

Generic Graduate

General competency framework · Professional level · 5 competencies · approx. 75 minutes

How to use this guide

- Focus on these 5 competencies — the behaviours that matter most for this role — not a chronological career history.
- Ask every candidate the same core questions, then probe. Allow around 15 minutes per competency.
- Ask for real examples and use STAR — the Situation, the Task, the Action they took, and the Result.
- Stay neutral, capture what they say, and judge later. Gather evidence on one competency at a time.
- Rate each competency 1–5 against the positive and negative indicators, and note the evidence.

5 Outstanding 4 Good 3 Acceptable 2 Marginal 1 Poor

1. Personal Development

Takes responsibility for their own development, setting clear goals in the process. Seeks out new development opportunities, learning from their successes and failures. Proactively asks others for feedback.

Why this matters for Generic Graduate: Universally named #1 across triangulated sources (AGCAS, ISE Annual Recruitment Survey, CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey, FindMyWhy generic graduate evidence). Graduates are pre-experience by definition; the rate at which they learn is what differentiates the high performers from the rest. ISE: 90%+ of employers select for this. CBI: consistently top-rated. AGCAS: explicit competence.

Tell me about the last time you identified and proactively pursued a learning and development opportunity?

- How did you identify the opportunity?
- What did you have to do to pursue it?
- What obstacles did you face? How did you overcome these?
- What did you learn? How have you applied this to your work?
- What is next for you in terms of your personal/professional development?
- How does this fit with your broader career/life goals?

Describe what you see as your key strengths and areas for development

- How does your view compare with how others might experience you?
- How do you know? What feedback have you sought from others?
- What are you doing to leverage these strengths?
- How are you planning to address the development needs?
- What will this give you?

Describe a situation where you received negative/ constructive feedback.

- How did it make you feel?
- How have you modified your behaviour in the light of the feedback?
- Can you think of a situation where you have taken feedback personally?
- Why was this? What did you do in this situation?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
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Fails to identify own development needs or does so superficially		Identifies own development needs
Identifies needs but waits for these to be addressed – does not proactively create or seize opportunities		Acts on development needs – creates and seizes opportunities
Lacks the passion and commitment to overcome barriers to personal development		Is passionate about personal development and overcomes barriers to pursuing development opportunities
Is guarded about own strengths and development needs		Is open and able to clearly articulate strengths and development needs
Recognises that there are opportunities for personal development but fails to translate these into clear development goals and plans		Sets self clear development goals
Is focused on development in the here and now. Is unable to articulate a development plan to support longer term career goals		Considers development for both current role but also future career aspirations
Does not seek or is not open to developmental feedback from others		Open to feedback on performance from others
Fails to act on or respond to feedback – rather repeats the same behaviour		Uses feedback to modify or change behaviour to improve performance
Tends to take feedback personally rather than view it as an opportunity to improve and grow		Sees feedback as an opportunity to improve and grow and proactively seeks this from others
Fails to review and rationalise mistakes and use these as opportunities for learning – sees mistakes as negative		Learns from mistakes – uses these as opportunities to learn

Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1–5): _____

2. Decision Making

Understands critical success factors and assesses a range of possible options before making a decision. Steps back and seeks alternative perspectives when faced with unfamiliar scenarios. Willing to make decisions without access to all the information. Considers the implications of their decisions beyond the immediate issue.

Why this matters for Generic Graduate: Assessment centres consistently test this through case studies, in-tray exercises, and group exercises. AGCAS names explicitly; CBI rates highly. The graduate's first 18 months involves making consequential decisions with incomplete information across rotations and projects — this is the cognitive-and-judgement combination employers test for at AC.

Describe a situation where you had to assess a number of possible options prior to making a decision.

- What were the options? Which did you choose?
- What criteria did you use to make the decision?
- What were the pros and cons of the other options?
- What was the outcome?
- What was the business impact of the decision?

Tell me about a time when you felt it was necessary to seek alternative perspectives/refer a decision upwards before taking action.

- What was the context?
- Why did you choose to refer/seek other perspectives?

- What challenges did this add to the decision making process?
- How did this help you/impact the quality of the final decision?
- To what extent do you still seek support/refer in this area?

Tell me about a time where you feel you were too hasty with your decision making/failed to consider the knock on implications of your decision?

- What makes you say that?
- Why did you feel you needed to be hasty/fail to consider consequences?
- What would have been the implications if you had deferred/understood the impact?
- What lessons have you learned from this? How has this informed your approach?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Makes decisions without a clear understanding of critical success factors and without clear criteria against which to analyse particular courses of action		Ensures they have clarity on criteria and critical success factors prior to engaging in decision making
Is rather blinkered in decision making – fails to consider the full range of alternatives or to accept that there may be alternative options		Considers a range of alternatives/options when making decisions and objectively assesses the pros and cons of these
Makes decisions without a full understanding of the wider context and the knock on implications		Appreciates the business impact of decisions – understands the wider ramifications and implications
Goes it alone, failing to get support or alternative perspectives where this is required (e.g. in unfamiliar situations/where information is incomplete)		Understands where additional perspectives could support the decision making process and is prepared to seek support and guidance prior to making decision
Fails to apply and adapt learnings from previous experience or trust tacit knowledge when dealing with novel situations		Applies and adapts previous experience to novel situations
Fails to consider a range of angles or the implications of different courses of action. Focuses exclusively on hard facts/quantifiable information at the expense of the emotional/ people aspects of the situation		Considers issues from a range of angles (e.g. cost, risk, impact, benefit, short and long term opportunities, impact on people)
Rushes into decisions – is hasty and often makes decision on the basis of a superficial analysis		Willing to make decisions and take calculated risks on the basis of absent/incomplete information
Shies away from making difficult/contentious decisions. Abdicates responsibility or defers the judgement to others		Is prepared to make and stand by difficult decisions

Summary of evidence: _____ **Rating (1–5):** _____

3. Organisational Skills

Establishes clear priorities and builds plans to ensure delivery on time. Works in a systematic manner and manages resources efficiently. Quickly adapts plans as circumstances require. Sees things through to completion.

Why this matters for Generic Graduate: Graduate schemes select for ability to manage workload across multiple workstreams, projects, and rotations. CBI names 'self-management' as consistently top-rated; ISE explicit on workload management. Time management and priority-setting under uncertainty is universally tested across graduate scheme contexts.

Tell me about a time when you were responsible for implementing a plan.

- What stages did you work through – how did you plan for success?
- On what basis did you determine priorities?
- How did you allocate resources?
- What were some of the risks? How did you identify & manage these?
- What happened when things did not go to plan?
- What methods did you use to monitor progress?
- What was your key learns from this process?

We are often faced with conflicting demands on our time. Can you give a specific example of when you have had to prioritise work activity?

- How did you go about making decisions about the priorities?
- How do you know that you were effective in your prioritisation?
- How could you have increased your effectiveness?
- How did you manage distractions and stay focused on the right things?
- Tell me about a time when you have had to shift your priorities in response to emerging business needs?

Describe a time when you have organised scarce resources to get the best result possible for the business

- How did you go about doing this?
- How did you monitor progress?
- What was the outcome?
- What would you do differently next time?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Fails to appreciate the importance of planning and review to successful task delivery		Creates comprehensive plans to increase the chances of successful delivery
Is less structured and methodical in approach		Adopts a structured and systematic approach to tasks
No evidence of contingency planning for changing circumstances/unforeseen issues. Fails to proactively assess and manage risk to delivery		Includes detailed contingency plans for delivery. Anticipates and mitigates risk to plans
Shows limited ability/willingness to flax and deviate from the plan in the light of new information/ circumstances		Quick to rethink/reformulate plans in the light of new information/unforeseen events
Fails to establish clear priorities therefore does not manage self/use own time as effectively as they could		Manages self and own time effectively by being clear on priorities
Fails to manage conflicting demands on time – lets real priorities slip or becomes overloaded		Able to (re)prioritise and juggle priorities on the basis of new information/changing circumstances
Is wasteful with resources or does not deliberately plan resources based on anticipated returns		Manages resources effectively – considering where to best place resources to generate maximum value
No clear structure/process evident for managing progress /measuring performance to time, budget and quality		Puts clear structures and processes in place for monitoring/managing progress to time, budget & quality
Loses cool when things do not progress as expected – increases effort without tackling the source of the issue or checking the expected return on the increase in effort		Responds calmly when things go off track. Creates time to take stock and review when feeling under pressure to respond and deliver

May move onto the something new prior to completing the task in hand		Sees things through to completion
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Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1-5): _____

4. Collaborative Working

Looks to understand others' perspectives and objectives. Respects different styles/approaches, whilst adapting their own style to enable them to work effectively with others.

Why this matters for Generic Graduate: Universally named across all triangulated sources. Graduates work across functions, often in cohorts, often with senior stakeholders. Group exercises at AC test this directly. AGCAS names 'teamwork' as a core competence; CBI consistently top-rated; ISE named.

Tell me about a time when you proactively sought the views of/engaged others to resolve a business issue.

- How did you ensure that the right people were engaged?
- How did you demonstrate that you had understood their views?
- How did their input inform and shape the final decision?
- What feedback did you receive?
- With hindsight, what might you do differently next time?

Describe a situation where your personal views/objectives were at odds with the team/key people around you?

- How did you react?
- How did you demonstrate you understood/respected their perspective whilst being clear about your own?
- What was the outcome?
- What did you learn about how best to engage with others?

Describe a situation where you have had to work hard to really understand the perspective of another person?

- What was the reason for the lack of understanding?
- What made it difficult to gain this understanding/get under the skin?
- How did you manage this?
- How have applied the learning from this situation to enhance your interactions with others?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Fails to engage and seek the views of others. Is more directive in approach and therefore may gain compliance rather than commitment to action/ideas		Proactively seeks the views and opinions of others when dealing with business issues – adopts a more collaborative/democratic approach to problem solving
Seeks to be seen to engage rather than actually demonstrating that they have heard the views and ideas of others (e.g. by adjusting their path or shifting their perspective in the light of the information gleaned)		Listens carefully to the thoughts and ideas of others and demonstrates that they have listened to and heard their views (e.g. by shifting own perspective in the light of the information given)
Adopts a “my way or the highway approach” – has strong views and may be less respectful of counter views or arguments		Shares own ideas/opinions willingly whilst recognising and respecting the views and opinions of others

Fails to manage conflict/divergent views or styles and approaches		Effectively manages conflict and potentially divergent views to get positive outcomes for all parties. Appreciates the need to work with others with different styles and approaches to their own
Seeks to be understood rather than truly understand the needs/objectives and perspectives of others. Transmits own views rather than questions to better understand		Takes steps to really understand the goals and objectives of others
Adopts a one style fits all approach. No evidence of adjusting/adapting style based on the needs of the situation and audience		Adapts style effectively based on understanding of the needs and objectives of others
No evidence of reflecting on the impact of their own style or of considering how they might be contributing to the breakdown of working relationships		Aware of the impact of own style on others and the need to check out assumptions they make about others and their style of working/needs/preferences

Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1-5): _____

5. Personal Leadership

Takes responsibility for their own actions. Proactively takes on additional responsibilities and drives their own performance. Lives their own values, actively acknowledges and seeks feedback from others.

Why this matters for Generic Graduate: ISE: 'takes ownership'; CBI: 'drive and initiative'; FindMyWhy: 'lives values, seeks feedback'. The graduate who waits for direction does not progress; the graduate who takes responsibility for their own development and impact does. This is the differentiator that early-career performance reviews consistently identify.

Give me an example of a time when you have been required to justify an action/decision that you had taken.

- Why were you required to do this?
- How did you feel about this?
- What approach did you take?
- What lessons did you learn from this experience?

Tell me about a time when you acted over and above what was expected of you in your day to day role/took on additional tasks and responsibilities.

- What made you take this on? What was it about you?
- How did you manage to deliver this on top of your day job?
- How did you keep yourself motivated/driven?
- What support did you need/get? How did you enlist this?
- What was the outcome? What feedback did you get?

What would you say are your core personal values?

- How are these manifest in the way that you work?
- Have you ever had a situation where your values/principles felt crossed or compromised? Tell me about it? How did you respond?
- With hindsight how would you approach this situation differently?
- How do your values support you at work/help you to perform? (strengths)
- How might these values get in the way/hinder you? (development needs)

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
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Does not hold self personally accountable for actions/decision/performance. May make excuses for mistakes or blame others/systems/processes		Takes personal responsibility for performance and actions
Quickly backs down when decisions/actions are challenged or becomes overly defensive about chosen path. Fails to appreciate the opportunity for learning		Has the confidence to defend decisions/actions – does this without getting defensive. Can provide a clear rationale for actions but can see alternative views
Does as much as is necessary. Shies away from taking on additional tasks or responsibility		Proactively takes on additional responsibilities/ is prepared to go “beyond the call of duty” for the greater good
Is unable to clearly articulate their drives and core values – does not appreciate what is important to them and how this might positively or negatively influence their behaviour and performance		Is self-aware – understands their motives, values and drivers and how these influence their behaviour in situations (both positively and negatively)
Behaves in a manner that is less consistent with their core values or responds in a less constructive way when faced with situations where these feel compromised/crossed		Behaves in a manner that is consistent with their core values – is prepared to take a stand/responds constructively when these feel compromised
Fails to articulate or is not prepared to admit areas of strength and areas in need of development		Able to openly and clearly articulate strengths and areas for development
Fails to proactively seek feedback on their behaviour/ performance/effectiveness. Waits for feedback to be given to them and in the absence of this carries on regardless		Actively seek feedbacks from others on their performance and the impact of their behaviour/style
Disregards feedback from others. Explains feedback away and justifies rather than using it to improve their performance/approach		Responds positively to feedback from others – acknowledges and responds by making the necessary modifications to style and approach

Summary of evidence: _____ **Rating (1–5):** _____