

# Using Recruitment Agencies: Guidelines for Students

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## Can using recruitment agencies help you to find a job?

Yes, they can give you access to a whole range of unadvertised jobs - both temporary and permanent. For many, a temporary job taken through an agency has proved to be a valuable way of gaining the necessary experience for a permanent post - a stepping stone to a long-term career.

Many of the specialist recruitment agencies are staffed by people who have an in-depth knowledge of their particular industry. Such contacts can be a useful source of advice and information to help you with your job hunt, but remember you will need to be very specific in any requests for advice.

If you don't look forward to filling in all those application forms, getting an agency to do the work for you will sound like a good idea. However, you should use other job hunting methods at the same time. Agencies rely on employers deciding to use their services instead of other methods of recruitment, such as newspaper advertising; because of this, they handle only a tiny proportion of the possible work available.

## Choosing the right recruitment agency

This depends where you want to work and the type of work you are looking for - see the guidelines below. You might want to register with more than one agency to maximise your chances of finding work, especially if you are looking for a permanent job. However, if you are looking for temporary employment, it is better to select one or two agencies at first. If you register with several who all offer you work at the same time, you will have to turn down offers of employment. The agency whose work you reject will think twice before they offer again - and you never know when you might need them at a later date!

The Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC) has a site full of information about recruitment agencies at: [www.rec.uk.com](http://www.rec.uk.com). REC sets standards, helps maintain quality of performance, and is a trusted source of information and guidance on many aspects of employment law and practice.

## 1. Traditional Recruitment Agencies

### High Street Agencies

You may already be familiar with high street recruitment agencies. There are several well-known chains (e.g.: Reed, Manpower, Adecco) with offices all over the country. Others are independently owned, and may have only one or two branches in a particular area. High street agencies will usually concentrate on local vacancies, offer permanent and/or temporary work and can deal with a wide range of employment types. Secretarial, clerical, admin, accounting, catering, computing and manual work are some of the most widely offered. Some agencies will specialise in one or two particular types of work, whilst others might deal with anything that comes their way.

### Specialist Agencies

These are agencies which deal with a particular type of work e.g. scientific/technical, public relations, pharmaceutical, legal, insurance, engineering. Usually, but not always, they require you to have a relevant degree and/or work experience of varying amounts. Check what is required with each individual agency.



They might offer temporary work, short-term contracts or permanent positions. These could be based locally, in the UK or sometimes overseas. Details of specialist agencies, including the types of work they handle and if they deal with new graduate assignments, can be found on the REC web site. You can use the 'Member Directory' under the 'Membership' tab, to search for agencies recruiting for a particular sector or occupational area.

### **Approaching agencies**

Agencies usually prefer you to call in rather than to telephone. However, there are some exceptions, most notably medical sales where telephone contact may count as a selection tool, so be careful before you phone. Dress smartly when you visit and take a copy of your CV with you.

You should be clear about the sort of work you want and are capable of doing, as this will be the first question you are asked. The answer 'anything' will not impress them. They may take this as a message that you have no skills in particular, and are desperate for a job! Instead, give a brief description of your previous work experience and any work-related skills you have developed from your course. After an initial discussion you may be asked to return for an appointment to register.

### **Registering and accepting work**

Agencies are not obliged to register your details. An agency which knows it cannot help you because you haven't got the right skills or experience for its regular clients should tell you so, rather than giving you false hope. Don't be offended or think they are being 'awkward'; they are simply trying not to waste your time or theirs. Instead, ask them for the names of other agencies which might be able to help you.

Once you have 'registered' it is a case of waiting until a suitable opportunity arises for which the agency is prepared to put you forward. They will telephone you when this happens, but it is often a good idea to phone them on a regular basis just to let them know that you are still looking for work.

When you are contacted for temporary work, you simply agree (or not) to take the work you are offered, write down the details and turn up for work at the appointed time. If you turn down work as unsuitable more than once or twice, you will find that the agency gives you less priority when future work comes in. For permanent work, you may not be the only candidate that the agency puts forward, and will usually have to go for one or two interviews before you know whether you have been successful.

## **2. Online Agencies**

There are literally thousands of sites relating to recruitment. Agencies here may work in a number of ways, but most commonly you will find that they offer one or both of the following:

### **Database Service**

This is where job seekers' details are collected in a database and the agency charges employers a fee to search through them. Most allow you to add your details straight into the database, whilst others ask you to fill in an application form and send it to them.

### **Advertised Vacancies**

Viewing the agency's website will allow you to access a list of recruiters and their vacancy details. Examples of these are:

- Reed Graduates - [www.reed.co.uk/jobs/graduate](http://www.reed.co.uk/jobs/graduate)
- Stepstone – [www.stepstone.co.uk](http://www.stepstone.co.uk)

## **Applying for jobs advertised by agencies in newspapers and vacancy bulletins**

It is not always easy to spot which jobs are advertised by agencies on behalf of employers as they often look exactly the same as employer vacancies. One clue might be spotting words like: recruitment, professional, personnel, temporary, career or services in the address you are asked to contact, or some combination of them e.g. 'Protemp', 'Career Professionals' etc.

Agency vacancies have suffered from a negative image, owing to a very few organisations advertising fictitious jobs just to get interested applicants on their register. This is of course irritating and results in wasted time for those who have prepared a really good CV for a non-existent job. However, the vast majority will be advertising genuine opportunities - so don't be put off. If in any doubt you can send a CV you've already prepared for similar work, and offer to give more details if required. Don't travel a long way for interview without checking if expenses will be paid or satisfying yourself that the vacancy is a suitable one. An agency will understandably be reluctant to give the name of their client to you until an interview has been arranged (you could bypass them and approach the employer directly) but should be forthcoming with other details such as job description, salary, prospects etc.

A final word of warning on the subject of those sales vacancies advertised with earnings that sound too good to be true. These might or might not be advertised as being on a commission-only basis. In some cases, the abbreviation OTE (On Target Earnings) will be used to indicate that the salary quoted is the one you can expect to earn if you meet your sales targets. Failure to meet those targets can mean that the actual amount earned is considerably less. These types of vacancies are often handled by agencies, owing to the high turnover of applicants. Ask searching questions such as: exactly how much of the advertised salary is guaranteed and how much depends on your performance? How many staff earned the advertised amount in the last year? Speak to them yourself if possible. Most opportunities offer real potential to earn, just make sure you are clear about what that means in your case.

## Dos and Don'ts

### DO:

- try to be selective when using recruitment agencies. Focus on agencies which handle the kind of work you are interested in and which have a good track record for finding jobs. Ask friends and relatives - personal recommendation is a good way to find a suitable agency.
- ask how long the agency has been in business. This can be another way of finding out how successful they are. New recruitment sites are appearing on the internet every day. It is best to be cautious as there is currently little or no regulation of the quality of these services.
- check on the REC website to see if the agency is registered with the Recruitment & Employment Confederation. Members of REC must follow a code of practice and fulfil certain obligations both to job-seekers and employers. (However, just because an agency is not a member of this organisation does not mean that they will necessarily have lower standards. Some specialist agencies simply choose not to register as they only deal with a very narrow section of the recruitment market.)
- ask about the current job market and how employers will view your qualifications and experience.
- check to make sure that personal details like your name and address will be held confidentially .
- send a back-up copy in the post, when sending your CV to an internet agency.
- use the internet to find out more about a company before applying/going to an interview. Most major companies have their own website and advice on researching employers can be found on the Careers Service website at: [www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers)

### DON'T

- part with any money unless you know exactly what you are buying. Agencies are not legally allowed to charge you a fee to register but can ask you to pay for other services such as preparing a CV. As always, it is best to check what is expected of you before registering.
- accept a job if you feel it isn't right for you. Resist the temptation to give into agency pressure.
- be careless. You must put effort into your CV and applications, and check them carefully for spelling and grammar mistakes.

**NB** The Careers Service can take no responsibility for the agencies listed above. You should satisfy yourself that their services are appropriate to your needs before registering your details with them.