

# **Human Resource Management**

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# Careers in Human Resource Management

This publication is an introduction to the Human Resource Management (commonly referred to as HR) sector.

HR is a highly competitive career area to get into with HR positions often getting more applications per post than the other graduate schemes. Some multinationals receive as many as 3000 applications for only a handful of HR places each year.

If you are considering HR, researching the career area, what it is about and how you may be suited is an important step.

## What is Human Resource Management (HR)?

Human Resource Management involves supporting and effectively managing the people who work for an organisation. HR is increasingly seen as a core commercial function as HR professionals make decisions and choices that enable organisations to operate effectively, competitively and profitably. HR can often involve making difficult decisions and judgment calls; there are sometimes no easy answers.

### The main areas of HR are:

#### Job Analysis

- Providing support to line managers in development of job descriptions, person specifications and performance indicators.
- Maintaining and updating a database with job descriptions, person specifications and performance indicators.
- Ensuring that all employees are familiar with their job description and have the necessary skills to perform their job.
- Using Job Analysis as a basis for other HR practices such as Recruitment and Selection, Performance Management etc.

## **Recruitment and selection**

- Liaising with line managers to determine the staffing needs of the organisation.
- Drawing up job descriptions, person specifications, preparing advertisements.
- Screening applications, setting selection tests and running assessment centres, interviewing and selecting candidates.
- Monitoring recruitment and selection to ensure the company operates in line with employment law and company policies on equal opportunities and diversity.

## **Performance Management**

- Developing and / or updating the organisation's Performance Management system to ensure that people's skills, behaviours, and contributions are recognised.
- Providing guidance and support to line managers so that they can apply the Performance Management system effectively.

## **Organisation development and training**

- Analysing the needs of the organisation and of individuals, and designing relevant training and development strategies to meet these
- Developing induction programmes and appraisal systems.
- All aspects of training, including designing and delivering sessions, sourcing external trainers, monitoring and evaluating training and identifying how to make it more effective for the organisation.
- Human resource planning - predicting how the organisation is likely to change in the future and future staffing needs.
- It can also involve career management, succession planning, management development and counselling of staff.

## **Employee relations**

- HR professionals develop systems for managers and support them in many areas. They include grievance handling, disciplinary proceedings, redundancy programmes, resolving differences between staff members, liaising with union representatives.

- Implementing diversity and equal opportunities policies and supplying accurate advice to managers and staff on the interpretation of employment legislation.
- Managing staff through processes of organisational change such as mergers.
- Ensuring the organisation adheres to legal frameworks in areas such as discipline & grievance, redundancy, and employment law.

### **Employee engagement**

- This distinct discipline is found in larger organisations and has links with employee relations.
- Focuses on areas such as branding and internal communications to build connections between employees and their organisation with the purpose of building loyalty to the organisation.

### **Pay and Reward**

- Developing and implementing a fair pay, rewards and benefits system for employees.
- Communicating the pay, rewards and bonuses system to all staff to ensure transparency and openness.
- Administering payroll systems, conducting job evaluations, analysing statistical salary data and liaising closely with the rest of the organisation.

### **Overall a HR career is about:**

- management responsibility
- variety
- business influencing
- consistent and efficient communication
- project and resource management
- professional recognition
- dynamic environments.

## What roles are available?

The HR function has undergone change in many organisations. There are now fewer “generalist” HR team members who carry out a range of HR tasks. In recent years HR roles have moved towards either:

- **Centralised service centre roles**, where staff offer a HR service to the whole organisation.
- **Centres of expertise roles**, where staff take on specialist HR roles such as compensations and benefits, employment law, recruitment & selection, employee relations, and training and development.
- **Business partner roles**, where HR personnel offer a more frontline strategic HR input for a business site.

Some specialist areas are also outsourced to consultants rather than being an in-house function. Specific qualifications such as organisational psychology may be required.

### Other HR-related roles to investigate include:

- careers adviser / consultant
- human resource consultancy
- occupational psychology
- corporate social responsibility adviser

## Who is suited to a career in HR?

HR is an ideal choice for individuals who like to:

- work with a diverse range of people.
- manage a broad range of valuable yet challenging tasks.
- operate in an unpredictable and changing environment.

Many applicants choose to apply to HR for other reasons. You may want to carry out more research before choosing a career in HR if you primarily:

- are interested in people related matters
- “want to help people”
- think it sounds like the least demanding or confrontational of the graduate schemes available

## **Before you embark on your applications for HR**

HR recruiters feel it is important that the right candidate has a good understanding of the nature of HR in today’s business world.

- Find out all you can about what HR is about.
- Think carefully about why you want to get into HR and how you will convey this motivation on your application.
- Identify how you will make your application stand out.

Try to also consider what your “Plan B” might if you are not successful applying for the graduate schemes.

If your main motivation is that you would like to “work with” or “help” people then a related career is also worth considering.

- A line management role probably provides more front-line people issues to deal with than a HR role.
- Roles such as counselling, social work or trade union work truly focus upon helping people.

HR today is often more about developing business strategy than looking after the welfare of staff members.

## **Where do HR professionals work?**

Many organisations employ HR professionals including multinational companies, banks, retail chains and public sector organisations such as local government, the health service, and universities.

Although the very smallest organisations may not have a specialist HR person, opportunities also exist in smaller public and private organisations such as charities and government agencies. HR vacancies can be found all across the UK although the HR function is one of the smallest teams in an organisation so numbers of vacancies can often be small.

Despite this range of opportunity, many graduates still target their applications at a small number of major multinational organisations with well-known brands. This makes these schemes particularly competitive.

## Routes into HR

### Graduate schemes

Some general management graduate schemes offer the opportunity to complete a rotation in human resources as part of their wider management training programme. There are also opportunities for graduates from any degree discipline to join a graduate scheme with an HR specialism.

Organisations offering a graduate scheme with an HR specialism include:

- Boots [www.boots.jobs](http://www.boots.jobs)
- Centrica [www.centrica.co.uk](http://www.centrica.co.uk)
- Civil Service [www.civilservice.gov.uk/faststream](http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/faststream)
- DHL [www.dhl-graduates.com](http://www.dhl-graduates.com)
- Diageo [www.diageo.com](http://www.diageo.com)
- EDF Energy [www.edfenergy.com](http://www.edfenergy.com)
- Fujitsu [www.fujitsu.com](http://www.fujitsu.com)
- NHS [www.nhsgraduates.co.uk](http://www.nhsgraduates.co.uk)
- Royal Mail [www.royalmailgroup.com/our-people](http://www.royalmailgroup.com/our-people)

Graduate employers often look for a good understanding of what HR is about and some relevant experience where possible. They look for overall strong evidence of the competencies sought such as leadership,

team working, excellent communication skills and sound, and reasoned decision-making ability.

To find further examples and advice see Prospects [www.prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/job-sectors/recruitment-and-hr/hr-graduate-schemes](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/job-sectors/recruitment-and-hr/hr-graduate-schemes)

### **Postgraduate training**

Many students choose to study a Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) accredited HR postgraduate qualification to improve their theoretical knowledge of human resource management. This route, when combined with the relevant practical experience necessary to achieve professional recognition under the CIPD's new membership framework, can be very effective if you are seeking direct entry to the profession outside of the graduate schemes.

If you are considering postgraduate study in HR and intending to apply to an HR graduate scheme, you will often go through the same selection process as those without the postgraduate qualification with employers still seeking evidence of your relevant skills and achievements irrespective of your further study. However, some HR graduate schemes, such as the NHS HR graduate scheme, will not accept applications from graduates who have already completed a CIPD accredited HR postgraduate qualification and expect such candidates to apply for direct entry positions to the organisation. You should therefore check with individual HR graduate schemes whether they welcome applications from graduates who are already CIPD qualified.

In deciding where to study a CIPD accredited HR course, where possible look for courses that provide an opportunity to complete placements and project work with organisations. Courses can also be taken part-time or by flexible learning and combined with gaining work experience. This can be very beneficial to new graduates with little work experience.

For further details of CIPD accredited courses across the UK visit the CIPD website [www.cipd.co.uk/qualifications/where-qualified](http://www.cipd.co.uk/qualifications/where-qualified)

## **Mature entry**

Many individuals move across into HR from other functions within a company bringing their experience and skills with them. Experience such as management, law, accountancy or administrative work can be useful in HR particularly at the more senior levels. Starting your career in another function can sometimes lead to opportunities for lateral moves into HR.

## **Getting experience**

Anything you can do to build up a portfolio of experience will benefit your job applications. If you are planning to get in and work your way up, or are seeking to apply to a graduate scheme, experience is important. Knowledge of the business world and commercial awareness is often essential.

Sometimes the hunt for HR work experience can turn into a vicious circle if you don't already have some! Graduates can find it difficult to obtain roles as a personnel administrator/officer as these can require knowledge of existing payroll systems. You could visit recruitment agencies to source temporary office work, and get your foot in the door [www.careers.manchester.ac.uk/findjobs/graduatejobs/agencies/](http://www.careers.manchester.ac.uk/findjobs/graduatejobs/agencies/)

Alternatively you could volunteer to do a specific project for an organisation – such as reviewing their absence policies/induction process – can allow you to gain experience and use your initiative without the need for previous experience.

It can take some time completing online applications and attending assessment centres. Putting in the ground work early can noticeably increase your chances of success. This includes:

## The following schemes can provide opportunities for HR projects:

- Search the Volunteer Hub, run by the University of Manchester, which offers voluntary projects with local not-for-profit organisations in Greater Manchester.  
[www.manchester.ac.uk/volunteers](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/volunteers)
- STEP  
A national vacation programme offering 8 weeks experience in a small company in the UK completing a live project for the organisation. Offers the opportunity to gain real responsibility and a good understanding of a career.  
[www.step.org.uk](http://www.step.org.uk)
- Manchester Graduate Talent  
Paid full-time positions for new graduate students offering up to 12 month placements in small and medium sized companies in Greater Manchester or within The University of Manchester itself.  
[www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/findjobs/graduatejobs/mgt/](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/findjobs/graduatejobs/mgt/)

In addition use your CareersLink account

[www.manchester.ac.uk/careerslink](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/careerslink) to receive vacancies by email. HR placements are advertised at all times throughout the year. The main graduate schemes are often advertised between September-December.

## Developing skills

Employers look for graduates who can demonstrate real evidence of the skills they seek. These skills include:

- the ability to communicate effectively
- influencing skills (e.g. with managers you have no direct power over)
- maintaining a fair and objective attitude
- working effectively with and managing others
- working well and making decisions in a pressurised environment
- confidentiality
- the integrity to protect/defend a point of view to commercial managers and against commercial pressures

- business awareness to see things from the employer's perspective

Developing your portfolio of experience could come from:

- active involvement in a society
- a volunteering project
- a vacation placement/summer job
- taking on extra responsibility in a part-time position
- organising an event or activity with others.
- Informal work shadowing

## Developing Insight

The Careers Service offers opportunities to increase your knowledge of different career areas. They include:

- Manchester Gold Mentoring – A six month programme which offers the chance to get an inside view of a career and talk to someone currently working in that role.
- Ask Me About - You can also log onto the Manchester Network at any time and ask our mentors questions on a one-off basis

Both accessible here

[www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/experience/mentoring](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/experience/mentoring)

- The CIPD hold an annual conference & exhibition annually at Manchester Central, usually in November. You can register for a free exhibition entrance ticket here <https://events.cipd.co.uk/events/annual/freepass/>. Whilst the event is aimed at HR professionals, not students it is a great opportunity to chat informally to professionals in the field and gain hints and tips about getting into the sector
- Connect with HR professionals on LinkedIn. Start by going to the University of Manchester's page and click on see alumni to find people who graduated from your university. Always write a short message to explain why you are hoping to connect. Can they offer you advice and insight into the industry?

## Job Search Strategies

- Tailor each application to the type of organisation or sector – why do you want to do HR for an engineering firm, a health service or a bank? Research the key HR issues in that industry.
- Apply to more than just the major multinationals. Consider smaller companies and different kinds of organisation.
- Make speculative applications by emailing companies directly with a CV and covering letter tailored for their organisation. Follow them up with a polite call after a week or so. This will show that you're keen and remind them that you are looking forward to receiving a response.

## Sources of Job Vacancies

### Graduate Schemes

Advertised in lots of publications and on different websites. Some of the best to begin your search with include:

- The Careers Service website  
[www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/findjobs/graduatejobs/](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/findjobs/graduatejobs/)
- Graduate Prospects  
[www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)
- Target jobs  
[www.targetjobs.co.uk/graduate-jobs](http://www.targetjobs.co.uk/graduate-jobs)

### Journals

- **People Management Magazine.** (also available in the Careers Library)  
This CIPD magazine carries job vacancies. It is particularly good for middle and senior management roles (also in the Careers Service Library) [www.peoplemanagement.co.uk](http://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk)
- **Personnel Today.** (also available in the Careers Library)  
Includes job vacancies for all levels including newly qualified.  
[www.personneltoday.com](http://www.personneltoday.com)

- **Health Service Journal.**  
For vacancies in the Health Service.  
[www.hsj.co.uk](http://www.hsj.co.uk)

## Websites

- **Local government and other public sector vacancies.**  
[www.lgjobs.com](http://www.lgjobs.com)  
[www.jobsgopublic.com](http://www.jobsgopublic.com)
- **University positions.**  
Vacancies in the UK and overseas in universities and other areas of the public sector are advertised on this website  
[www.jobs.ac.uk](http://www.jobs.ac.uk)

## Websites for more information

- **Prospects**  
Information & case studies on the different job roles in ‘human resources and employment.’  
[www.prospects.ac.uk/recruitment\\_hr\\_sector.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/recruitment_hr_sector.htm)
- **Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.**  
The careers section of the CIPD website includes lots of useful information including application advice.  
[www.cipd.co.uk/hr-careers](http://www.cipd.co.uk/hr-careers)

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