

Getting into... HR and Recruitment



HR and recruitment roles exist in almost any type of organisation you can think of – in the public, private and voluntary sectors. You could find HR roles in a law firm, technology company, charity or university for example, both in the UK and abroad.

This variety offers many different opportunities, but consider carefully which industries interest you and what sort of organisation and work environment will suit you. Working in the HR department of a bank will present different challenges to an HR role in the NHS, for example.

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Exploring Your Options

In this section we will be talking about the types of roles that exist within the industry, and where you might expect to work. There will be many roles and employers that we don't cover here, but these are some popular examples that you can use as a starting point when exploring your options.

Typical roles

Human Resources

Graduates tend to start as an HR administrator or HR assistant, and will deal with employee queries, data entry and record keeping. It's common to start in an admin role and work your way up, learning from colleagues and gaining specialist experience. Some HR roles will entail working in number of these areas, whilst others will focus on just one. This information will be covered in the role's job description.

Employee Relations

Deal with complex and sensitive cases including redundancy, disciplinary, restructures and conflict resolution. They may also write policies and procedures for their company.

Reward & Benefits

Plan and manage the pay & benefit offering of a company, ensuring the package offered is attractive and flexible for employees.

Diversity & Inclusion (D&I)

Work to ensure recruitment, training, and development opportunities are fair and accessible to all. Activities include setting up diversity networks, assessing practises and policies, arranging events and coaching staff.

Learning & Development (L&D)

Identify learning needs and develop learning interventions. This can include delivering training, developing learning modules (both online and classroom based), evaluating learning needs, and coaching.

Recruitment

Recruitment entails a number of processes such as identifying, interviewing, selecting, hiring and on boarding staff for an organisation. This role can form part of an HR team, or for smaller organisations could be the responsibility for the line manager of the role advertised. Some organisations choose to outsource this work and use a recruitment agency to find candidates.

Some recruitment agencies deal with companies from a large range of sectors, whilst others work with particular industries or firms. Pay is often dependent on meeting targets, so if you are confident and committed this can be an exciting area to work in.

Job titles for similar roles vary, so read job descriptions for a fuller understanding of the role. Many roles exist in organisations, such as Office Administrator and Personal Assistant for example, that include significant responsibility for recruitment, even though this isn't specified in the job title.

Typical Employers

SME's (small and medium sized enterprises) have less than 250 employees and tend to hire HR Generalists as due to having smaller teams. HR Generalists can be involved with a wide range of HR activities including employee relations, recruitment, payroll, training and ensuring the company is compliant with labour law.

Larger organisations also offer entry level or graduate jobs, which tend to fill up quickly and are advertised all year round. Working your way up in a large organisation is common. Starting in junior roles can give you an insight into how the organisation and wider industry works, and enable you to build valuable networks. Some larger organisations will also offer graduate schemes.

For further detail about roles available visit [Prospects' Recruitment and HR webpage](#).

Getting Industry Ready

What employers are looking for will vary depending on the role, but this is a general overview of key areas you might like to think about. It is important to always read the job description carefully to see exactly what the job responsibilities are, and what skills and experiences are required.

What employers want

Qualifications

Although a specific degree or HR qualification are not required to enter the industry, accredited professional qualifications from the CIPD (or equivalent) are essential to progress to senior HR positions. Some employers offer support such as study days or help towards fees when studying towards a professional qualification.

You could choose to take a short or introductory course in business or HR, to boost your CV and explore the subject before committing to a longer and more expensive course. Professional Associations (e.g. CIPD and REC) may also run introductory training days. Take a look at the [CIPD skills map](#) for further details.

Skills

Here are some key skills many employers within this sector are looking for when hiring graduates. As was mentioned before, it is important to always read the job description carefully to see exactly what the job responsibilities are, and what skills and experiences are required for that particular role.

Communications skills

Your work will be people-focused, and require you to communicate with a variety of stakeholders. You will need to have strong written and verbal communication skills to avoid miscommunication, as well as the ability to listen and manage conflicts that might arise.

Analytical skills

You will need to be able to analyse data and information, and use this to influence both your work and the organisation as a whole. Examples might include analysing the application of a potential recruit, data about the performance of staff members or the value of an organisation.

Organisational skills

HR and recruitment professionals manage tasks that need to be completed by different people and departments. These roles involve time management (such as when drawing up contracts), Records management (such as when managing staff data) and calendar management (such as meetings and training sessions).

Digital skills

Technology plays a huge role in many people's jobs, and it will be your responsibility to understand digital developments and how these can be used to enhance efficiency and the employee experience.

Commercial awareness

HR aims to improve organisational performance and meet business objectives, so you need to be able to demonstrate business awareness and understand the needs and pressures of an organisation. This might include how national and international developments are impacting the industry, or technological changes that facilitate an increase in outsourcing and remote/flexible working.

Commercial awareness also proves your interest and enthusiasm for the role and company. You can build your commercial awareness by following relevant publications, researching online and attending industry events.

How to gain relevant skills and experiences

Use your time at university to develop the skills mentioned above. Remember that part-time work, volunteering and involvement in clubs and societies are all opportunities to do this!

Take on responsibility

Take on positions of responsibility, whether voluntary or paid. This could be a Team Leader at work, or a committee member for a university society.

Read job descriptions

Find out what skills recruiters are looking for by reading job adverts. You can also look at the professional body CIPD's Profession Map.

Follow organisations online

Use social media to see what organisations are doing and build commercial awareness and your network. You can also take a look at industry magazines and join professional associations.

Attend events

Attend university or external events to hear from recruiters, develop your understanding of the industry and make new contacts. You can ask these contacts for advice, or even for an opportunity to shadow them in their role.

Get application ready

Update your CV and have a speculative letter ready to adapt should you need to apply for an opportunity at short notice. Book an appointment to get it checked by Careers and Enterprise.

How can Careers and Enterprise help you?

There are a number of ways Careers and Enterprise can help you build skills and prepare for applying to opportunities.

Appointments

We run one-to-one appointments with expert career consultants who can talk to you about a variety of topics including your CV and applications, as well as give you career guidance and advice surrounding making career decisions. You can also book [Practice Interview appointments](#) to test your skills, for when you have an upcoming interview

Events

We hold a range of [careers events](#) throughout the year where you can learn more about an industry, network with employers and find out what people look for in a graduate.

Programmes

If you are looking to develop your skills, Careers & Enterprise is home to the [Aspire Programme](#): Queen Mary's Student Career Development Programme. These programmes take place alongside your degree, allowing you to gain vital employability skills to add to your CV, as well as raise your commercial awareness. Please note: Eligibility requirements apply.

Online Resources

Our bank of [online resources](#) is a great place to go for careers support. We have guides (such as this one), templates for things like CVs and applications, as well as tools that you can use to build or improve a CV ([QM CareerSet](#)), practice for a psychometric test ([Graduates First](#)) or practice for a video interview ([ShortlistMe](#)).

Make the most of work experience opportunities

Once you have found a work experience opportunity, it is important to make the most of it! Here are some things to keep in mind before, during and after the opportunity.

1. Discuss your expectations with the employer at the start, so that you have the same understanding of what the experience will involve.
2. Always be polite, motivated and interested. Work experience can involve boring tasks, but being flexible, helpful and willing to get involved will make a good impression and could lead to more opportunities.
3. Be inquisitive and learn everything you can about the way the organisation works. How do they hire? What key skills are they looking for? What are the main issues affecting the organisation at the moment?
4. Talk to people who work at the organisation and find out what they do and how they got there. You might uncover job roles and employers that are new to you as well as pick up some helpful tips. Keeping in touch with people you meet can be a great way of finding out about future opportunities.
5. Ask for feedback at the end of the placement to identify your strengths and the skills you need to develop further.

For more information or where you can develop your skills and experiences, see the Resources section.

Finding Opportunities

The application process will vary, depending on the organisation and type of role that you are applying for. Most graduates enter HR through SME's within entry-level generalist roles to gain a flavour of all the different specialisms. Roles can be advertised up to a year in advance or down to 1-2 months before the start date.

Larger organisations also offer entry level or graduate jobs, which are advertised all year round. These opportunities typically appear 1-3 months before needing to be filled. Larger organisations are also more likely to have graduate schemes, which are structured one or two year programmes that combines work and training. HR graduate schemes or internships exist in a wide-range of organisations, from banks to law firms, and usually begin recruitment in the autumn term, nearly a year before the job starts!

Improve online presence

Create or update your profile on LinkedIn and follow organisations you are interested in to find out about current trends, develop your commercial awareness and expand your network. These might include companies (@theHRdept), or relevant professional associations (e.g. Institute of Recruitment Professionals). Did you know employers will often Google potential employees before hiring them? Make sure your profiles are professional and aren't going to put employers off!

Speculative applications

As well as applying to advertised vacancies (for work experience or full time work), send out speculative applications to organisations that interest you. A speculative application is sending an application to an organisation and enquiring whether there have any opportunities available. This is particularly beneficial if you are sending it to someone you have met before, known as a 'warm contact', for example at an industry event. By doing this you are showing initiative and drive. Many opportunities, especially in SMEs, are not advertised, so you could find yourself in the right place at the right time!

Resources

Getting Industry Ready

[Changeboard](#)

A HR jobs board and HR news articles

[Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development \(CIPD\)](#)

The professional body for HR and personnel development. Website includes professional development advice, and information about courses, qualifications and networking events. Being a member of the CIPD will look good on a CV and demonstrate your motivation and dedication to the industry.

[People Management \(magazine of the CIPD\)](#)

includes job adverts for HR and Recruitment, plus industry news.

[Institute of Recruitment Professionals Professional Association for Recruitment](#)

Has detail careers information in 'Help & Advice' section.

[Institute of Student Recruitment](#)

News and jobs within student recruitment.

[Milkround](#)

News and jobs in the media industry

[Personnel Today](#)

News about HR and job adverts.

[The HR Jobsite](#)

News, industry information, training, blogs.

Finding Opportunities

[QM Careers Hub jobs board](#)

Advertise a range of roles across all industries. Remember HR and recruitment roles exist in all sectors.

[Careers in Recruitment](#)

An online jobs board.

[Changeboard](#)

A HR jobs board and HR news articles

[People Management](#)

The magazine of the CIPD – includes job adverts for HR and Recruitment, plus industry news.

[HR Grapevine](#)

HR jobs board.

[inHR](#)

HR jobs board.

[Institute of Student Recruitment](#)

News and jobs within student recruitment.

[Milkround](#)

News and jobs in the media industry

[Personnel Today](#)

News about HR and job adverts.

[Simply HR](#)

HR jobs board.

[Target Jobs](#)

A range of graduate jobs, schemes and internships plus contains careers and application advice.

[Agency Central](#)

Place to find temping agencies. Temping (a series of temporary jobs in various organisations through an agency) can be an excellent method of building your experience and establishing a network of industry contacts, whilst trying different roles and organisations.

[QTemps](#)

Find temporary work