

Using recruitment agencies

What are recruitment agencies?

Recruitment agencies help employers find the right candidate for their vacancy. They save employers valuable time and money used to advertise and interview potential candidates. When the agency places a candidate they are paid a set fee by the employer.

Why use recruitment agencies?

Agencies are really useful in helping you get permanent jobs in specific careers as well as temporary or seasonal work. Recruitment consultants, who work in the agencies, make many contacts with employers so usually know when vacancies are coming up.

Recruitment agencies advertise employers' vacancies on their own websites as well as national job sites such as S1Jobs or Monster.

They also have their own websites, where you can register your details with them, upload your CV, and apply for any jobs advertised there.

It can be a good idea to register with several agencies, as this gives you wider exposure and more chances of being considered for work. One good reason is that recruitment agencies can also have 'drier' seasons and not much work coming in, usually at set times of the year, for example, after Christmas.

What to expect from a recruitment agency

If you see a vacancy you are interested in, they will get you in to formally register with their agency. You can also directly approach them without answering a specific vacancy. You can do this by telephone, or by registering online using their own websites. You can set up a job alert with many, in the same way with the national websites.

Bear in mind, agencies can't charge you any fees to register or in helping place you in work.

Whatever method you use to contact them, you will always be invited to visit their office with a copy of your up to date CV. You will be asked to complete a registration form, outlining your work experience and education, and what sort of work you are looking for, as well as your salary expectations. You will then be interviewed by a recruitment consultant, who will get more details about your requirements and what skills you have. Although you may be asked questions such as what are your strengths and weaknesses, these interviews are not as formal as job interviews!

While you are there, you may be asked to complete typing or data entry tests, particularly if you are applying for secretarial or clerical posts. So, you should set plenty time aside when you first visit an agency.

After the interview they will tell you they will keep you informed of any suitable vacancies that might come up that fit your skills and experience, usually by telephone. They normally expect you to keep in touch to ask about

any updates also.

If a vacancy arises

Recruitment consultants are like sales people, where they cold call employers, and ask if there are any opportunities in their company. Once the relationship has been established, an employer contacts the recruitment consultants, to ask them to fill a vacancy or role for them.

When a vacancy arises, they provide the recruitment consultant with a description of the role and a person specification. If you suit that role, the consultant will contact you directly to describe the job and ask you if you are interested in being forwarded for the position. If you are, they will send your CV as a potential candidate for short listing among others. Communication is only between the consultant and yourself, and many consultants do not tell you who the company is, until you agree to go for the interview. It's a good idea to clarify the job role, since you are hearing the information second hand; if you don't understand or feel the information is incomplete, you should ask.

If you are successful for shortlisting, you will attend an interview directly with the employer at their premises, so you need to treat this like a formal interview and do all the necessary preparation work. The added advantage is that you can get important information from the recruitment consultant about the organisation, who is essentially their client! They can only help you so far, though.

What not to expect from a recruitment agency

It's important to remember that it is not a recruitment consultant's job to find you work, so you need to be proactive in your own career. Persistence is the key with recruitment agencies, so you should build a good relationship with a consultant if you want to be remembered. Keep in touch on a regular basis by telephone, just to let them know you are still available and looking for work.

If you are not contacted by an agency however, but there are jobs coming up you could apply for, it could just mean that they are pretty busy and most probably, have lots of people on their database looking for work. They usually go by people who have more recently joined who have appropriate skills, and they might just forget about you if you have been on their database for some time.

If you get a job

Don't forget that if you get temporary work through an agency, you are entitled to the same rights as permanent workers, such as holiday pay and getting paid the national minimum wage.

After 12 weeks, you are entitled to the same treatment as colleagues in a similar line of work.

Don't forget to tell an agency if you have found work somewhere else – otherwise you might still receive phone calls from them!