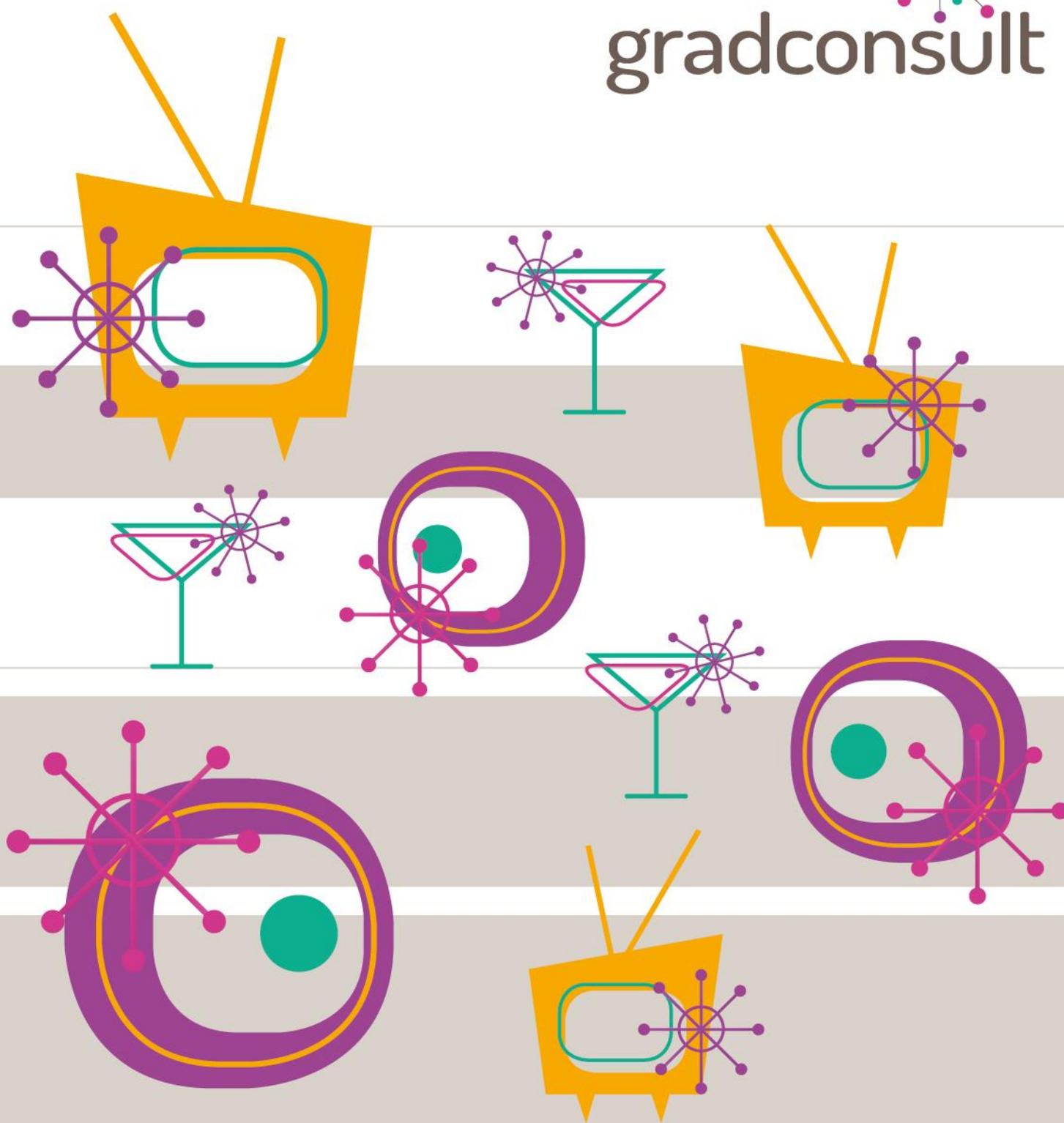


gradconsult



SME Guide to Graduate Recruitment & Development

Why recruit graduates?

Recruiting graduates is not the sole privilege of large, corporate businesses. There are more and more SME businesses hiring graduates, and most of these businesses do not have a graduate programme. This guide will help you discover how your business can hire graduates without needing a graduate recruitment team. We have distilled all the very best bits for you, for free.

Why hire a graduate?

- To fill existing or future skills gaps
- Bring in new ideas & ways of thinking
- Get skills from degree-level study
- More cost effective than hiring experienced employees
- Create a 'talent pipeline' approach

Return on investment (ROI)

You need your graduate to make a difference to your business - that's why you're hiring them. Ensure you decide from the outset how you will measure ROI.

Measures will differ, depending on your reasons for hiring, but could include:

- Profit from time / money saved through process improvements
- New income streams or increased capacity
- Improved quality of products / services / project delivery

Graduates love working for SMEs

The scope of work on offer at an SME is typically much broader than a large business. Graduates learn very quickly to turn their hand to many different tasks in any given day. The [millennial generation](#) thrive on variety and many express a preference for working in this way.

SMEs are close-knit environments, offering great variety, early responsibility and an unrivalled opportunity to learn. Graduates that we have hired into SMEs often comment on these aspects:

“fast-paced, fun, team environment”

“The MD knows my name!”

“freedom & flexibility to implement my ideas”

“accountability and responsibility to deliver”

In a nutshell:

- Graduates often bring fresh ideas, new skills and ways of thinking
- You don't have to offer a comprehensive graduate programme
- With a bit of planning, you can get access to the right skills for your business effectively and efficiently

Gradconsult works directly with employers on how to hire and develop the very best graduates for your business. We draw upon extensive experience - our employees have helped over 500 businesses hire thousands of graduates over the last 15 years. If we can be of help to your business, give us a call.

5 useful facts about graduates

1

They generally work in regions they know

Recent [research](#) into graduate mobility shows that graduates usually work in a region they are already connected to, either because they studied there or live there. Only 18% move to an area unconnected to them and, of those, nearly half move to London.

2

There are more women than men

UK university [statistics](#) show that since 2012 the majority of graduates are women. Government initiatives in recent years have also positively impacted the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of graduates. Diversity of workforce has proven business benefit – the more diverse your team, the better your business performs.

3

The hidden graduate pool

Many graduates delay applying for jobs in their final year to concentrate on getting the best qualifications they can. Some take a gap year after university. These graduates might have missed the usual recruitment [milkround](#) and so are hidden from the mass market. You are perfectly placed to access this pool. Your local university careers service can advise you on how to reach their graduates, or free services like [Graduate Talent Pool](#) can help you recruit graduate interns.

4

Second jobbers can be gold dust

Often graduates start on big corporate graduate recruitment programmes and then decide the environment is just not for them. They are usually great quality candidates but find they want a chance to make more of an impact in an SME. Others decide they want to swap industries and follow a different career path. These “second jobbers” can be very valuable hires for an SME. They have proven experience in the professional world but still offer the energy and fresh thinking of a new graduate.

5

The fine line between student and graduate

One month someone is a student, the next they are a graduate. The difference is just an exam result, but competition for a graduate is much higher. Consider whether you could get the same benefit from a student instead. There are many opportunities for this; from remote project work over a few weeks to full-time workers on-site for 3-12 months. There is often support available, so talk to your local university about possible options.

How to find the best graduates

Get social – Our experience tells us that you should just focus on Facebook and LinkedIn. Don't bother with twitter (they don't use it). Promote your brand and what you are doing – make it relevant and related, not just posts about your vacancies. Give an insight into your business and what it is like to work there.

Contact your local university careers service – they usually have dedicated employer engagement people. Call them, say you're an employer and find out about all the free ways you can advertise your role. If you have time, there may also be opportunities to get on campus and meet students face to face. Don't limit yourself to certain degree courses. Often great applicants come from surprising backgrounds. For example, English or language grads often make great coders!

Offer an internship or placement – this is the classic 'try before you buy' approach to graduate recruitment. There is huge demand for these in UK universities nationwide. Make sure your opportunity fits, that you are willing to pay (that's the law) and that you have the right support mechanisms in your business to cope. Funding is often available through your local university or council. Your local university can advise you.



What salary?

Don't be scared by media stories of £36k+. Outside London a realistic average salary is **c.£20k** (with regional and specialism variations). Emphasise other benefits too e.g office culture, flexible working etc

Pitch your vacancy perfectly - to get good applicants, you need to position your advert right. This means understanding the market for the role you are trying to fill. Research local salaries and skills availability.

Make sure the job title is appealing but truthful e.g *co-ordinator* rather than *administrator*, *business development* rather than *sales*.

Think carefully about your applicant criteria. Only list your absolute deal-breakers, rather than your wishlist. Graduates, particularly women, often won't consider applying if they don't have absolutely everything listed. You could lose some great people.

Consider the time of year you are looking. Autumn means you need existing graduates, whereas in spring you may be able to target current students who do final exams in May/June.

What to include in your offer

- ✓ Competitive salary
- ✓ Variety of work
- ✓ Team culture
- ✓ Entrepreneurial approach
- ✓ Flexible working
- ✓ "We work with clients such as..."
- ✓ Making a difference

Selecting the best person for your business

STEP 1: CV and Cover Letter



CV alone predicts future performance with 25% accuracy

Choose your application process

Make it easy for graduates to apply (CV and cover letter), instead of an onerous application form. There is still great value in reviewing CVs and cover letters. Just make sure you have a robust, fair, scoring criteria.

Consider video interviewing

Video interviewing is the new kid on the recruitment block. It is an affordable way to recruit and can directly replace the telephone interview, saving time and money in the process.

Unlike live Skype interviewing, video interviewing involves the employer pre-arranging the questions to be asked, and setting time frames for the candidates to answer them in. The candidate then completes the interview, to be reviewed at the convenience of the employer.

In short, it gives a good insight into the candidates applying and lightens the administrative load. This flexibility can be invaluable when trying to run your business as well as run a recruitment process.

Assess work-based tasks

We know that you haven't got the time to invest in a resource heavy assessment centre. You just want to make sure you hire the best person for the job.

Doing an interview goes part of the way. But an even better way to predict future performance is having your candidate run through one or two assessment tasks. This doesn't have to be onerous. It could be a work sample or situation you know your future graduate will face in your business.

The trick is designing a task that fairly and accurately elicits the behaviours you want to see.

This is just a taster of areas to consider when recruiting graduates. For further advice, please do give us a call.

STEP 2: Telephone or Video Interview



CV + telephone or video interview predicts future performance with 30 - 40% accuracy

STEP 3: Face-to-face interview with individual assessment task



Adding an assessment task and face to face interview predicts future performance with 55 - 65% accuracy

4 easy steps to creating a development plan

1. Induction

A graduate will come to you with bags of enthusiasm, but at this stage they will need lots of direction in terms of what to do and how your business works. The purpose of the induction is to immerse them in your business from their first week, so they are set up from the outset to deliver a great job for you. Induction should consist of a day-by-day plan for the first week. There is a blank induction plan on the next page populated with suggestions. Simply add in relevant information about their first week's activities, details of people to meet, where and at what times.

2. Quality Work

Ensure your graduate has real, substantive and challenging work to do with clear targets, quality standards, deadlines and measures of success. This will not only allow you to get the most benefit from having a graduate in your business, but it will also provide the graduate with excellent experience and nurture an on-going positive commitment to your business.



3. Select the best line manager

If you are a small or fairly informal business this may seem unnecessary, but graduates consistently rate their line manager as critical to their early career experiences. Your graduate may have had little practical work experience and will most likely had no experience of your specific business. They come to you with intelligence and ability. You offer an opportunity to put learning into practice and their line manager will be the most influential person in shaping their performance and attitude.

A line manager's duties will vary from business to business, but all need to get the basics right like setting clear objectives and targets, monitoring and ensuring work quality and building trust with the graduate. Striking the right balance with the graduate between training, support and challenge will be critical to their success. Often, if you give a graduate freedom to achieve, they will exceed expectations.



4. Feedback / appraisal

Appraisal is another chance to give open and honest feedback to your graduate about their performance, although should never be the only occasion. We know graduates today love feedback. They thrive on it. So don't leave them guessing. Timely feedback is a great opportunity for them to learn and develop.

This is just a taster of areas to consider when developing graduates. There are a raft of other things such as mentoring, professional qualifications and much more!

Induction week timetable - sample

Day	Time	Department / activity	Key contact (Name and position)
Monday	AM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome meeting with line manager • Introductions • Health and Safety • Lunch with colleagues 	
	PM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tour of the business • Housekeeping • The job role and objectives 	
Tuesday		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induction project briefing • Meet the team • Any job training needed • Commence work on induction project 	
Wednesday	AM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-week check in with line manager 	
	PM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with training • Continue with induction project work 	
Thursday		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with training • Continue with induction project work 	
Friday	AM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare summary update on induction project 	
	PM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with Line Manager to review the induction week. <p>Possible agenda:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning from the week • What's gone well? • Any outstanding questions? • Any concerns? • Discuss and review results from induction project • Agreed actions 	

Join the Small Graduate Recruiters' Club

The *Small Graduate Recruiters' Club* offers networking opportunities and training events throughout the year to support businesses looking to take on, or improve how they hire, small numbers of graduates.

Our club is particularly useful if your organisation recruits between 1 and 40 graduates per year (either into a job or onto a more structured graduate scheme) and you want to 'DIY' your graduate recruitment rather than pay agency fees. We offer tailored training and resources on how to find, employ and develop graduates.

Contact kerry@gradconsult.co.uk to register your interest, and follow us on Twitter [@TheSGRC](https://twitter.com/TheSGRC) for updates



"I have come away with at least five action points for myself that will have an impact on what we do in the business."

"The sessions were engaging and really informative"

"I wish I had brought our directors who think the whole recruitment thing is easy!"

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