

# Getting into HR & 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. Thinking about where you would like to work and why will help you make persuasive job applications.

## Recruitment

- Recruitment can form part of an HR team in an organisation, or be outsourced through agencies where Recruitment Consultants find candidates for vacancies in client organisations.
- 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.
- Understanding the business needs and skills required by clients is important. Sales and negotiation skills are highly valued particularly in relation to building and maintaining a client base.
- 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.

## Human Resources

Opportunities are huge and varied and responsibilities will vary in different organisations. The main difference is between **specialist and generalist** positions.

- Generalist positions have responsibility for a variety of HR tasks e.g. recruitment, training, and advising on employment law. Specialist positions focus on one particular HR function and are more common in larger organisations where teams are larger so individuals focus on particular areas.
- HR functions include: recruitment and talent management, learning and development (training), reward and benefits, performance management, employee engagement, payroll, diversity and inclusion, change management and employee relations.
- Recent graduates tend to start in a generalist position. A typical entry-level position is HR Administrator, typically involving updating records and databases and dealing with general HR queries. This is an excellent way to enter the sector.

*For further detail about the roles available, see the links at the end of this guide and visit Prospects:  
[www.prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/job-sectors/recruitment-and-hr](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/job-sectors/recruitment-and-hr)*

## Where Can I work?

### SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SME)

The majority of graduates go on to work for an SME, which is an organisation with fewer than 250 employees. These companies exist in every industry, so an HR role in an SME could mean working for anything from a high-street law firm to a technology start-up.

In small organisations, one person might be responsible for all areas of HR so general positions are likely. This can mean more variety and could provide opportunities to take on responsibility or work with senior members of staff earlier. HR roles will require previous experience, so general admin roles that involve some HR work are a more common entry point for graduates. Keep in mind that early on in your career you will also want to ask advice and learn from more experienced HR colleagues. Positions become available throughout the year, but SMEs don't always advertise opportunities, so you'll need to be proactive to find them. See the networking and speculative application sections in this guide for further details.

### LARGER ORGANISATIONS

Offer entry level or graduate jobs, which tend to be filled as soon as a vacancy becomes available and are typically advertised one to three months before the start date. This means positions are advertised all year round. Working your way up in an 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 (see page 3).

# Where To Start?

**Use** your time at university to develop the skills required by recruiters in this sector, e.g. admin and digital skills. Remember part time work, volunteering and involvement in clubs and societies can be opportunities to do this - organising a large event can be valuable in developing your planning and organisational skills; getting involved in a group project is an opportunity to develop leadership skills.

**Take** on positions of responsibility, voluntary or paid, e.g. as team leader or shift supervisor, or as captain of a sports team or committee member of a student society.

**Read** job descriptions to find out what recruiters are looking for (start with the websites on page 6) plus see a map of skills required produced by the Professional Association CIPD: [www.cipd.co.uk/cipd-hr-profession/cipd-hr-profession-map/default.html](http://www.cipd.co.uk/cipd-hr-profession/cipd-hr-profession-map/default.html)  
Think about ways you can develop these skills, particularly if there are areas where you currently have little experience.

**Follow** organisations who interest you and people working in the industry on social media. A good place to start is with industry magazines and Professional Associations, or companies that interest you and people you meet at events. This is an easy way to learn about what's going on in the industry and develop your contacts, who could mention relevant events or work experience opportunities.

**Attend** careers careers events (on campus or across London) to hear from recruiters, develop your understanding of the industry, job roles and employers, as well as make new contacts – both speakers and participants - who you can add to your network.

**Update** your CV and have a speculative letter ready to adapt should you need to apply for an opportunity at short notice. Get it checked at the Careers & Enterprise Centre.

**Volunteer** for a charity to help with their administration, or perhaps even support their training and recruitment of volunteers for example. Experience of managing a budget or a project are also valuable.

*Consider a student membership of the CIPD (the professional body for HR and people development). This will give you access to the latest HR resources (including podcasts), career development advice, and networking opportunities. See [www.cipd.co.uk/membership/joining/student/](http://www.cipd.co.uk/membership/joining/student/)*

*Part of Human Resources work is to prevent mistakes and protect an organisation from matters that could have serious consequences, such as an employee taking the company to tribunal, which could incur loss of reputation, not to mention being very expensive.*

*If you work or volunteer in a non-HR role for an organisation with an HR team, why not ask if you can work shadow someone from the team or meet with them for an information interview (where you ask them questions about their career path and routes into the industry).*

## GAIN EXPERIENCE AND DEVELOP TRANSFERABLE SKILLS AT QMUL

- Browse QRecruit [[www.careers.qmul.ac.uk/qrecruit](http://www.careers.qmul.ac.uk/qrecruit)] and JobOnline [[www.careers.qmul.ac.uk/jobs](http://www.careers.qmul.ac.uk/jobs)] for available internships or temp work, or upload your CV to get informed of new opportunities. Don't forget you can always get your CV checked by Careers & Enterprise before you upload it and send it to recruiters.
- Participate in QProjects, the work experience scheme run by the Careers & Enterprise Centre, which links students to interesting projects in local charities: [www.careers.qmul.ac.uk/qprojects](http://www.careers.qmul.ac.uk/qprojects).
- Volunteer with QMSU volunteering, who offer roles in the local community: [www.qmsu.org/volunteering](http://www.qmsu.org/volunteering)
- Join relevant societies (e.g. business or campaign groups) or start your own: [www.qmsu.org](http://www.qmsu.org)

## WHAT IS A GRADUATE SCHEME?

A structured one or two year programme that combines work and training, that can lead to a professional qualification. They are generally offered by larger organisations and can involve working in different departments of the business. A permanent position at the end of the scheme is not guaranteed.

- They are less common than assumed, with only 10% of graduates doing them overall.
- Remember HR graduate schemes or graduate internships exist in organisations from banks to law firms, manufacturers, retailers and energy providers.
- Most schemes begin recruitment in the autumn term, nearly a year before the job starts. There are usually multiple application stages including psychometric tests and assessment centres (see the Careers & Enterprise QMPlus page for practice materials). Note deadlines well in advance, and allow time to work on applications.
- Many schemes have strict degree classification and UCAS points entry criteria, so check you meet these.
- Salaries tend to be high and working hours longer.
- Smaller businesses are far less likely to offer them.

## Making the most of work experience opportunities:

1. Discuss your expectations with the employer at the start, so 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.
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 (e.g. Brexit or working legislation changes)?
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, which will help you make decisions about your options. Keeping in touch with people you meet can be a great way of finding out about future opportunities (see networking tips on page 5).
5. Ask for feedback at the end of the placement to identify your strengths and the skills you need to develop further.

## Commercial awareness

HR aims at improving organisational performance and meeting business objectives through people, and recruitment is about ensuring you have the right people in the role in order to do this, so demonstrating your business awareness – understanding the needs and pressures of an organisation and how this relates to the work done within HR for example – will help you stand out from the crowd. Consider how national and international developments are impacting the industry such as immigration and economic factors in relation to Brexit or the recession for example, plus 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 could be asked about this at interview e.g. ‘Why do you want to work for us (and not our main competitor)?’. Have a good understanding of how the organisation makes money and how they differentiate themselves from others. Read the company’s website plus the websites listed in this guide to develop this knowledge.

Keep up to date with trends and developments in HR by reading relevant publications, such as People Management, the magazine of CIPD, the professional body for HR and people development or Personnel Today. Attending events is another way to gain insight into the industry from those working in it. Find out what they feel the current challenges are and where they see the profession in 5 years’ time for example.

# Next steps: Getting in

Gain **work experience**. This doesn't just have to be in HR or recruitment, as administrative experience from any industry is particularly useful for getting into HR in the longer term and will be a valuable addition to your CV. There is no one way of finding a job. The most successful candidates are likely to be those that do a little of everything: apply to advertised jobs and work experience on job boards (see the links on the final page), **attend events**, network, make speculative applications and **utilise personal contacts**.

If you are applying for jobs, **prepare for the interviews** and assessment centres in advance, as employers don't always give much notice before being invited to interview. Start practising for potential writing tasks and brush up on your awareness of the sector. You could be asked where you see the industry in five years' time for example, so be ready to answer this type of question. See [our resources](#) on how to prepare for interviews, including a list of sample interview questions.

**Build your online profile.** Create or update your profile on LinkedIn and follow organisations you are interested in on Twitter to find out about current trends and develop your **commercial awareness** - otherwise known as business focus or industry understanding (see previous page for further details). These can be companies e.g. @theHRdept, relevant professional associations (e.g. Institute of Recruitment Professionals) and industry magazines such as @PeopleMgt or @HRGrapevine.

**Speculative applications.** As well as applying to advertised vacancies (for work experience or full time work), making speculative applications to organisations enquiring directly whether they have any opportunities available, can be a very effective approach - particularly when sending to a 'warm contact' i.e. someone you have interacted with before at an event or on Twitter. You could apply to your favourite publications / publishing houses for example, detailing your interest and enthusiasm for the organisation. Many opportunities, especially in SMEs, are not advertised, so you could find yourself in the right place at the right time! See '[How to Find and Apply for Unadvertised Jobs](#)' for further details on speculative applications and read the networking section on page 5 to find out how to build your contacts.

**Learn a new skill!** Another way to make a good impression to employers, is to develop the skills that they are looking for. Skills such as project management, business or finance (numeracy skills and budgetary control) are highly sought after in this industry, so taking a short course or teaching yourself a new skill can help you to stand out from the crowd. A short introduction to HR or recruitment could also be useful and will demonstrate initiative and enthusiasm.

**Find short courses:** Floodlight: [www.floodlight.co.uk](http://www.floodlight.co.uk),

Hot Courses: [www.hotcourses.com](http://www.hotcourses.com) and

as well as Professional Associations such as [CIPD](#) / [IRP](#). You could learn online using Youtube tutorials or websites like [Lynda.com](#) (paid for service).

HR is about working with people as a resource of an organisation and its goals. You have to be organised, good at systems and enjoy working with people (the good bits and the challenging bits). Be honest with yourself, do you enjoy administration and can you deal with conflict? Having a realistic sense of what working in the sector involves will be valuable when convincing employers of your suitability for the job.

Whilst HR is about helping people it is also about partnering with the business and potentially being involved in tough decisions i.e. redundancies, disciplinaries, grievances and dealing with angry / upset staff in employee relations cases. Be aware when applying for work experience, that issues such as confidentiality and dealing with sensitive matters could mean some areas are restricted to permanent staff only.

Graduates may often have a number of work experience or temporary opportunities before finding longer term positions. This building block approach is a common way to enter the industry in a longer term capacity. Make the most of your work experience (see previous page).

**Be positive and gather skills and contacts** along the way, so you are in a stronger position to apply for roles in the future.

## FAQ: Do I need to have a particular degree subject?

To work in HR you don't need to have a specific degree, rather you need to be able to explain how your skills and experience (including those gained from your degree) are relevant. Previous work experience to demonstrate your skills and motivation in the industry is **highly valued** by employers. Degrees in human resource management, business, management, economics or psychology might be an advantage for some companies. A professional qualification is normally required in order to progress in to more senior positions.

## Networking

Keep in touch with anyone you meet through work experience or careers events using social media and email. You never know when they might be able to help you! Think about how you will introduce yourself to new contacts. **Make a good impression** by preparing a quick outline of who you are, what you do, and how it relates to them.

If you meet someone interesting at an event or during work experience, **follow up** with a short email or LinkedIn message. Students have found work experience by introducing themselves to employers at events, but do this diplomatically so you don't cause offence! As well as building your contacts, think about people you already know - friends, family, or previous colleagues from volunteering or extra curricular activities.

Consider how social media can build your digital presence and support your job search. **Twitter** and **LinkedIn** are valuable tools for following industry trends, as well as hearing about events, news and jobs. Use your Twitter feed to make interesting and insightful contributions to ongoing discussions. Don't just focus on obvious self-promotion or job-seeking – the more engaging/entertaining/informative you are, the more followers you will attract and the broader your network will become. Once you've interacted with someone online it will give you an opening to talk to them in real life.

## FAQ: Do I need a masters or a professional qualification?

Although an HR qualification is 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. Part-time, evening and distance learning options are available, so the course can be taken over a number of years alongside employment. A certificate option is offered as a stepping stone to the diploma, which is another option to consider.

There are also many Human Resources and business related Masters courses. A Masters is not essential, but may be an advantage, particularly if your first degree was in an unrelated subject. Be aware, further study does not replace work experience, where you develop your skills in a professional environment. You still need to demonstrate your transferable skills (e.g. teamwork, communication) by participating in work experience opportunities. Look for courses recommended by the relevant Professional Association (e.g. CIPD), that have strong links with employers, and perhaps a placement option. Before you start a course investigate what exemptions you would get should you decide to take the Professional Qualification in the future.

Don't feel you have to take a course straight after your undergraduate degree. Gaining further experience first can be an excellent way to test whether it is the right career for you. Look at job descriptions and speak to those working in the industry to find out which (if any) qualifications are valued most by employers in the area you are looking to work in. HR admin positions are common entry points for recent graduates to gain experience and an understanding of the industry (making sure HR is right for them!) before undertaking additional qualifications.

You could choose to take a short or introductory course in business or HR, to boost your CV, network 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. A skills map and further details on these points see: [www.cipd.co.uk/learn/career](http://www.cipd.co.uk/learn/career)

# Top websites for finding work experience and jobs

Be aware when searching that job titles may differ for similar job roles (e.g. HR Assistant, HR administrator, Recruitment Trainee) and that the same job titles (e.g. HR Assistant) can be used for very different roles, so read the job description and person specification for full information. Once you have found a site you like, bookmark it and check it regularly for new posts. Browsing vacancies can help to identify interesting employers to apply to speculatively – particularly if the role being advertised is in a different team or is too senior.

## **QM JobOnline:** [www.careers.qmul.ac.uk/jobs](http://www.careers.qmul.ac.uk/jobs)

- A range of roles across all industries. Remember HR / admin roles exist in all sectors.

## **Careers in Recruitment:** [www.careersinrecruitment.com](http://www.careersinrecruitment.com)

- Jobs board.

## **Changeboard:** [www.changeboard.com](http://www.changeboard.com)

- HR jobs board and HR news articles

## **Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development:** [www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk)

- 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:** [www.cipd.co.uk/pm](http://www.cipd.co.uk/pm)

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

## **HR Grapevine:** [www.hrgrapevine.com/jobs](http://www.hrgrapevine.com/jobs)

- HR jobs board.

## **inHR:** [www.inhr.co.uk](http://www.inhr.co.uk)

- HR jobs board.

## **Institute of Recruitment Professionals:** [www.rec-irp.uk.com/](http://www.rec-irp.uk.com/)

- Professional Association for Recruitment. Has detail careers information in 'Help & Advice' section.

## **Milkround:** [www.milkround.com](http://www.milkround.com)

- News and jobs in the media industry.

## **Personnel Today:** [www.personneltoday.com](http://www.personneltoday.com)

- News about HR and job adverts.

## **Simply HR:** [www.simplyhrjobs.co.uk](http://www.simplyhrjobs.co.uk)

- HR jobs board.

## **Target Jobs:** [www.targetjobs.co.uk](http://www.targetjobs.co.uk)

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

## **The HR Jobsite:** [www.thehrjobsite.com](http://www.thehrjobsite.com)

- News, industry information, training, blogs.

You could also try the online job boards of local newspapers for vacancies in your area.

## Recruitment 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. Know the type of work or organisation you are interested in, so you can be specific about what you are looking for. Previous work experience may be necessary. To find agencies search: [www.agencycentral.co.uk](http://www.agencycentral.co.uk)

# Top Tips and a Final Checklist

- Get some administration and office experience.
- Be prepared to start at the bottom, in an assistant role – there's plenty of scope for working your way up.
- Keep an open mind – sometimes taking another role in an organisation can lead to a HR opportunity opening up.
- Develop your organisational skills – run a society, set up an event
- Fine tune your commercial awareness, be prepared to show you are business savvy – show you understand the needs of that organisation and that you are able to contribute to this.
- Join the CIPD – This will prove your interest in the sector and allow you to keep up to date by following them on social media. They also have an excellent careers advice section.

## CASE STUDIES

Find out what it's like to work in the industry from people who already do:

**CIPD:** [www.cipd.co.uk/cipd-hr-profession/hr-careers/hr-interviews-videos.aspx](http://www.cipd.co.uk/cipd-hr-profession/hr-careers/hr-interviews-videos.aspx)

**Prospects:** [www.prospects.ac.uk/case-studies](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/case-studies)

**Careers Box:** [www.careersbox.co.uk](http://www.careersbox.co.uk)