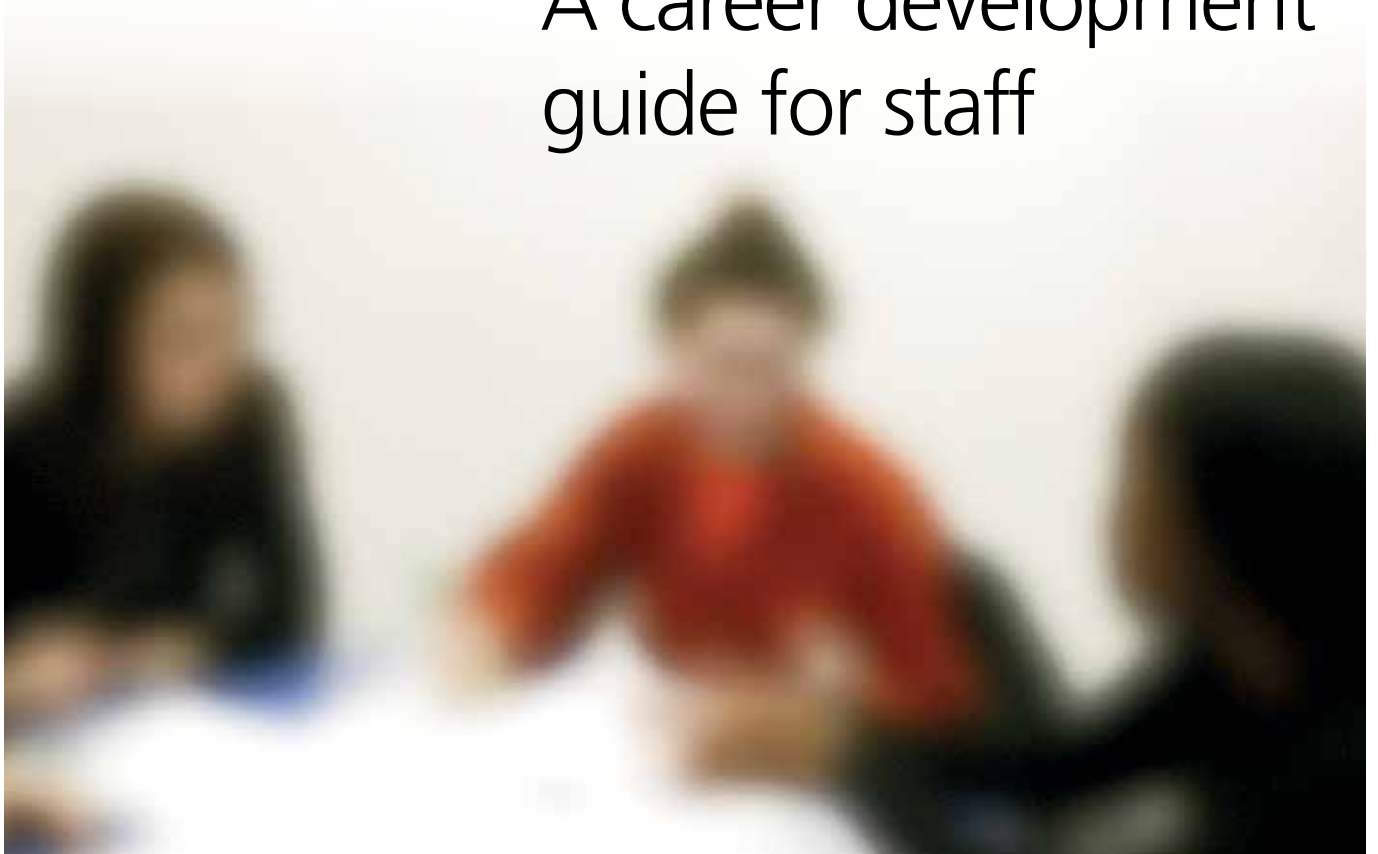




THE LONDON SCHOOL  
OF ECONOMICS AND  
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

# The Life Book:

A career development  
guide for staff



# Acknowledgements

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## Human Resources (HR) at LSE

This guide has been sponsored and published by HR with the aim of helping you develop your career at LSE. HR provides a wide range of opportunities to meet the needs of the diverse members of staff at LSE. To see what's available, visit the HR website.

## About the author

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All information was correct at the time of going to press.

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This book is full of practical help and advice on how to approach changing jobs, including comprehensive guidance on how to decide which jobs to go for, how to draft your application and CV and to make the best of yourself at interview.



# 1 Foreword

The world of work changes around us all the time, and in recent times, the speed of change has escalated. Whilst at times this can be challenging, it also offers tremendous opportunities to use our skills, experience and abilities across a wide choice of roles. The university sector generally, and LSE in particular, offers a wider range of opportunities than many far larger organisations, and can still offer good job security. We also offer a range of courses and support tools to help you gain the best value from your time with us, and to support you when you want to make changes.

This book is full of practical help and advice on how to approach changing jobs, including comprehensive guidance on how to decide which jobs to go for, how to draft your application and CV and to make the best of yourself at interview. It is written mainly to support onward career development and progression at the LSE, but those of you who are considering working elsewhere will find it equally helpful. If your unit is reorganising or offering new posts, it will also support you to approach that with confidence.

Enjoy the booklet, good luck in your applications and please take advantage of the many written support tools referenced here to create an enjoyable and successful onward career.

# 2 Who and what this guide is for

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## LSE – a great place to work

Once you get the LSE bug, it's hard to leave. In fact, the School has a staff retention rate of 93 per cent. That's very high, even for a university. Indeed, working in the higher education sector in general is a pretty good place to be at the moment. This is not just because your job is relatively secure in an economic downturn, but also because benefits for staff have really improved over the last few years.

But the high retention rate at LSE, as well as the positive aspects of working in the Higher Education sector, can have a downside. Sometimes it means that job openings and promotional chances can be more limited than at places where staff turnover is higher. You might wait for many years in your current role and not have the chance to move upwards. But if you are creative in developing your career, you can have a long and fulfilling career at the School and within the wider HE sector. Indeed, one of the aims of this guide is to give you some ideas and equip you with some skills to help you develop your career in the way you choose.

## What this guide is about

In this guide you will:

- read about staff at LSE who have developed their careers successfully
- find out about the different ways you can develop your career at LSE
- think about how you might develop your career if think you need to move on from the School
- learn how to write better job applications
- learn how to be more successful at job interviews
- get answers to the most frequently-asked career questions

## Who this guide is for

This guide is mainly for professional support staff at LSE. However, many of the principles in the guide will help you no matter what job you do.

Once you get the LSE bug, it's hard to leave. In fact the School has an overall staff retention rate of 93 per cent.





# 3 How to develop your career

In this section you will find out:

- the different ways you can develop your career at LSE
- about opportunities in the HE sector
- how to make a complete career change

## Your options at LSE

You have a few choices if you want to develop your career at LSE: gain a promotion within your own department; have your own job re-evaluated under the HERA (Higher Education Role Analysis) process; or move sideways to a different department and possibly upwards after that. Whichever route you are going down, try and take advantage of everything LSE has to offer to help you develop new skills. Let's look at these options in more detail.

### Getting promoted in your own department

If you want a more senior job in your own department, you have really got to pinpoint what kind of skills and experience you need to give you a realistic chance of being appointed. At first, it can feel like a Catch-22 situation: you want the promotion to get the experience, but you need the experience to get the promotion. But there are a few things you can do to boost your chances:

- 1 Ask your manager for additional responsibility.** Think about where your weak areas or gaps are in terms of skills and experience. If you haven't any experience of managing budgets, for instance, perhaps your manager would allow you to be responsible for a small budget within your department or if you are weaker at liaising and networking, ask if you can represent your department at a particular meeting or consultative forum if this is appropriate.
- 2 Take advantage of HR's services.** HR offers a wide range of excellent courses covering topics such as:
  - Leadership and management
  - Customer service
  - Project working
  - Personal development

As well as giving you new knowledge and skills, these courses are a great way for you to meet people in different departments at LSE.





## Case study: Peter Anastasi

### Current role

**Security Teamleader, LSE**

### Career path

I've been working for about 46 years and in that time my career has been very varied indeed. At age 18, I started out as a ladies' hairdresser! Since then I've worked for Joseph Lyons catering, the Bank of Cyprus and Trusthouse Forte. The place where I worked for the longest time was Alpha Steele where I did a variety of roles: accounting, sales and purchasing. Before I joined LSE, I worked for a company called Evenshaw who provided the security to the Towers before LSE owned them. I applied for my current role and went through an interview and fortunately got the job.

### Career tips

Of course, it's important to get the basics right when you are making applications and having an interview, but there's a lot to be said for the personal qualities you show, whatever job you happen to be doing. If you get a reputation for someone who's hardworking, flexible and enthusiastic, that will go a long way in making your career progression easier. I would also say that if you are currently at LSE, it's important to build up your contacts with people outside your immediate sphere of work.

- 3 If you are new to LSE, get a mentor.** The School offers induction mentoring to new members of staff. This helps you become oriented to LSE and helps you make contacts across the School. Even if you have been at LSE a while, there's nothing stopping you finding a mentor for yourself. Speaking to someone with more experience now and again can really help you make better career decisions and help you meet new people. Your mentor could be someone in a completely different department at LSE, or it may be someone outside the School. Wherever they work, a good mentor will act as a sounding board and give you confidence to move to the next level, if that's what you want.
- 4 Get involved with wider School activities.** There are lots of ways you can add to your skills and experience outside your immediate job. There are many committees and working groups at LSE and becoming involved in one can improve your CV in terms of showing motivation, organisational skills, administration, teamwork, leadership and networking. Recently, for instance, LSE introduced a Staff Consultative Council which regularly needs new staff members to be involved.
- 5 Volunteer.** There are only so many hours in the day but if you can find the time to contribute to something outside work, then this can also give you some added experience. LSE runs an employee volunteering scheme and staff who have volunteered in the past have done things such as:
  - Sitting as a school governor or on the board of a public body
  - Supporting a local charity

- Undertaking practical tasks, for example, delivering meals for the elderly or cleaning up neglected open land
- Spending time with a local school student helping to improve reading skills

You can use these skills to support any job application.

- 6 Show willingness and work hard.** This is obvious in many ways, but often forgotten. Some people get into the mindset of waiting until they get a better job before they really start putting in the hours and showing willingness. Their logic is: if I'm not getting paid that much, then why should I put in the extra effort. But that mindset will keep you stuck where you are. If you develop a reputation for hard work and willingness, people will want you; they will encourage you to apply for promotions and give you extra responsibility.

If you think you have got a strong case for a HERA evaluation, then speak to your manager in the first instance. If they agree, speak to someone in the HR reward team at LSE.

Once you think you have got the skills and experience for a more senior position, it's just a matter of waiting for the right position to come up. Even though you are an internal candidate, it's still important to follow all the conventions and protocols for making good written applications and performing well at interview (see the relevant section of this guide.)

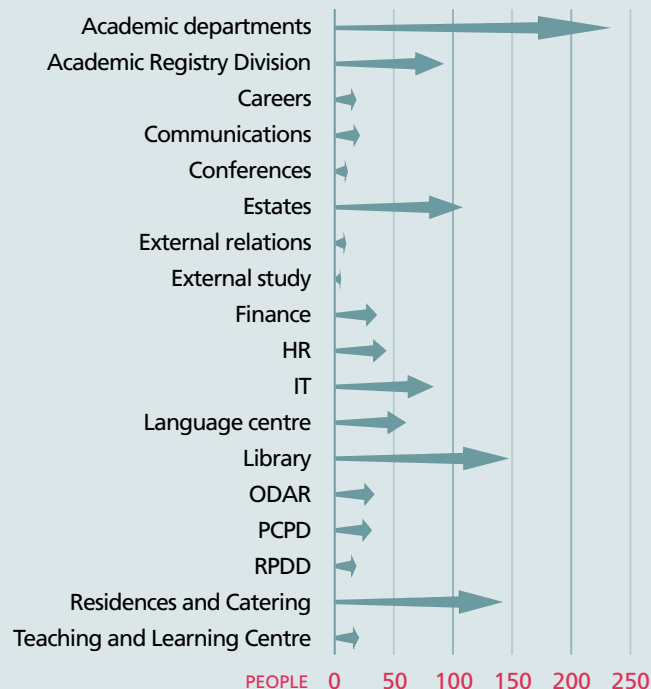
## Getting your job re-evaluated through HERA

HERA stands for Higher Education Role Analysis. It's the system HR staff use in the HE sector to analyse someone's job to see if it's at the right grade or salary level. You might be in a situation where you don't necessarily want to change to a different job, but you do think that your job has changed significantly since you first started it. Naturally, you want that change to be reflected in the grade and salary.

There's one very important thing to remember about HERA. You are unlikely to be upgraded if you are just doing more of the same tasks, compared to when you first started. Any changes in your role have to be in content, complexity and breadth. For instance, imagine that you are an administrator in an academic department. You now have to deal with 150 students instead of 120. This constitutes a change in volume of work, but not complexity or breadth. However, if you now have to manage another member of staff and be responsible for managing budgets – and these tasks were not part of your original job – then you would have a much stronger case for an upgrade.

If you think you have got a strong case for a HERA evaluation, then speak to your manager in the first instance.

## Where support staff work at LSE



(Data provided by the HR department at LSE, 2009)

PCPD = Planning and Corporate Policy Division

RPDD = Research and Project Development Division

Academic Registry Division includes student services, student recruitment, admissions, timetables, data management and Teaching Quality Assurance and Review Office.

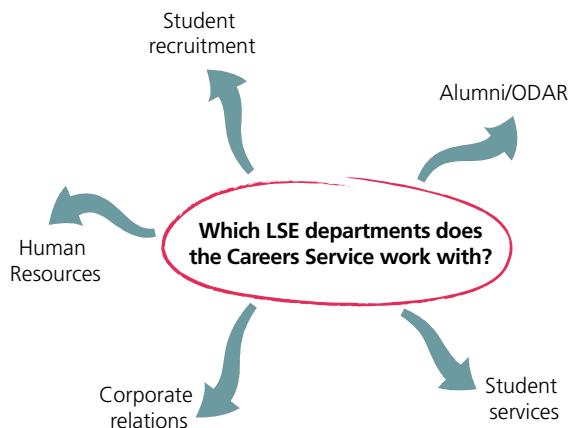
## Moving sideways, then upwards

In an organisation such as LSE, where the staff turnover is generally low, you may have to think laterally and move laterally to keep developing your career in a way that satisfies you. Despite what you may think, it's relatively straightforward to move to a different department within the School, so long as you have the right skills and personal qualities. Non-academic staff are spread over many different departments of the School, distributed according to the proportions shown in the chart above.

This chart gives you a good overview of where professional staff work at LSE. If student numbers continue to grow, then new roles and opportunities will continue to feature heavily. For instance, the new Department of Management has required many more staff to support its growth.

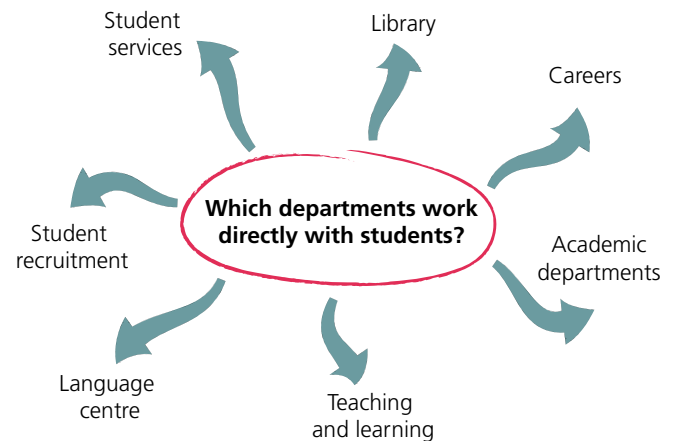
If you want to make a lateral move, but you are not sure where to go, consider the overlaps between your department and another. Many departments at LSE are related or in “families”. You can use a spider diagram to think creatively about this. See the illustration below, using the example of the careers service.

In careers work, there is a mixture of one-to-one work with current students and alumni, training and teaching groups, and working with external employers. Many prospective students also ask about future careers before they come to LSE. There is also a careers dimension to some of the work HR and SD carry out too, but focused more on staff. So think about your current department and ask yourself: which other departments



do we deal with very often, and where are there similar themes between what I do and what another department does?

As well as thinking about related departments, you could also think in terms of a main feature of a job that you want. It could be that you are in an administrative role at the moment and you want to work more directly with students.



There are probably other departments that work directly with students. But the point is that you can really start to think beyond your own sphere of work. This is why there is also real value in making contacts throughout the School – you get to find out about what people do in their jobs!

Moving laterally within the School can be a great way of adding to your skills and experience. Some people, for instance, want to gain a certain type of experience in managing staff and their current role will never allow them to do that. The case study that follows is a good illustration.

# Case study: Elaine Hemmings

## Current role

**Institute Manager, the European Institute, LSE**

## Career path

Since 2006, I've been the Institute Manager at the European Institute at LSE. My job is very broad but in a nutshell it's my responsibility to ensure the smooth running of the institute including managing the institute's human, financial and accommodation resources. I'm the link between the institute and a wide range of academic and administrative staff across the School. Before that, I worked in the Teaching Quality Assurance and Review Office (TQARO) at LSE, as the Communications Manager. In this position, I was responsible for the content of the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses, the School Calendar, and maintaining the ARD intranet. I was also the Secretary to the Graduate Studies Sub Committee. When I moved from the TQARO role to the Institute Manager position, it was a sideways move in terms of grade and salary. However, I wanted to add to my skills: in particular, I wanted to gain experience of managing staff and finances.

## Career tips

Don't be afraid of taking a sideways move if you want to develop your career. There aren't always tall hierarchies at LSE and you often have to move around to keep your career progressing. Since I took on the Institute Manager role, my role has been re-evaluated through the HERA process. That means that, even though it was initially on the same grade as my previous role, it's now on a higher grade. I would also encourage people to be patient; opportunities always come up at LSE. With increasing student numbers, new programmes and initiatives, there are bound to be newly created positions too.



## Career options within the HE sector as a whole

During the last decade, the HE sector has become increasingly business-like. Universities have to compete more and more for students – particularly international students. This has meant that there's been more focus on marketing to prospective students, ensuring current students have a positive experience and keeping the institution's research and teaching reputation as high as possible. It's become a serious business and, to keep a serious business going, you need seriously good people working for you. There are many more jobs now in planning, marketing and communications, administration, IT, finance and student support than ever before. What's more, the number of HE students has increased significantly over the last decade; consequently, there have been many more opportunities for professional staff to manage the students.

For academic support and managerial jobs within the HE sector, probably the best source of opportunities is **jobs.ac.uk**

Universities tend to advertise vacancies as they arise. As well as checking universities' websites, you can look for jobs in the appointments pages of Tuesday's *Guardian*, Thursday's *Independent* and Thursday's *THE (Times Higher Education)* – Alternatively, you can look at:

**[jobs.guardian.co.uk](http://jobs.guardian.co.uk)**

**[timeshighereducation.co.uk/jobs](http://timeshighereducation.co.uk/jobs)**

**[jobs.independent.co.uk](http://jobs.independent.co.uk)**

You can also use specialist sources such as professional bodies or trade magazines. For instance, if you are interested in marketing roles within Higher Education you could look at the Chartered Institute of Marketing's website or look at magazines such as Marketing Week.

## What are the best courses and qualifications for a career in HE?

In the eyes of recruiters, it's generally true that relevant experience and previous achievements are more important than qualifications. Having said that, completing a relevant course can sometimes make a strong statement on your CV about your motivation. And it is true that, for some specialist jobs, you might need to do a particular course. However, many people get into the mindset of thinking that they need a professional course or qualification before they can apply for certain positions. Usually, it's not the case.

If you are not sure whether or not to do a course, try and have an informal chat with people who already do the job you want. Ask them if a course or qualification is needed. Better still, talk to the managers who hire for the positions you are interested in. Ask them what they would look for. If you do need to study further, the type of course you need will vary enormously depending on the type of role you are interested in.

Before you leap into doing further study, ask yourself three questions:

- 1 Do I really need to take this course?
- 2 Which course is the most relevant, practical and useful in terms of the kind of jobs I'm interested in?
- 3 Where's the best place to study it? (Think about academic reputation and the support you might receive as a student.)





## Other public sector options

You might want to leave the HE environment, but still work in a public sector or not-for-profit setting. University experience can often stand you in good stead when you are applying for other public sector roles. The following areas are usually the most common destinations:

- Local government
- Central government
- NHS
- Charities
- Teaching
- Other policy-related roles

Let's have a brief look at these in turn.

### Local government

Local councils have many administrative, policy and management jobs in different departments. You can sign up to individual councils' mailing lists and look on their websites. There is also a central portal of local government jobs at **lgjobs.com**. If you are a graduate, you can also apply to their graduate development programme (**ngdp.org.uk**).

### Central government

People with HE experience sometimes move into related government work. The most obvious choice is the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. As with local government, there is a centralised portal of civil service jobs which you can access at **civilservice.gov.uk/recruitment**

There are a number of central schemes open to graduates of all ages and some government departments/agencies advertise and recruit through their own websites (eg, HMRC, HM Treasury, DESG and The Environment Agency).

### NHS

As the biggest employer in the UK, the NHS has lots of administrative and managerial roles. NHS organisations advertise jobs on their own websites and through magazines such as the Health Service Journal (**hsj.co.uk**). The NHS also runs a graduate development programme and especially welcomes mature applicants.

### Charities

The charity sector has many different types of opportunities, from fundraising and administration, to policy work and working in the field. A good site to research the charity sector is **charitiesdirect.com**. You can look for vacancies at **charityjob.co.uk**

### Teaching

Since the downturn in the economy in early 2009, the number of people applying to become teachers has gone up by 40 per cent. There are many routes into this rewarding profession.

### Other policy jobs

Lots of staff at LSE say they are keen to have some sort of policy job. There are many different types of policy jobs, in many different sectors. To summarise, you could work in policy in any of the following environments:

- Higher education
- Local government
- Charities
- Trades' Unions
- Business
- Central government
- Think tanks
- NGOs

The best thing to do is to find a list of organisations you are interested in, and look at their websites for opportunities. LSE careers service has lots of useful information on policy-related jobs if you want to find out more about this area.

To see a range of public sector opportunities, take a look at the following websites:

**[jobsgopublic.com](http://jobsgopublic.com)**

**[opportunities.co.uk](http://opportunities.co.uk)**







## Making a complete change in your career

Your work situation is made up of two different elements: the content and the sector. When you are changing career, you need to consider both of these aspects.

### Changing career: step-by-step

Below is an example of someone who wants to change both aspects of their career and who's approaching the change incrementally.

**Current role** HR at LSE

**Target:** Marketing in the private sector

**Step 1:** Gain experience in a marketing/communications role within LSE or HE sector

**Step 2:** Apply for marketing roles within the private sector

### Changing career: everything at once

If you are too impatient to try the step-by-step approach, it is possible to make a more radical change. However, it's a bit harder to convince potential employers because you are changing sector and content all at once. But it can be done if you are determined, active and enterprising.

Below are some top tips for those of you who want to change career:

- 1 Develop your network of contacts.** Don't just think about your friends, colleagues and relatives, but also their contacts too. Let people know, in a roundabout way, what kind of job you are looking for. Use a spider diagram to generate possible sources of contacts.
- 2 Ask people about their jobs and the sector.** This is also called "information interviewing". This sounds complicated, but once you have found people who do a similar job to the one you want, see if you can arrange to speak to them for 15 minutes. Don't beg for a job or thrust your CV on them. Just gather information about the sector and opportunities. The person you speak to might also refer you on to someone else in the sector. Follow-up with a polite email or thank you note. The questions you can ask might include:
  - What are the main skills you need to do this job well?
  - How did you get started in this field?
  - Is it necessary to do any qualifications or courses?
  - Where are most vacancies advertised?
  - Do you know of anyone hiring at the moment?
- 3 Try speculative applications.** This means contacting organisations on the off-chance they are looking for someone. Try and find out who's in charge of the department you are interested in and send your CV and a covering letter to them. This may sound like a long shot. In some ways it is, but in other ways your odds of success are better because you will not be competing with anyone else in

You could list as many relevant skills as you think are appropriate, but don't go overboard. This approach sometimes works, but it's a slight gamble as some employers do prefer a traditional CV.

a normal selection process. Managers are often on the look out for good people. You could be the answer to their prayers!

- 4 Change your CV.** Applying for a job and sector for which you have no relevant experience in can be tricky. Part of the battle is convincing the reader of your CV that you at least have the ability or potential. Sometimes it's worth trying to present the information in a more meaningful way for the recruiter. For instance, let's say you want to go into marketing but you have no marketing experience. Instead of a regular reverse chronological CV, you could try and emphasise the skills you have relevant to marketing. For instance, at the top of your CV, you could create a section called "Marketing skills" and within it you could have a few bullet points saying how you have developed skills relating to marketing. For example:

### Marketing Skills

- *Research:* Completed a 10,000 word research dissertation for my MSc; conducted 20 surveys and analysed the results when I worked in student recruitment at LSE
- *Creative thinking:* At the accommodation office at Brighton University, I generated a new, more efficient way of dealing with student enquiries. Saved approximately 100 staff hours
- *Organising:* At LSE, successfully organised 25 events per year at LSE for prospective students

You could list as many relevant skills as you think are appropriate, but don't go overboard. This approach sometimes works, but it's a slight gamble as some employers do prefer a traditional CV. If you try this technique, use specific examples to back up your skills.

- 5 Do some work shadowing or volunteering.** If all else fails, this is still a good short-term option. Anything that gets some relevant work experience on your CV will put you in a better position.



# 4 Making high-impact job applications

This section helps you:

- Make good applications for internal jobs at LSE
- Write a great CV
- Put together a high-impact covering letter

## Understanding the LSE system

LSE, like most universities, will assess your application for jobs based on how well you can show that you meet the requirements of the role. These requirements are laid out in what's called a person specification. This is a summary of the qualities needed to perform the job and in the HR world they are called competencies. LSE uses 14 competencies in total, but seven of them are much more commonly used.

## Putting the reader first

Many people don't consider their reader sufficiently before they write. As a result, the document they end up producing doesn't make an impact. Whether you are completing an application form, updating your CV or writing a covering letter, it's crucial to consider your reader. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Who is/are my reader(s)?
- What will they be looking for?
- How can I make this information easy for them to read?
- After they've read my application, what do I want them to do, think or feel?

Before they start writing most people are usually thinking: "How can I get this application out of the way?" These two starting points are very different and will lead to radically different results.



Top seven	Additional seven
<b>Communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convey basic factual information clearly and accurately</li> <li>• Convey information in the most appropriate format</li> <li>• Explain complex information to non-specialists</li> </ul>	<b>Investigation, analysis and research</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following standard procedures to gather and assess data</li> <li>• Collating and analysing data from a range of sources</li> <li>• Establishing models and setting the context for research projects</li> </ul>
<b>Teamwork and motivation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contributing actively to a team</li> <li>• Motivating others in a team</li> <li>• Providing leadership and direction</li> </ul>	<b>Sensory and physical co-ordination</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic levels of co-ordination, dexterity and physical effort</li> <li>• Applying skilled techniques and co-ordinating sensory information</li> <li>• High levels of dexterity, where precision is essential</li> </ul>
<b>Liaison and networking</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passing information on promptly</li> <li>• Mutual exchange of information with internal and external contacts</li> <li>• Influencing developments through contacts</li> </ul>	<b>Work environment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handling dangerous equipment or substances</li> <li>• Regular travel between sites</li> <li>• Working outdoors</li> </ul>
<b>Service delivery</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reacting appropriately to requests for advice or information</li> <li>• Actively promoting the services of the institution to others</li> <li>• Setting overall standards of service offered</li> </ul>	<b>Pastoral care and welfare</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of support services available locally and nationally</li> <li>• Giving supportive advice and guidance</li> <li>• Formal counselling on specific issues</li> </ul>
<b>Decision making</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Own work and immediate team</li> <li>• The organisational unit as a whole</li> <li>• Future development of the institution</li> </ul>	<b>Coaching, development and instruction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Induction of new colleagues</li> <li>• Giving guidance or advice to peers on specific aspects of work</li> <li>• Mentoring, coaching and appraising performance of direct reports</li> </ul>
<b>Planning and organising resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning and organising own work</li> <li>• Organising the work of others</li> <li>• Future development of the institution</li> </ul>	<b>Teaching and training</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing instruction to students new to a particular service or area</li> <li>• Delivering internal training courses to colleagues</li> <li>• Assessment and teaching of students</li> </ul>
<b>Initiative and problem solving</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selecting a course of action from available options</li> <li>• Resolving problems when an immediate solution is not apparent</li> <li>• Dealing with complex problems which could have significant repercussions</li> </ul>	<b>Knowledge and experience</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient experience to carry out day-to-day tasks</li> <li>• Breadth of knowledge or experience to act as a point of reference for others</li> <li>• Capacity to act as an authority in a given field</li> </ul>

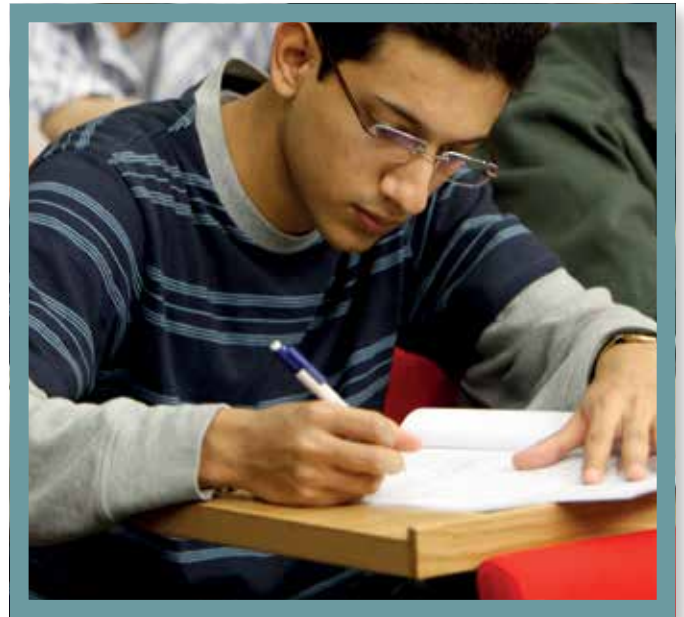
Under each heading are some descriptions of the kinds of things you might have to demonstrate for each competency. You can see from this list that a particular competency can be assessed at different levels of complexity. This is because certain jobs only need basic skills whereas others need those qualities to be much more advanced. Notice under each heading how the examples usually become more complex. Under “Knowledge and Experience”, for instance, the requirement of the third bullet point is much greater than the first.

When managers and HR staff at LSE create person specifications, they will think about the requirements of the job and use these categories to show a candidate the skills they need. A person specification also indicates whether a particular quality or “competency” is essential (E) or desirable (D). If you don’t meet the essential criteria it’s unlikely you will be shortlisted. See the example on the right, which was taken from a co-ordinator role in the HR division at LSE.

Competency	Evidence	E/D
Knowledge and Experience	• Experience in drafting documents, eg, policies and procedures, for a range of audiences	E
	• Experience in project coordination across a range of areas	E
	• Excellent IT Skills. Proficiency in Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook and using the Internet for research purposes	E
Analysis and Research	• Experience with researching and analysing data, produce recommendations/findings highlighting relevant points to inform decision making and policy formulation	E
Planning and Organising	• Ability to successfully coordinate different projects that have conflicting deadlines	E
	• Experience of independently preparing action plans from meetings and coordinating follow-up	E
Service Delivery	• Experience of setting up systems and processes to support service delivery	E
Communication	• Excellent verbal and written communication skills	E
	• Ability to communicate developments of policies/ procedures effectively to a range of audiences	E
	• Examples of having conveyed complex information to less knowledgeable groups or individuals on the phone and face-to-face	E
Liaison and Networking	• Examples of influencing decisions and developments through effective liaison	E
Initiative and Problem Solving	• Ability to work autonomously	E
	• Ability to actively contribute to all stages of project development and implementation	E
	• Evidence of having discussed customer needs to establish, and deliver, the best solution available	E
Teamwork and Motivation	• To be a pro-active and supportive team member	E

(E) Essential: requirements without which the job could not be done.  
(D) Desirable: requirements that would enable the candidate to perform the job well.

All vacancies at LSE also come with a job description. Whereas the person specification will show you which personal qualities and skills you need to do the job, the job description shows you the duties and responsibilities of the job. Below is a section of the job description for the same role:



### **Researching and Drafting**

To research, draft and edit policies and procedures, particularly in relation to trends in Reward in the Higher Education Sector.

- As part of the policy development process, to analyse findings, propose options and revise drafts incorporating feedback from HR managers
- To use a range of media, including the internet and specialised HR and Higher Education publications for research purposes
- To assist with the preparation of benchmark data relating to Reward

### **Project Coordination**

To timetable yearly project plans, and implement appropriate monitoring mechanisms.

- To manage the diaries of the HR Managers, ensuring Reward Team objectives are flagged for action in a timely fashion
- Supporting the HR managers, to coordinate project time frames to ensure project outcomes are delivered successfully and to deadline

- To organise meetings of the Framework Agreement Implementation Group, including producing agendas and minutes, ensuring the preparation of draft papers and coordinating follow up between meetings
- To coordinate activities relating to Equal Pay Audits within the Reward Project by organising appropriate data collection

### **Administration**

To assist the HR Managers in the review and development of systems and processes within the Reward Team, making best use of all available technologies.

- To assist the HR Managers in developing reports to monitor impact of Reward Initiatives
- Maintaining effective electronic and paper record systems in support of on-going activities, to ensure easy access and retrieval by the HR Managers

### **Dissemination of Information**

To consult with various groups within the School informally and formally on specific issues, for example, policy change and development.

- To effectively communicate agreed policy and procedural changes to a wide audience on behalf of the HR managers

## 21 Making your statement of application stand out

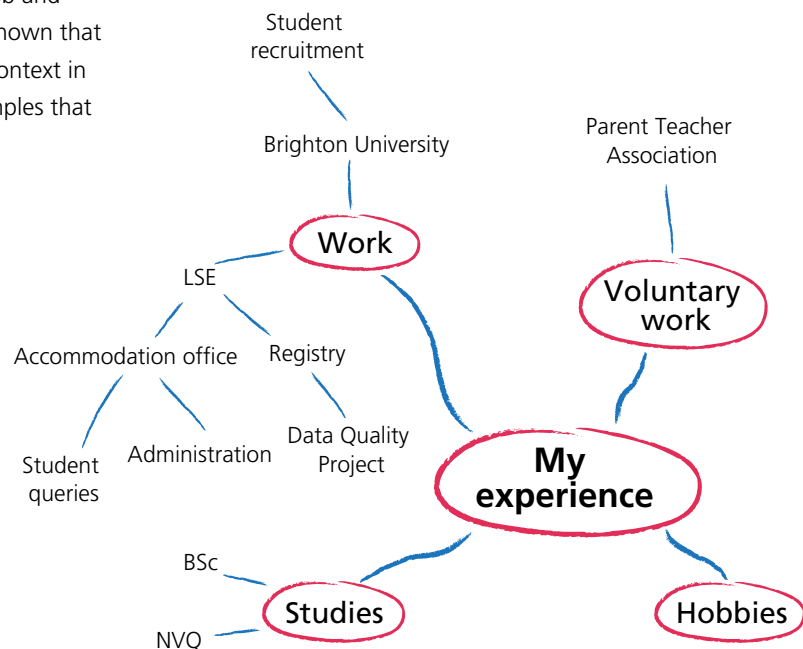
To apply for support jobs at LSE, you will need to send a CV and complete a statement of application. This is a bit like a covering letter, except your aim should be to really address the qualities on the person specification. Anything between one and two pages is about the right length. You don't need to send a covering letter as well as the statement of application. **Do not just send your CV without the statement of application.** It's easier and quicker to do this, but it's frustrating for the reader who wants to see how you meet the job's requirements. Therefore it's really important that you base your statement of application on the competencies required in the job and provide examples from the past of where you have shown that particular ability. Use the job description to see the context in which that ability is needed and try and choose examples that are as relevant as possible.

### Step 1: brainstorm your experience

It's a good idea, too, to brainstorm all your experience once you have looked at the competencies. This will give you an overview of what material you have got to choose from and which examples you are going to choose. An effective way of doing this is a mini mind map, or spider diagram.

Put the central idea or theme in the middle of the spider diagram and come up with a few main categories of experience. Although relevant work experience is probably the most useful

when you are applying for a job, remember that recruiters are trying to assess competencies and not necessarily experience. For instance, you can have developed organisational skills from many different areas of life, not just work. So think broadly in the first instance and then develop each category. For instance, in the example below, the "Work" category has been developed to a certain extent. You could go further here, and break down the different elements of "student queries", "administration" and "data quality project". Develop all the branches as fully as you can or want to. By the end, you should have a really comprehensive view of all the things you have done that might be useful for both applications and interviews.



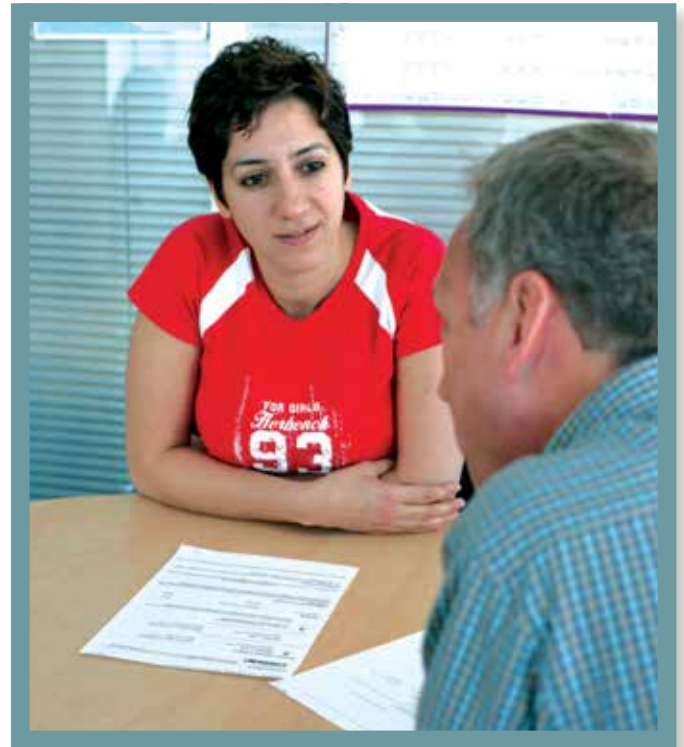


### Step 2: choose relevant examples

You should know by now what the competencies are for the job you are interested in. Now you can choose which examples from your own experience you are going to use. If possible, use examples gained in a similar context to the job you are applying for. Use recent examples within the last five years, unless an older example is especially relevant. Try to vary your examples so that you don't look one-dimensional; you'll also make it more interesting for your reader.

### Step 3: group the competency headings – optional

When you make your statement of application, you should use headings which specifically address the competencies (eg, one heading for communication, one for planning and organising and so on). However, if there are a lot of competencies and you have lots of examples, your application could become very long and tedious. If that's the case, group a few competencies together in a single heading, especially if they are similar. For instance, in the person specification above, you could probably group "Communication" and "Liaison and Networking", or perhaps "Service Delivery" and "Planning and Organising".



The important thing when you write your examples is to be focused, specific and concise. Avoid general statements and use specific examples from the past.

#### Step 4: write your examples

Introduce your statement of application simply. Something along the lines of "Dear Human Resources. Please find enclosed my statement of application, showing my suitability for the vacancy of \*\*\*\*\*". Then move into your examples. The important thing when you write your examples is to be focused, specific and concise. Avoid general statements and use specific examples from the past.

##### Analysis and research

When I worked for Brighton University's student recruitment office, I carried out a mini-research project. I collected statistics about the students who applied to study there in the previous five years. Using Excel, I then analysed the data according to various criteria: student gender; ethnicity; country of origin and age. I produced a report about this which really informed the marketing plan for the University.

##### Communication

I currently work as an accommodation assistant at LSE. On a daily basis, I answer student queries about their housing issues face-to-face, on the phone and via email. I also run introductory group sessions for new students to answer any questions they have about their student accommodation for the year.

Once a month, I also represent the accommodation office at a staff-student consultative forum. This is an official meeting where staff respond to student concerns and inform the students of any new developments or policies. I also prepare a written report in advance of the meeting which the students and other staff members read.

Remember that recruiters assess your communication skills by the quality of your written application too. So, errors in grammar, confusing sentences or a messy format will seriously harm your chances.

Notice in these examples how the information is relatively specific; the reader can easily imagine what you have done in the past. The examples used also satisfy the needs of the person specification. You can also use bullet points rather than paragraphs, but be careful that your document doesn't have a busy or cluttered feel which bullet points can sometimes create.



## TOP 5 CV errors

- Not considering your reader before you start
- Not targeting your experience to the job you are applying for
- Describing duties rather than achievements
- Vague information with no specifics about your experience. “Worked in a team of seven” is better than offering “Developed teamwork skills” for example
- Errors in grammar and punctuation; poor formatting

## Boost your CV

Think relevant experience, think skills, think clear layout. In a nutshell, that's what you have to do to create a good CV. Although there isn't one “right” way of compiling a CV – and be suspicious of anyone who tells you there is, there are some top tips you should know.

### 1 The basics

#### Get started with the right headings

Your CV should have the following sections, not necessarily in this order:

- 1 Personal details
- 2 Work experience
- 3 Education
- 4 Specific skills (such as languages or IT)
- 5 Interests and activities (optional)
- 6 References

#### It's not *War and Peace*

Most recruiters will probably get bored if your CV is longer than two pages. If your CV is three or four pages, you are probably listing lots of information vertically, waffling, or not using space efficiently.

## 2 Making an impact

#### Keep it relevant

Who says that education must always come before work experience? If your previous work experience is really relevant or eye-catching, then put that section first. After you have been working for a few years, this section usually comes first anyway, unless for some reason your education is the more relevant. Busy managers and HR staff will not always make it to the second page of your CV if there's nothing relevant on the first. Be brutal with your pruning. If it's not relevant, delete it.

#### The devil is in the detail

Whether you are explaining education, work experience or hobbies and interests, give enough detail so the reader can get an idea of the scope of your activities. Describe your work activities by listing achievements and responsibilities. If you worked in a team, how big was the team? If you were responsible for a budget, how much money was involved? Being too general when describing experience is one of the biggest CV sins.

#### Get skilled up

You could of course be in the position of having valuable experience that's not directly relevant. That's where transferable skills come in handy. Transferable skills are the abilities or aptitudes you have developed in one context but which can be applied to another. Let's say you have got some experience in student recruitment but you want to work in the alumni office. You could argue that you have developed a good understanding of student needs, skills in marketing, the ability to research and analyse data, the ability to work under pressure and so on. All of these are valuable skills to have in many jobs at LSE. So sometimes on a CV, you can have a section outlining relevant

## Avoid the following clichés and misused words:

- I want to work for a dynamic and challenging organisation
- Great interpersonal skills
- I am a great team player (or any other vague, unsubstantiated claim)
- Leverage
- Going forward
- Utilise
- Deliverables
- Add value to

skills for a job. One note of caution about using skills: always use evidence to back up your claims. Try and resist the temptation to simply list lots of skills without saying how you developed them.

### **Make it a work of art**

Have clear distinct sections for the information. Check and re-check for spelling and grammar errors and don't simply rely on a computer spell checker. Present the information in a consistent manner. Be very fussy about layout and presentation.

## 3 CV sins

### **Ready-made CVs**

Many word processing packages contain templates of CVs. They can be helpful to get you started, but a CV is your personal document and you need to say what *you* want to meet the needs of a particular job. Recruiters can spot this sort of "manufactured" or ready-made document a mile off.

### **CVs within an email**

Sooner or later, you'll have to email your CV to someone. The best way is to attach it as a document – the layout will be destroyed if you send it as text within your email. But remember to virus scan your document before sending it.

## 4 CV grey areas

### **Your personal profile**

Some CVs have a "personal profile" or a section called "career objectives" at the top. This gives employers a snapshot of your personality, career to date and aspirations. Some employers like them whereas others find them bland and irritating, particularly if they make generalised claims. Personal profiles are appropriate if you have quite a lot of work experience and/or if you want to change career. If you want to mention your career objectives but don't like the idea of a personal profile, stick them in the covering letter.

### **Are you photogenic?**

Including a photograph on CVs is a much-debated topic. Whatever your view, it's always going to be a bit of a gamble, irrespective of how nice the photo is. It's all very subjective. You could remind a recruiter of their long-lost love or their neighbour from hell! If you do choose to put a photo on your CV, make sure it is of good quality because your CV will be photocopied. And ask an honest friend the extent to which you are photogenic. If you are not getting anywhere with your current photo-less CV, it might be worth experimenting, but it is a gamble.

Have a look at the CV, on the next 2 pages:

# Jane Doe

25 Stoneleigh Road, London SE19 2ED

Tel: 01234 567890

janedoe@hotmail.com

Personal details are concise, with name given prominence. Ensure your email address is professional.

## Career History

Use clear, distinct section headings. Avoid underlining – it's old fashioned.

### 2006 to date Senior Accommodation Officer, LSE

Supporting the head of department with the management of the accommodation office.

- Line manager to six part-time and temporary staff
- Supervisor to three permanent administrative staff
- Acting as the point of contact for hall managers, Senior Residents/Wardens, academic staff and administrative staff within LSE
- Managing the departmental and Hall budgets (totalling £100k), monitored debtors and maintained accurate financial records

Where possible, quantify your information and be as specific as possible.

eg) Line manager to **six** part-time and temporary staff  
Hall budgets (totalling **£100K**)

### 2004 to 2006 Accommodation assistant, LSE

Part of the accommodation office team at LSE.

- Dealt with student enquiries face-to-face, on the phone and by email
- Processed over 3000 student applications for accommodation
- Updated student records on a regular basis
- Worked successfully in a team of eight, and supported other team members when necessary

### 2002 to 2004 Student recruitment assistant (part-time), University of Brighton

- Carried out a wide-range of administrative and support functions for this busy department.
- Organised 15 focus groups to see why they chose to study at the university
- Attended recruitment events and answered prospective students' questions
- Updated and maintained the department's webpages
- Responded to student emails and telephone calls
- Liaised with other departments such as accommodation, registry and careers to solve student problems

Include achievements as well as day-to-day duties

Jane Doe

Tel: 01234 567890 – janedoe@hotmail.com

## Relevant Training and Professional Qualifications

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <b>2007</b> | Currently studying for the Diploma in Management offered by LSE               |
| <b>2006</b> | Introductory certificate in Management (CMI), equivalent to NVQ level 3 (LSE) |
| <b>2003</b> | Customer care course (University of Brighton)                                 |

Talk about useful skills/experience you gained from your studies – not just academic content.

## Education

### **2001 to 2004 BA in English Literature, University of Brighton (2:1)**

- Improved my research skills and my ability to write clearly and effectively
- Made 15 presentations to other students over a three-year period
- Elected as student representative on the English department's staff-student liaison committee
- Successfully completed a 10,000 word dissertation on the Victorian novelist Wilkie Collins

### **1999 to 2001 Calloway Castle School, Liverpool**

- A levels in English (A), History (B), Sociology (C)

Don't write a shopping list of hobbies, eg, yoga, tennis, golf, reading, salsa. Instead, pick one or two and go into more detail.

## Hobbies and Interests

I play table tennis competitively three times a week for my local club and play in the Women's British League team.

*References available on request*

If you have space, you can put the contact details of two referees on the CV. Or you can say they are available on request.



## Making applications for jobs outside LSE

### Jobs at other universities and the public sector

Most universities and public sector recruiters will ask for some kind of personal statement, based on the competencies in the person specification. Some may also want a CV. If you address the competencies with specific examples and prepare a CV which outlines some relevant skills and experience, then you should find that the number of interviews you get will increase. Many opportunities in local government still require you to complete an application form.

### Online applications for graduate jobs

If you are interested in a graduate training scheme position, then you'll more than likely have to complete an application online. As well as your biographical data, you'll have to answer questions about your skills and motivation. Example competency questions include:

- Describe a time when you have achieved something as part of a team
- Give an example of when you have solved a problem in a creative way

Example motivation questions include:

- What steps have you taken to find out about this career?
- Why are you interested in working for X (name of company)?

When you answer both these types of questions be specific and focused, avoiding general language and clichés.

### Private sector jobs

It's much more common for private sector employers to ask you for a CV and covering letter. As with any job, try and tailor your CV to the needs of the role and then, in your covering letter, make a strong case for your suitability.

## ICME: an easy formula for good covering letters

There are four parts to a good covering letter, outlined below.

### I Introduction (5-10 per cent)

- You observe business letter formalities (dates, subject headings, Dear Sir or Madam etc)
- You give a clear, concise opening, outlining who you are and what you want

### C Capability (40-45 per cent)

- You outline your skills, qualities, experience or potential – *backed up with focused examples from your CV* – and make clear how they relate to the job you are applying for

### M Motivation (40-45 per cent)

- You show real motivation for, and understanding of, the role
- You are specific about why you are interested in that sector, role, division or function
- You give very clear reasons why the organisation appeals to you
- Most importantly, the language and examples you use are free of clichés and generalisations



Most important are the “capability” and “motivations” sections. They are the heart of the letter and what will get the attention of the reader.

## E Ending (5-10 per cent)

- The letter ends on an upbeat note, without being over-the-top or pushy
- You sign off correctly. If you start the letter with Dear Sir or Madam, you should end with Yours faithfully. In all other cases, it is Yours sincerely

Most important are the “capability” and “motivations” sections. They are the heart of the letter and what will get the attention of the reader. They are equally important, too, and you should spend about the same amount of space on each. The percentages in the brackets represent how much detail and space to devote to each section.

Usually, covering letters are up to one page long. If it's a statement of application based on competencies, it's fine to go up to two pages.

Let's imagine that you are interested in a job at King's College London and they don't want a statement of application matching the competencies. Instead they want just a CV and covering letter. The role is departmental manager for the English Language and Literature department. In preparation for writing the covering letter, you have looked at all the information provided about the role and you have done some research about King's College and the English department.

See how the example on the facing page follows the ICME structure.



25 Stoneleigh Road, London SE19 2ED  
Tel: 01234 567890  
Janedoe@hotmail.com

Human Resources  
King's College, London  
Strand  
London. WC2R 2LS

15 March 2013

Dear Human Resources

**Departmental Manager (English Language and Literature)**

I would like to apply for the above position which you recently advertised on jobs.ac.uk. Please find my CV enclosed for your consideration.

Since 2004, I've been working at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) where I was promoted from accommodation assistant to my current role of senior accommodation officer. In this position, I have a wide range of management and administrative responsibilities including line-managing nine staff, overseeing budgets of nearly £100k and organising office procedures. I have also built up strong relationships with academics and administrative staff at LSE. My time in student recruitment at the University of Brighton has also given me in-depth experience of working directly with students, dealing with their questions professionally and understanding their needs. I believe these qualities – management skills, the ability to build relationships with staff at all levels, and significant experience of working with students – are equally important for managing an academic department.

Working at LSE has been a brilliant experience, but I'm now ready to apply my skills and experience to a different setting. I've always been interested in becoming a departmental manager because I particularly enjoy working with both academic staff and students. The organisational nature of the role also appeals to me. I'm especially interested in joining the Department of English Language and Literature for two main reasons. First, the department has an extremely good reputation both within King's and outside. (I noticed that the recent RAE assessment exercise found 70 per cent of the department's research as "internationally excellent" or "world-leading".) Secondly, the fact that I studied English Literature at university would allow me to relate to the students easily as well as understand their needs. I would also be comfortable with the language and terminology used in course materials, handbooks and reading lists.

I'm very excited by this opportunity and would very much welcome the chance to discuss my suitability further at an interview.

Yours sincerely

*Jane Doe*

Jane Doe

Introduction. Brief, to the point.  
No waffle.

Capabilities. Show how your  
experience/skills are related to the  
job you are going for. Be specific.

Motivation. Identify some reasons  
why you are genuinely interested  
in this particular role. Again, be  
as specific as you can.

Ending. Brief, positive, upbeat  
but without being pushy.



### Good applications checklist

Refer to the following checklist before submitting any important applications:

My statement of application... ✓	My CV... ✓	My covering letter... ✓
Addresses all the essential criteria on the person specification and some “desirables” if possible	Prioritises information relevant to the job	Follows a logical structure such as ICME
Uses headings for the main competencies	Where possible, includes achievements rather than just duties	Is no longer than one page
Uses specific examples rather than general statements	Quantifies the information presented – for example, worked in a team of 4; managed a budget of £15k	Refers to relevant specifics in my CV
Is free of clichés, jargon or needless technical language	Is either one page or two pages and not something in between	Gives equal detail and space to the “capabilities” and “motivation” section
Is no more than two pages long	Has a clear, consistent layout with plenty of white space and no underlining	Is free of clichés, jargon or needless technical language

If you can honestly agree with all of these statements, then your written applications will be better than those of many other applicants.

# 5 Improve your interview skills

In this section you will learn about:

- the interview process at LSE
- how you can improve your performance
- the kinds of interviews you might experience at other places
- other kinds of selection exercises

## What to expect at LSE

Interviews in the UK aren't what they used to be. If you have not had an interview for a while, then you might be surprised how structured they are these days. Long gone is the "old boys' network" and interviews in the style of a casual chat.

At LSE, the process is very fair. Just as your application is assessed against transparent criteria, so will your interview performance be. It's common practice for you to be interviewed by two interviewers. For more senior jobs, there could be three or more panellists. Interviewers will often take it in turns to ask you questions and it's normal for them to take notes so they remember what you said during the interview.

If you are an internal candidate, it's usual for your current or future manager to be on the panel. Sometimes candidates feel a bit awkward in this situation and almost feel silly giving detailed examples which your manager already knows about. Interviewers have to assess your performance on the day so treat internal interviews as if you were going for a "new" job elsewhere.

Panel interviews at LSE can also move quite quickly because the interviewers will have prepared their questions beforehand. Don't be afraid to take some time to think about the questions before giving your response. You can always ask to come back to a question later on if you get really stuck.

For some positions, you might have to do an additional assessment exercise. This gives the recruiters a chance to see if you are suitable for all aspects of the job. For instance, if the job you are applying for involves a lot of one-to-one interaction with students, then you may be asked to do a short role play. Similarly, if the job involves a lot of writing, you may be asked to write a short letter or email. Many jobs at the School involve computer work so you may also be given an IT test. You will be told beforehand if there are any additional assessment activities. The interview process will be the same whether you are an internal candidate or not.

“Many candidates are unfamiliar with competency-based interviews. The important thing for them to remember is to answer the questions in a relevant, focused and specific way and to avoid general and vague statements.”

Iain McLoughlin, careers adviser, LSE

## Competency-style questions

As we saw in the section on making good applications, there are the top seven competencies that LSE uses to assess its candidates. Competencies are simply qualities or skills that you may have. Usually, interviewers will ask you questions about things you have done in the past, but sometimes you might be asked what you would do in a given future situation. The table below lists the top seven competencies and gives an example question for each.

Competency		Example question
1	Communication	Can you give us an example of where you have had to simplify complex information?
2	Teamwork and motivation	Describe a time when you have helped a team reach a common goal.
3	Liaison and Networking	How do you meet people working in similar roles to your own?
4	Service delivery	How would you deal with a situation where the person you are dealing with is being particularly difficult?
5	Decision making	Which kinds of decisions are the most difficult for you at work and why?
6	Planning and organising resources	How would you prioritise your work to meet conflicting deadlines?
7	Initiative and problem solving	Give us an example of when you had to solve a complex problem at work.

There are many possible questions an interviewer could ask you about a particular competency; the list above shows just a few examples. Interviewers at LSE are trained to probe for evidence with follow-up questions if they feel they need more information. Example follow-up questions, in relation to communication, are given below:

**Main question:**

Can you give us an example of where you have had to simplify complex information?

**Possible follow-up questions:**

How did you simplify the information?

How did you check their understanding?



Answering competency questions

Be specific, be focused, be concise. Interviewers are looking for specific examples from your experience. The most common mistake candidates make is giving general, vague or even waffly answers.

Below is a dialogue between a candidate and an interviewer about teamwork. The first example shows the candidate giving an average-to-poor answer. The second answer is much stronger, although not perfect.

Dialogue 1 (average-to-poor answers)	
Interviewer:	Can you give me an example where you achieved something as part of a team?
Candidate:	Umm...a couple of weeks ago we had to send out information to all the postgrads. We had to make sure they all received the info within a tight deadline. It was important to work as a team.
Interviewer:	How did you go about doing that as a team?
Candidate:	We divided the work up and each took responsibility for different things. I looked at the list and chased things up.
Interviewer:	And what was the outcome?
Candidate:	Things worked out fine in the end.

In reality, the interviewer might probe a bit more here to look for further evidence.

Dialogue 2 (strong answers)	
Interviewer:	Can you give me an example where you achieved something as part of a team?
Candidate:	Two weeks ago, I worked on a project where I was part of a team of 5. We had to collate and send out information to all the postgraduate students. My role within the team was to ensure each member was aware of their responsibilities and to ensure that the contact data we were using was accurate and to prevent duplication of material being sent. It was very important that each student received the information at exactly the same time.
Interviewer:	How did you go about doing that as a team?
Candidate:	We sat down together as a team to breakdown the responsibilities. We each agreed to take on specific tasks and I co-ordinated the project to ensure everyone completed their job. In the end, the project went very well – each student received just one copy of the information and we managed to meet the tight deadline.

Again, the interviewer might probe a bit more here if needed.

In the second dialogue the candidate answers in a much more detailed way. For instance, he mentions how many people were in the team and what specifically the project was. He also says what his role was in the team. The interviewer would still want to know more, but at least it gives them a clearer picture of the candidate's experience.



## Are you motivated?

Providing good evidence of competencies shows your ability to do the job. It means you have the skills, experience or potential to do what's needed. But you can be good at something and not really enjoy it and not necessarily be motivated to do it either. Some people are very good with spreadsheets, for instance, but they don't necessarily like doing them!

So as well as your abilities, interviewers are also looking for evidence of your motivation to do the role you are applying for. Will you get out of bed each morning and be excited about doing it? Below are some examples of motivation questions, along with a tip on how to answer each one:

- **How does this position fit in with your career plan?**

**Tip:** come up with a coherent rationale.

- **What do you look for in a job?**

**Tip:** choose things that are important parts of the job you are applying for.

- **Could you tell us about why you applied for this role?**

**Tip:** say how your experience and skills are relevant for the role; say why you are motivated to do it also.

- **What do you do when you have quiet periods at work?**

**Tip:** don't say, "sit around and take it easy". Focus on what you could do like planning for next term or asking your manager if there's anything you could help with.

- **How would you like to see your career developing over the next few years?**

**Tip:** most interviewers like a mixture of ambition and commitment to LSE, but don't make it seem like you want to be in charge of everything after a week!

- **If you could change any part of your current job, what would it be and why?**

**Tip:** don't pick something that's also going to be part of the job you are applying for. This question is trying to get at what you really like and dislike doing at work so it's easy to trip yourself up here.

The key thing about answering these questions well lies in two things: enthusiasm and preparation. Enthusiasm because interviewers really want to see that you are motivated to do the job; preparation because it's important to have really found out as much as possible about the role, the department and to have come up with some convincing reasons why you want the job.

## Other tricky questions

Below are some examples of common questions, along with a tip on how to answer each one:

- **Tell me about yourself**

**Tip:** don't launch into a long, rambling monologue. Focus on some specific things that reflect your ability and/or motivation to do the job you are applying for.



- **Tell us a little about your strengths and weaknesses at work**

**Tip:** pick strengths that show you in a good light and ones that are relevant to the job you want. For weaknesses, try and avoid core skills like organising and communicating – and focus on how you are improving in that particular area. Don't say, "I'm a perfectionist", or "My standards are just too high." Yuck.

- **What's the reason that you left/are planning to leave your current position?**

**Tip:** focus on what you are looking for now, as opposed to what is wrong with your current role or organisation. Never criticise previous colleagues or your boss.

## Other ways to improve your performance

Once you understand the system, have a sense of how interviewers will be assessing you and the kinds of questions you might encounter, you are in a good position. But it's only half the battle. There are other aspects of preparation and performance that you need to consider.

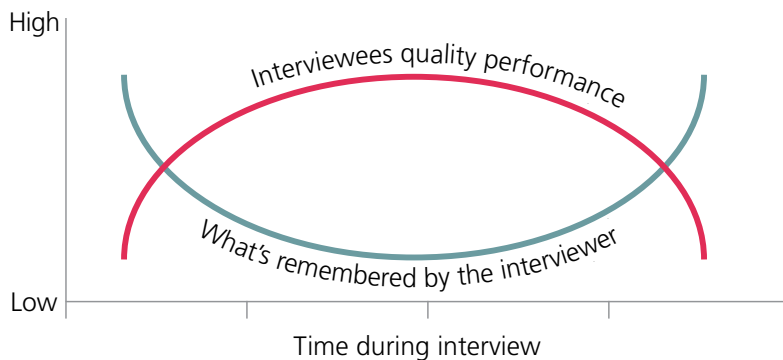
### Be prepared

For interviews at universities, you usually know the competencies you will be asked about during the interview. They are the ones on the person specification. It's a good idea, therefore, to have two examples of each competency prepared in advance. For example, if you know that teamwork is a big part of the job you are going for, think of a couple of specific examples from the past where you have worked as part of a team. Prepare two examples for each relevant competency, but don't script out your answers – just jot down some key points; otherwise your answers will sound wooden.

You'll also show your motivation by really preparing for the job. If you are offered an informal chat about the role, then take the opportunity. You'll find out more about the role which will help you with your preparation and it's a chance to show the interviewer you can communicate well on the phone – assuming you can!

### Things you can do to prepare:

- Talk to people in the department
- Talk to users of the service if appropriate and possible
- Take a thorough look at the department's website
- Think about future challenges for that department. Sometimes a department's strategic plan is available through their website
- Look at the websites of similar departments in other organisations
- If possible, build up a rounded picture of the day-to-day reality of the role before you go for the interview
- Think about how the department fits in with the organisation as a whole
- Double check the location of the interview and give yourself plenty of time to get there



Your performance is best in the middle; this is when an interviewer's attention is at its lowest.

## Good introductions and endings are crucial

It's been proven that people remember the beginnings and endings of things, more than they do bits in the middle. This is called the primacy and recency effect. This is also true of interviews. Assessors are very receptive to you at the beginning and end of your interview but have to work harder to focus in the middle. However, your performance tends to be the direct opposite of this: you are nervous at the start and also a bit anxious at the end. In the middle you tend to relax a bit. It's only human. It makes sense, then, to really work on your beginning and endings – because that's usually when you'll be most nervous and fidgety.

## Some ways you can make a good first impression include:

### **Dress appropriately**

Find out how people dress in the department/organisation you are interested in. Then go to the interview a bit smarter than that. Even if you are an internal candidate, it's good to show you are serious about the position by dressing smartly.

### **Be pleasant to everyone**

Sounds obvious but many people forget that the whole department is often consulted before making decisions, not just interviewers. Making an effort to be pleasant to the receptionist, for instance, could make all the difference on a close decision.

### **Introduce yourself**

Most interviewers will break the ice and say something like... "Hello, you must be....[your name]". If they don't, take the opportunity to introduce yourself.

### **Avoid the "wet lettuce" handshake**

Use a relatively firm grip, but don't squeeze. Use one hand, and don't put your second hand over the interviewer's hand.

### **Make good eye contact (and without staring)**

This is important, especially when you shake hands at the start. But don't go overboard. For panel interviews, give the majority of eye contact to the person asking the question, but look at the other panellists now and again, in as natural a way as possible.

### **Have some water beforehand**

It's easy to get a dry mouth when you are feeling nervous, so have some water beforehand. Interviewers will often offer you a drink at the start. It's fine to accept, but it's safer to drink it once you feel more relaxed. Otherwise you'll be shaking the plastic cup or clinking the cup and saucer!

## Ways you can leave a strong impression at the end:

### **Ask good questions, but not too many**

You will usually be given a chance to ask questions at the end. This is your final chance to impress so avoid questions about flexible working, holidays and salary. You are in a much stronger position to deal with these kinds of things once you have been made an offer. Also avoid questions to which you should already know the answer after having done your basic research. Ask things you genuinely want to find out and which show a real interest in the role and organisation. Topics you could ask about include: training and development opportunities; how you'll be assessed; the team you'll be a part of; the future development of the role and department.

Don't ask any more than three questions; two is probably the right number. If your questions have already been answered during the interview, don't simply say you haven't got any questions. Say something like, "I was going to ask about X, Y and Z, but we covered this in the interview."

#### **Reaffirm your enthusiasm about the opportunity**

Sometimes, although not always, an interviewer might ask you if you have anything final to add. If this happens, simply restate your enthusiasm for the role without sounding desperate!

#### **Don't let your guard down until you are a long way out of sight**

Once you leave the interview room, remain as professional as possible until you are sure no one is looking. Don't ruin your hard work by ignoring the receptionist on the way out or by lighting up just outside the building.

### **How are you using your body?**

According to a very famous study, 55 per cent of communication is received through body language. The implications of this for interviews are obvious: how you look, your gestures and other non-verbal language are very important. Good body language is really about avoiding extremes: making eye contact without staring; shaking hands but not applying a vice-like grip; making a gesture with your hand for emphasis without wildly gesticulating.

### **Going for interviews at other universities or the private sector**

The vast majority of universities will use competency-based interviews. The style of job descriptions and person specifications may vary, but recruiters will still be looking for evidence of relevant qualities.

In the private sector competency interviewing is also very common but you may encounter different styles of questions. In small organisations, the interviews might be quite informal and not as structured as in larger organisations. What's more, you might encounter more unusual, or sometimes more "aggressive" questions, especially in tough areas of work such as investment banking. Here's a selection of questions:

- When did you last fail?
- Who else have you applied to?
- What makes you better than the other candidates?
- Sell me this pencil
- How many nappies were used in the UK last year?
- What business stories have caught your eye recently?
- Who would your dream client be and why?
- How would you invest £1m in the economy at the moment?



39 Some of these questions seem scary, but part of the battle is not to panic. Take your time and trust your judgement. Whatever sector the job you are going for, the important thing is good preparation. Think about the requirements of the role and you'll understand why a certain question is being asked. Some questions are deliberately difficult to see how you react to pressure and whether you can think on your feet. If these are requirements of the job, then the questions are legitimate.

## It's not all about interviews

As mentioned earlier, you may have to do other things as part of a selection process. All the assessors are trying to do with these exercises is to see if you can do the job you are applying for. Therefore the vast majority of selection exercises will be related to the job in some way. Think about this beforehand. The most common type of selection exercises are group exercises, psychometric tests, written tasks and presentations.

### Psychometric tests

There are two main types:

- Aptitude tests, which assess your abilities
- Personality questionnaires, which give a profile of the kind of person you are

Psychometric tests can be used at various points in the selection method. Sometimes they are used as the second stage of selection, increasingly now as an online test, after the candidate has successfully completed the first written stage of their application and as a basis to determine which candidates are invited to interview. Sometimes they are used further on in the selection process, for instance as part of an assessment centre, possibly after a first interview stage. Universities don't usually use these as part of recruitment, but they are more common in graduate-level jobs and in the private sector.

### Written Exercises

Although written exercises take a variety of forms, there are some general principles which apply and some useful steps you could take to prepare:

- Normally written exercises will be conducted under timed, test conditions – so pace yourself
- Make sure you read and follow all instructions carefully
- Be careful with your grammar and spelling
- Ensure you know how to set out a business letter correctly
- Comprehension and doing a précis is an important part of many written exercises, so practise reading newspaper and magazine articles quickly and summarising their main points

Express yourself clearly and succinctly. Avoid waffling or making a comment just for the sake of speaking.

### **Presentations**

Oral presentations are a common assessment tool, especially for jobs where you will be expected to give formal presentations as part of the role. Whatever the subject of your presentation there are some basic principles to bear in mind:

- Keep to the brief
- Rehearse beforehand
- Structure your talk carefully
- Ensure you have a clear, effective introduction and conclusion
- Consider your audience and pitch your talk according to their level of knowledge and experience in your topic
- If you are allowed visual aids, make good use of them, but don't overuse. For instance, if you are using slides, the slides should just contain highlights or signposts for your talk, not all the detail
- Ensure you don't block the audience's view of visual aids and don't use the screen as your notes. This will result in your talking to the screen, rather than to the group
- Produce handouts to give to your audience
- Use prompt cards as an aide memoire, but do not read your presentation out word for word or learn it off by heart and recite it. Both these approaches will make your talk sound stilted and wooden
- Use anecdotes and examples, which often give life to a presentation, but be cautious about telling jokes since the audience may not share your sense of humour

### **Group exercises**

Whatever form a group exercise takes there are some basic principles to remember:

- Participate actively in the group, but don't dominate
- Listen and facilitate, encouraging quieter team members to contribute and building on others' ideas
- Bring structure to the exercise and ensure the group doesn't digress. You will probably have a set amount of time for your exercise, so time-keeping is important
- Express yourself clearly and succinctly. Avoid waffling or making a comment just for the sake of speaking
- Try to think beyond the obvious. Suggest different angles or approaches to the problem or question in hand
- Present coherent arguments that aim to persuade others of your point of view; but don't be stubborn. Be prepared to negotiate

# 6 Troubleshooting:

## answers to frequently asked career questions

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### I'm applying for jobs at LSE and elsewhere but not getting any interviews. What am I doing wrong?

You might not be doing anything wrong. Sometimes there are simply too many other candidates with more relevant experience and skills. That said, many people do make a mess of their applications, making it hard for the reader to shortlist them, even if they are internal candidates. Consider these questions:

- 1 Have you specifically addressed the competencies on the person specification? If you are simply supplying the same CV and letter for all jobs you apply for, you will not get much success.
- 2 Are your examples specific, focused and relevant?
- 3 Have you had your application checked by someone with experience in this area?
- 4 Be honest with yourself: are you going for jobs at the right level? You might be aiming too high or too low.
- 5 Have you asked for any feedback? If you manage to get some feedback, it helps you understand where you are going right and wrong.

If you are unsure about the quality of your written applications, revisit the section on making good applications.

### I've been doing my current role for a long time, and really want to get promoted. But there don't seem to be any opportunities in my department. What can I do?

Your options include changing department within LSE, doing a related role within another university, or making a complete change to non-university work. Go back to the section on "How to develop your career" in this guide to see greater detail about this.

First, ask yourself why you want promotion. Are you bored, do you want more money, or both? If it's simply that you want a new challenge, talk it through with your manager. Is there anything you can do to improve your performance in your current role? You don't have to wait for your annual appraisal for this. I'm sure they'd be happy to give you some extra responsibilities if you show eagerness for this. Bear in mind that you will not necessarily get more cash for this in the first instance. In the longer term, though, you can argue that your role has changed substantially and that it should be re-evaluated through the HERA process. If you are successful, you will be entitled to more money. But don't make the mistake of assuming you should be promoted simply because you have worked at LSE a long time.



## I'm not happy in my job, but have no idea what else to do. How can I move forward?

Is it really true that you have no idea at all? Most people at least have some clues about what they don't like or don't want. Try and pinpoint what's bothering you. Is it the environment, the content of the job, the long hours, or your manager? You might only need a small change to make a big difference in your day-to-day experience. For instance, you might like the content of the job, but not like working in universities. Similarly, you might like the university environment, but not the type of job you are doing.

Make a list of the features of the work you'd like to do. Start by identifying the aspects of your current role or previous work experience that you do/did quite enjoy. Start looking for opportunities that have more of those aspects in them. Don't be put off by unfamiliar job titles and look more at the content of the role. Go step by step. If you are only 50 per cent happy with your current role, then try and get something you'll be at least 75 per cent happy with. Then, in time, go for the Holy Grail of something you are 95-100 per cent happy with!

If you need help with generating some ideas, try these:

- Read *How to find a job you'll love* (by John Lees; McGraw-Hill publishers, 2008)
- Speak to a careers professional
- Read *The Guardian Guide to Careers* which is good for giving an overview of different sectors.

## I'm getting interviews, but not job offers. How can I improve?

Firstly, you may be performing well; it's just that sometimes there are more suitably qualified candidates. Try and get some feedback if possible. The most common errors for poor performance in an interview are:

- inadequate preparation
- giving vague, irrelevant or waffly answers
- not appearing very enthusiastic or motivated to do the role

Revisit the section on interview technique in this guide which shows more detail about how you can avoid these errors. You may be convinced you are not making one of these mistakes, but try and get some independent feedback if possible. Speak to HR at LSE.

## Am I too old to get promoted or change career?

No. Current age legislation makes it difficult for organisations to discriminate on the basis of your age. Universities and the public sector in general recruit transparently against personal qualities and experience so age isn't a problem. Although there still may be pockets of prejudice around, things are much better than they were even five years ago. An equally important question is, are you holding yourself back?





## I want to leave the university sector. How will employers view me?

The key thing for you to do on any application is to highlight relevant skills and achievement. Focusing on the aspects relevant to the role you are going for. Your job is to make a convincing case for how you are very suitable, no matter what environment you have been working in. It's true that it can be easier to get jobs in a similar field than in a completely new sector, but you need to look for things in common between where you are now and where you want to go. For instance, if you have been working in university student recruitment and want to move into corporate marketing, it may seem a bit of a jump. However, the two jobs have lots of requirements in common: to include the ability to understand clients' needs; being able to do research; making presentations; carrying out surveys and so on. Focus on what you do have that's relevant, rather than what you don't have.

## I'm being made redundant; what can I do?

Redundancies are quite unusual at LSE but anyone could face this situation in their career, wherever they work. Organisations have a due process to go through if they need to make staff redundant, so you should have plenty of opportunity to discuss the situation with your employer. If you are a member of a trade union, they will be able to give you some professional and legal advice, and may be able to attend any relevant meetings.

In these situations, it's normal to go through different stages: shock, anger, sadness, and acceptance. If it seems as if the redundancy is definitely going to happen, then seek some help from professionals such as a counsellor or a careers professional – whichever you think is more appropriate for you. For some people, redundancy is very traumatic; others have reported that it has given them the jolt they needed to re-evaluate their career.

## How can I plan well for my retirement?

There are two main aspects to consider: financial and psychological. In terms of the financial aspect, LSE subscribes to two pension schemes: USS and SAUL. You will probably be in one of these. If you want to work out what you will get when you retire, then visit the website of the appropriate pension provider. LSE also has a pensions office (see the HR division web pages). They can give you some information and refer you to an independent financial adviser, if need be. Some staff decide to pay AVCs (additional voluntary contributions) to their pension to increase the amount of money they receive when they retire.

Some research has shown that if you retire from a full-time job with no activity to take its place, it can adversely affect your physical and mental health. If possible, reduce your hours to part-time for a while before retiring fully. Some departments can't accommodate this, and if this is the case, ensure you have got some structured activity in place ready for when you are no longer working.

# 7 Career resources

## A: LSE stuff

### **LSE Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours: framework for managers and leaders.**

This guide, produced by HR outlines a series of ways managers can assess their own performance and see areas for improvement.

### **The HERA toolkit**

You can get one of these from the HR reward team. It tells you all about the HERA process and gives some guidelines if you manage staff.

### **The careers service**

You can access lots of information about different sectors of work through the careers service's website ([lse.ac.uk/careers](http://lse.ac.uk/careers)). Most of the information is targeted at new graduates and current students but some of will be useful to more experienced professionals.

## B: Books

### **How to get a job you'll love (John Lees; Mcraw-Hill, 2008)**

A great guide full of practical techniques to help you identify your perfect job.

### **The Guardian Careers Guide (ed. Jimmy Leach; The Guardian, 2008)**

Lots of useful information on the most common careers sectors in the UK.

### **Brilliant Presentations (Richard Hall; Pearson Education, 2007)**

A lively book on making good presentations

### **Getting things done (Marc Allen; Piaktus, 2005)**

An excellent book to help with all aspects of becoming more organised and improving your productivity at work.

### **Troublesome words (Bill Bryson, 2002)**

If you have trouble with using the right words in your writing at work, then this guide will help. In particular, there's a very readable guide on punctuation at the end of the book.

## C: Websites

### **Jobs.ac.uk**

Use this site to look for administrative and managerial jobs in universities

### **timeshighereducation.co.uk**

Click on "search jobs"

### **jobs.guardian.co.uk**

### **jobs.independent.co.uk**

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