



Getting the most from your student jobs

Read this, do all of the activities, and you will be able to really learn from your student jobs – from all jobs, even the most simple, straightforward and routine.

You will get quality insights into work and to your own attitudes to work, and specifically find it easier to

- 'Choose' careers which might suit your circumstances
- Identify excellent responses to application form and interview questions.

The guide considers

- Context – where do your employers fit into the world of work
- Content – the range of tasks and jobs in every employer
- Culture – what makes employers different.

So when you look at a career or job vacancy you will be asking yourself the right questions.

Context – does this employer or employment sector interest me?

Content – Do these tasks interest me?

Culture – Do I like the style of this organisation?

The Benefits

Before reading this guide:

Interviewer Question: Ahh, Ceri, I see that you have had some part time work whilst at UWS. How have these experiences influenced your decision to apply for Bloggets Biscuits?

Ceri's Answer: I've worked in the housing department of my local council, and had a job selling ice cream. I improved my communication skills, and now feel confident in dealing effectively with a wide range of people.

After reading this guide:

Ceri's Answer: Well I have had two paid jobs, one in the private sector selling ice creams on the beach, the other in a local government's housing department. I have also worked as a volunteer with a charity promoting health information to young people in Swansea. I enjoyed the work in the housing department, particularly being part of a large organisation with a range of activities and resources. However, I was disappointed with the limited contact I had with anyone other than the housing officers. Also there was very little scope to use my initiative because of the regulatory nature of the work.

Both Healthwatch and Zippy Ice Cream had a financial element that I found challenging and rewarding. Healthwatch had an extremely small budget for publicity, so prioritising and problem solving with the team and negotiating with suppliers was very interesting.

With Zippy Ice Cream I had total responsibility for ice cream sales at Rest Bay. I collected the stock and float daily and banked the takings. I worked out which were the most profitable lines. By the end of the summer, I had established where the best sites were, and what the best start and finish times were and when to send for more stock and sellers.

I performed three very different types of tasks. The ice cream job was all about sales and customer service: dealing with the general public. The housing department position was that of acting as an administrative assistant to the housing officers. In the charity I was a member of the team that arranged production, printing and distribution of a leaflet for school leavers.

These experiences have made me realise that I enjoy responsibility and decision-making in an environment that has very clear constraints of time and resources.

I have also discovered that I like working with the general public and a variety of other specialists. I am not sure that I am suited to tasks that are supportive in nature, as I know I like being involved in line activities. I feel that a company such as Bloggets with its high speed manufacturing processes, multiple suppliers and many different brands all competing with other UK produces, will provide a great opportunity for me to build on what I have learned so far.

WHERE and WHAT?

That's Context

This section is about context, the first of the three elements. It will give you an appreciation of economic sectors and enable you to pinpoint your whereabouts in the economy.

- What is the name of the organisation where are you working?

- What is the purpose of the organisation?

- Does the organisation provide a product or a service?

- Who are the customers?

- Is your organisation to be found in one or many locations?

- How many people does your organisation employ? Less than 10, 50, 100, 250 or more than 250?

- How well known is your organisation? Is it a household name? Well known in the locality? Well known in a specialist field?

- How long has it been established?

Without doubt you will work or have worked for an organisation operating within one of three economies: local, national and international. Whether it be in an international, national or local setting all organisations have a purpose. The purpose could be to sell fruit and vegetables, raise public concern about homelessness, provide affordable air travel or make the best ice cream in Swansea...

Nearly all national economies operate in some sort of mixed system. The United Kingdom is a good example of a mixed economy: a mix of private and public sector.

Some parts of the economy are owned and operated by central government directly for example the Armed Forces, The Civil Service, and the road network. Some parts are indirectly funded by government for example local education authorities. These are all considered public sector activities.

Other parts of the economy are supported by public donations to operate independently in a non-profit making manner. For example The National Parks, Barnardos, Amnesty International, religious groups, sports associations and trade unions.

The remainder is owned by private citizens.

Private sector profit making organisations are easy to identify for example Asda, Easy Jet, Kellogg's, Ford, Lloyds TSB, Joe's Ice cream and The Pub on the Pond.

But it is important to note that many 'free' products and services are only free at the point of delivery. Everything has a cost.

Careers advice from the University for example is free but the costs of providing such a service are paid by the University from its grant from the Funding Council which in turn is paid for by student fees and general taxation.

Since the end of the Second World War the UK economy in general has been shifting away from making things to providing services.

Health, education, leisure, entertainment, tourism, financial advice are good examples. Increased mechanisation and development of high technology manufacturing methods has meant that fewer people need to be employed to make the same amount of goods.

You are far more likely to be employed in a service activity than were your grandparents.

In the past 20 years many industries previously owned by the state such as telecommunications, power, fuel, air and rail transport have been privatised (sold to shareholders). Public services such as health and education have been placed in competitive environments. Here managers have responsibility for their budgets and can choose to buy in services from private suppliers. This is called outsourcing.

Publicly and privately owned organisations are increasingly choosing to outsource their activities. Outsourcing is simply deciding that a particular area of work or part of a process is best delivered by another organisation. For example the staff canteen may be operated by a commercial catering firm not the employer themselves.

Organisations can, and do, outsource their marketing, advertising, promotion, accounting, transport and distribution functions. They leave it to "the experts." For example, Dell Computer Corporation outsource production, and many government departments outsource their IT systems to companies like EDS and IBM.

Also in recent years there has been a much stronger emphasis upon public accountability.

Private profit making organisations have always striven to satisfy the customer and in turn the shareholders, otherwise the customer will go elsewhere. Now publicly owned organisations are also expected to give and maintain high standards of service. The customer has an entitlement to this even if there is no alternative provider.

Hence "Citizens Charters" ... "Statements of Service"... and similar concepts. Citizens have far more access to complaints and appeals procedures. There is a watchdog culture for everything.

Another development in the past 20 years has been the increase in self-employment and the number of small and medium sized enterprises: SMEs - organisations employing less than 250 people.

Small enterprises have increased partly because of the transfer of work that was once done in house, to external specialists. But also new technology has allowed small enterprise to flourish. Working alone or in small groups can be economically viable. The Internet, PCs, fax machines, laptops, voicemail, video conferencing, camera surveillance, vending equipment and specialist software have reduced whole buildings of activity to a single desk. Ask your parents about typing pools, tea ladies, post rooms, travel departments, receptionists, the computer floor, security guards and communication via the switchboard and telex operators.

Gone.

Finally SMEs often meet their customers' needs and the culture of quality by their flexible use of resources.

SO

- Are you working in the private or public sector?

- If you are working in the public sector are you working directly for central government, local government or a non-profit making organisation?

- If you are working in the private sector who owns the organisation? Is it an individual, a partnership or a group of shareholders?

- Do you think you are working for an organisation that is in a declining part of the UK economy or one that is growing?

WHAT and WHO?

That's Content

This section is about content: the second of the three elements. It will give you an appreciation of the range of tasks that are undertaken in organisations. You will be able to pinpoint exactly what tasks you do in your job compared with others.

- How did you get your job?

- What sorts of things do you have to do?

- How much training were you given?

- Who trained you?

- Are you working alone or as part of a group? If you are in a group are you all doing similar tasks?

- Do you come into contact with others performing different tasks to yours?

- Does your employer have named departments for workers undertaking specific tasks?

- Does your employer have workers who are able to do many different types of task?

- What sort of contact do you have with people working inside your organisation?

- What sort of contact do you have with people working outside your organisation?

Whether you are in the private or the public sector, whether you are working for an organisation that is making something or providing a service... the fewer the number of people employed the more likely it is that they will multi-task or have several roles.

So wherever you are working in a pub, a shop, for the local council, making TV screens or in a volunteer project - you can see - that all organisations have a structure which has named tasks. These tasks can be undertaken by an individual or people within a department. The size of the organisation will determine this. However irrespective of size, appropriate assignment of tasks to different people enables the organisation to operate effectively.

In a manufacturing organisation the main task is that of making the product. The production operatives on the factory floor are assisted and supervised in this task by production managers, production engineers, production planners and quality controllers.

In order to ensure that raw materials for production are in place, someone will be responsible for purchasing. So that the finished goods are transported to the correct destinations in the right quantity and at the right time some people take responsibility for logistics (or supply chain management).

The manufacturer will also have others devoted to the task of selling the product: sales, assisted by those whose key concern is that of researching the customers' needs and promoting the product: market research, marketing and promotion.

People involved in tasks of recruiting and training the workforce and making sure that salaries are appropriate and employment laws and procedures are followed, are undertaking personnel (or human resources) tasks.

Others will have responsibility for communications, information technology and administration, where they undertake tasks involving the provision and recording of information to aid decision making in all parts of the company.

Keeping track of the costs from all the activities involved in the manufacture of the product, making sure that the product is priced competitively and that income from sales is received speedily, falls to those with responsibility for accounting and finance.

Finally workers whose key role is to redesign and refine the product to meet changing customer needs are to be found in research and development activity.

In a non-production environment the main task is to provide a range of finished goods, services or a combination of the two. Librarians, teachers, nurses, social workers, disability advisers and recruitment advisers all work in a service environment.

The customer service agent, nurse or volunteer for example are the front line: the first point of contact for their particular client group. Just like the production operatives, customer service workers are assisted by others in the organisation who are there to see that the correct resources such as information and types of good are available to meet customer need.

All service organisations will have employees specialising in marketing and market research, investigating and evaluating customers' views of the service and changing it accordingly to meet their needs. All service organisations will also have individuals undertaking tasks concerned with human resources, IT, communications, administration and finance.

The Careers Centre is a service organisation. Our clients are students, graduates, academic departments and employers. The Centre employs 30 people, the majority of whom are involved in the main tasks of providing information, careers advice and education, placements and work opportunities.

As in most small organisations the career staff are responsible for their own record keeping, correspondence, and administration. Everyone can cover the basic front line activity of manning reception if required and we meet at least once a fortnight to review our activities and plan for the future. The rest of the tasks we perform are generally in our specialist areas for example careers advice or student placements, graduate recruitment or local part-time work. Some of us take on additional responsibilities for example relating to marketing and evaluating our activities so that we can research, develop and design better and new services for our customers.

The Director of the Careers Centre, the Departmental Secretary and our IT specialist provide support in some areas of financial information, administration, personnel and IT. However there are some tasks that we are unable to perform such as payroll, catering for events, cleaning and building maintenance and bulk buying of equipment, that the University does on our behalf.

But in small organisations one individual will do many tasks; for example the managing director may do all administration, personnel and marketing, the production (or service) manager may also be responsible for sales and research.

SO

- Are you performing main tasks in your organisation or assisting those that do?

- Do you have a job title in a named department? Please specify.

- How are you paid? Is it an individual's responsibility or that of a named department?

- If your organisation is providing a free service do you know who has responsibility for paying for resources?

- Does the person supervising you just manage your type of tasks or does he or she undertake a range of other activities in the working day? Name them.

- Are some of the services your organisation needs to function outsourced or conducted at another site? Name them.

WHO and HOW?

That's Culture...

This section is about the final element: culture. It will give you an appreciation of why organisations feel different. You will be able to pinpoint exactly the culture and style operating in your workplace.

- What types of decisions does your supervisor make?

- What types of decisions are you making?

- Are you supervising anyone?

- Does your organisation have a few in authority at the top and more people at the bottom?

- In general does your organisation have people working as equals drawing together different specialists to complete an objective?

- Are you working somewhere where there is one powerful figure and few decisions can be made without him or her?

- Does your organisation have very clear, formal channels of communication linked to very clear lines of authority?

- Are you working in a situation where informal communication based on shared aspirations, interests and friendships dominate?

Every organisation is unique in its mix of aims, objectives and ethos.

But every organisation is the same in that all face the same questions of who is going to do what, when, how and with what resources - which are always limited. Decisions have to be made.

Larger organisations have individuals or whole departments dedicated to the performance of specified tasks, and in many ways organisational structure is based on the division of those tasks.

In general those performing main tasks such as selling, making or providing a front line service, dominate decision-making. The reporting structure and management responsibilities tend to reflect this.

For example the aim of a school is to provide education in a classroom setting. The teaching staff have prime responsibility for the delivery in the classroom. Thus the manager of this group, the Head Teacher, will dominate decision making for the whole school. Support staff, for example in personnel, IT, finance and administration, support those performing the main tasks.

The advantage to an organisation of operating main task alongside support is that main task people can concentrate on their core roles and support can be called in to provide specialist information when required.

Larger organisations can have enough employees to group by specialisation. Grouping by specialisation clarifies responsibility and allows the specialists to work in a group of like-minded individuals.

The main problem with departmentalising is that it can produce isolation where the purpose of the organisation's very existence can be forgotten!

You may well have already worked with someone who has cried in exasperation " We are being run by a bunch of accountants/lawyers/engineers/public relations people/production managers/anoraks".

If not yet, you will.

So, making sure that an organisation has a structure that best suits its size, aims and objectives is key to its success.

It is possible to place most organisations into one of three structures: hierarchical pyramid, horizontal (or matrix) and web.

Pyramid structures are where there are less people with authority at the top of an organisation; more people at the bottom. Some pyramids can be tall and thin with many levels of responsibility; others are wide and flat giving fewer layers of hierarchy and thus limited chances of promotion.

An aim that demands a consistent, time bound and standard end product demands a rigid hierarchy with a clear chain of command for example, an international burger chain, the armed forces, a call centre and a hospital accident and emergency department.

The strict routines, procedures and carefully delineated authority of these organisations have not arisen because employees are not to be trusted, although sometimes it can feel that way. Rather they are there to ensure that clients receive the same quality of product or service irrespective of when and where they require it.

Horizontal or matrix organisations operate when people of equal standing and equal but different expertise pool resources to meet an objective. An organisation with the key objective of harnessing a range of skills and specialist tasks over time to produce a flexible service, increased knowledge or

innovative design best suits a matrix/team working democracy. For example, an advertising agency, a group medical practice, a research laboratory and Formula 1 team.

A web structure can be found when an organisation is based around a central sometimes-charismatic figure. Very small organisations often operate in this manner. Every employee reports directly to the centre and the central figure makes or influences every decision about the business or activity for example a solicitor working in a small practice or Mrs Brown owner of the Village Store.

Of course it is quite usual for organisations to work in a mixture of ways: specific objectives should determine a specific culture. A range of activities produces a range of working styles for example The Chloe fashion and perfume label has all of: designer Stella McCartney (web), fashion and perfume development (horizontal), production and sales (pyramid).

In essence it is horses for courses. An unnecessarily rigid regime can stifle creativity and independent thinking and not meet the customers' needs. An inappropriately anarchic regime can lead to chaos where customer satisfaction is down to luck.

However concentrating on formal structures especially in large organisations can disguise what really happens...

The formal structure of an organisation is based on job titles and official roles. In fact a considerable number of decisions are influenced through informal links. These links can be social, sporting, family or made because of the continuous absence of someone higher in the chain of command.

A lot of power can be vested in the informal, which is why people with apparently very little, if any, official authority, can have a tremendous influence on how an organisation operates.

Some school caretakers may come to mind.

The routine pre-interview advice "be pleasant to everyone" is not said lightly. All is not as it seems. The real movers and shakers in an organisation are often the ones without the fancy job title...

In small organisations those with formal and real authority are usually the same, as long as they manage their time effectively. Absence of the key player can make a significant impact on a small organisation. Either their authority is eroded or the web collapses completely.

A final thought... sometimes the feel, culture and style of an organisation can actually be out of its control. The way tasks are divided, information reported, decisions taken and by whom, may look appropriate for the type of activity undertaken, but the real power is held outside the organisation.

Small firms that only exist to supply one customer operate with the fear that the customer will change his mind.

Similarly non-profit making organisations often operate in the anxious knowledge that their funding may cease at short notice.

The good managers control what they can control, develop strategies to deal with the unknown and encourage their fellow workers to think the same. Those good managers... will be you!

SO

- What shape is your organisation?

- Does your organisation have authority, reporting and decision-making that suits its purpose?

- What external factors impact on your organisation?

- Do you think you are being managed appropriately for the tasks you have to do?

- Have you come across or heard about an individual or group with informal influence? What effect does this have on the organisation?

- Who does your job if you are not there?
