

How much do you want to earn?

The average starting salary for a graduate in 2006 was £22,851, but salaries ranged from £6,000 to £40,000. The highest paying jobs require at least three years of industry experience.

A lowly £6,000 a year may come as a shock, but how realistic are you about your expectations and the competition for graduate jobs? The list of what you hope to achieve is long, but as a start it would include a good salary, work life balance and development of potential.

In 2004/05 approx 271,000 people obtained a First degree and with more people going to University this will increase. There are about 50,000 graduate jobs available each year: you do the maths.

The Association of Graduate Recruiters represents 235 organisations which recruit and employ graduates. In 2006 these organisations had 21,157 jobs. These are the employers who will look for more than a degree, and will offer more than just a salary.

Life skills, soft skills, competencies, whatever you want to call them, are now paramount when applying for a job. Many organisations screen applications for these before even looking at a degree. If you can't write about and talk about your experiences, will you get the job you want?

The good news is that everyone has experiences; all you need to do is write and talk about them. Don't be shy, celebrate what you have achieved. The smallest example can show lots of evidence: if you've worked in a student bar you will have dealt with difficult customers, worked in a team, influenced people, have an understanding of how the bar works. You don't need to have climbed Everest to have evidence of life skills.

The next step will be to transfer these experiences to an application form. Understand what an organisation is looking for; research their culture before completing an application form. Keep a record of what you have done, when it happened, where, what you said and what you did, and then you have the starting point to explain your evidence and get the job that you really want.