



Human  
Resources

# THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT:

## Frequently asked questions



## Q

**I'm applying for jobs at LSE and elsewhere but not getting any interviews. What am I doing wrong?**

You might not be doing anything wrong. Sometimes there are simply too many other candidates with more relevant experience and skills. That said, many people do make mistakes on their applications, making it hard for the reader to shortlist them, even if they are internal candidates. Consider these questions:

- 1 Have you specifically addressed the competencies on the person specification?
- 2 Are your examples specific, focused and relevant?
- 3 Have you had your application checked by someone with experience in this area?
- 4 Be honest with yourself: are you going for jobs at the right level? You might be aiming too high or too low.
- 5 Have you asked for any feedback? If you manage to get some feedback, it helps you understand where you are going right and wrong.

If you are unsure about the quality of your written applications, revisit the section on making good applications.

## Q

**I've been doing my current role for a long time, and really want to get promoted. But there don't seem to be any opportunities in my department. What can I do?**

Your options include changing department within LSE, doing a related role within another university, or making a complete change to non-university work. Go back to the section on "How to develop your career" in this guide to see greater detail about this.

First, ask yourself why you want promotion. Are you bored, do you want more money, or both? If it's simply that you want a new challenge, talk it through with your manager.

Is there anything you can do to improve your performance in your current role? You don't have to wait for your annual appraisal for this. I'm sure they'd be happy to give you some extra responsibilities if you show eagerness for this. Bear in mind that you will not necessarily get more cash for this in the first instance. In the longer term, though, you can argue that your role has changed substantially and that it should be re-evaluated through the HERA process. If you are successful, you will be entitled to more money. But don't make the mistake of assuming you should be promoted simply because you have worked at LSE a long time.

**Q****I'm not happy in my job, but have no idea what else to do. How can I move forward?**

Is it really true that you have no idea at all? Most people at least have some clues about what they don't like or don't want. Try and pinpoint what's bothering you. Is it the environment, the content of the job, the long hours, or your manager? You might only need a small change to make a big difference in your day-to-day experience. For instance, you might like the content of the job, but not like working in universities. Similarly, you might like the university environment, but not the type of job you are doing.

Make a list of the features of the work you'd like to do. Start by identifying the aspects of your current role or previous work experience that you do/did quite enjoy. Start looking for opportunities that have more of those aspects in them. Don't be put off by unfamiliar job titles and look more at the content of the role. Go step by step. If you are only 50 per cent happy with your current role, then try and get something you'll be at least 75 per cent happy with. Then, in time, go for the Holy Grail of something you are 95-100 per cent happy with!

**Q****I'm getting interviews, but not job offers. How can I improve?**

Firstly, you may be performing well; it's just that sometimes there are more suitably qualified candidates. Try and get some feedback if possible. The most common errors for poor performance in an interview are:

- inadequate preparation
- giving vague, irrelevant or waffly answers
- not appearing very enthusiastic or motivated to do the role

Revisit the section on interview technique in this guide which shows more detail about how you can avoid these errors. You may be convinced you are not making one of these mistakes, but try and get some independent feedback if possible.

**Q****Am I too old to get promoted or change career?**

No. Current age legislation makes it difficult for organisations to discriminate on the basis of your age. Universities and the public sector in general recruit transparently against personal qualities and experience so age isn't a problem. Although there still may be pockets of prejudice around, things are much better than they were even five years ago. An equally important question is, are you holding yourself back?

**Q****I want to leave the university sector. How will employers view me?**

The key thing for you to do on any application is to highlight relevant skills and achievement. Focusing on the aspects relevant to the role you are going for. Your job is to make a convincing case for how you are very suitable, no matter what environment you have been working in. It's true that it can be easier to get jobs in a similar field than in a completely new sector, but you need to look for things in common between where you are now and where you want to go. For instance, if you have been working in university student recruitment and want to move into corporate marketing, it may seem a bit of a jump. However, the two jobs have lots of requirements in common: to include the ability to understand clients' needs; being able to do research; making presentations; carrying out surveys and so on. Focus on what you do have that's relevant, rather than what you don't have.

**Q****How can I plan well for my retirement?**

There are two main aspects to consider: financial and psychological. In terms of the financial aspect, LSE subscribes to two pension schemes: USS and SAUL. You will probably be in one of these. If you want to work out what you will get when you retire, then visit the website of the appropriate pension provider. LSE also has a pensions team (see the HR division web pages). They can give you some information and refer you to an independent financial adviser, if need be. Some staff decide to pay AVCs (additional voluntary contributions) to their pension to increase the amount of money they receive when they retire.

Some research has shown that if you retire from a full-time job with no activity to take its place, it can adversely affect your physical and mental health. If possible, reduce your hours to part-time for a while before retiring fully. Some departments can't accommodate this, and if this is the case, ensure you have got some structured activity in place ready for when you are no longer working.

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