

FEATURE: Recruitment Agencies: helping them to help you

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“There’ll always be a place for recruitment agencies,” says Elizabeth Kerr, manager at [Four Seasons Recruitment Ltd](#), a specialist agency for the fashion and retail sector. “They provide a valuable service to clients and to candidates.”

Jan Rowan, College Careers Adviser, [University College for the Creative Arts](#) agrees. “If you can find an agency that suits, it’s another place to look,” she explains.

So it’s official, then: recruitment agencies are worth considering, as part of that all-important job search process. But what makes them different; what can they offer that you can’t do yourself?

Firstly, there’s the expertise: agencies, particularly specialist agencies, have considerable knowledge of their sector, access to labour market data and a wide range of contacts. They’ll have an ongoing relationship with companies, developed over a period of time, and a good understanding what of their clients (ie, employers) want. They can save you time, matching you with employers, and provide you with useful hints and tips, especially on presentation and CV preparation. What’s more, they may have access to jobs not advertised in the public domain. An employer might use an agency for reasons of confidentiality, to save time, or to avoid having to process applications themselves. However, in order to take advantage of the benefits an agency can provide, it’s important to choose the right type.

Finding an agency

A lot can depend on the kind of work you’re looking for, whether it’s temporary ‘filling-in’ work, a start in your chosen career, or the next step up. Make sure you choose an agency that covers your sector (eg, fine art, fashion), profession (eg, designer) and/or level (eg, entry-level) of work. As Jan Rowan says, “Do research an agency to see if it’s the right one for you – make sure they offer the right type of job and will represent you satisfactorily.”

Some agencies do not offer entry-level jobs, or if they do, then it is only to those who have acquired previous experience – it is important to check this, if you're searching in that market. As a recruitment consultant from [Sophie Macpherson Ltd](#), a fine art specialist agency explains, “At this agency, we're geared to those with experience. We do have positions for young graduates but more frequently for those who've been building up experience. We also offer an internship service in a variety of galleries and auction houses – a lot of people have the academic credentials but they need assistance in getting on that first step on the ladder.”

Elizabeth Kerr agrees: “I would advise people at university to take a summer out and get an internship or other valuable experience,” she says. “It puts the graduate in a much better position.”

If you're a recent graduate, your careers service may be able to advise you on suitable agencies to contact. Otherwise, talk to those in your sector or in the area in which you'd like to work. Another useful source is specialist or trade magazines and then there's the internet – as well as recruitment agency websites, you'll also find other online sources of vacancies. As with any internet research, you should investigate the information thoroughly, to make sure it's accurate, up to date and appropriate.

So having identified your agency or agencies, how do you make the most of the experience?

- Be proactive: if you've sent them your CV or completed an online form, follow this up a few days later with a phone call. Agencies receive lots of CVs – contacting them adds the personal touch, it's professional and means you make more of an impact.
- Once you're registered, keep in touch with your recruitment consultant/s, calling them regularly (but not excessively) will keep you in the forefront of their mind. Also, remember to update them with any changes to your circumstances or requirements.
- Treat them as you would an employer; some agencies have a lot of say in the pre-selection process so if you don't impress them you could lose out on opportunities. And remember to give the same attention to interviews gained through the agency as you would to an interview you achieved by yourself.
- Prepare for your meeting with agencies – be well presented, professional and have a good CV. As Elizabeth Kerr says, “CVs should have all the crucial information, be well laid out and be proofread. Pay attention to detail. It's important that the candidate's written communication is good and the CV is a good indicator of that.”
- Most importantly, know what you want from an agency before you apply. As a recruitment consultant from [Sophie Macpherson Ltd](#) says, “Be clear regarding areas or roles you are interested in, but do be open to ideas and advice. Be enthusiastic, and as positive as possible.” As well as providing advice on presentation, agencies can also provide useful feedback after an interview or selection process.
- Make sure you're the one who decides when your CV is sent out, and to which companies – your choice of possible employers should be discriminating. Critically, there should be a strong match between you and any possible job opportunity. A good agency will understand their clients' requirements and take the time to find out about candidates, their attributes and their aspirations. They will then be able to make an informed decision, ensuring a good match between client and candidate.
- Establish an effective working relationship with your agency. You should feel comfortable with them and they should be working in your best interest. Provide them with as much relevant information as possible, and be professional, open and honest. Registering with several agencies (eg, two or three), rather than just one is fine, but don't register with too many. It's more beneficial to do your research first and select fewer, more appropriate agencies. In some very specialist sectors there are likely to be fewer agencies anyway.

And remember:

- A potential job should be a good fit with you. Don't let agencies persuade you to go for jobs that aren't suitable.
- It's important that you have all the relevant information about the company and the job before you go for an interview. Don't let agencies send you for selection without that information
- Agencies shouldn't charge you for the job hunting service they provide – they charge the employer. However, they may charge for related services such as looking at your CV, so do ask about any charges.
- Some agencies are members of the [Recruitment & Employment Confederation](#), a trade body that represents the recruitment industry.
- A good agency can provide you with an excellent service, but an agency's first priority will be their client (the employer).
- When you've been successful in finding work, remember to thank the agency for their time and help. You will have gained an additional contact who may be of benefit in the future.

Finally, don't rely on an agency to do all the work for you. As Elizabeth Kerr says, "Be proactive: in the job seeking process it's important to use a variety of routes." Be proactive, be professional, do your research and know what you want. Put yourself forward in a positive way – it will stand you in good stead when you achieve that job – whether through an agency or through one of the many other options out there.

Websites:

[Four Seasons Recruitment Ltd](#)

[Recruitment & Employment Confederation – Directory of Members](#)

[Sophie Macpherson Ltd](#)

University College for the Creative Arts – Recruitment Websites (agencies and online recruitment tools)

