

# Top 100 Graduate Employers 2016-2017



THE  TIMES  
**TOP 100**  
GRADUATE EMPLOYERS

## Top 100 Graduate Employers

# An essential guide to making the best of the good jobs

**The verdict is in from the Class of 2016 on the top 100 firms, reports Martin Birchall**

When the first edition of *The Times Top 100 Graduate Employers* was published in 1999, barely a fifth of the population had access to the internet, Tony Blair's government had just introduced the first student tuition fees — £1,000 a year — and fewer than half the UK's leading graduate employers paid starting salaries of £20,000 or more.

The original aim of the guide was to help university leavers to understand the increasingly complex graduate job market and identify the country's most prestigious and sought-after employers. Seventeen years on, *The Times Top 100 Graduate Employers*

continues to provide an independent annual assessment of the employers that new graduates rate most highly.

The 2016 edition, published today, is based on research with more than 18,000 graduates from the Class of 2016 who left UK universities this summer. In an outstanding achievement, PwC, the global accounting and professional services firm, has been voted the UK's leading graduate employer for the 13th year running. The firm took over the top spot in the rankings from the Civil Service in 2004.

Aldi's popular trainee area manager programme remains in second place, while the widely acclaimed Teach First scheme — which has grown to become the UK's largest individual recruiter of graduates since its launch in 2003 — has moved up to third.

The Civil Service, best known for its respected Fast Stream graduate programme, is in fourth place, its highest ranking since 2010. But in a surprise move, after rising up the rankings in nine of the previous ten years and reaching No 3 in last year's Top 100, Google, the internet giant, has slipped back to fifth place.



All the Big Four accounting and professional services firms are ranked within this year's top ten. KPMG has moved up to sixth place, overtaking rivals Deloitte and EY.

Elsewhere in the new Top 100,

**This year's chart will prove an indispensable building block for aspiring professionals**

discount retailer Lidl has jumped an impressive 11 places to 14th position. Santander is the year's highest newcomer, returning to the rankings in 63rd place. And with a leap of 34 places, the Bank of England is the biggest climber of 2016.

Several of the leading strategy consulting firms have done well in the new rankings. McKinsey & Company has moved up for the third consecutive year, taking it to just outside the top 20 employers, while the Boston Consulting Group has jumped sixteen places to 37th, its best ranking so far.

A total of 211 organisations have now appeared in *The Times Top 100 Graduate Employers* since its inception

**“211 organisations have now figured in the rankings**

and more than 40 of these have made it into the rankings every year since 1999. The most consistent performers have been PwC, KPMG and the Civil Service, which have never been lower than 9th place in the league table. The NHS has also had a formidable record, appearing in every top ten since 2003, while the BBC, Goldman Sachs and EY have all remained within the top 20 throughout the past decade. *Martin Birchall is editor of The Times Top 100 Graduate Employers and managing director of High Fliers Research*

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The Times Top 100 Graduate Employers 2016-2017

Rank	2015	Employer	Industry or Business Sector	Graduate Vacancies in 2017	Starting Salary	Rank	2015	Employer	Industry or Business Sector	Graduate Vacancies in 2017	Starting Salary
1	1	PwC	Accounting & professional services	1,500	Competitive	51	64	ExxonMobil	Oil & energy	Varies	£37,500+
2	2	Aldi	Retail	150	£42,000	52	81	Amazon	Retail	500+	Competitive
3	4	Teach First	Public sector	1,750	Competitive	53	55	Newton Europe	Consulting	120	£45,000-£50,000
4	5	Civil Service	Public sector	900+	£25,000-£27,000	54	34	M&S	Retail	200	£23,500-£28,000
5	3	Google	IT & telecommunications	Varies	Competitive	55	83	MI5	Public sector	150	£30,000+
6	9	KPMG	Accounting & professional services	1,000	Competitive	56	50	Slaughter and May	Law	80	£43,000
7	6	Deloitte	Accounting & professional services	1,200	Competitive	57	63	Baker & McKenzie	Law	30	£45,000
8	7	NHS	Public sector	100+	£22,896	58	78	Nestlé	Consumer goods	30-35	Competitive
9	8	EY	Accounting & professional services	900	Competitive	59	48	Citi	Investment banking & fund mangement	Unknown	Competitive
10	10	BBC	Media	35-40	£22,000+	60	66	Danone	Consumer goods	25-30	£28,500
11	13	Unilever	Consumer goods	50	£30,000+	61	85	Penguin Random House	Media	50+	Competitive
12	14	JP Morgan	Investment banking & fund mangement	Varies	Competitive	62	58	Police	Public sector	250	£29,331
13	12	GSK	Chemicals & pharmaceuticals	50+	Competitive	63	NEW	Santander	Banking & finance	Up to 50	£30,000
14	25	Lidl	Retail	240+	£36,000-£44,000	64	NEW	Virgin Media	IT & telecommunications	50+	£29,000
15	15	Goldman Sachs	Investment banking & fund mangement	About 300	Competitive	65	59	Deutsche Bank	Investment banking & fund mangement	Varies	Competitive
16	18	HSBC	Banking & finance	500+	Competitive	66	100	Bank of England	Public sector	60+	£30,000
17	17	Accenture	Consulting	500+	Competitive	67	47	Royal Navy	Armed Forces	Varies	£25,727
18	11	John Lewis Partnership	Retail	30+	Dependent on scheme	68	62	Airbus	Engineering & industrial	80+	£26,000+
19	19	Jaguar Land Rover	Engineering & industrial	250	£29,000	69	96	Herbert Smith Freehills	Law	70	£44,000
20	16	Barclays	Banking & finance	300+	Competitive	70	97	AECOM	Engineering & industrial	400	£23,000-£26,000
21	22	McKinsey & Company	Consulting	Varies	Competitive	71	70	Boots	Retail	40-60	£25,000
22	28	L'Oréal	Consumer goods	28	£30,000	72	95	Wellcome	Charity	10-12	£26,000+
23	23	Rolls-Royce	Engineering & industrial	200+	Competitive	73	NEW	RAF	Armed Forces	500-600	£30,000+
24	21	IBM	IT & telecommunications	300+	£30,000+	74	60	DLA Piper	Law	75-80	£24,000-£42,000
25	30	Lloyds Banking Group	Banking & finance	400+	£28,000+	75	71	Mott MacDonald	Engineering & industrial	250+	£24,000-£28,000
26	20	BP	Oil & energy	100+	£33,000+	76	76	Network Rail	Transport	125-175	£26,500
27	26	Shell	Oil & energy	70+	£32,500	77	84	Bank of America Merrill Lynch	Investment banking & fund mangement	200+	Competitive
28	35	Army	Armed Forces	650	£25,727	78	87	Norton Rose Fulbright	Law	Up to 50	£42,000
29	29	Microsoft	IT & telecommunications	40	Competitive	79	93	Lloyd's	Insurance	25	Competitive
30	33	Clifford Chance	Law	100	Competitive	80	54	Diageo	Consumer goods	50+	Competitive
31	36	Morgan Stanley	Investment banking & fund mangement	Varies	Competitive	81	90	Grant Thornton	Accounting & professional services	200+	Competitive
32	24	Tesco	Retail	150-200	£24,000-£32,000	82	61	Hogan Lovells	Law	60	£43,000
33	31	Arup	Engineering & industrial	250+	Competitive	83	73	Siemens	Engineering & industrial	70-80	Competitive
34	27	P&G	Consumer goods	100	£30,000	84	86	Oxfam	Charity	50+ voluntary internships	Voluntary
35	51	RBS	Banking & finance	300+	Competitive	85	NEW	Irwin Mitchell	Law	50	£25,000+
36	39	Allen & Overy	Law	90	£42,000	86	45	European Commission	Public sector	Varies	£41,500+
37	53	Boston Consulting Group	Consulting	Varies	Competitive	87	52	British Airways	Transport	To be confirmed	Competitive
38	32	Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer	Law	80	Competitive	88	67	Local Government	Public sector	120	£24,174+
39	41	Linklaters	Law	110	£43,000	89	79	BlackRock	Investment banking & fund mangement	120	Competitive
40	42	Atkins	Engineering & industrial	350	£22,000	90	89	Facebook	IT & telecommunications	Unknown	Competitive
41	43	Sky	Media	90+	£25,000-£32,000	91	46	Cancer Research UK	Charity	8	£25,000
42	40	Frontline	Public sector	300	Competitive	92	92	UBS	Investment banking & fund mangement	300	Competitive
43	49	BAE Systems	Engineering & industrial	350+	£28,000-£30,000	93	99	Credit Suisse	Investment banking & fund mangement	Varies	Competitive
44	37	Apple	Consumer goods	Varies	Competitive	94	NEW	Savills	Property	170	Competitive
45	38	Mars	Consumer goods	40	Up to £32,000	95	NEW	Standard Life	Banking & finance	50	Competitive
46	75	AstraZeneca	Chemicals & pharmaceuticals	80+	£28,000	96	65	Bloomberg	Banking & finance	250+	Competitive
47	44	BT	IT & telecommunications	250	£27,500-£31,500	97	80	Mondelez International	Consumer goods	About 40	Competitive
48	69	Transport for London	Public sector	150	Competitive	98	68	McDonald's Restaurants	Retail	100	£21,500-£24,500
49	72	WPP	Media	1-10	Competitive	99	NEW	BMW Group	Engineering & industrial	20-30	£31,000
50	56	Bain & Company	Consulting	Varies	Competitive	100	94	BDO	Accounting & professional services	250	Competitive

The hot 100: how undergraduates decided where opportunity knocks most loudly

The Times Top 100 Graduate Employers for 2016 has been compiled by High Fliers Research from face-to-face interviews with 18,353 final-year students who left UK universities earlier this year.

Undergraduates taking part in the research were asked the open-ended question: "Which employer do you think offers the best opportunities for graduates?" Altogether they named

more than 1,500 different organisations. The 100 employers with the most nominations from the graduate class of 2016 form the new Top 100 rankings. The 2016-2017 edition of The Times Graduate

Employers is published as a full-colour hard-backed book and provides details of the graduate jobs and work experience available from the country's leading employers in 2017, their minimum

entry requirements and the universities they will be visiting during the 2016-2017 campus recruitment round. It is available now, priced £19.99, from top100graduateemployers.com.





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## Top 100 Graduate Employers

# Recruiters make light of referendum fears

**Despite apocalyptic Brexit warnings, it is business as usual for employers so far, writes Greg Hurst**

It was known as Project Fear. Opponents of Brexit warned repeatedly that jobs would go, financial markets would slump and recession would beckon if Britain left the European Union. Spending would be cut, taxes would have to rise.

So far at least, things haven't turned out that way. The economy appears to be growing. There has been no emergency budget, although the Bank of England did move quickly to bring interest rates closer to zero.

The graduate recruitment market, too, appears to have been relatively unaffected to date by the referendum result. The 2016 Top 100 employers have increased their graduate vacancies for 2017 to 22,009, up by 3.2 per cent on this year's total for the same companies.

This does suggest a levelling off after five years of consistent growth: last year the graduate recruitment market expanded at a rate of 7.9 per cent. It is positive growth, nonetheless.

It did not always look as though the short-term impact of the referendum



would be as benign. Louise Bryan, head of colleague and leadership development at Lloyds Banking Group, recalls a meeting with its 400 summer interns, who will be looking for graduate jobs for autumn 2017.

"It was June 27, the Monday after Brexit, and 80 per cent-plus of the Q&A was linked to Brexit and what the impact would be," she says. "At

**It's a deal: like the UK economy, graduate recruitment seems to be relatively unaffected by the vote to leave the European Union**

that time it was too early to say. It is still too early to say what the impact would be in the candidate market, and we have no plans to make changes to our graduate programme."

Like many leading employers, Lloyds hired a full complement of candidates for this autumn's graduate programme: 404, similar to the previous year.

Although many of the questions

about Britain's impending exit of the EU have yet to be answered, recruiters are not thinking about the immediate needs of their organisation but several years ahead. "We are already starting to think about our strategy for recruitment for 2018," Bryan says.

"We are considering how we need to recruit, to attract and develop the graduates to be capable for the future. These candidates won't roll off the programme until 2020, but it's important that we think ahead to attract young leaders of the future."

Martin Blackburn, UK people director at KPMG, says: "We typically hire around 1,000 graduates each year and we expect this year's intake to be broadly in line with this."

"Recently we have invested heavily in our graduate recruitment process, introducing Launch Pad, which combines the traditional three stages of first interview, assessment centre and final interview into a single day, to make it easier and more engaging for millennials to apply to us."

Jenny Taylor, graduate programme manager at IBM, says: "We have seen no impact on graduate recruitment numbers or outlook post the Brexit referendum."

There may yet be big implications for graduate recruitment when Britain leaves the EU, depending on the negotiated exit terms. For now, however, students can put any anxieties aside.

Greg Hurst is The Times education editor

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Top 100 Graduate Employers

Starting package delivers results for supermarket

2nd Aldi

Aldi, the ambitious discount retailer that is currently opening a new store each week in the UK, may not be the most obvious choice as the country's second most popular graduate employer.

But the company's eye-catching starting salary of £42,000, plus an Audi A4 company car, has helped to take Aldi from 65th place in 2002 to almost the top of the rankings in 2015 and 2016.

Graduates are recruited for the company's challenging area manager training programme and within 12 months of starting work take responsibility for up to four of Aldi's stores.



3rd Teach First

Teach First's mission is to recruit high-calibre graduates to teach in schools in some of the country's most disadvantaged areas.

Since its launch in 2003, more than 10,000 graduates from many of the UK's top universities have joined the fast-track two-year teaching and leadership programme, taking Teach First from 63rd place in the Top 100 to 2nd place in 2014.

Recruitment for the programme's 2017 intake is already under way, with up to 1,750 places available in both primary and secondary schools in different parts of the UK.

4th Civil Service

With more than 900 vacancies on offer in 2017, the Civil Service Fast Stream is one of the largest recruiters of graduates in the public sector.

The Fast Stream is the principal entry point for new graduates wanting to work in major Whitehall departments, such as the Cabinet Office, Department of Health and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, government agencies or the Houses of Parliament.

Competition for places remains fierce, with more than 30,000 applicants for the programme in 2016.



5th Google

It is just 20 years since Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin built their first search engine while studying at Stanford University.

In that time, Google has become one of the world's best-known technology companies and a popular employment choice for new graduates.

Google first appeared in the Top 100 in 85th place in 2005 and has now been ranked in the top ten graduate employers in the UK for three years running.

It is has graduate vacancies in sales, technology, engineering, HR and marketing in 2017.

top100graduateemployers.com



Firm favourite is a perennial winner

1st PwC

PwC, the global accounting and professional services firm, has been named the UK's leading graduate employer for the 13th consecutive year.

Since first reaching number one in *The Times Top 100 Graduate Employers* in 2004, PwC has recruited more than 15,000 trainees and remains the country's largest private-sector employer of new graduates.

The firm's enduring appeal with university-leavers is fuelled by its ambitious annual programme of more

than 900 recruitment events at many of the country's most prestigious universities. And its commitment to providing open days, taster courses and work-experience placements helps students to gain a first-hand insight into the firm's graduate opportunities.

PwC is already accepting applications for its 2017 graduate vacancies and is preparing to hire about 1,500 trainees for 29 UK offices including its London headquarters (pictured). Up to half the vacancies are at the firm's accounting practice, but more than 700 new recruits will join PwC's consulting, actuarial, tax, technology and legal businesses.



Chart hit: placed tenth in 2016, the BBC has been voted into the top 20 by graduates every year for the past decade

numbers but graduates are recruited to work as analysts in London, Bournemouth, Glasgow and Edinburgh, with many hired through the bank's internship programmes.

**13th GlaxoSmithKline**  
The healthcare company employs more than 100,000 staff worldwide and has long been a favoured destination for new graduates wanting to work in research and development. But GSK also offers "future leaders" programmes for graduates wanting to work in engineering, IT, marketing, sales, human resources and finance.

**14th Lidl**  
Discount retailer Lidl joined the Top 100 as a new entry in 89th place in 2009 and has climbed the rankings each year since. Now in the top 20 for the first time, Lidl is set to recruit at least 240 graduates for management development programmes in 2017, with sector-leading starting salaries of up to £44,000.

**15th Goldman Sachs**  
With a staff of more than 34,000 worldwide, Goldman Sachs is one of the best-known names in investment banking and financial services. It has appeared in the top 20 graduate employers in each edition of the Top 100 for the past 15 years and is

planning to recruit about 300 graduates for its London office in 2017.

**16th HSBC**  
The banking group HSBC has 6,000 offices in 71 countries, serving more than 47 million customers. It expects to recruit more than 500 trainees in 2017 for its global graduate programmes, with roles in commercial banking, global banking and markets, retail banking, wealth management and private banking.

**17th Accenture**  
The global consulting and technology company Accenture is a former No 1 graduate employer in the Top 100. It continues to be a substantial recruiter of university-leavers in the UK and is planning to hire more than 500 new graduates in 2017, with vacancies in London, Manchester, Newcastle and Edinburgh.

**18th John Lewis Partnership**  
Although John Lewis has been graduates' employer of choice for retail at The Times Graduate Recruitment Awards each year since

2011, it has dropped down the Top 100 rankings for three years running. The company expects to hire about 30 graduates for its department stores and Waitrose supermarkets in the year ahead.

**19th Jaguar Land Rover**  
The motor manufacturer holds the record for being the fastest-climbing employer in the history of the Top 100, having jumped more than 70 places between 2010 and 2014. It is offering 250 vacancies on its graduate programmes next year, with roles available in engineering, research and development, IT, finance, marketing, sales, purchasing and logistics.

**20th Barclays**  
Barclays is an international banking and financial services group with 130,000 staff in more than 40 countries worldwide. Its operations include retail and corporate banking, investment banking and wealth management, mortgage lending and credit cards. The bank recruits about 300 graduates each year in the UK.

This year's movers and shakers

There are seven new entries or re-entries in *The Times Top 100 Graduate Employers* this year.

The highest entry is by the Santander banking group, which has had an emphatic return to the rankings in 63rd place, just ahead of Virgin Media, the IT and telecoms company, which makes its Top 100 debut at No 64.

The Royal Air Force and Savills, the property firm, are back in the league table in 73rd and 94th places respectively.

Irwin Mitchell, the law firm, and BMW are both ranked in the Top 100 for the first time, while Standard Life makes a re-entry in 95th place. This is the Edinburgh-based finance company's first year back in the rankings since 2004.

The highest climbers in the new Top 100 are led by the Bank of England, which has jumped an impressive 34 places to 66, and AstraZeneca, the pharmaceuticals company, and online retailer Amazon, which have both climbed 29 places, to 46 and 52 respectively.

A further eight



organisations have moved up at least 20 places in the new rankings, including M5, Herbert Smith Freehills, another law firm and AECOM, technical advisers.

But Cancer Research UK, the European Commission, British Airways, Bloomberg and McDonald's are heading in the other direction, having dropped 30 or more places this year.

Organisations leaving the Top 100 in 2016 include Centrica, General Electric – and Sainsbury's, which had appeared in the rankings every year since 1998.

Two graduate employers that were new or re-entries in the 2015 rankings – First Derivatives, the Northern Ireland-based technology and consulting company, and National Grid – have also dropped off the list this year.

Fourteen employers have reached their highest Top 100 ranking this year, including Lloyds Banking Group in 25th place and Transport for London at No 48, with Danone, the yoghurt-maker, and Penguin Random House, book publishers, in 60th and 61st places respectively.



Top 100 Graduate Employers

# Different paths can lead to the same destination

## Last-minute decision engineers a change of direction

Nikki Clarkson, like many students, waited until her final year at university to apply for a job – and then chose a different speciality from the one she was studying. She says: “I started considering a career when choosing my A levels.

“Being good at science and maths, I was thinking about medicine and engineering but moved towards engineering and was accepted for a course at the University of Birmingham in chemical engineering – a subject I really enjoyed.

“As the course continued, I knew I wanted a career in engineering but couldn’t make up mind about what type of job. I spent



Nikki Clarkson, inset, joined Jaguar Land Rover

a lot of my final year on Gradcracker [the careers website for engineering and technology students], went to careers events and on site tours.

“Towards the end of 2014, in my final year, I applied for five or six jobs and was invited to go through the whole assessment process by two companies.

“One of them was Jaguar Land Rover, which had made an impressive presentation

at a university careers fair. It is a big, innovative company, mostly based in the Midlands, where I wanted to stay, and offers a very attractive salary.

“After an online assessment, maths, literacy and situational judgment tests, I was invited to an assessment centre for further tests and interviews.

“I got an offer from both companies but chose Jaguar Land Rover because I wanted

to do something more material to everyday life; for example, you can’t go outside without seeing cars on the road. The other job involved process engineering.”

Clarkson was one of 330 graduates taken on in September last year. This year’s intake was 240 and the company also continued to take on students who had been on placements. They all undergo presentations and inductions together –

“a good opportunity to make friends,” Clarkson says.

“Then it was straight to work, joining the materials engineering department for three months before two further technical placements and one non-technical with HR.

“It has been really satisfying to develop a wide range of skills with help from experienced colleagues.”

## Variety adds Wellcome spice to the programme

Elena Gillies was undecided about a career, but then found a graduate development programme that offered the chance to work in many different divisions of an organisation before settling in the one best suited to her.

She says: “Studying English Literature, a subject I really liked, at King’s College London was an exciting opportunity. But when I started thinking about a job, not too many people were interested in a non-numerical degree.

“I wanted to stay in London and had visited the Wellcome Trust [the leading charity, funding research into human and animal health] and admired the work it did. I discovered that its graduate programme offered an extensive range of opportunities within the organisation.

“Although I applied for six or seven graduate schemes, the Wellcome Trust one was my top choice because it was so varied. There were few



My new role: Elena Gillies helps set up Friday Lates at the Wellcome Collection

obstacles to applying and after sending off my form and a covering letter, I was invited to complete online tests, do a phone interview and turn up for an assessment day in January last year.

“It was a long day, with an interview, group exercise, writing assignment and presentation task but it was worth going through the hoops.”

Gillies had applied for a rotational programme that offers candidates the chance to try out four jobs over two years. Graduates can choose a

varied programme in which the focus is on developing as broad a portfolio of skills as possible; or they may choose to be more specialist, basing their rotations on subjects that really interest them.

Gillies says: “I started in September last year and so far have worked with the education and learning team and the culture and society directorate. I have been involved with education policy, a nationwide survey of young people’s attitudes to science and met school governors and MPs.

Top 100 Graduate Employers

## Switch points towards career in property

Hattie Maud underwent a Damascus conversion in her final year studying theology at Durham University. Instead of pursuing a career relevant to her degree, she decided she wanted to work in the property industry and embarked on a Masters in Real Estate at the University of Reading.

She says: “During the course, I applied to join Savills [the estate agency] as a trainee surveyor on its graduate scheme. I knew its training programme is the best in the property industry and one of the reasons for wanting to be a surveyor was a desire to be out in the world meeting people rather than sitting behind a desk.”

Savills’ graduate programme offers the chance to gain an internationally recognised professional qualification. In Maud’s case, the company would support her to train for the gruelling examination to qualify for membership of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, specialising in



with people from across the company.

“The interview was a couple of weeks later. I thought they were genuinely interested in me, my hobbies and interests. I was in the choir at Durham and sang in the Albert Hall and we talked about that. I think they were looking for people who can relate to others across a field of different interests.”

Maud, 22, joined Savills four weeks ago and says: “I was given a three-day induction course and there are ‘lunch and learn’ sessions when different teams talk about their work.”

Savills’ graduates are given responsibility from the start, in teams encouraged to value their contribution, and are surrounded by experts from whom they can seek help and advice.

Savills employs 30,000 staff and has 700 offices and associates worldwide. It will be taking on 170 graduates next year, with opportunities to work in many UK locations.

## Applying early pays handsome dividends

Lucas Batchelor took the first steps to a career when he just 17, applying for a place on PwC’s business insight week. This proved a great chance to network with other people, followed by time in an office working with teams on live projects.

He says: “It was brilliant, learning what type of work was on offer. When I decided to continue to university, the company was very supportive.

“I joined its two-day talent academy at Easter during my first year at Queen’s Belfast, where I’m studying economics and finance. On the second day we formed into teams for a debate on Brexit and our team came first.”

A career with the company seemed on the cards and at the end of his first year at Queen’s he joined PwC’s



summer internship programme, a six-week stretch in the Belfast offices.

Batchelor, pictured, was attached to a team working in technology consulting, a growing area in PwC, which, as an economics student, caused him some concern.

“I was quite worried, but again the team was very supportive. Working as part of a team, you can pick up what you need to know as long as there is someone to ask.”

In the past year,

hundreds of students have followed these paths: 191 took part in business insight week placements, 150 joined the talent academy and nearly 500 were granted summer internships.

After his summer internship and a testing interview, Batchelor, now 19, received a conditional job offer, some two years before many of his fellow undergraduates will start thinking about careers. He needs to achieve at least a 2:1, but that should not be a problem because he was top of his faculty with 90 per cent in the first-year exams.

He is likely to join 1,500 graduates hired next year, together with school leavers (145 last year) and students who have been on work experience placements (1,133 last year).

This year PwC is planning to hire a third more graduates into technical roles and is also trying to open out its graduate recruitment to a more diverse set of applicants, including ethnic minorities and those from less affluent backgrounds.

Interviews by Tony Dawe and Jenny Knight

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# Apply yourself to avoid rejection

There are many pitfalls to avoid when chasing your first job, warns

**James Darley**

In almost 20 years in graduate recruitment I have seen, screened, hired and, sadly, rejected thousands of applications. Here are a few tricks of the trade, to avoid silly and costly mistakes.

## Application forms

Honesty – employers will check your academic qualifications. If you tell porkies you could find your offer withdrawn. If your first-year results were not as good as you had hoped, include them but explain that you don't feel they are representative of what you are going to achieve.

Work experience — give a true and accurate reflection of the work you have done. Don't fill gaps in your CV to make it sound like you've done more than you have. Recruiters aren't looking for a long-winded description of activities; they're trying to see what you have learnt and how you have developed.

Questions — competency questions ask you to write about a time when you overcame a problem or rose to a

challenge, to reflect on these, what the outcome was and what you learnt. Use examples relevant to the workplace, not from your academic studies. Strengths-based questions describe a situation and ask you what you would do about it.

Don't go over the word limit, and check what you have written. Some employers will strike you out if you have made spelling or grammatical errors, or used "text speak".

## Online testing

There are several categories of tests that employers use regularly, from ability tests such as verbal or numerical reasoning, to personality and psychometric tests. Preparing in advance is key. A university careers service can help you to practise different types of tests and some employers include sample tests on their recruitment websites.

## Assessment centres

These can last for a half day, a full day or even an overnight stay and feature exercises, presentations, testing and further interviews. Remember you are being assessed from the second you walk in.

In group exercises, you are thrown into a team of other candidates and set a challenge. Many struggle with this, thinking that they have to be the leader. Instead, do something within the team that helps to get the task done.

But don't stay silent, or we won't



Testing time: group exercises can provide a difficult challenge for some candidates at assessment centres

have any evidence of your strengths and abilities.

Be yourself and try to enjoy it. The best feedback that I receive is from candidates who say they have no idea if they got the job but they enjoyed the day. They often leave with an offer. James Darley is director of strategic alliances at Teach First

## It pays to make an early start

Don't leave your job search until your final year. While at school, try out work experience with a range of employers, decide the sorts of work you like, then investigate this further during university vacations by undertaking internships in areas that interest you.

You need to establish where you would enjoy working. Visit the employer stands at careers fairs, talk to graduates and find out what it's really like to work there. You can do this better in the networking session after a corporate presentation or at the company's "drop-in" sessions.

Does your family know someone at the company? Ask how many graduates they take, how many they retain and what roles they move to after the programme.

What happens after the programme is key. If they are really committed to developing people, there will be a structure. HSBC established "ConnectUs", which provides learning, development and networking for graduates and non-graduates post-programme.

If an organisation doesn't have something like this, is it really interested in building a long-term relationship with you?

**JOHN MOREWOOD**  
Head of Emerging Talent Europe at HSBC

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