

Bigger isn't always better: working for a smaller company

You are probably familiar with the major graduate employers who feature heavily in publications such as 'The Times Top 100' or 'The Guardian UK 300'. But did you know that these are not the only employers with graduate jobs on offer? More and more graduates are working for SMEs, so why not consider doing it too?

What is an SME?

According to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) accounted for 60% of employment in the UK private sector in 2014. As the European Commission (2005) states, the definition of an SME is a company with less than 250 employees (medium sized enterprise) or less than 50 employees (small enterprise). In fact, 99.3% of SMEs are classed as small enterprises and many employ less than 10 people.

Advantages of working for an SME

- You may have a more varied role and get a wider range of business experience than you would in a larger company.
- SMEs are keen to utilise the skills of graduates, therefore you may quickly be required to work on your own initiative or be given responsibility for projects.
- Working for an SME means that you are more likely to have contact with senior management and potentially can have an impact on the running of the business.
- Your individual input into the company may be more visible and directly linked to its performance.
- Recruitment for SMEs is usually as and when required. This means that you will not 'miss out' on opportunities by being too late, in the way that you can with the annual recruitment cycle for large organisations.
- They are less likely to be concerned with your degree classification than major graduate employers are. Often SMEs are more interested in your work experience and if you demonstrate a genuine interest in their business.
- Small enterprises often cover growth industries, such as social media or biotechnology, and so are ideal if you want to be at the forefront of innovation.
- In some sectors, graduates working for SMEs may find themselves working on a contract for a larger organisation.

But it's not for everyone...

- An SME is unlikely to have the structured graduate scheme that most large graduate employers offer. If you are looking for a graduate development programme with clear career progression up through the company, then an SME may not be suitable for you.
- Starting salaries are often lower than those for many graduate schemes, but there can be the potential to move into higher paid roles over time.
- As SMEs tend to recruit when they have a need for an employee, you are unlikely to be able to defer your start date for a prolonged period in order to travel or pursue other interests.
- Expectations of you as a graduate will probably be higher in an SME. As you are likely to have more responsibility within the company, you will be expected to demonstrate your professional skills and competencies right from the outset.



How to find work with an SME

ADVERTISED OPPORTUNITIES

Career Connect- available to students via MUSE

Access Career Connect to begin your search for SMEs. You can filter your search of employers by organisation size, which will help you to identify relevant companies, and to find suitable vacancies.

Internship programmes

There are now a number of internship programmes which focus specifically on recruiting students and graduates into SMEs.

- STEP - http://www.step.org.uk/grad_default.aspx
- RISE Sheffield - <http://www.welcometosheffield.co.uk/rise/graduates>
- Check our 'Find Vacancies' webpage for details of other initiatives focused on SMEs - <http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/jobs>

Knowledge Transfer Partnerships - <http://www.ktponline.org.uk/graduate-opportunities>

A combined work and training programme for graduates, which is frequently based within SMEs.

SME jobs boards

Some graduate jobs websites now have sections dedicated to SMEs. For example:

- Graduate-jobs.com - <http://www.graduate-jobs.com/sme>

Regional jobs boards

For a list of regional graduate jobs boards, see:

- AGCAS - www.agcas.org.uk/agcas_resources/146-Regional-graduate-job-websites-

If you're interested in working in the Sheffield region, see:

- Yorkshire Graduates - <http://www.yorkshiregraduates.co.uk/>

Newspapers, trade magazines and journals

Local, national and sector specific media often advertise vacancies in SMEs. It is not possible to list every publication here, but the following websites should help to get you started.

- The Paperboy - <http://www.thepaperboy.com/newspapers-by-country.cfm> (lists local and national newspapers for 180 countries)
- Careers Service Information Resource > occupations – <http://www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/infotree/>
- Prospects - www.prospects.ac.uk/types_of_jobs.htm (see 'Employers and vacancy sources' for specific occupations)

MAKING SPECULATIVE APPLICATIONS

Many opportunities with SMEs may not be advertised, and speculative applications by CV and covering letter are often well received. It is a good idea to follow up speculative applications with a telephone call. If you telephone a company and they say that they do not have time to speak to you, it is fine to ask what a convenient time would be for them. Talk to a Careers Adviser for further advice on making speculative applications.

How to find companies to contact

Professional bodies / trade bodies

The websites and publications produced by professional bodies are a good source of information on relevant SMEs. Some professional bodies even provide directories of their member companies e.g.:

- ICAEW - www.icaew.com/en/about-icaew/find-a-chartered-accountant
- Management Consultancies Association - http://www.mca.org.uk/consultancy_directory
- Institute of Practitioners in Advertising - <http://www.ipa.co.uk/agencies>

For information on the professional bodies relevant to a particular occupational area, see:

- Careers Service Information Resource > occupations - <http://www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/infotree/>
- Prospects > types of jobs - www.prospects.ac.uk/types_of_jobs.htm (see specific occupations).

Online directories

In addition to large graduate employers, the following online employer directories contain details of SMEs.

- Prospects - www.prospects.ac.uk/graduate_employers.htm
- Kompass - www.kompass.com/

Library resources

- University of Sheffield Library - <http://www.shef.ac.uk/library/subjects/company>
The Library subscribes to a number of business information resources including Business Source Premier and Mintel.
- Sheffield Business and IP Centre - <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/libraries/businessinformation.html>
Based in Sheffield Central Library, they may be able to help if you're searching for local business information.

Networking and social media

Networking is important for making contact with SMEs, both face to face and via social media. The Careers Service organises a number of events each year where you will have the opportunity to meet a range of employers, including SMEs. Find out more about forthcoming events by visiting our What's On Diary at: <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/events>

Use professional social networking sites, such as LinkedIn, to find companies who are working in the sector that you are interested in. Many employers, particularly SMEs, will check social media profiles before recruiting candidates. Therefore you need to make sure that your digital presence is a professional one. For further advice on using social media, see: <http://www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/flipbooks/socialmedia/>