



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Careers Service

School of Mathematics

Applying to Graduate Jobs & MSc courses

Matt Vickers

Careers Consultant

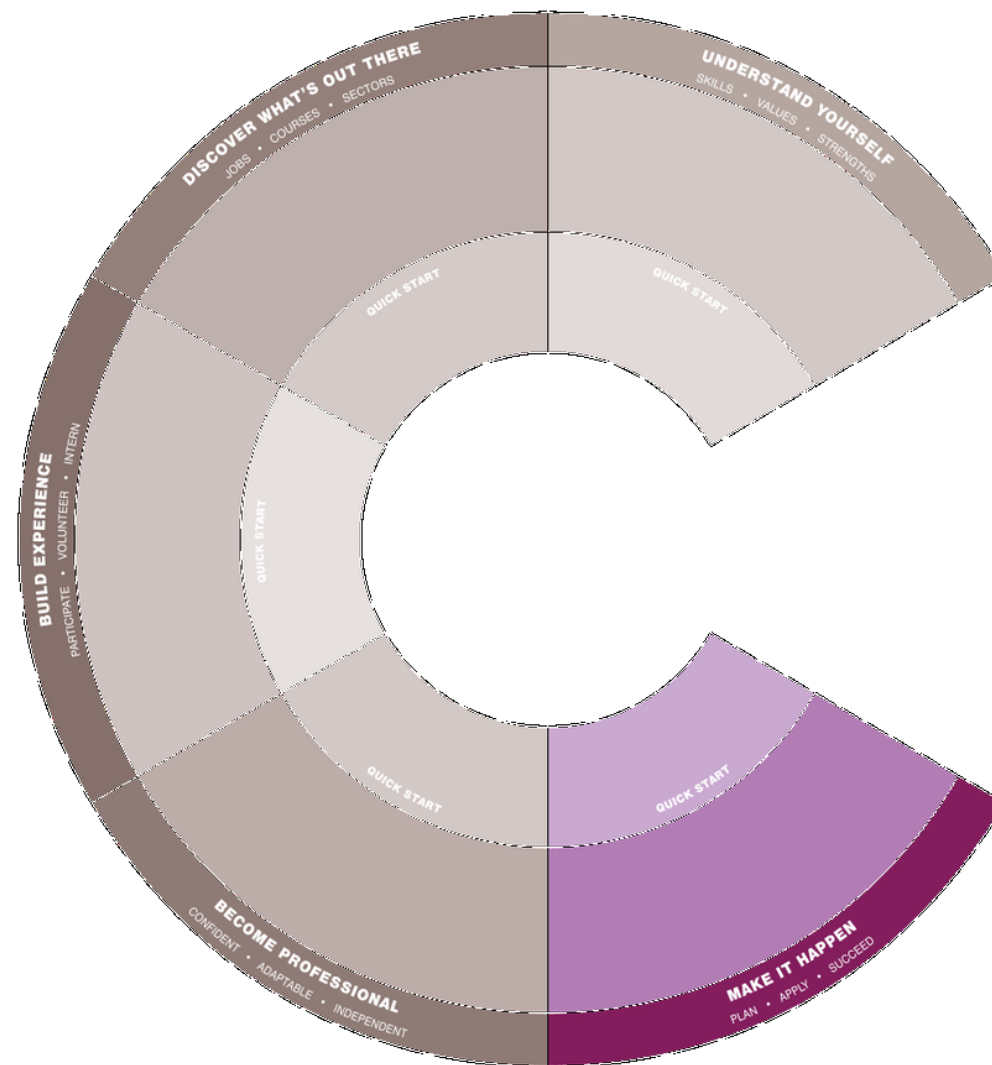


Aims

- Understand where the application form fits into the selection process
- Understand how to **prepare** to complete the Application Form
- Consider how to tackle **questions**
- Provide **tips** on completion of forms
- Give **confidence** and answer questions



Career Compass: how it fits



Make it happen

Use the **Student Guide** and **Toolkits** to help you get started:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/careers/students/undergraduates/careers-compass/student-guide>



Reasons for (online) application forms?

Employer / University

- sadistic instrument of torture? ✘
- self-selection by candidate ✓
- gather relevant information ✓

You

- friends are all doing it? ✘
- to sell yourself ✓
- to get an interview (eventually) ✓



Employer / University



Job description



Person Specification

Education, Knowledge, Experience, Skills



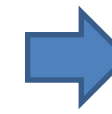
**CV or
Application Form**



Tests



Interview(s)



Job Offer



Education, Knowledge Experience, Skills



Profile/background (i.e. biography)



Inspiring futures

Candidate

The selection process



**Assessment
Centre**



Recruiters say...



“Candidates that really stand out are those that can demonstrate how their skills and experience align with the job.”
Jez Chance, Marketing & Communications Manager



“Candidates can really stand out by taking time and care to think about their application and clearly show the skills and capabilities that recruiters are looking for.”

Sarah Moyles, Graduate Recruitment & Development
Manager



Before you rush to start...



Wait a moment and consider if you...


- really **want** the job / MSc / PhD?
- have the **time** to apply?
- can you provide evidence that you **meet the criteria**?

If so, start to prepare – but leave the application alone!



Research the vacancy

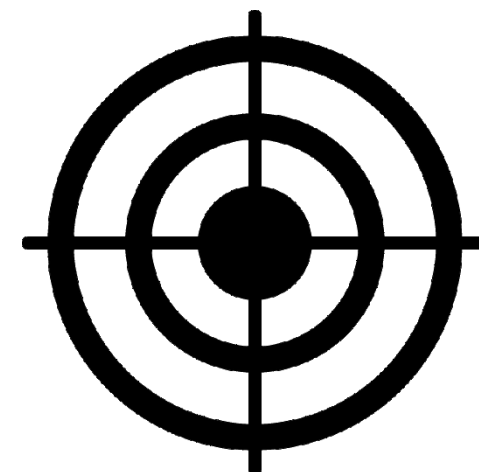
Job Role (or Postgrad. course)

- full job description/person spec
- proxy – similar descriptions?
 - competitors
 - old job descriptions 
- Prospects [sectors](#) and [profiles](#)
- TARGETjobs [sectors](#) and [profiles](#)
- speak to [contacts](#)
- careers information [events](#)

Organisation (or University)

- recruitment literature / prospectus
- company website (not just careers!)
- employer [events](#) / open days
- media e.g. [BBC Business](#), [FT](#)
- social media: LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter etc.
- TARGETjobs [Organisations](#)
- university open days (online)

Target your application to the vacancy
– know what you are aiming it at?



Research the candidate: you!



1. Academic

- knowledge = courses (relevant)
- knowledge = projects
- achievements

2. Experience

- paid work (casual + internships)
- unpaid (voluntary) work
- social activities/extra-curricular/sports
- life?

3. Personal

- skills & qualities developed
- motivation shown





Looking at yourself

- Use our resources on [Understanding yourself](#) to quickly get started.
- Use our [Toolkit](#) to gain a fuller understanding of yourself
- Are you giving yourself enough credit? Beware “I just...”
- ... so ask family/friends and people who know you well: “what have I done that should go in my CV/application form?”
- Speak to a [Careers Consultant](#) if stuck



Recruiters say...



“Before you start, take time to write a list of your key achievements – this will help you when answering questions... Research the job role and company culture so you can tailor your answer to suit the organisation.”

RBS Graduate Careers Newsletter



“Treat an application like an exam or assignment. Do your research, prepare yourself mentally and stay calm. Think about how many applications you want to make, as it might be better to reduce the number so you can increase the time you spend on each.”

Sara Reading, National Graduate Recruitment Manager



e.g. Conference Sales Executive

For this role you will be involved in the sales and marketing of the halls and meeting rooms at Kensington and Chelsea Old Town Halls. The 2 venues host 5000 events each year ranging from small meetings to international conferences.

You will deal with conference/exhibition enquiries, conduct show rounds, co-ordinate services and facilities for the conference/exhibitions and meetings and liaise with clients and service providers. You will enjoy meeting and interacting with a wide variety of people. You will develop a sales strategy programme, acting on your own initiative, which will include visiting potential clients and dedicated venue-finding agencies to secure additional business.

You will ideally be a graduate looking for a career in Sales and Marketing. With excellent interpersonal skills you will also have the ability to organise a varied workload in a busy environment. Computer literacy is essential

**What is this recruiter
looking for?**



e.g. Conference Sales Executive

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You will ideally be a graduate looking for a career in Sales and Marketing. With excellent **interpersonal skills** you will also have the ability to **organise** a varied workload in a **busy** environment. **Computer literacy** is essential

**What is this recruiter
looking for?**



Postgrad admissions tutors?

Taught (e.g. MSc)

- Academic ability / record
- Subject knowledge
- Ability to manage workload
- Self-management / manage time
- Able to meet deadlines
- Written communication skills
- Willingness to discuss in class
- People skills (classmates)
- Collaboration (group projects)
- Interest / link to & future career plans

Research (e.g. MPhil, PhD)

- Academic ability / record
- Subject knowledge
- Research skills (MRes, PhD etc.)
- Project management / set goals
- Set goals
- Written communication skills
- Presentation skills
- People skills (research skills)
- Collaboration (other researchers)
- Interest / link to & future career plans

Inspiring futures

Both: any contribution to the university/school?
e.g. Class Rep, Student Ambassador, Cttee Member, MathsCircle etc.



Analysing the job / giving evidence of suitability

Skills & qualities required	Applicant's evidence
Excellent organisational skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Planned travel during gap year• Held down P/T job and averaged 2.1
Good computing skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use Word for course work• Used Access database in P/T job• Learnt Python / R
Ability to get on with a wide range of people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Worked in busy shop• Uni Open Day volunteer• Maths PALS
Using initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Secured sponsorship for charity run• Suggested course changes as Class Rep.
Showing flair and imagination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helped design a new website (including graphics) for Uni Chess Club
Sales: persuading, negotiating, networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased membership of uni chess club by 50%, by suggesting a new marketing approach and being pro-active in speaking to students at Welcome Week events.• Found summer job by cold-calling businesses.

Types of questions

- Personal details
- Administrative
- Academic Qualifications
- Biodata
- Analytical
 - career aim (motivational)
 - activities and interests (motivational)
 - skills and experience (competency)
- ‘Blank boxes’



Motivational questions

Q) What attracts you to our company?

A) *“Because (IBM) is a large, international company with great opportunities and training.”*

[A genuine but weak answer]

“To answer this reasonably requires some research into what we do, how we work, our culture, and shows whether someone has a passion for IT”

IBM Graduate Recruitment Manager

- **Don't** just repeat info. from their website. Relate it back to you
- **Do** talk about meeting representatives of their company at careers fairs and/or employer presentations.
- **Do** say something you have discovered from your research e.g. about their clients/new products/expansion etc.



Sample competency questions

(soft/transferable skills)



“Please tell us about experiences and people that have over time shaped your decision to consider a management career within Unilever and in your chosen function in particular. What efforts have you made to test out your choices?”

*“Using an example of a time when you were in **a new environment and had to achieve a task**, please describe a) how you established and used a network of contacts, and b) how you set about influencing people, to help you achieve your task.”*

haysmacintyre

*“Describe a recent situation where you **demonstrated motivation and initiative.**”*

*“Describe an occasion where you **worked as part of a team** and what your contribution to the team was.”*



Analytical questions - tips



- Make it **varied** - plan your answers
- Use **recent examples** where possible
- Focus on **process** and **achievements** (verbs & outcomes)
- Include YOUR input (especially on teamwork)
- **Truthful** answers are usually “right”
- Be positive

Get help from **CARL!** (or STAR)



Use a framework – e.g. CARL (or STAR)

Context – set scene, outline issue/example. (10-20%)

Action – what did **you** do/steps were taken? (60-80%)

Result – what happened; outcome? (10-20%)

Learning – retrospective view; what did you learn?

A follow-up question;
use only if requested, or if asked a negative question



Sample bad answer

Source: *How to Complete an Application Form*, University of London Careers Service

Give an example of a team you have been in. What was your role in the team? How did the team work together? What was the outcome?

“Last year I was involved in an expedition as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. Six of us to met to plan our root over Dartmoor and to allot roles. The weather was poor and one of the party injured his leg, but after much effort we completed the expedition successfully.”

Did you notice the deliberate mistake?!!

“**root**” Don't rely on spell checkers... see

<http://grammar.about.com/od/spelling/a/spellcheck.htm>



Sample better answer

Source: *How to Complete an Application Form*, University of London Careers Service

Give an example of a team you have been in. What was your role in the team? How did the team work together? What was the outcome?

“Last year, when we were working for the Duke of Edinburgh gold award, six of us undertook an expedition on Dartmoor in November. We each had specific roles which we decided to take, mine being to organise food supplies. Though we were keen to carry as little weight as possible, I pointed out the need not simply to provide food for the expected duration of the trip, but to carry some emergency rations in case of delay. In the event one of the team had a bad fall and we had to take it in turns to support him, while battling against wind and rain. We were extremely grateful for our extra food during the inevitable delay in reaching our destination.”



Employer feedback



Teamwork Competency Question

Please describe a group activity where you have contributed to the group's success.

“Whilst this may appear to be an easy question to answer, students are failing to answer the question being asked:

The example should include details of the activity, key objectives, individual contribution, challenges faced, overall outcome.

The question requires applicants to be very specific around their contribution to the team, challenges faced (or when something didn't go according to plan) and how these were resolved.

Many students are only answering half the question - detailing the teamworking activity and objectives and outcome but not addressing their individual contribution and the challenges they themselves faced. This may be due to the fact that they don't want to admit something went wrong or that they faced any challenges - however admitting this isn't a sign of weakness!”

Konica Stones, Student Recruitment Manager, PwC



Blank boxes: jobs and MSc courses

e.g. “Please include a statement in support of your application.”
e.g. “Please use this space to outline your suitability for this post.”

- Be relevant. What does the reader want to know?
(Why their **job/MSc**?; why their **organisation/uni**?; why **you**?).
- Specifically address the above and any requirements not covered elsewhere in the application.
- Message first (key points); wording later.
- Bullet points (use * if format doesn't offer any)
- Some **bold** may help (use CAPS if format doesn't offer any)



Blank boxes (cont'd...)

- Make it easy: side headings to expand on
> gives you a framework
- ✓ ...and makes it easier for the reader!
- So it becomes a series of points you need to expand on – and much less daunting!

Statement in Support of Application for Teaching Post (Ref: KT670J)
Matt Vickers

Introduction & Educational Philosophy

Interest/Experience of Age Group

Communication

Teamworking

Designing and Planning Work

Experience of ICT

Watch our quick guide to personal statements

The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the 'CAREERS SERVICE' website. The page title is 'Applications and CVs for further study'. The breadcrumb trail is: Home > Careers > Students > Undergraduates > Make it happen > Write CVs and applications > Applications and CVs for further study. The main content area includes a 'Contact us' button, a sub-header 'Applications and CVs for further study', and a paragraph of advice: 'Advice on applying for further study, including examples of CVs and personal statements. Most students considering further study will be applying for Taught Masters degrees, and this is the focus of this page. If you are thinking of applying for PhD or MRes study see [Moving on to a PhD](#). Writing applications for further study is similar to completing job applications. You need to provide evidence that you have the required qualifications, skills, experience and relevant knowledge. You also need to explain why you have chosen the course, for example how it will help you move towards your career goals.'

Below this is a section titled 'Personal statement' with the text: 'A personal statement is a key element of postgraduate applications. Watch our quick guide to help you write a successful statement. [Quick guide to personal statements for postgraduate study](#) [Prospects: postgraduate study personal statement examples](#)

The next section is 'CV' with the text: 'Some institutions will ask you to submit a CV in support of your application. Your CV should be tailored to the programme with an emphasis on relevant study and experience. It should demonstrate that you have the skills needed to study at this level - self-motivation, research, persistence and problem solving. This article was published on 26 Sep, 2021'

The left sidebar contains a navigation menu with categories: 'Careers Service home', 'Students', 'Undergraduates', 'Make it happen', and 'Write CVs and applications'. Under 'Write CVs and applications', the following items are listed: 'How to write your CV', 'CV360 for instant feedback', 'How to write your cover letter', 'Examples of CVs and cover letters', 'US resumes', 'Referees and references', 'How to complete an application form', 'Explaining your qualifications', 'Applications and CVs for further study' (highlighted), 'Build your commercial awareness', and 'Sharing your disability'. A vertical 'Ask a student!' button is on the right side of the page.





Sample Question & Answer

Please describe a time when you saw an opportunity to really make a difference for the future of a group, an activity or yourself.

What did you do?



A real answer – what do you think?

The biggest challenge whilst carrying out the assignment was conducting a financial analysis on the company. I was assigned this task, as I had previous experience in this area as I have carried out two financial and accounting modules during my University degree. I conducted a full ratio analysis on the company, which included analysing Next's Profit and Loss Account and Balance Sheet. I presented the ratios and included details of the company's current financial position, along with an explanation of how the company could improve their position.

The Presentation involved presenting our group's report on Next Plc to the rest of the Marketing group. Our group conducted a Microsoft Powerpoint presentation, to ensure it was conducted in the most efficient and systematic way. Each member presented their individual section, the final section then included contributions by all group members. Our group had practised the presentation on numerous occasions prior to the final presentation, which ensured a smooth running. Each member of the Marketing class was given a feedback form to report their opinions of the presentation. Our group received all positive feedback all awarded a 2:1 for the presentation, this contributed towards the final outcome of our Marketing modules.



Poor...

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Good

During the summer of 2003, I was recruited to be part of a two-month, six-man roadshow travelling around the M25 area promoting tennis and Ariel Liquitabs. Within the first week of the roadshow the event manager resigned and I applied to take over this role. Although I had no specific previous experience, I felt it was a **great opportunity to stretch myself** and make a difference to my future.

I was accepted as the new event manager and took over the very next day, it was extremely difficult initially, but I **drew on my experiences** of Head of School and captains of numerous sports teams and settled into the role relatively quickly. My role necessitated **dealing with a vast range of individuals** from Sainsbury's Managers to children as young as 5 years of age, which improved my **interpersonal and communicational skills**. In addition, my **motivational** skills were also tested, as I was constantly required to motivate my staff due to the roadshow becoming monotonous in the latter stages.

The roadshow appeared to be a real success with the tennis clubs receiving a **10% increase in applicants** and **rival soap powder brands putting on extra promotions**. The **feedback** I received on how I managed the roadshow was extremely positive and I have subsequently **been put forward** to manage numerous other events.



The very bad...

Mealtimes are a difficult and challenging time as this is one affair when my friends and I are truly tested in our decision making skills.

There has been more than one occasion where a unified agreement on what to do about dinner has proven to be a problem. **I therefore take it upon myself to be the spokesperson for the group.** One example would be where two of my friends wanted chicken nuggets and hence wished to go to McDonald's while three others preferred the Chicken Royale from Burger King as opposed to the McChicken Sandwich one can get at McDonalds. **Using my initiative, intuition and lateral thinking** I suggested that we all go to KFC instead. My reasoning was that this was that **KFC do chicken popcorn and are a far better choice than chicken nuggets. While their Fillet Tower Burgers are a step up from the standard Burger King Chicken Royale as they have a hash brown in them as well.**

Thus using some originality of thought, a certain degree of diplomacy and a persuasive tongue I convinced them all to join me at KFC.



And the appalling...

I do apologise for not completeing the following sections, I have not had enough time. I graduate in a week and am extremely busy. I hope you will consider this application.

Thank You !!!

No. They will not!



Online applications



- If possible, print off a copy...
- ... or register, then go in and note down questions.
- Draft answers in MS Word:
 - Easier to edit
 - Can spell/grammar check (but not perfect)
 - Show it to a careers consultant and/or friend, family etc.
- Remember: a formal document, even online!
- Keep to word/character limits! (But not much less)





Initial screening can take as little as 90 seconds

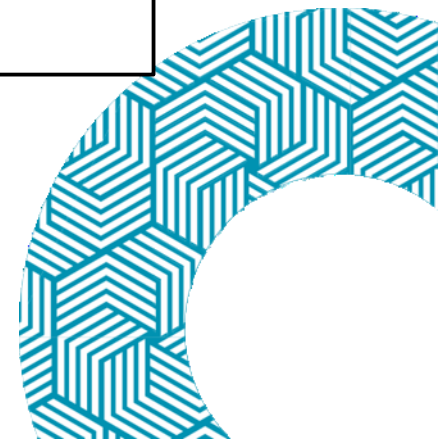
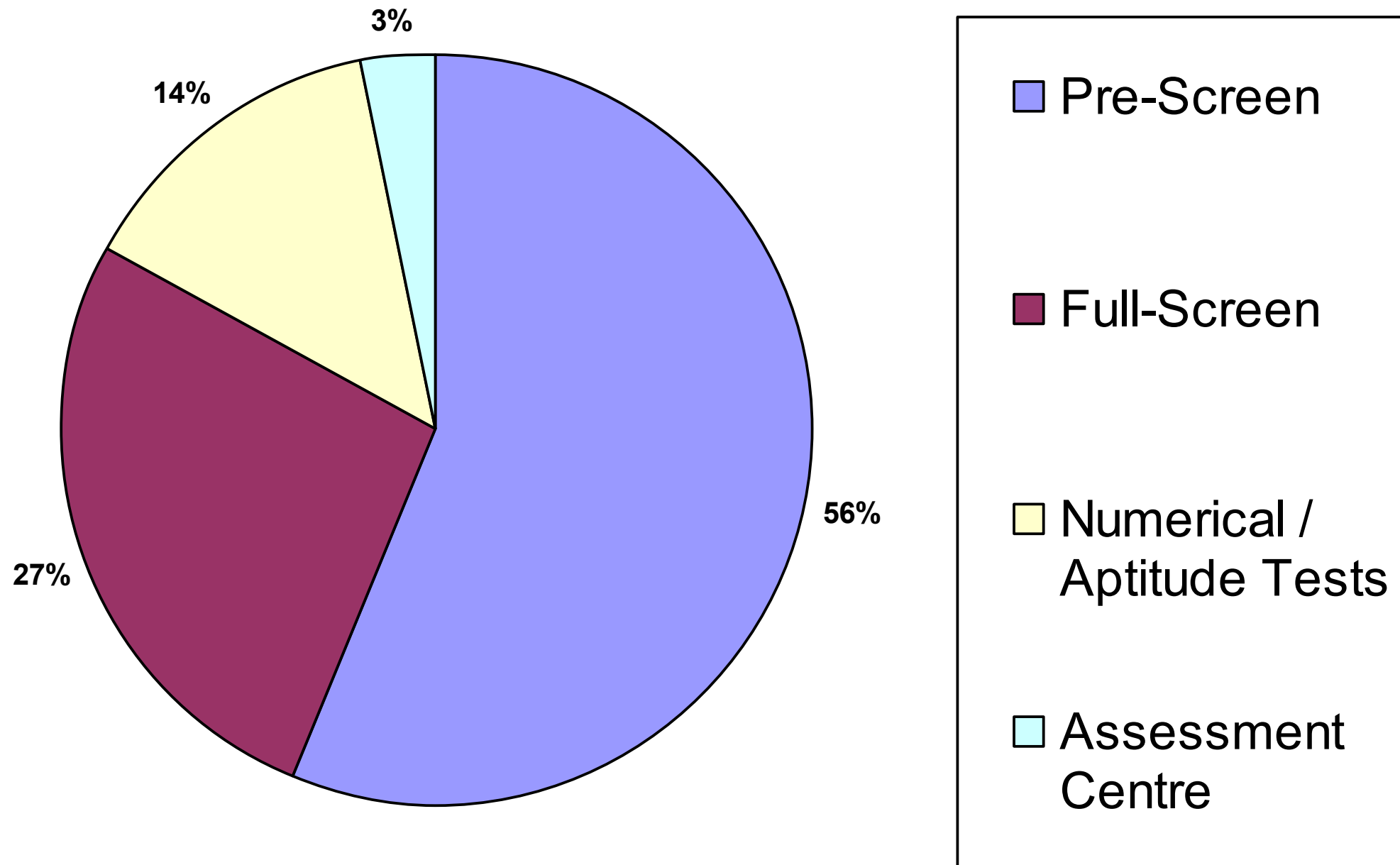
Up to 80% of candidates can be rejected at the application stage – though this varies.





Where Graduates Fail IBM Selection

(Source: IBM, November 2006)



Resources to help you:

The screenshot shows a website page titled 'CAREERS SERVICE' with a purple header. The main content area is titled 'Write CVs and applications' and includes a breadcrumb trail: 'Home > Careers > Students > Undergraduates > Make it happen > Write CVs and applications'. A 'Contact us' button is in the top right. A left-hand navigation menu lists various resources, with 'Write CVs and applications' highlighted. The main content area features ten resource cards arranged in two columns, each with a title and a brief description.

CAREERS SERVICE

Careers Service home

Students

Undergraduates

Make it happen

Write CVs and applications

- How to write your CV
- CV360 for instant feedback
- How to write your cover letter
- Examples of CVs and cover letters
- US resumes
- Referees and references
- How to complete an application form
- Explaining your qualifications
- Applications and CVs for further study
- Build your commercial awareness
- Sharing your disability

Home > Careers > Students > Undergraduates > Make it happen > Write CVs and applications

Contact us

Write CVs and applications

Write CVs and cover letters, and complete application forms. Advice about references, how to explain your qualifications and how to show commercial awareness.

How to write your CV

Advice on what to include in your CV and how to structure it

CV360 for instant feedback

Make use of CV360 to get instant feedback on your CV before booking a feedback appointment with us.

How to write your cover letter

Advice on what to include in your CV and how to structure it.

Examples of CVs and cover letters

Access a range of examples of CVs and cover letters.

US resumes

Find out what a resume is and how it's different from a CV.

Referees and references

Information on references including how many references you will have to provide, who you should ask, what information you need to provide and references for postgraduate study.

How to complete an application form

How to answer common application form questions

Explaining your qualifications

Answers to key questions about how to present your qualifications in applications.

Applications and CVs for further study

Advice on applying for further study, including examples of CVs and personal statements.

Build your commercial awareness

Employers expect applicants to show evidence of commercial or business awareness. Find out how to develop this.



Get feedback!



1. CV360 feedback software (24/7)

- [Careers Service Plus](#)



2. Maths Careers Drop-in

- Mondays (Weeks 1-11), 12:30-14:30
- JCMB (outside Magnet Café)
- Just turn up

3. Booked appointment

MyCareerHub



- Standard 30-min appointment (daily)
- May see any free consultant
- Book via [MyCareerHub](#)



Any questions?

