



# Career Advice Guide

## Contents

<b>About SF Group</b>	page 3
<b>Your job search with SF Group</b>	
Why register with <b>SF Group</b> ?	page 4
How to register	page 4
Our commitments to you	page 5
The recruitment process	page 6
<b>The job application</b>	
Writing a CV	page 7
Writing a cover letter	page 8
<b>The interview</b>	
Preparation	page 9
Attending the interview	page 10
Typical interview questions	page 10
Questions you can ask	page 12
Post-interview tips	page 13
A successful interview	page 13
An unsuccessful interview	page 14
Psychological tests	page 15
Example test questions	page 16
How to prepare for the tests	page 20
Test answers	page 21

## About SF Group

We specialise in the temporary and permanent recruitment of Finance, Human Resources, Secretarial, Sales & marketing, and Procurement & Supply Chain personnel at all levels.

We currently have 80 consultants across the East Midlands, West Midlands and North West. Each region has a team of consultants who specialise by:

- i) geographical location
- ii) level of recruitment, e.g. clerical, part-qualified, qualified
- iii) type of recruitment e.g. temporary or permanent

## Office Network



For a full list of our offices with contact details, visit [sfgroup.com](http://sfgroup.com)

## Your Job Search With SF Group

### Why register with SF Group?

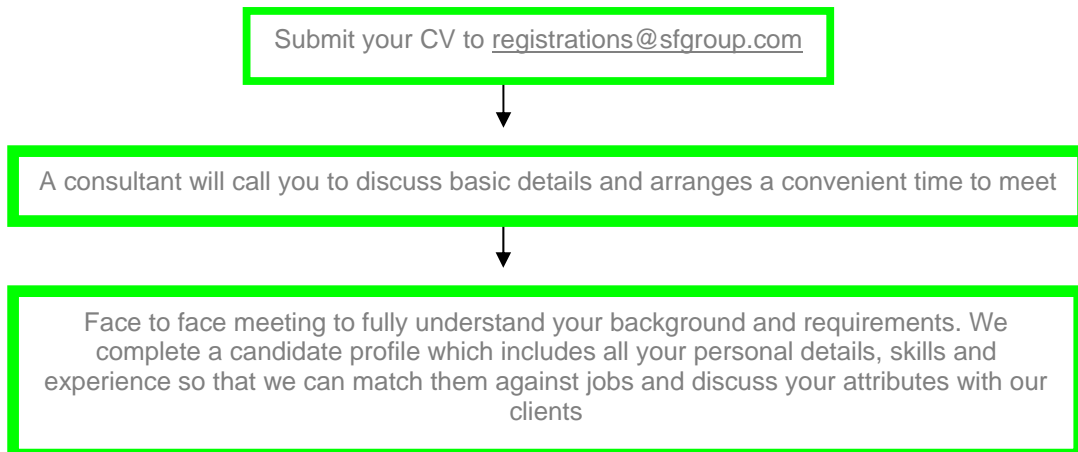
**SF Group** is the fastest growing financial and HR recruitment consultancy in the UK and we aim to become the market leader both in terms of **quality** and **size**. At **SF Group**, we are absolutely committed to making sure that our **quality of service** is not only the highest in the industry, but exceeds the expectations of our clients and candidates.

Our trained consultants are experienced in understanding your particular situation. They can offer relevant, friendly and professional advice on:

- Career direction
- Market conditions
- Companies and roles to which you are applying
- Salary guidance
- Interview techniques

### How to Register With Us

The registration process at **SF Group** is simple:



## Our Commitments To You

- Every candidate who registers with **SF Group** and lives within the geographical areas we cover, will be personally **contacted within two working days** of receiving their application.
- **SF Group** policy states that we must **interview every candidate face to face** before submitting their details to any positions.
- Our bespoke internal communication system ensures that **every consultant is made aware of new candidates** as soon as their registrations have been completed.
- After the initial meeting with a consultant, **candidates are contacted every 30-40 days**, or at their preferred intervals, to keep them up to date on the current job market and any positions for which they have applied.
- **SF Group** guarantees that candidate details will only be submitted to clients with the **candidate's prior permission**.
- Upon securing a first interview with one of our clients, **candidates are fully briefed** on the company, client and position. As we will have previously met the client face to face, we are in a better position to prepare candidates for their interview.
- Should the candidate be successful in progressing to the next stage, our consultant will **meet with the candidate before the second interview** to advise of any changes to the interview process and discuss any issues they may have.
- Following the interviews, we will always offer **honest and constructive feedback** to help candidates succeed in their search for a new position.
- As part of the **SF Group** post-placement service, every candidate is **visited within one month** of commencing their employment to confirm that they are happy in their new position.
- **SF Group** will continue to **act as an intermediary** for as long as the client and candidate wish, thus ensuring that specialist consultant advice is at hand for both parties should it be required.
- Should any candidate decide that they are no longer seeking a new opportunity, we will still **keep in touch every 3 to 6 months** to continue the personal relationship.

## **The Recruitment Process**

At **SF Group**, we endeavour to provide you with a personal service, ensuring that you have all the necessary information throughout the process to help you perform to the best of your ability. Your application is handled in complete confidence at all times.

### **Matching your details with vacancies**

After the registration process has taken place, we will match your criteria against our clients' positions. Once we have selected suitable opportunities, we will call you to discuss the roles and answer any questions you may have. Your details will not be submitted to the client without your prior consent. We will then call the client to discuss your skills and experience.

### **Approaching clients on your behalf**

Many clients have on-going recruitment requirements and, due to the strong relationships we have developed with these clients, they often ask us to make them aware of relevant candidates who register with us. Again, only with your permission, we can approach these clients on your behalf.

### **Interview preparation**

Once an interview has been arranged, the **SF Group** consultant will meet you to fully brief you on the company, their culture, the department and the role. We will ensure that you are completely prepared before you attend the interview.

### **Interview feedback**

After your interview, we will call you to discuss your thoughts and feedback. It is important that we understand what you liked about the role and what reservations you might have, if any. We will then seek feedback from the client, brief you accordingly and set up further interviews as necessary.

### **The offer**

We will liaise between you and the client about the job offer, acting as an intermediary in all negotiations regarding remuneration and terms & conditions.

### **On-going communication**

Following the offer, we will contact you regularly to check that everything is being handled smoothly up to when you start your new position. We will then visit you to ensure that you have settled in well.

## The Job Application

### Writing a CV

#### CV design

The purpose of your CV is to convey your skills, experience, achievements and potential for a position. Generally, you should try and keep your CV to 2 pages unless you have extensive experience. It should be printed on good quality paper with the first page capable of generating excitement and interest in a potential employer.

The layout of your CV is vital to ensure that it is easy to read - avoid using a mixture of fonts or overuse of italic or underlining. Ensure sufficient spacing so that the text does not appear cramped.

#### Content

Your CV should address the following areas:

- Personal details
- Education
- Qualifications
- Career objective or profile – what you are looking for and for what reasons
- Employment history – in reverse order
- Training & development
- Any other information relevant to the position

#### Achievements

This is a vital part of your CV as it plays an important role in marketing yourself:

- Always refer to achievements which you feel would benefit the organisation.
- Demonstrate the problem you faced, how you approached it, which techniques you used and how successful you were in terms of measurable results.
- Focus on achievements which address particularly important skills within a managerial capacity. Always quantify your achievements.

#### Falsifying information

Ensure that everything you write in your CV is true, accurate and can be verified. Interviewers will often use your CV as a foundation for the interview so make sure that you can defend what you have written.

## Writing a Cover Letter

### The purpose of a cover letter

Your cover letter is equally as important as your CV and requires just as much consideration. It aims to instantly influence the reader to ensure you receive a positive response to your initial contact. You should pay particular attention to the layout, ensure it has a defined structure and try to make the content interesting and relevant.

### What should you include in your cover letter?

- Demonstrate a specific match between what you can provide and what the role requires
- Highlight any specific training you have received which would be relevant to the role or company
- Indicate the transferability of your skills and achievements and how these would be of particular benefit to the company
- Focus on some of your personality traits, eg. level of commitment, ability to work under pressure etc

### Example

*I am writing to enquire whether you have a vacancy in your company for a Finance Manager. I enclose a copy of my CV for your consideration.*

*As you will see from my CV, I am currently working for ABC Ltd as the Finance Manager. In my present position I am responsible for managing all aspects of the finance department including cash flow, forecasting, budgeting and preparation of accounts. I have worked closely with the Business Development team and have been able to identify potential areas of risk in their expansion plans.*

*Over the last year I have implemented ISO 9000 throughout our organisation. This meant rewriting many of the company's procedures and in some cases creating new procedures. I successfully obtained accreditation at the first attempt within the Board's six-month timescale.*

*With my proven ability to manage and maintain the highest financial reporting standards whilst also minimising costs, I feel that I would be able to make a significant contribution to your company's management team.*

*I would be grateful if you would contact me if you have any vacancies in your company, or keep my information on file in case of future openings. I would welcome hearing from you.*

*Yours sincerely,*

## The Interview

### Preparation

#### Research the company

Whilst the **SF Group** consultant can give you information on the company, the role and the interview format to help you prepare, you'd be wise to do as much of your own research as possible. Company websites are a major source of information and can provide you with corporate history, press releases, downloadable reports and reviews. You can also visit the archive files of newspaper websites or search engines such as [www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk) by entering the name of the company in the search box.

#### Make sure you know about:

- Brief company history - mergers, takeovers, growth etc
- Products and services
- Company size, both in terms of employees and financial measures (turnover etc)
- Any recent press reporting or speculation (eg new product launches, joint ventures, initiatives, new advertising)
- Something about the company culture
- Their main competitors

#### Try to predict the questions you may be asked

If you have researched the company in sufficient depth, you should be able to answer most of the questions in this area. Any other questions are likely to be about you so you should revisit your CV at this point and think about the achievements you have detailed. It is likely that the interviewer will probe deeper into these achievements so make sure you have additional information about these on the tip of your tongue!

#### Also, be prepared to answer questions on:

- gaps in your CV
- why you've made those particular career moves
- what you would have done better with hindsight
- motivations
- long term career plan
- problem solving

It's often a good idea to write all your thoughts and examples down on paper – this will help you clarify any grey areas and give you more confidence in preparing for the interview.

## **Attending The Interview**

### **First impressions**

This is your chance to make a good impression. How you present yourself will have a big impact on the interviewer so don't forget the basics: businesslike suit, clean shoes, minimal jewellery and good personal hygiene.

### **Body language**

Your behaviour will be watched the minute you walk in the building: demonstrate an interest by reading company literature in the foyer, be friendly to the receptionist, offer a firm handshake and maintain regular eye contact. Always accept a drink – taking a sip can provide you with a little thinking time before you answer difficult questions.

### **Think about what you say**

Always try to listen to the questions- it sounds obvious but candidates so often answer the question they *wish* had been asked. If you don't understand the question, asked for it to be repeated and be honest if you truly don't know the answer. Use every question to demonstrate your ability to do the job and make extra effort never to criticise your previous employers, however bad you may feel about them.

## **Typical Questions**

### **Tell me about yourself**

Summarise your qualifications, career history and abilities, highlighting those relevant to the position.

### **What do you dislike about your current role?**

The interviewer wants to ascertain whether the aspects you dislike in your current role are also present in the position in question. The best approach is to highlight an aspect of your current company which differs from the company you are talking to.

### **Why do you want to leave your current employer?**

Never be negative about your current employer but demonstrate a desire to achieve other goals. It is best not to refer to salary as being a contributory factor unless you are being paid significantly less than the market rate.

### **What are your strengths?**

Choose 3 or 4 strengths and provide relevant examples. Strengths to consider are ability to learn quickly, positive attitude, technical ability and determination to succeed.

### **What is your greatest weakness?**

Try and pick one which isn't particularly relevant for the position and could also be considered a strength, eg. I am fairly demanding of my team but I am getting better at using the carrot and not the stick.

### **Other Questions to be Prepared for**

Why do you want to join us?

How much do you know about the role?

What attracted you to the role?

What skills and experience do you have that make you suitable for the position?

How do you cope under pressure?

How would your colleagues describe you?

What do you enjoy about your current role?

Which part of this role is least attractive to you?

What has been your biggest achievement?

What is the biggest mistake you have made?

What are your long term goals?

Why should I employ you?

What skills can you bring to the company?

How do you like to be managed?

Do you prefer to work as a team or an individual?

## Questions You Can Ask

Always prepare several questions in case one or two of them get answered unintentionally in the interview prior to your opportunity to 'ask any questions'. If this is the case, make sure that you **don't** ask these questions as you will give the impression that you have not listened in the interview.

### Tips

- **Pick up on comments** throughout the interview about which you can later ask questions, ie. *"You mentioned earlier that a new Finance Director has been recently been appointed...how has this impacted on the rest of the team?"*
- **Look on the company's website** for any 'latest news'. This can form a great basis for asking topical questions and also demonstrates that you have kept an eye on any recent company developments, for example:

*"I notice that you've just opened a new office in Manchester, is this part of a wider expansion campaign?"*

*"I notice that you've recently become part of ABC Group, what impact will this have on the company going forward?"*

### Other Questions

What will be my responsibilities?

Where will I fit into the overall organisational structure?

Who will I report to?

Where does he/she fit in the structure?

Who will report to me?

What do you expect me to do in the first 6 months?

What are the chances of advancement/promotion in this position?

What training do you provide?

Do you provide assistance towards any professional qualifications?

**Ask questions that display your enthusiasm, willingness and ability:**

What is the team working on at the moment?

Can I meet the team?

Can I look around?

What are your strategies for growth?

How soon do you want an employee in place?

If there was one major achievement that you would like to see happen within the role from the outset, what would it be?

Can you describe what made the last person successful in this role?

What are the immediate improvements or priorities that need to be applied to this role?

What changes would you like to see in the way the job is performed?

To ensure I would be able to hit the ground running would you be able to supply any procedures, literature or other supporting information in preparation for my first day in the role?

## Post-Interview Tips

After each interview, try and obtain as much feedback as possible about your performance. Ask the interviewer how you performed and what how you could perform better in the future. Also what reservations they might have about your application and what impression you gave. At **SF Group**, our consultants will always try to obtain as much feedback for you as possible. Keep a note of any feedback so that you can refer to it when preparing for future interviews.

## A Successful Interview

If you have been successful in the interview process, you are likely to start feeling quite anxious in the weeks leading up to joining the new company. These feelings are quite normal as you naturally want to make a good impression and fit in with the team. The following tips should ensure that your first few weeks go according to plan:

- Be part of a team – a team will lend support and help you feel less exposed, as well as providing a great learning ground.
- Learn your job – try not to demonstrate a 'know it all' attitude in your first few weeks as this can often put people off. Instead show that you are eager to learn and willing to listen to the advice others offer.

- Arrive at work on time and stick to your lunch hour. If your team are busy, offering to take a shorter lunch break to help out will demonstrate your willingness to be a strong team player.
- Dress appropriately, according to how others are dressed in the office.
- Don't get involved in office gossip – you may want to listen but don't contribute.
- Find a mentor – sometimes your supervisor may not be the best person.
- Always stick to project deadlines.

## **An Unsuccessful Interview**

If you are unsuccessful in the recruitment process, don't take it personally and don't dwell on it. The best thing to do is to send another application out straight away to keep the ball rolling.

However, depending on which stage of the process you were rejected, you should address:

- **Your CV** – Was it tailored to the specific job? Is the format correct? Your **SF Group** consultant can offer advice on your CV at any time.
- **Your interview techniques** – Did you do enough preparation? Were there particular questions on which you struggled?

The important thing is not to become too disheartened, but treat it as a learning curve. Make sure that you get as much feedback as possible from the client to understand where you may have gone wrong. Of course, your **SF Group** consultant will always endeavour to obtain as much client feedback for you as possible.

Always try to remain optimistic and focused on your career search as throughout the process your interview skills and techniques will only get better!

## **Psychometric Tests**

Clients often use psychometric tests in the recruitment process and your **SF Group** consultant will advise you whether they are to be used in your interview process. However, psychometric tests do not measure how good someone is at a job and only serve to 'help' in the process.

### **Why do companies do tests?**

- Increasingly employers are incorporating tests on assessment procedures – both for selection and for development and counseling purposes.
- There is good evidence that tests which are professionally used and evaluated can provide employers with more objective, reliable and relevant information concerning an applicant's likelihood of success in the job.

### **How can tests help you?**

- They will enable you to demonstrate your strengths.
- They have been chosen to measure skills relevant to the job.
- The tests are carefully designed and fully researched so that they are fair to all applicants.

### **How can they help a client?**

- They identify the people best suited for the job.
- They find out where in the organisation you may be best placed.
- Tests give them objective measures of your strengths and limitations.
- Those who do well in tests are usually successful in the job itself.

### **What sort of tests will you have to do?**

This depends on the skills selected as being relevant to the job. The tests address the following aptitudes:

- Understanding the meaning of words, logic within sentences and grammar
- Understanding written information, drawing inferences and summarising
- Solving short numerical problems quickly
- Interpreting and utilising business-related numerical data

## EXAMPLE TEST QUESTIONS

### VERBAL APPLICATION

Choose the combination of words which you think will best fit the blank spaces for each question. Your answers should be grammatical and make the most sense.

1) The \_\_\_\_\_ of the venture might have been predicted if \_\_\_\_\_ attention had been paid to the report which pinpointed several fundamental problems.

- |         |         |         |         |         |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| A       | B       | C       | D       | E       |
| Failure | Failure | Failure | Success | Success |
| No      | Less    | More    | More    | Greater |

2) The company will provide \_\_\_\_\_ clothing and equipment where it is required. However, it is up to the \_\_\_\_\_ to take reasonable care of their own safety by using equipment that is provided.

- |            |            |            |            |               |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|---------------|
| A          | B          | C          | D          | E             |
| Protection | Protective | Protective | Protective | Precautionary |
| Employed   | Employment | Employers  | Employees  | Employees     |

3) \_\_\_\_\_ recent industrial relations \_\_\_\_\_, the company hopes that profits will \_\_\_\_\_ a dividend to be paid to the shareholders.

- |           |            |            |              |              |
|-----------|------------|------------|--------------|--------------|
| A         | B          | C          | D            | E            |
| Despite   | Because of | In view of | In line with | Due to       |
| Conflicts | Set backs  | Acrimonies | Improvements | Difficulties |
| Allow     | Prevent    | Permit     | Deter        | Preclude     |

## NUMERICAL REASONING

1) If a maintenance contract costs £87 per month and a technician call out not under a maintenance contract £325, how many call outs per year would make the contract worthwhile?

A	B	C	D	E
4	5	6	7	8

2) A total of 5,200 analyses last month required 17,300 hours of computer time. Approximately how much computer time would be required to perform an additional 300 analyses if all other factors remain unchanged?

A	B	C	D	E
330 hours	540 hours	660 hours	940 hours	1,000 hours

3) How many times over the three year period did branches A, B and C experience a reduction in profit? (refer to table 1)

A	B	C	D	E
0	1	2	3	4

4) By what percentage did the total profit made by Branches A, B and C increase from Year 1 to Year 3? (refer to table 1)

A	B	C	D	E
1.5%	6.2%	20%	22%	102%

**Table 1**

Branch	Profit		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
A	4.1m	4.8m	4.7m
B	2.8m	2.9m	2.5m
C	6.1m	6.4m	6.6m

5) Of a total of 225 employees, 32% are female. 89% of female employees are between the ages of 20 and 35. How many employees are females between the ages of 20 and 35?

A	B	C	D	E
12	58	64	89	201

6) If a department makes a profit of 30% on a turnover of £85,000, what percentage profit can be expected if overheads increase by £10,000 but other factors remain unchanged?

A	B	C	D	E
5%	10%	14%	18%	25%

## VERBAL ANALYSIS

Choose the correct answer to each question by basing your answers to the information contained in the passage only and not on general knowledge. Some questions have 2 options, others have 5. See how many you can do in 8 minutes.

Accountants have shown how simple it is to inflate profits artificially by manipulating accounting standards, while the stock market demonstrates that such artificial inflation will be followed by natural deflation: many companies have been humbled by falling profits and share prices. Certainly, accounting standards are as much to blame as accountants, but the heart of the problem is that tension between the interests of management and those of shareholders is almost invariably resolved in favour of management. Shareholders notionally have the right to vote against the re-election of auditors, but they never do, and it is the management that signs the cheques. It is desirable for the accounting profession to police itself more effectively and for share holders to take more seriously their responsibility for the election of auditors. However, neither is likely to happen.

1) Which of the following best replaces the word “notionally” (line 7)?

- A Actually
- B Theoretically
- C Figuratively
- D Legally
- E Naturally

2) Which **ONE** of the following summarises the overall message of the passage?

- A Shareholders should become more actively involved in company proceedings than at present.
- B Management should not be more influential than shareholders in the appointment of external advisors.
- C Auditors’ activities should not be controlled by the purse but by professional ethics.
- D Manipulation of accounting standards is ultimately undesirable and should be prevented.
- E Inflation and deflation are not always caused by legitimate influences.

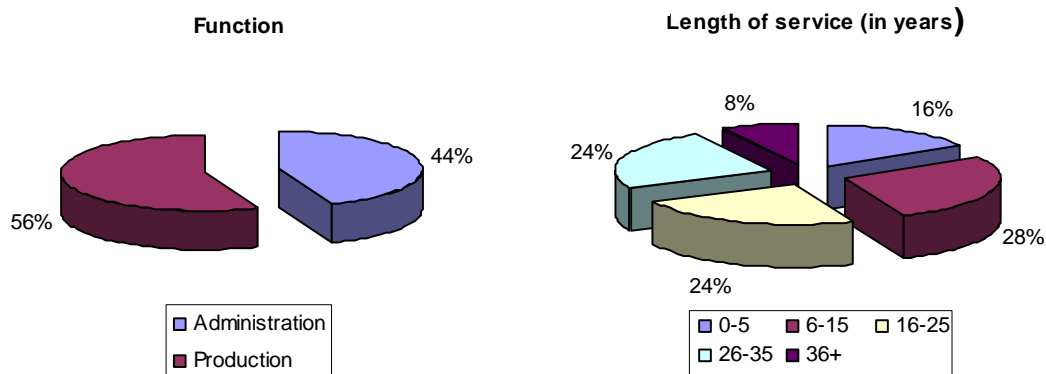
3) Can it be inferred from the passage that most companies overstate their profits?

- A Yes
- B No

## NUMERICAL ANALYSIS

Choose the correct answer from the 5 options given for each question by using the data provided. You will only need to refer to the set of information given above the four questions. See how many you can do in 8 minutes. You may use a calculator.

### STAFF PROFILE, YEAR 1



If the company has 275 members of staff:

1) How many more production staff are there than administrative staff?

- |    |    |    |     |            |
|----|----|----|-----|------------|
| A  | B  | C  | D   | E          |
| 12 | 27 | 33 | 110 | Cannot say |

2) How many administrative staff have served between 10 to 20 years?

- |    |    |    |    |            |
|----|----|----|----|------------|
| A  | B  | C  | D  | E          |
| 31 | 57 | 72 | 89 | Cannot say |

3) How many administrative staff are there in the 26 to 35 years' service group, if the proportion of production staff and administration staff is the same for this group as for the overall group?

- |    |    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|----|
| A  | B  | C  | D  | E  |
| 11 | 29 | 37 | 49 | 52 |

4) If half of the 0 to 5 years' service group and all of the 36+ years' service group are production staff, how many production staff are there altogether in the other groups?

- |     |     |     |     |            |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|------------|
| A   | B   | C   | D   | E          |
| 110 | 132 | 164 | 231 | cannot say |

## **WHAT CAN YOU DO TO GIVE YOUR BEST PERFORMANCE**

Don't be discouraged if you found the questions difficult or got many of them wrong. There are many things you can do to improve your performance.

### **ON VERBAL TESTS**

Read books, newspapers, business journals and reports. Do verbal puzzles and crosswords. Play word games.

### **ON NUMERICAL TESTS**

Practice doing arithmetic with or without a calculator. Do number puzzles. Read financial reports. Study data presented in tables, charts and graphs.

## **FINALLY – BE PREPARED FOR THE TESTING SESSION**

### **BEFORE THE SESSION**

- Get a good night's sleep before the tests.
- Give yourself plenty of time to get to the session.
- If you wear glasses or hearing aid, be sure to take them with you.
- If you have a disability which might make taking the test difficult for you, let us know in advance so appropriate arrangements can be made.

### **AT THE SESSION**

- Listen carefully to instructions.
- Do exactly as you are told.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Read each question carefully before answering.
- Work quickly and accurately, as most tests have short time limits and many questions.
- Don't waste time on difficult questions.
- Try as hard as you can. The more questions you get right, the higher your score will be.

**REMEMBER** – the outcome of most assessments is based on a combination of data from different sources. Even if you don't feel confident about your performance in the tests, you may have other strengths which will be taken into account. Employers often offer the opportunity to obtain feedback on test performance. This may help you to understand your own relative abilities and may aid you in your career thinking.

## Test answers

Verbal Application:

- 1 C
- 2 D
- 3 A

Numerical Reasoning:

- 1 A
- 2 E
- 3 C
- 4 B
- 5 C
- 6 D

Verbal Analysis:

- 1 B
- 2 D
- 3 B

Numerical Analysis

- 1 C
- 2 E
- 3 B
- 4 A