EXCELLENCE IN CUSTOMISED ASSESSMENT

RUNNER UP

OVERVIEW

We worked with Unlocked to introduce an animated Situational Judgement Test (SJT) to their prison officer recruitment process. The SJT provided a robust and efficient way of both increasing engagement and improving the calibre of people coming through to the Assessment Centre, with reduced adverse impact. This work not only achieved its aims but has been recognised within the industry as an example of best practice and innovation in recruitment.

CHALLENGE

At Unlocked Graduates, the challenge throughout the selection process was to ensure they were recruiting applicants who could meet a high standard of behavioural competence, whilst educating them on the role of a prison officer and what to expect on the programme, and to do so in a manner that minimised adverse impact.

APPROACH

To design the bank of scenarios, Sten10 started the process by running job analysis meetings with individuals and focus groups. We wrote a wide range of scenarios, working with Unlocked to ensure that these scenarios were both targeted and varied enough to assess Unlocked attributes, and educated applicants on different elements of the programme. After an initial pilot to check the quality of questions, we eventually

piloted fifteen final scenarios on 100+ participants on the programme to help set a pass rate.

Unlocked wanted to create visual and interactive resources alongside each scenario, however due to Covid restrictions and security, they were unable to film in prisons and therefore explored options involving animation. Previous research indicated that adding a video element not only increased the validity of the test, but also reduced adverse impact;

therefore, we advised this would likely support Unlocked's aims. Unlocked put out a tender for an agency to support with creating the animations and commissioned 'Digifish' to work with them. We supported in the choice of supplier by reviewing their example items and previous work. There were several challenges when creating the animations that needed to be overcome:

- How to depict the prison environment without it being too bleak; avoiding traditional "prison imagery."

- Ensuring the characters were not clearly identifiable by gender or race, to avoid stereotyping.

- Creating animations that would not impair the assessment purpose or guide applicants in any way to a specific response.

- Whether to include music/voiceovers and how to avoid bias with this.

- Obtain sign off from the Ministry of Justice that the animations did not falsely depict the role of a prison officer.

We addressed these challenges by having regular meetings with Digifish and Unlocked and discussing feedback with the animator at the early stages to establish the look and feel of each scenario.

- We felt that opting for a grey character and subtle depictions of the uniform would address any issues of personally identifying with the individual, would make the scenario clear, and would avoid a very "prison-specific" look.

- We included a voiceover but opted for a neutral accent that we signed off as unlikely to induce bias. We selected a female voice for the voiceovers to challenge the psychological phenomena known as 'stereotype threat'; whereby people who do not feel they may 'fit in' to a role or organisation tend to perform worse due to interfering thoughts. This also challenged the stereotype that all prison officers are male.

- Adverse impact was also minimised by providing practice materials in advance.

OUTCOME

The Situational Judgement Test was launched with fifteen scenarios and corresponding animations in September 2020. A significant impact was seen in terms of Unlocked's core objectives:

- Increase in completion rates of 75%, achieving over and above Unlocked's initial target of 70%, and nearly doubling their previous conversion rate.

- Difference in sift-out rates for those from ethnic minority backgrounds improved from 20% to 13%.

- As a final point, Unlocked was pleased to see that 22% of those who passed the assessment centre were in the above average percentile score of the SJT, compared to 16% of those who passed telephone screening. This demonstrated that the Situational Judgement Test showed some predictive criterion validity for later stages of the assessment process and was therefore a suitable sifting tool that delivered quality applicants to the organisation.

Positive feedback from applicants who went through the application process included the following:

- "The Situational Judgement Test was a really helpful and short insight as to what working within a prison would be like. Picking an answer that would be your natural instinct / approach within a certain situation allows you to see if you would be able to handle issues that do arise in a challenging environment and alert you as to whether the role would be for you."

- "The Situational Judgement Test gives you a really good insight the overall values that Unlocked hold. I found it helpful with what to expect at the assessment centre and it also gives you an idea of the kinds of things you are likely to come across whilst on the scheme."

- "It's a great way to find out whether you think that you would be a good fit for the role!"

- "It really made me realise that this is 100% the ideal job for me, learnt what the prison officer role entails, and although I acknowledged that the situations can be really challenging, I became so excited by the possibility of working for Unlocked and being able to make the right decisions and help change people's lives, which motivated me more."