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WHITEPAPER

A guide to a career in HR

A career in HR can mean many things. In this guide we talk about the different elements of HR, how to get started in HR and then how to keep progressing your career as you gain in experience and skills

It's an exciting time to be in HR or starting a career in HR. The profession is changing and the nature of work is changing - HR has a lot to do and can really make an impact on organisational performance.



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About DPG:

If you are looking to develop your career in Learning & Development, Human Resources or Management then we can help. By developing your skills and knowledge, you increase your professional credibility and boost your earning potential and promotion prospects.

We offer you everything you need to have the best learning experience while you develop yourself, including personal facilitators, unlimited 24/7 access to the online DPG Community and expert programme advisers. Our independent customer ratings also highlight the great experiences available to support your professional development.



Mike Collins - Head of Content and Design



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There's a myriad of different job titles under the HR umbrella.

Starting your HR career

Anyone looking to enter the profession can be forgiven for wondering where to start. There's a myriad of different job titles under the HR umbrella for starters – L&D professional, HR generalist, HR administrator, HR business partner, learning technologist, employee relations officer and so on. This broad range of job titles is partly because the HR spectrum is a broad one. HR includes learning and development, organisational development, people analytics, business development, employee engagement, performance and reward, people analytics, employee relations and recruitment, resourcing and talent planning.

And, of course, what is expected of an HR professional in one organisation can be vastly different to what is expected from an HR professional in another organisation, depending on the sector, company size and culture.

All of this means it can be daunting to think you have to decide, when at the beginning of your HR career, which route you want to take – generalist or specialist, recruitment and retention or L&D...The good news is that you don't have to decide straightaway. In fact, when starting out, it is usually best to start in a more generic role. That way you gain experience in the whole spectrum of HR and can better understand how it sits within the business. Also, having a broad understanding of and experience in HR will stand you in good stead throughout your career, even if you choose to specialise in one particular area a couple of years down the line. Why? Because it helps you understand the bigger picture. It helps you have a more strategic, more holistic appreciation of HR and its business impact in all the different disciplines.

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A CIPD qualification will open doors

Getting a foot in the door

As with most professions, there is no one set route into HR. However, there are definitely two things that will make it a lot easier to break into the profession. The first is on the job experience. The second is qualifications.

The customary place to enter HR is at entry level, say as an HR assistant, HR administrator or HR officer. If you are applying for these roles, but not getting invited for interview, try getting some work experience – even a couple of weeks' worth will boost your CV. It shows that you are committed, should help you get a job interview and will give you something concrete to talk about at that interview. And you never know, work placements sometimes lead onto further experience or even a job.

And then there are qualifications. The industry standard is a CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) qualification. The CIPD is the internationally recognised HR professional body and any kind of CIPD qualification will open doors. Some job adverts specify that candidates have to be CIPD qualified, so it really is a good idea to get qualified. And if you get a job without having a CIPD qualification initially, you may find that you still need to get qualified because without that formally recognised certification, it is harder to progress your career.

Entry level qualifications start at Level 3 Foundation. Gaining one of these qualifications not only makes your CV a lot stronger, it will also give you a good perspective on and practical experience in a range of HR and development skills. As an aspiring HR professional you should investigate the range of CIPD entry-level qualifications.

How and where can you gain a CIPD qualification? The CIPD provides training through its training arm, CIPD Training, but there are plenty more training providers and universities that are also accredited to provide CIPD qualifications. We are one such training provider and hold a 98% customer satisfaction rating.

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As you would expect, these qualifications don't come free of charge. And as well as the costs of the qualification itself, there is also the time spent working towards the qualification to consider. The good news is that professional and career development loans are available. These are bank loans that cover the costs of courses and training being undertaken by people to enable them to move into a new career or to boost their career prospects. On the government's website (<https://www.gov.uk/career-development-loans/overview>) it says that applicants can borrow between £300 and £10,000. The loans are normally offered with a reduced rate of interest, with the government paying the interest during the study period.



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A business apprenticeship scheme

A business apprenticeship scheme is another potential route into HR. These schemes are available to anyone over 16 who is not at school or in college full time. They represent a great opportunity for people at the beginning of their working life and can take anything from a year to four years to complete. If you're interested, find out what apprenticeships are available to you. The CIPD recommends an Apprenticeship in Business and Administration, for example. Why? Because it will give you all-important skills in business and HR as they contain modules in both.

Graduate training scheme

Graduate training schemes are another good option. With graduate training schemes, you can go for an HR-specific scheme or for a general scheme that will give you exposure to several different departments, including HR.

A degree qualification

A degree qualification will also stand you in good stead, even if the degree is not related to HR. That said, an HR-related degree will obviously put you in a much stronger position than a non-HR related degree. Universities run degree courses in HR management or combined degree courses such as Business and Management or Business and Human Resource Management. Employers tend to like it if candidates have a degree qualification, particularly a business one, because HR professionals increasingly need to have a good understanding of business.

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Gaining a qualification will show that you are serious



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Making the move from business into HR

This increased emphasis on business nous means that the industry wants people with business skills and experience gained in other disciplines. For that reason, it has become a lot easier for experienced business professionals to make the move into HR, going in at a higher level. You just need to demonstrate that your skills are transferable. The profession really needs people with great business skills, great leadership and management skills and great strategic skills.

If you are an experienced professional working outside of HR who would like to work inside HR, then apply for jobs where your current skills will be useful. Also do a bit of career maneuvering in your current position – maybe a stint job shadowing someone in your HR department or a secondment.

Gaining a qualification will show that you are serious about making the move and will enable you to network with people in the industry.

The ongoing benefits of being HR qualified

As we have discussed, HR qualifications are really important in terms of career prospects. You can keep topping up your knowledge and skills, say to help yourself move into a more strategic HR position. However, the benefits of these qualifications are much greater than just being something you have on your CV. Studying for the qualification will greatly enhance the breadth and depth of your knowledge and skills of HR and business. It will enhance your personal network and give you access to a group of like-minded individuals.

The CIPD sets out six key benefits on its website.

- 1 Valued by employers
- 2 HR in a business context
- 3 Flexible to meet your needs
- 4 HR and L&D study paths,
- 5 Boosting your earnings potential
- 6 The knowledge for professional membership.

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The current top HR skills

The CIPD's HR Outlook Winter 2016-17 survey tells us a lot about what HR professionals and teams need to be delivering in the near future. It states that HR must:



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- ✓ Demonstrate the value of the HR agenda
- ✓ Use HR data to strengthen evidence-based decision-making
- ✓ Harness the benefits of technology
- ✓ Prepare for economic uncertainty (for example globalization and Brexit)
- ✓ Adapt to the changing needs and desires of the workforce
- ✓ Strengthen the capability of people managers

So, as an HR professional you need to have these skills. You need to know and be able to communicate the impact, the value of HR. You need to have evidence-based decision making at the core of what you do. You need to really understand the importance of HR data - what data needs to be gathered, how to interpret it and then really importantly, how to use that data and communicate it to your stakeholders. Analytics is very important, but the necessary skills are lacking in HR, in terms of interpreting the data and sharing the data.

The benchmarking organisation Towards Maturity's report (<https://towardsmaturity.org/2016/11/19/unlocking-potential-business-learning-benchmark>) 'Unlocking potential: releasing the potential of the business and its people through learning', shows that a significant number (nearly 30%) of the C-suite executives polled said that a lack of skills, resources and experience with analytics within the HR function was diluting HR's effectiveness inside their organisation.

Digital skills are key to the future success of HR. Deloitte's 2017 Human Capital Trends report (<https://dupress.deloitte.com/dup-us-en/focus/human-capital-trends.html>) highlights just how important digital skills are. Likewise, Towards Maturity's research emphasises the importance of digital HR skills. The importance of digital HR skills and understanding cannot be overstated.

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So, what skills do modern HR professionals need to possess?

They need to have:

- ✔ Great digital skills. Understand new and emerging learning technologies
- ✔ Analytics skills – even if you can't interpret the data first hand, you need to understand what HR analytics can do, how to interpret the data you are given and how to share it with stakeholders and why
- ✔ Stakeholder management skills
- ✔ Business nous and financial acumen
- ✔ Communication skills
- ✔ Influencing skills
- ✔ An understand how people learn best



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