

How to Interview Candidates in 2025



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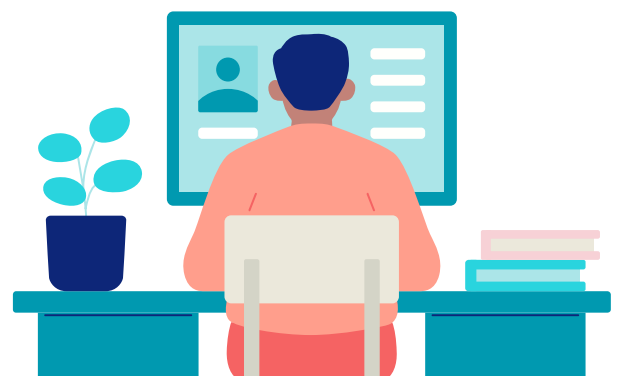
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How to Interview Candidates in 2025

Research from Totaljobs suggests that finding candidates with the right skills is among the top challenges employers expect to face in 2025.

In the context of economic uncertainty and AI reshaping the workplace, recruiting top talent efficiently isn't just important – it's crucial to your organisation's success.

While every step of the recruitment process matters, from crafting irresistible job adverts to seamless

onboarding, there's one element that truly makes or breaks the deal: the interview process.

A well-conducted interview helps assess candidates beyond their CV, evaluating both skills and personality fit.

In this guide, we'll provide actionable insights and practical tips to help you master the end-to-end interview process and secure the perfect hire for your team.





The purpose of candidate interviews

Interviews offer an invaluable opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of a candidate's skills and experience.

What's more, interviewing is often described as a 'two-way street.' It is an opportunity to offer insight into your culture and values, as well as to detail the benefits on offer – showcasing what sets you apart as an employer.

Furthermore, whether it's about the expectations of the role, the working environment, or otherwise, it's also the perfect time to address any questions the candidate may have.

Through various interview techniques and formats, you can assess whether a job applicant:

- Has qualifications that align with the requirements of the job.
- Has relevant experience to facilitate a smooth transition into the role.
- Demonstrates transferable skills essential for growth within the position.

Shortlisting interview candidates

The first step in your interview process is to shortlist the most relevant candidates for the role. Investing your time in this will make the interview process more valuable and increase your chances of success.

What is shortlisting?

Shortlisting or screening candidates involves reviewing job applications, CVs, and cover letters to identify those best suited for the role. The shortlisted candidates from this process will be those you invite to interview.

Why is shortlisting important?

It's a good problem to have, but with a well-crafted job ad and attractive benefits, it's common to feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of applications you receive. Shortlisting candidates can help ease this burden by narrowing down the pool to those best suited for the role.

Shortlisting also helps refine your hiring strategy by identifying gaps in your approach. For example, if you're not attracting enough suitable candidates, it may indicate the need to review the content and placement of your job ads.

How long should a shortlist be?

The ideal length of a shortlist depends on:

Opportunity:

The number of high-quality applications you receive for the role.

Your specific requirements:

For highly technical or specialist roles, the shortlist is typically smaller as unsuitable candidates are filtered out.

Previous success rates:

Analysing conversion rates from application to offer and acceptance can help you determine the appropriate shortlist size.



How to shortlist candidates

Here are 6 steps for shortlisting candidates:

Step 1: Start with a strong job description:

A comprehensive job description is the foundation of the shortlisting process. Your job ad should clearly outline essential and desirable skills, required experience, necessary qualifications, and the key responsibilities of the role.

By setting clear expectations from the outset, you can attract more qualified candidates to help streamline the shortlisting process down the line.



Step 2: Establish your shortlisting criteria:

Use your job description to define how you'll judge each application, considering the following categories:

Essential experience:

These are the non-negotiables required for the role. This may include specific qualifications, a minimum number of years in a relevant role, or essential legal requirements like the right to work in the UK.

Desired experience:

These are skills you expect a candidate to have that are not necessarily deal-breakers. This includes experience with specific tools or software, as well as soft skills such as communication or leadership.

'Nice-to-haves':

These are bonuses that can set a candidate apart from others. Examples include previous experience in your industry, fluency in another language, or a willingness to travel.

Step 3: Create a scorecard for each candidate:

You can use the criteria you've created to objectively rank each application.

Review each application and assign points for examples of:

Essential experience – 3 points
Desired experience – 2 points
'Nice-to-haves' – 1 point

This points-based system provides a structured approach to assessing candidates, helping you confidently identify the top contenders for the job.

Step 5: Completing your shortlist:

Your scorecards will prove invaluable at this stage.

After evaluating each candidate against your criteria, remove those who don't meet your requirements. Then, compile your shortlist with the strongest contenders, identifying exceptional candidates or those with the most potential based on their skill sets.



Step 4: Avoid bias:

It's essential to minimise bias and ensure a fair and equitable shortlisting process. One effective strategy is to involve multiple people in the process, allowing for diverse perspectives and mitigating the risk of unconscious bias.

Going a step further and anonymising candidate information also helps to ensure an unbiased, merit-based review process.

Step 6: Communicating with candidates:

Effective communication is essential throughout the whole recruitment process. Ensure timely and transparent communication with all applicants, informing them of the status of their application, whether shortlisted or not.

This can help bolster your employer brand and foster a positive candidate experience.

Preparing for interviews

Preparation is the key to success – and doing the groundwork before every interview can set the tone for a speedy and successful hiring process.

After all, by dedicating time and effort to the candidates you're due to meet, you'll be best placed to get the most from them in return.

From deciding the format of the interview to preparing the questions you want to ask, here we'll explore how you can prime yourself for conducting interviews.



Different types of interviews

Deciding on the style of interview you want to implement at the outset of the hiring process is vital.

This choice may vary based on your industry, the job role you're hiring for, or your own hiring criteria. While a consistent candidate experience is highly recommended, consider the possibility of accommodating individuals with diverse needs.

Remember, there's no one-size-fits-all approach to interviewing, so be flexible in tailoring your approach to each role.

Let's look at some of the interview formats and settings you can utilise.

Competency-based interviews

Competency-based interviews involve asking each candidate the same set of questions that invite them to share specific examples of when they have demonstrated the skills essential to the role.

Why choose a competency-based interview?

Discovering new talent:

By focusing on candidates' demonstrable skills rather than their experience and qualifications, you can uncover talent that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Reducing bias:

Using standardised questions allows you to objectively compare candidates based solely on their responses, rather than relying on 'gut feel'.

Minimising the risk of bad hires:

Assessing each candidate's key skills means you avoid making decisions based on factors like their personality or educational background.

As competency-based interviews differ from more traditional interview styles, it's essential to inform candidates in advance. This helps them prepare and ensures a smoother interview process. Additionally, don't hesitate to ask follow-up questions to gain a full understanding of each candidate's suitability for the role.

You can follow this structure to produce questions relevant to your role:

"Can you tell me about a time when you had to lead a team?"

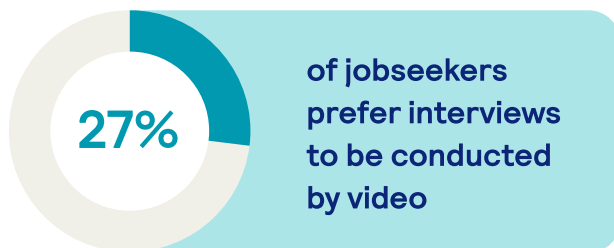
"Give me an example of a time you had to deal with a difficult customer or client..."

"Can you tell me about when you've had to prioritise to meet conflicting deadlines?"



Video interviews

Video interviews allow face-to-face interaction without requiring candidates to be in the same location. They're invaluable for screening candidates before in-person meetings or if you're taking a digital-first approach. Interestingly, Totaljobs research has found that over a quarter of people prefer interviews to be done online via a video call. This is due to the fact that video interviews offer greater flexibility. They are easier to schedule, and they offer convenience by eliminating the cost and time associated with travel. Plus, for particularly hard-to-fill roles, they allow you to expand your talent pool to different corners of the UK and beyond.



Tips for conducting video interviews:

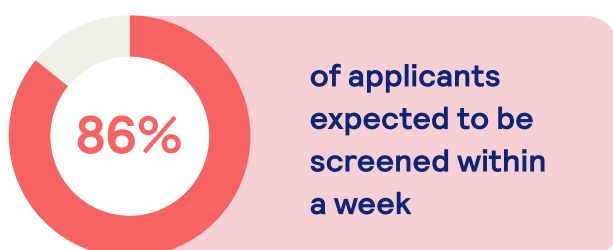
- Ensure that you still prepare your questions in advance. While video calls may feel more casual, having well-thought-out questions ready is crucial.
- Test the platform before the call, ensuring that your internet connection, webcam, and microphone are working properly.
- Find a quiet, well-lit space with a neutral background to minimise distractions.
- Have the candidate's contact details to hand to ensure the interview runs smoothly and you can overcome any unexpected technical hiccups.

Phone interviews

A phone interview is usually a scheduled conversation with a candidate that gives both parties the chance to introduce themselves and make an initial impression.

Totaljobs research shows that 9 in 10 candidates expect to be screened for an interview within a week of applying. Phone interviews can help facilitate this process, as they allow you to speak to a large pool of candidates at speed.

Phone interviews offer a brief look at the candidate but lack the depth of in-person interviews.



Review applications and CVs

If you've shortlisted several candidates, it's also wise to refresh your memory about the person you'll be speaking with.

Before each interview, take the time to review the candidate's CV, noting areas where you need clarification, want more information, or that particularly pique your interest.

Then, instead of asking them to repeat information already provided in their application, you can use the interview as an opportunity to delve deeper into their experience or to fill in the blanks.

Tips for conducting a phone interview:

- Seek out a quiet, distraction-free environment to make the call.
- Ensure you introduce yourself, the company, and the role.
- Use open-ended questions to understand the candidate's experience.
- Encourage questions from the candidate.
- Clearly explain the interview process and next steps.



Understand the role requirements

It may sound obvious, but before any interview, it's important to refresh your memory around the specifics of the job.

You would hope – and expect – that the candidate will have a firm grasp of the requirements of the role, so ensuring that you know it inside out will help you have a productive conversation.

Take time to carefully review the job advert, highlighting the key skills and competencies you're looking for in successful candidates.

Prepare interview questions

The interview presents an opportunity to delve beyond the application and truly understand each candidate's suitability for the role. You only have a limited time with each person, so it's important to maximise it.

Whether it's via video, face-to-face or as part of a panel, to get the most out of the interview process, you need to plan the questions you want to ask. You can follow these example questions, depending on your requirements.



Basic

Basic interview questions can help you to understand a little more about the candidate's background and what motivates them. This can be especially helpful during the screening process.

Examples of basic interview questions:

"Can you walk me through your CV?"

This open-ended question invites candidates to provide an overview of their background, work experience, and career to date. Listen out for their ability to articulate their achievements, and to link their experience to the role you're hiring for.

"What attracted you to this role?"

Understanding what has motivated a candidate to apply can help you see how they align with your values and culture. Look for genuine enthusiasm and a clear understanding of your company and the role's responsibilities.

"What's your ideal work environment?"

Whether they want autonomy or prefer working as part of a team, this question can help you assess their fit for your company and the specific role you're recruiting for.

Intermediate

Intermediate interview questions can help you learn more about a candidate's strengths, weaknesses, adaptability, and potential contributions to your team.

Examples of intermediate interview questions:

“What are your strengths – and some areas where you feel you have room to grow or develop further?”

Inviting candidates to discuss their strengths and potential weaknesses reveals their self-awareness and ability to reflect on their performance. Look for honesty, a willingness to learn, and skills relevant to the position.

“Can you tell me about a difficult situation you faced at work and how you overcame it?”

Whether involving colleagues, customers, or projects, hearing first-hand how candidates go about solving a problem can give you valuable insights. Ideally, they should offer specific examples, outline their thought processes, and explain the result.

“Tell me about a project or task you worked on that you're particularly proud of. What was your role, and what made it successful?”

This prompts candidates to share a specific example of how their work contributes to a team's success. Look for candidates who can talk through their achievements clearly and show ownership and pride in their work.





Advanced

These questions are focused on how candidates navigate delicate situations, highlighting their resilience and leadership qualities. They are especially valuable for senior positions, technical roles, or for candidates who have already impressed.

Examples of advanced interview questions:

“Why are you leaving your current job?”

Understanding a candidate's reasons for seeking new opportunities can be eye-opening. Look for openness, responses that indicate ambition, enthusiasm for a new challenge, or that align with your company's values.

“If you're successful today, what do you think would be most challenging in this role?”

This question assesses a candidate's awareness of potential challenges and their ability to address them. It allows you to explore their critical thinking skills and gain insight into their expectations for the role.

“Tell me about a time you had to give difficult feedback...”

This question can give you an impression of a candidate's emotional intelligence and soft skills. Look for their ability to provide constructive criticism and maintain positive relationships in challenging situations.

Competency-based

Competency-based interviews are becoming more common, chiefly because they provide more objective results than other interviewing techniques. These interviews rely on candidates providing specific examples to demonstrate the skills required for the role.

One effective technique for crafting competency questions is the 'funnel technique', which focuses each question on a specific skill.

Examples of competency-based interview questions:

"Can you share a time when you had to resolve a conflict within a team? How did you approach it, and what was the outcome?"

"Tell me about a project you led from inception to completion. What challenges did you encounter, and how did you overcome them?"

"Describe a situation where you had to adapt quickly to unexpected changes. How did you approach the situation, and what was the outcome?"

Funnel technique:

1

Begin by asking the candidate for an example of when they have used a particular skill. You can initiate this by using phrases such as **"tell me about a time when..."** or **"explain to me how..."**

2

Once the candidate provides their initial response, probe them for more information. This may involve asking questions like **"what effect did that have?"** or **"how did you handle that situation?"**

3

After the candidate has responded and you've probed for further details, feel free to ask any follow-up questions necessary for clarification. This process allows you to gain a comprehensive understanding of the candidate's competencies.

Conducting candidate interviews

Once you've completed your shortlist, scheduled your interviews, and wrapped up your preparation, it's time to move on to the interview phase.

While every interview is unique, there are things you can do to ensure a smooth process while gleaning the information you need and providing each candidate with a positive experience, regardless of the format you choose.



Let them know what to expect

Totaljobs has found that two-fifths of candidates believe they do not receive enough information before an interview.

While organising the interview, be sure to let them know what they can expect in

terms of the format, style, and who will be joining them. This could also include any logistics, such as details around parking, the duration of the interview, or specific instructions they might need to find you.

Consider the environment

The space you choose can set the tone for the entire interview.

For face-to-face interviews, it's wise to book a meeting room to ensure you have a quiet and professional space that your guest feels comfortable in. If this isn't possible, or if you're looking for a more informal chat, consider a local coffee shop.

It's equally important to find somewhere free from distractions when conducting a video interview – and remember to double-check that your software is working correctly beforehand to avoid any technical hiccups.

Establish trust

They say you never get a second chance to make a first impression. A warm greeting, maintaining eye contact and opening with friendly small talk helps put the candidate at ease and sets the tone for a positive interview. If there are multiple interviewers present,

take a moment to introduce yourselves, your roles within the company, and your responsibilities during the interview, whether it's note-taking or shared decision-making. This simple gesture fosters transparency and helps build rapport from the outset.

Discuss the role and company

While the candidate will have seen the job description and researched the company, taking a moment to re-introduce the role's key responsibilities and share some background information about the organisation can set the stage for a more engaging and fruitful conversation.

Not only does this ensure that everyone is on the same page, it also creates an opportunity to delve deeper into specific aspects of the job and organisational culture that they may have missed.

Explore the candidate's ambitions

Having the candidate share their career goals offers insight into their motivations and helps you assess their fit for the role. It also allows you to see how their wants and needs tally with the opportunities available at your organisation, and whether they could be a long-term fit.

If they are successful, beginning your working relationship by discussing their career objectives opens the door to exploring potential paths for development and progression within your organisation.

Ask competency-based questions

As we've explored, competency-based interview questions are the fairest and most effective way of finding out the information you need from each candidate.

You can of course ask more general questions, but by framing some previously prepared questions on the key skills and competencies of the role, you stand the best chance of being able to gauge their suitability for the job.

Utilise follow-up questions

Keep in mind that candidates may feel nervous or not fully grasp the connection between their responses and the position you're filling. If an answer lacks detail or is particularly intriguing, use follow-up questions for clarification.

You can ask about specific results, the rationale behind their decisions, or any details that will give you a deeper understanding of their experience and skill set.

Allow the candidate to ask questions

As the interview wraps up, it's always best to give candidates a chance to ask their own questions about the role and the company. Encourage them to speak up and be ready to chat about anything

from the hiring process to the culture at your organisation. Remember, candidate questions indicate enthusiasm. While some may arise earlier, this dedicated time ensures all concerns are addressed.

Outline the next stages

Conclude the interview by setting the candidate's expectations for the remainder of the hiring process.

This doesn't necessarily mean providing immediate feedback to them. It's your chance to let them know what to expect in terms of timelines and any additional

steps, such as a task or a second-stage interview.

This transparency is essential, with 60% of candidates dropping out of lengthy or unclear hiring processes. So, ensure that candidates are well-informed and know what to expect moving forward.



Evaluate candidate performance

After the interview, take a moment to reflect on each candidate's performance and decide on the next steps.

To ensure fairness and informed decision-making, consider implementing a simple scoring system to evaluate

how well they align with the core competencies required for the role.

If you interviewed with someone else, comparing your scores and discussing your thoughts can help solidify your decision.

Providing feedback after a candidate interview

After investing time and effort in preparing for and attending an interview, 78% of candidates rightfully expect feedback, regardless of the outcome.

While positive feedback is fantastic, offering constructive feedback to unsuccessful candidates is equally important. This helps them discover their areas for improvement and to improve their interview skills for future opportunities.

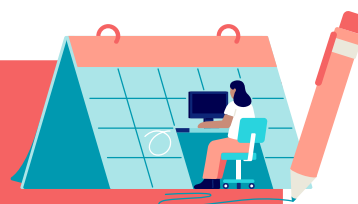
This is mutually beneficial – it enhances their prospects and positions your business as an attractive employer for future opportunities.

Moreover, timely feedback demonstrates professionalism and respect for the candidate's time. It also contributes to maintaining a strong employer brand, as candidates often share their experiences with peers and on online review platforms.

Remember, every candidate has the legal right to request feedback after an interview, so documenting interview feedback is vital.

8 in 10

candidates want to know if they have been successful within a week of an interview



Feedback for successful candidates

Great news – you've held your interviews and found at least one standout candidate.

Now, it's important to provide positive feedback that strengthens your relationship with the candidate and boosts the chances of a successful hire.

Whether making a job offer or inviting someone to the next stage of the process, praise, support, and clear communication are vital. Remember, every interaction with candidates shapes their perception of you as an employer, so make each one count.



Inviting someone to the next stage

Even if you're not ready to offer them the job, feedback for candidates advancing to the next interview stage is essential. Celebrate their progress, highlight their strengths from the initial interview, and offer constructive feedback for the next stage if needed.

Above all, make sure they are clear on what to expect during the next stage, whether meeting new stakeholders or completing tasks.

Making a job offer

If you've found the person for the job, then it's time to share the good news.

When making a job offer, be clear, enthusiastic, and honest. This will help the candidate feel valued and excited about the opportunity and improve the chances of them accepting the role.

Making a verbal offer

To help you build rapport and gauge their immediate response, it's best to deliver a verbal offer over the phone or via a video call.

Begin by thanking them for their time and efforts. Pick out their strengths and what impressed you during the process, explaining why they're an ideal fit for the role.

During the conversation, cover key details of the offer, including salary, benefits, start date, and next steps. Encourage questions from the candidate to ensure they fully understand the terms of the offer and feel confident in their decision to accept. This will set the stage for a long and positive working relationship together.

Sending a written offer

Once the candidate has verbally accepted the job offer, it's time to formalise it with a written offer. This document is typically sent via email and includes crucial details such as the job title, start date, probation period (if applicable), salary, contracted working hours, and other essential terms and conditions.

It's also the perfect opportunity to request any necessary documents or references from the candidate, such as their passport or driving licence, to complete the hiring process.

Feedback for unsuccessful candidates

Offering constructive feedback to unsuccessful candidates is essential to ending the hiring process on a positive note and helping them continue their professional development. Doing so is also beneficial to your employer brand.

Giving feedback to candidates who have been unsuccessful may be uncomfortable, but it's a key part of the process. Here are some tips and steps to make the process easier and more beneficial for the candidate.



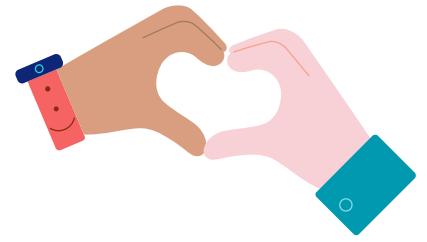
Best practice for providing feedback to unsuccessful candidates:

- Make detailed notes immediately after each interview to ensure that the feedback provided is precise and relevant to the candidate's performance.
- Be constructive in your feedback by offering actionable advice on how the candidate can improve for future opportunities. Focus on specific areas where they can build on their skills or experience.
- Provide feedback promptly to avoid prolonging the candidate's waiting period and to demonstrate your respect for their time and effort.
- Ensure confidentiality and keep any feedback between yourself and the candidate in question.
- Avoid biases or discriminatory behaviour and base your feedback on objective observations from their interview responses.



How to offer feedback to unsuccessful candidates:

Here are 7 steps you can follow when providing feedback to unsuccessful candidates.



Step 1: Thank the candidate

Thank the candidate for their time and their interest in the role, as well as the effort they invested in the interview process.

Step 2: Encourage

While they have been unsuccessful, you should still be encouraging. Ensure you take time to highlight the things that impressed you during the interview, or within their application.

Step 3: Provide reasons

Provide specific reasons why you are not offering them the job, focusing on facts while avoiding overly critical feedback. This is where competency-based interview frameworks are particularly useful, as you can objectively point to areas where they were underqualified or where another applicant was more suitable for the role.

Step 4: Share

If there are specific development areas – share them. This can help candidates to frame the experience as a positive and know what they need to focus on to be successful in the future.

Step 5: Respond

Allow candidates to ask follow-up questions and address any concerns they may have about the feedback provided. Respond promptly and professionally to clarify anything that's required.

Step 6: Motivate

Keep the door open for future opportunities by encouraging candidates to reapply. Tell them how they can stay informed about potential openings within your organisation.

Step 7: Be polite

End the conversation politely and courteously. Doing so will leave a positive impression of you and your organisation and help to maintain a good relationship with the candidate.

Securing top talent through effective interviews

2025 looks set to be another challenging year for both employers and recruiters, with numerous obstacles to overcome when seeking to attract and onboard top talent. However, by mastering the art of interviewing, you can navigate these challenges and secure the candidates you need to drive your organisation forward.

Below, we've outlined the key takeaways you can implement to start conducting productive interviews that elevate your hiring process:

Comprehensive shortlisting:

Adopting a structured, criteria-based approach to shortlisting candidates can promote an unbiased and efficient selection process.

Thorough preparation:

Dedicating time to understand job specifications, reviewing candidates' background, and formulating relevant questions can lay the ground for more meaningful interviews.

Format selection:

Reflecting on which interview format best aligns with the role – whether competency-based, video, or phone – can help facilitate an effective dialogue.

Two-way conversations:

Engaging in open-ended conversations can assist both interviewers and candidates in gauging suitability, cultural fit, and aligning expectations.

Foster a productive environment:

Creating a welcoming environment, be it virtual or physical, can help to encourage a focused and genuine exchange between participants.

Implement objective assessment:

Introducing competency-based questions and thoughtful follow-ups can provide a balanced view of a candidate's skill set and compatibility with the role.

Outline next steps:

Outlining the next stages of the recruitment process can help to keep candidates engaged while managing expectations.

Provide feedback:

Sharing prompt feedback, regardless of whether a candidate has been successful or not, can assist in their professional development and enhance your employer brand.



By integrating these practices into your recruitment strategy, you can not only improve the quality of your hires but also provide an exceptional candidate experience that reflects well on your organisation. Remember, the interviewing process is more than just a means to fill a position – it's an opportunity to onboard talented and passionate individuals who can contribute to long-term success.

Overview of Totaljobs

We are Totaljobs. We deliver the people you need to help your business grow and thrive.

As a global business with a local heart, we're proud to be part of The Stepstone Group. This makes us one of the world's leading hiring platforms, with a presence in over 30 countries.

Whether you want to attract and recruit brilliant people, sharpen your hiring strategies, or build your market presence, we're here with precise and powerful solutions.

Do you have a hiring need?

Call us on [0333 0145 111](tel:0333 0145 111)

