice for applicants](#).

This article from HBR also has some further reading on [red flags to watch out for at interview](#).

7. *You attend a first-stage interview for a role on a graduate scheme you are keen on, following a long application form and having to undertake and pass a range of psychometric tests. You notice the panel seem surprised for a short moment when you enter the room (as though they were perhaps expecting a different person - one of them even looks at your application paperwork and re-checks your name a second time). The interview goes well, and they seem keen to know more about your final year project. You talk them through the basics of it and one of the panel members then asks you for some further technical details, which you provide accordingly. They seem very pleased and interested and advise you will know the outcome in a few days' time. However, when they call with feedback, they share that you have been unsuccessful. They say that whilst you were very much appointable, a couple of your answers were 'too technical', and they felt that one of the other candidates had a more engaging communication style that would better-suit their client group.*

Suggested guiding questions:

- *What concerns might you have in this situation?*
- *How would you name or describe this situation?*
- *How would you respond to this feedback?*

Watch [this video](#) to learn about how Tom (first interviewee in the video) navigated this type of situation.

8. *You are relatively new in your graduate role when you are invited to a team social event. During the event, you notice that one of your colleagues is looking very uncomfortable due to the amount and type of attention they are receiving from your team manager. You observe them trying to move away and increase their personal space. You can't hear what is being said (it's quite noisy) but you observe that your colleague seems uneasy about the situation and suspect they are looking for a way out of it.*

Suggested guiding questions:

How would you name or describe this situation?

What steps could you take (in the moment or afterwards) to support your colleague?

You may want to take a look at [this article](#) to support your discussion.

9. *You apply to a graduate scheme you are interested in and are pleased (after several tricky stages) to be invited to a final interview. Early on in the discussion, one of the panel members apologises for mispronouncing your name. You tell her not to worry at all and go on to explain her how your name is pronounced. Another panel member then steps in to ask whether you have another - shorter or easier to pronounce - name that they can call you instead? You are unsure how to proceed as you would prefer to be known by your given name.*

Suggested guiding questions:

- *How do you feel about the way the employer is communicating?*
- *How could you respond to this request?*
- *What concerns might this discussion raise for you about the organisation?*

You may want to take a look at [this article](#) to support your discussion or [this project](#) at the University of Warwick.

10. *You attend interview with for a graduate role and are considering asking for a reasonable adjustment as you are neurodivergent and are worried about the interview format. In particular, the wording and pace of the interview questions is an area where you have struggled in previous interviews. On checking through the invite email from the employer, they haven't specifically invited you to let them know about any adjustments you need (and you are unsure about how they will view it the situation you share the information with them) so you decide to proceed without letting them know. On the interview date, you feel well prepared and do well with the questions from the first two interviewers. The third interviewer is more rushed in his approach than the previous two though. It feels like he is firing questions at you one after the other, without giving you a chance to consider before answering. Afterwards, you are worried that you have underperformed on the last few questions as a result of this. About a week later, you find out you have been unsuccessful in securing the role.*

- *Putting yourself in the position of this student, are there any options you could consider to approach this differently in the lead-up to the interview?*
- *What are the risks of not letting an employer know about adjustments you may need?*

You may want to take a look at [this article](#) to support your discussion

Graduate Scenarios (postgrad cohorts, finalist cohorts)

11. *You have been working for your graduate employer for about 18 months when a promotion you are interested in comes up in your immediate team. You decide to apply for the role and decide to have a chat with the hiring manager to find out more. The hiring manager advises that they would discourage you from applying as they don't feel you would be the 'right' for the role just yet. They advise you to wait for the next opportunity, which they assure you will come up in a few months' time. A few days later, you speak to a colleague on the same level as you who joined at the same time. You have had similar feedback and grading in appraisals. You find out that the same hiring manager has strongly encouraged him to apply and has offered him additional advice on how to approach the selection process. You reflect on the fact that your colleague has been able to get more facetime with the hiring manager as he has attended a few socials you missed due to other family commitments.*

- *How would you name or describe this situation?*
- *Are there any follow-up questions you could ask the hiring manager?*

You may want to take a look at [this article](#) to support your discussion.

12. *You are part of an interview panel for a vacancy in your team and as part of this, you have been asked to take part in shortlisting meetings. Following an agreed shortlist being submitted, you attend a follow-up interview planning meeting. The chair of the panel mentions he has now heard that one of the shortlisted candidates requires a reasonable adjustment to the interview process. They have requested more time to complete a written test you will be setting, which is due to a disability they have disclosed. The chair shares that he doesn't feel he wants to offer them more time as he is concerned that, this would translate into them 'needing more time to complete the work involved in the role if they were hired.' He plans to go back to HR and push back on this adjustment request.*

- *What concerns do you have about the course of action the chair plans to take?*
- *How could you raise these concerns with them?*
- *How could you challenge their assumptions?*

You may want to take a look at this [information from ACAS](#) to support your discussion.

13. *In your new role, you are part of a large and diverse team. Amongst your team members, you have a Jamaican colleague, two Ghanaian colleagues and a colleague from Nigeria. One day, a colleague from another part of the business comes to your office looking for help from a particular team member. She starts by saying: 'I am really sorry, but you all look so similar in this team; and I get confused and can never remember who's who! You all have similar hairstyles at the moment too....' She says this with a laugh and a smile and some other people, including the team members she is referring to, laugh awkwardly, before somebody points her in the direction of the right person. After she finishes the discussion with your colleague, she apologises briefly, says she will try harder to put names to faces next time and then asks the four colleagues who were affected by her mistake to repeat their names back to her to help her remember and help her avoid future embarrassment.*

- *How would you name or describe this situation?*
- *What steps could you take (in the moment or afterwards) to support the colleagues in your team?*

You may want to take a look at [this article](#) to support your discussion.

14. *You are part of a team organising a staff party at your office have seen feedback from previous events, in which some staff say they felt excluded. One criticism was that the last event was very alcohol-centric, and another mentioned that some team members were not able to attend due to the timings. Some colleagues on the events team are reluctant to make changes to the planned format as they perceive that doing this would 'create more work to cater to the needs of a relatively small number of people' and they 'don't have enough time or energy to change the plan at this late stage so would prefer to go with something that the majority of people will enjoy and be happy with.'*

- *What concerns do you have about the course of action your colleagues are proposing to take? What are some of the impacts or consequences if they follow this course of action?*
- *How could you challenge their assumptions?*

You may want to take a look at [this article](#) from Mental Health UK to support your discussion (the whole article is useful and there is a specific section on social events).

15. *After completing your 2-year graduate scheme, you are pleased to have secured a job offer for a next-step role with an exciting startup business in your field of interest. The salary was not advertised on the job advert and when you ask about this. The employer asks you what your expectations are and what you are currently earning. You are a bit unsure where to start with these questions.*

- *How do you feel about the way the employer is communicating?*
- *How could you respond to this request?*

You may want to take a look at [this article from Milkround](#) and [this campaign](#)