

Completing Public Sector Applications

Careers & Employability Service

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**Manchester
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Introduction

The Public Sector is a major employer of MMU graduates and inevitably this is a sector that many consider when job seeking. It covers a wide range of employers including Local Government (e.g. City and County Councils), The NHS, Universities, Charity and not-for-profit organisations, Central Government (e.g. Revenue & Customs etc), civilian jobs in the Police and Fire Service, plus others.

There are specific graduate schemes in the public and not-for-profit sector and most of these will have their own specific application forms. This application guide refers to the many “one off” applications that students and graduates make and it gives tips on how to target your application as effectively as possible. For vacancy sources in the public sector go to:

<http://www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides/opportunities-public-sector.pdf>

This is also available in hard copy from MMU Employability and Careers Service.

Format of the Application

Usually you will be asked to complete an application form. In most cases this will be via the organisation’s web site and you would download the application for completion and either email it back or upload your completed application. Some employers (e.g. NHS) allow you to store your application form for future applications. This can save you time but it is essential that you update your application so that it addresses each individual job you are applying for.

You will frequently be asked **not** to send a CV, if so, **do not do so**. Even if there are no specific instructions about the use of CVs or you are asked to send one in addition, do not fail to complete the application form fully.

A covering letter would not be essential (unless asked for) but if emailing your application the body of your email (or an additional attachment) could act as a covering letter, introducing the documents you are sending and talking positively about your application and why you want this particular job and why you want to work for the employer (and sector). Not all employers will take the cover letter into consideration but including one would not go against you (unless you have been specifically asked not to).

Most employers still accept hard copy applications via post and details should be given in the advert/web site. If this isn’t clear you will need to check first.

What to Expect

You will usually be faced with several documents, including a job description and person specification. You may also see other documents such as an equal opportunities policy, or a description of the aims and ethos of the organisation, so

often there is quite a lot to read through. One of the first things you should do is pay close attention to the person specification to see how well you fit their requirements.

The Person Specification

This is normally used to decide who to interview – sometimes almost exclusively. It will comprise a list of criteria, often subdivided into headings such as Qualifications, Experience or Skills, and will usually state whether a specific criterion is essential or desirable. In effect, the person specification is outlining the ideal person for the job. You need to show that you are that person!

Your first task is to look at the criteria which are deemed to be essential, and ask yourself if you have some evidence to show that you can meet each one. Interviews are usually only offered to applicants who can meet all the essential criteria. If you feel satisfied that you can, then look through the ‘desirable’ criteria to see if you can meet some or all of these too; If too many applicants meet all the essential criteria, the selectors will move on to these ‘desirable’ characteristics to make up their shortlist for interview. Sometimes the paperwork will also show you whether the information is to be gathered from the application form or in the interview.

How to Win an Interview

The first part of the form is usually straightforward – you will need to complete your personal details, including qualifications and a brief history of your employment experience. Follow the instructions carefully. You will then come to the section ‘Information in Support of Your Application’, or what we might call ‘the blank bit’. This is where you address the person specification.

Selectors are often faced with looking through many applications, so they need to find evidence as quickly and easily as possible. They will often have a grid on paper in front of them, with a list of names on one axis, and a list of the essential and/or desirable criteria on the other. They will be putting a tick in the boxes as to whether each candidate fulfils the criteria, and will normally compare notes to ensure agreement. Therefore, it is your task to offer them the evidence they need – if you can tick all the boxes, you have every chance of getting that interview.

That ‘Blank Bit’!

Do not worry too much about creating a narrative in paragraphs in ‘the blank bit’. It is easier and more logical to look at the person specification and use the same headings or numberings in your application. Quite simply, make it easier for the reader. If they can clearly see which element of the person specification you are addressing it makes it easier for them to decide if you meet that particular criterion.

It’s always a good idea to have a brief introduction explaining what you are going to do in the statement, i.e. address the person specification and in doing show that you have the skills, personal qualities, knowledge and experience they require. If the statement is on a separate document give it a heading with the job title, name of employer and your name.

Use bullet points if you wish. Use bold type for any headings, and work through the specification in an orderly way, finding evidence for the skills and experience they are looking for, e.g. if the specification says 'An effective team worker' you might say; 'I worked in a small team for two special projects at university, taking responsibility for arranging meetings, negotiating tasks and working towards team objectives. I contributed effectively to a larger team when I worked at 'Really Good Shop' in summer 2009. Here I regularly attended meetings and worked collaboratively with colleagues sharing duties and supporting each other in tasks.' Depending upon the application and the need for detail you could also give a feel for how tasks were negotiated, issues discussed in meetings and why team work was important for the successful outcome.

There will almost certainly be some criteria which you are less strong on. In this case, you must do your best to produce evidence as best you can and possibly indicate willingness to develop yourself in these areas through training. The main failing candidates have when they apply is that they say that they can do something but don't provide any evidence that they can. You can draw your evidence from your studies, your work experience, from your personal life, volunteering or travel – try to use a range. If you would like more detailed suggestions about finding your evidence, please see "How to...Assess and Sell Your Skills" at www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides or find in hard copy in the careers information room.

If you are currently a penultimate or final year student at MMU an excellent way to practise application forms and identify your evidence for skills and knowledge is to apply for the MMU Professional Passport. For details of when this is running go to: www.mmu.ac.uk/passport. Here you can also find useful tips for completing applications.

Closing Dates

You will find that every job will have a closing date. Employers will adhere to this. If they don't get enough suitable applicants they will usually re advertise. Recently, for some vacancies, the NHS (others may well follow) have started advertising with a closing date but warning that they will close early should they reach "x" number of applications. In these circumstances it is always important to apply as soon as possible.

Finally

Look again at the job description. You will probably find that in applying yourself to the person specification, you have covered most of the skills and experience the role requires; but if there are elements of the role which don't seem to be covered, add these to the 'blank bit' , possibly under a heading of 'Other Information'. MMU Careers and Employability will be pleased to look over drafts if you are still a student, or recent graduate.

If you are not receiving invitations to interview, do try to get feedback. Some organisations are unwilling to give you any, but others will be helpful, and it can be a positive experience, confirming that you are not doing anything fundamentally wrong,

just perhaps up against applicants with more experience or better qualifications. Here you need to look at ways in which you can develop your experience (you can discuss this with a careers adviser) and perhaps just be philosophical, and hope for better luck next time – determination and thoroughness will often pay off.

In Summary

- Address the person specification.
- Provide evidence for the skills, knowledge etc you are demonstrating
- Saying you can do something without backing it up is one of the biggest failings in unsuccessful applications.
- Structure your personal statement to make it easy for the reader to read.
- Read the job description thoroughly; make sure that you understand the job and how the elements of the person specification are applied. This could help you give better examples in your statement.
- Don't just wait until the last minute, apply as early as possible.
- You can research the public sector within "Industry Insights" at www.prospects.ac.uk and within "Career Sectors" at <http://targetjobs.co.uk>
- Book a careers appointment (call 0161 247 3483) if you want to discuss your applications

Good Luck with Your Applications!