

A close-up, low-angle shot of a man with a thick, dark beard and mustache. He is looking upwards with a slight smile, showing his teeth. He is wearing a blue and dark blue striped button-down shirt. The background is a plain, light grey.

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From the editor

HOW TO GET HIRED

TARGETjobs Consulting has been helping graduates find their first jobs in consulting for 20 years. The coronavirus pandemic has certainly made 2020 an unusual one, with recruitment processes and even internships going virtual. It is difficult to predict, as we go to press, how the consulting sector will fare over the next 12 months, but you can be sure that we'll be here to help you show recruiters that you're the best candidate for the job.

How can you ensure your application will get you to the interview stage? By reading our advice on pages 16–19.

What key skills and competencies do consulting recruiters looking for in candidates? Find out on page 12.

What is the best way to prepare for and impress a recruiter during a case study interview? Read top recruiters' tips on pages 22–23.

What happens at assessment centres? Find out what you can expect on pages 24–25.

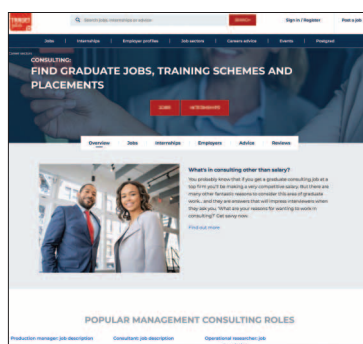
How do you secure an internship, how do you impress your employer during your internship and what should you do if you can't get one? See pages 27–29.

There's plenty more to help you start your career – including what salary you can expect to earn, what it's like to work as a consultant and where your career can take you – both in this publication and online at **targetjobs.co.uk/consulting**. For the latest updates on Covid and graduate recruitment – such as virtual recruitment processes and internships – please check **targetjobs.co.uk** and **nextstepssupport.org**.

Jacky Barrett, editor

Digital fix

Register with **targetjobs.co.uk** to search for graduate jobs, training schemes and placements.





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Get started



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1

Variety

One of the most appealing aspects of consulting is the huge variety of projects you'll work on, colleagues you'll work with and clients you'll meet. Many consultancies also offer international travel opportunities.

2

Early responsibility

You'll be entrusted with responsibility and will find yourself working with senior clients very soon into your career, which is exciting if you're the type who thrives on challenge.

3

An impressive skills set

Thanks to the toolkit of business and management skills you'll develop, consulting could open up interesting options in other career areas further down the line.

4

Achieving results

If you work on a successful consulting project, there is immense satisfaction when you see that it has made a real difference and benefited a client.

5

Continuous learning

Management consulting offers the chance to keep learning and developing throughout your career.

6

Top-notch workmates

The consulting sector attracts and therefore recruits top-quality graduates, so you'll be working with diverse, intelligent, like-minded colleagues who enjoy combining creative, innovative thinking with a very practical approach to problem-solving.

7

All degrees sought

There is a strong numerical element to consulting, so it can be an advantage to have a degree in business, economics, science or technology, but it isn't essential. The consulting profession also offers exciting career prospects for those with a relevant postgraduate degree, MBA or industry experience.

The consultants you'll find in this publication and online at targetjobs.co.uk have degrees in philosophy, politics and economics, civil and architectural engineering, chemistry, accounting, French, biochemistry, engineering, English... you name it! This wide variety of subjects studied is common in most consulting firms.

8

Last but not least... the perks

The consulting sector is notable for its generous pay packets. On joining, you can expect to earn in the region of £27,000 (and at some firms, considerably more). Read our article on salaries on page 8. Many consultancies also offer great benefits to their employees, including pension schemes, private healthcare, a welcome bonus, gym memberships and season ticket loans. Other possible perks include sponsored MBAs, paid time off for charity work and excellent maternity benefits. @

How the consulting sector works

Get to grips with the consulting sector so you can understand what the sector is all about, and work out where your skills, talents and interests will fit best.

Understanding what consulting is all about, what kind of consulting different firms do, and the range of clients they work with, will be your key to deciding whether this career is right for you and then applying to employers that will suit your abilities and aspirations.

Recruiters sometimes comment that candidates who come to interview are not sufficiently clued-up about what consulting is, what industries hire consultants, and what consulting roles involve. TARGETjobs Consulting is here to help guide you through the process of understanding the sector and put you in a great position to start your career.

What is consulting?

Consultants are brought in when an organisation wants to generate a competitive advantage, maximise growth or improve business performance. A consultant's role is to generate and/or implement a list of actions that will improve an organisation's profit-making ability, effectiveness and position in the market, while adding brand value. Management consultants work with all kinds of organisations worldwide, from blue-chip companies to non-profit organisations to international governments.

The consulting profession is incredibly diverse, as is the variety of work consultants are involved in. There are both services and industries. Services, also known as functions or specialist capabilities, are the types of work a firm does. Industries, also known as practices, areas of expertise or sectors, are the fields

in which they work. Some firms specialise in a particular service – such as strategy – and a variety of industries, while others specialise in one service in one particular area of industry. Other firms incorporate a variety of both. Bear this in mind when applying: do you want to specialise early or start out as more of a generalist, working on a wide range of projects, topics and industries?

Where will I work?

The simple answer is anywhere. Wherever there is an organisation looking to generate a competitive advantage, maximise growth or improve business performance, consultants can be found. Here are some of the key areas of work for consultants:

- Financial services – banking and insurance
- Healthcare and pharmaceuticals – including biotechnology, life science enterprises, vaccine and medical devices
- Manufacturing – aerospace, automotive, electrical and electronic engineering, industrial components, heavy process industries (including steel)
- Media and telecommunications – media and entertainment, telecommunications, internet, computing, electronics, technology
- Natural resources – utilities, gas, mining, oil, electricity, chemicals, renewable energy providers
- Public sector – central government, local government, public sector bodies, educational institutions, charities and not-for-profit organisations
- Retail, consumer, transport and leisure – retail, leisure and hospitality, consumer goods, travel.

What will I do?

Management consultancy

Management consultancy is about helping organisations to improve their performance. The scope of management consulting ranges from focusing on a specific area of a business (for example, its human resource capability or a manufacturing process) to developing company-wide IT solutions, to recommending long-term strategic developments.

Strategy consulting

Strategy consultants often work with senior personnel in the client organisation to offer a high-level insight into how to improve the position of the business. They will consider a range of factors, including competitors, the current state of the market and customer behaviour, to undertake detailed analysis on key business issues. They try to anticipate future developments and help businesses position themselves accordingly.

Implementation

Consultants work with clients to bring about change in their organisation, taking a strategy that has been recommended and turning it into a reality. A successful implementation will ensure that the technology, people and process elements of the organisation are in harmony. Some consulting firms offer strategy and implementation services.

Information technology consulting

IT consultants offer expertise in the area of technology, providing IT services and solutions to help organisations compete more effectively in the marketplace. Areas of work include improving operations, application development, integration, and business and network strategies.

Human resource consulting

Human resource consultants help organisations to manage their investment in people effectively. Advice can be given on a wide range of issues, including employee benefits, compensation, communication, change management and workforce planning, job evaluation, and industrial relations.

Economics consulting

In this niche area of consulting, specialist economic knowledge is applied to generate business recommendations and expert advice provided in areas such as competition policy, regulation, valuation of intellectual property and businesses, and disputes. Clients can come from all industry sectors, but there is often work on government issues and with regulatory authorities. ©

With thanks to PwC for its help with this article.



What will I earn?

The salary and benefits you can expect to receive as a graduate working in consulting.

The average starting salary in the consulting sector is around £27,000. You will be happy to hear, however, that many of the employers featured on **targetjobs.co.uk** offer considerably more than this average. Alfa, for example, last year offered its graduates a salary of £40,000. Newton Europe's graduate salaries started at £45,000–£50,000, plus a sign-on bonus. You'll find that most consulting employers are tight-lipped when it comes to talking about money before they offer you a job, preferring instead to leave it to your

imagination with descriptions such as 'competitive' or 'highly competitive'.

Benefits

Base salary is not everything, of course. Here is an idea of some of the typical benefits you could be offered in your first year. Some of them will be optional, which employees can choose to suit them personally:

- private health cover and dental insurance
- subsidised gym membership
- pension scheme
- performance bonuses
- a sign-on bonus and relocation expense reimbursement for new starters

- life assurance
- season ticket loan
- opportunity to buy extra holiday
- free staff restaurants for breakfast and lunch
- retail vouchers
- childcare vouchers
- health screening
- cycle lease scheme
- laptop and smartphone on joining
- sponsorship for an MBA programme.

Work/life balance benefits

For a sector famed for its long work hours (but, refreshingly, its lack of 'face-time'), it is not surprising that many firms are keen to offer 'time off' benefits to their employees – see our article on page 38. Here is a sample of what you could expect:

- part-time and home-office options.
- three- to six-month externships (up to six months) to graduates, after two to four years of associate experience, and sabbaticals (up to three months).
- taking a break from case work and going on secondment, temporarily working within a client's organisation.

Money, benefits and perks should not, of course, be the reasons you enter the profession, but if you do decide that consulting is the career for you, the salary and benefits are certainly attractive. ©

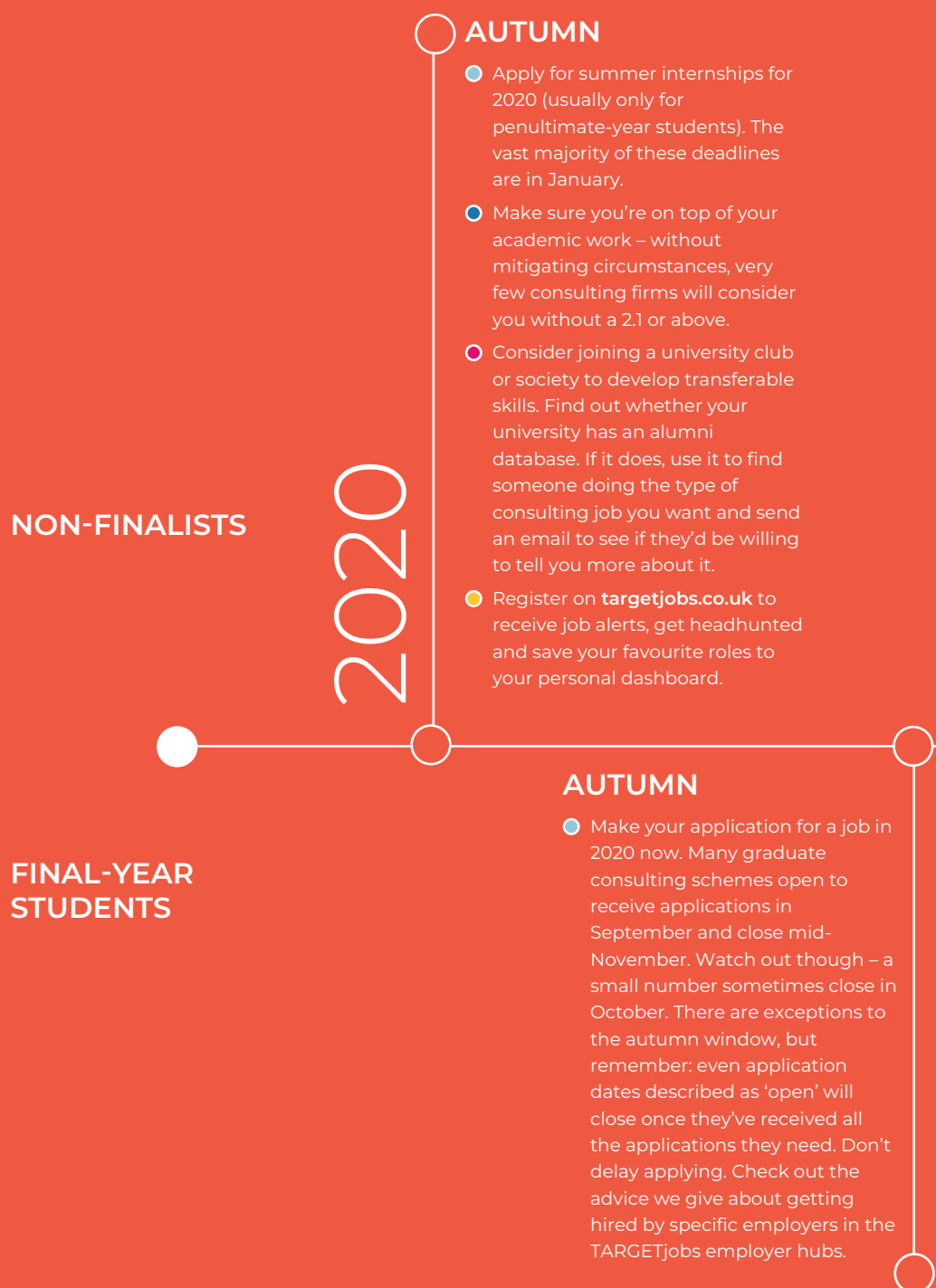


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Your application action plan



WINTER

- Now is usually the time to apply for short programmes (generally lasting two days to a week) such as insight days, McKinsey's Discover programme, PwC's Talent Academies, Discover EY, among others... all of which increase your chances of being considered for firms' graduate schemes. Many are designed specifically for first-years and give you a great introduction to a consulting career.
- If you're in your penultimate year and didn't get accepted onto the internship you wanted for the summer, plan ahead by investigating alternative work experience, such as volunteering abroad. Make the most of any festive social events to ask family and friends about suitable contacts they know of or ways to expand your CV.

SPRING

- If you're lucky enough to get selected for any insight days or spring programmes, make the most of the experience and network. Now is your chance to ask questions and think about which firms would suit you.
- Sound out a friendly tutor to see if there are options for relevant paid work at your university over the summer if you haven't managed to line up an internship. Research whether there are any modules you could take next year that would particularly please employers in your area of interest. If you can't find this information on company websites, contact the graduate recruitment team directly to ask.

SUMMER

- Draw up a form or other system to record the skills you pick up over the summer – whether through an internship, travelling, volunteering or in a part-time job. It'll all help when filling out application forms.
- Make the most of your internship (see the section from page 26) to give yourself the greatest possible chance of it turning into a full-time job offer. If you don't have an internship, there are plenty of alternatives to boost your employability, many of which are described on page 28. You could, for example, contact small local companies to see if they could offer you a couple of days' work shadowing or give you a tour of their facilities.

WINTER

- This is usually peak time for interviews and assessment centres. Read the information in this publication on pages 20–25 and in the TARGETjobs employer hubs online to get tailored advice about how to handle yourself in case study interviews and at assessment centres. If you're still making applications to firms with open deadlines, ensure you can access the job-hunting resources you need over the Christmas holiday.

SPRING

- You're probably pretty busy studying for exams so job-hunting may be on the back burner right now. But, if you haven't managed to secure a job for the autumn, keep your eyes open for any schemes that may reopen, or those that may not have closed. Consider being more flexible when it comes to location – opportunities in London tend to go first.

SUMMER

- Job secured for September? Congratulations – enjoy your summer!
- If not, check you can still access your university's careers resources once you are no longer a student. Don't give up – some graduate schemes may still be open (find out which ones on [targetjobs.co.uk](https://www.targetjobs.co.uk)). If you're planning to reapply to the same firm, read our article about applying for the second time on [targetjobs.co.uk/consulting](https://www.targetjobs.co.uk/consulting) to maximise your chances of success.

What are consulting recruiters looking for?

Critical thinking

Consultants need to be able to analyse data (which can include statistics, information and facts of all types) to solve problems, draw conclusions, make business decisions and provide recommendations to colleagues, clients and bosses.

At interview, if you are asked a competency-based question about solving a problem, you can demonstrate your critical thinking ability by explaining how you completed a realistic assessment of the situation and explored and evaluated options. Case study interviews will be a perfect opportunity for recruiters to test your ability to think on your feet and break down a problem.

Commercial awareness

All consulting recruiters will be looking for evidence of commercial awareness. Make sure you can demonstrate intelligent awareness about the firm to which you are applying and the business environment in which it operates. This includes an awareness of the sector, its regulators, its competitors and current issues facing the industry.

When it comes to discussing work experience in an interview, it is not necessarily what you did that is likely to advance your chances of employment, but how you display awareness of the environment in which your former employer operates.

Ability to listen and persuade

Retail strategy consulting is about delivering evidence-led strategic insights for clients. In order to demonstrate these skills at interview, candidates should show that they can listen carefully to information and opinions and critically assess their validity. Candidates also need to have the confidence to offer the team their own insights and persuade them, in a constructive way, of their logic.

Case-study interviews, particularly those that involve working as a group, offer an opportunity for candidates to display a persuasive, logical approach, taking others' arguments and any new information into account throughout.

Communication

A consultant must be able to do more than understand and solve complex problems – they need to be able to convey information and insights clearly to their clients and colleagues. Confidence and the ability to persuade others and build trust are essential.

Your communications skills (written and oral) will be tested thoroughly throughout the recruitment process: via your initial application, at interviews, at assessment centres and during case study interviews. Remember that listening to others' opinions and addressing them is also an essential aspect of being an effective communicator.



Economic knowledge

At RBB it is essential that graduates are educated to a high level; however academic excellence alone is not enough. Our team of experts believes that, when applying economics, the complexities of real-world markets should be assessed rather than merely relying on theoretical models. These include being able to apply economic theory and econometrics to practical situations; being able to present data in a way that is effective and readily understandable to the non-economist; and being a good team player with strong written and oral communications skills.

Caroline English, HR manager, RBB Economics

Enthusiasm

Consulting clients need to feel that you are interested in them and motivated to help them – conveying enthusiasm in your communications is therefore an essential part of the client-consultant relationship. It is also vital when it comes to teamwork and working effectively and happily with your colleagues.

During the recruitment process you can demonstrate your enthusiasm for the role on offer by showing that you've done your research on the employer and the role you're going for, asking the interviewer perceptive questions and talking about your interests outside of work.

Get started

Applying for a graduate job in consulting doesn't have to be stressful. Just take it step by step. Over the next few pages you'll find out...

- how to choose the right consulting employer for you – everything you need to consider in order to find the right fit
- how to submit an outstanding application, including top tips on producing a great CV and cover letter
- how to impress your interviewers, at both the general interview and the case study interview
- what to expect at assessment centres – from further interviews to role play, all the elements you might find. ©

5

**things you need
to think about
when choosing a
consulting firm**



Most consulting firms offer their graduates an exciting mix of training, travel, project work, early client contact and increasing responsibility, but there are of course differences between firms' offerings. When you're thinking about which employer would suit you best, consider the elements that will affect you the most. There are five key areas you should consider before sending off your application(s).

1. What sort of work does the consulting firm do?

Some consulting firms will specialise in a particular service, or function, such as strategy, and some will focus on a particular industry. Many will operate across a variety of both. Our article on page 6 explains this in more detail. Do you have a preference? Would you like your graduate programme to keep your options open, and give you a broad experience, or would you prefer to work somewhere where you can specialise sooner?

2. How much travel will your job involve?

Most consulting firms will require you to do some travelling – this is often cited as a reason graduates find the profession so exciting. To understand your clients' businesses, you'll usually need to spend time at client sites, working closely with clients and colleagues in your team. However, some firms require less travel than others. Additionally, for some, travel will be primarily UK-based, whereas others will take you almost anywhere in the world. Roland Berger, for example, tells its candidates: 'Over 75% of our work includes cross-border challenges.' OC&C Strategy Consultants, on the other hand, is known to require less travel than other firms. It's very much a case of personal preference – try to find a firm that offers you the travel experience you'll be comfortable with.

3. What opportunities will you be offered?

Is it important to you that your company will give you the chance to do a sponsored MBA after a few years? Is there a specific style of training or qualifications you're looking for? All the firms advertising in this publication and on [targetjobs.co.uk](https://www.targetjobs.co.uk) offer excellent training programmes for graduates, but there will be differences between them. A smaller firm may not be able to offer the range of training options that a larger firm may be able to, for example. Plus, think of your future: does training continue as you progress through the firm? Do secondments and sabbaticals matter to you? What is the promotion structure?

4. What sort of reputation does a firm have?

Some firms have global reputations and/or are recognised as leaders in their fields – how much does this matter to you?

Some have a reputation for offering really great job security – Oliver Wyman, for example, stresses that it is looking for 'future leaders' rather than 'two-year employees' – whereas others have an 'up or out' policy. The best way to discover a firm's reputation is to speak with its alumni and read the business press.

5. Will a firm's culture be right for you?

It can be more difficult to discern a firm's culture from the outside, than, say, its training opportunities. But you can get a 'feel' for a firm by attending employer presentations and speaking with representatives at careers fairs. Consulting involves long hours working within a team, so do you feel you connect with the people you have met? Would you feel comfortable spending long hours with them? You can also get a good sense of a firm's culture through its social media channels. ☺

Submit an outstanding application

Most consultancies ask you to complete an online form and submit an accompanying CV and covering letter. Master these elements of the application process and you'll be well on your way to the interview stage.

ONLINE APPLICATIONS

Expect to see the following kinds of categories in a typical consulting online application:

- Registration: applicants must fill in their name and email address, create a password, and choose a security question and answer. This enables them to save the form at any point to complete at a later date.
- Personal information: name, address, telephone number, email and so on, plus how a candidate heard about the vacancy.
- Education: details sought here include university, degree and grades achieved, and any other languages spoken. There is also an opportunity to record any other test scores.
- Employment history.
- Skills.
- Preferences and documents: covers preferred office and position, plus the facility to upload a covering letter, CV and exam results.

Exercise caution

Outside of work, the internet and email are primarily reserved for keeping in touch with friends and family. Many applicants forget to switch off the informality when it comes to professional correspondence and this hasn't gone unnoticed. The main crimes are poor grammar and spelling errors, incorrect employer details, lower case personal pronouns ('i'), and, in severe lapses, faux pas have included smileys and text speak. These mistakes will immediately blow your chances of creating a good impression. The best way of assuring this doesn't happen is to take your time. Most online systems will allow you to save your work and come back to it at another time, so you don't have to do it all in one sitting.

Mitigating circumstances

Online systems are designed to filter out candidates who don't meet the set criteria. Saying that, recruiters realise there may be reasons why you didn't achieve better A level grades, for example. If this is the case use the 'Other information' box on the form to explain your circumstances. It's also advisable to contact recruiters directly after submitting your application to explain things in person.

Checks and planning

Successful applications require equal measures of time, effort and common sense, so make sure you've covered the three key points of consideration before hitting the 'send' button:

- Preparation. Research is a key ingredient of producing successful applications so be sure to use all available resources (eg the internet, graduate recruitment literature, careers publications) to find out about an employer and the position.
- Answering the question. Make sure your answers are tailored to the particular section of the application you're completing and that you address the questions directly and succinctly.
- Attention to detail. Read through your application a number of times to check for spelling mistakes. It's advisable to print a version and ask a careers adviser, friend or family member to read through it for spelling, grammatical sense and consistency – don't just rely on your computer's spell-checker program to pick up things.

Online assessments

Some firms will wait until the assessment centre stage before asking you to complete tests. Others may include these tests in the application form stage. Expect any combination of ability, aptitude and critical thinking tests. Ability tests, such as numerical, verbal, deductive and inductive reasoning tests, measure either general or particular skills, capability and acumen. Aptitude tests examine your potential to learn a new skill that is needed to do the job you have applied for. Critical thinking and situational judgement tests assess candidates' natural responses to given situations.

Take a look at [targetjobs.co.uk](https://www.targetjobs.co.uk) for more information about these kinds of tests, and opportunities to practise them.



TOP TIPS TO HELP YOU WRITE THE PERFECT COVER LETTER

A consulting covering letter must show that you have thought about the job and know about the organisation, and should briefly outline the qualities that make you the perfect candidate. Roland Berger sums it up well: 'Tell us why you'd like to join us and how you'd be a perfect fit for the role in question.' A covering letter can make or break your application; taking time over it is essential. Here are our seven top tips for writing a covering letter that will get you noticed (in a good way):

1. Write a new tailor-made cover letter for each position. This avoids the risk of leaving the wrong firm or recruiter name on there but also gives you the chance to show recruiters how motivated you are to join their particular firm instead of just any consulting firm.
2. Open with style. Get a named contact to address – most firms will provide this on their website. If in doubt, use any contact numbers provided to phone and ask. Introduce yourself and explain which position you're applying for and where you saw it advertised.
3. Make your cover letter memorable and to the point. Memorable means that recruiters can remember key things about you by the end of the letter. It's not about adding a shock factor statement or something kooky. If, for example, a firm is looking for candidates who are 'intellectually curious', a covering letter to this firm should demonstrate your intellectual curiosity as much as possible through descriptions of your achievements, motivations and experiences (not through stating 'I am curious!').
4. Demonstrate your interest in and knowledge of the firm to which you're applying. Devote a paragraph to explaining why you are interested in the job and the firm. If you are applying to Alfa, for example, show that you know what asset finance is; if you're interested in joining FTI Consulting's economic and financial consulting practice, show that you're aware that you'll be supported through professional qualifications to become a Chartered Accountant (ACA) or a Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA). You could also show you've done your research by referencing some of the firm's recent projects and explaining why they interest you.
5. Show them why they want you. Use the next paragraph or two to explain why you're the right candidate – but don't just repeat the content of your CV. PwC stresses: 'Throughout the process, we'll be looking for you to show awareness and evidence of the skills and qualities you need to succeed in our business. Wherever possible, you should be able to demonstrate and highlight how you match our requirements.'
6. End well. The closing paragraph of your letter should be strong and clear. Reaffirm your suitability for the role and your enthusiasm about the prospect of working for the employer. If you are really keen, you can add a line saying that you'll give them a call to see how your application is progressing, but if you say it you must do it! State that you look forward to hearing from them and are happy to provide any further information they need. 'Make it easy for us to distinguish you from other applicants,' says OC&C Strategy Consultants.
7. Check spelling, grammar and sense very carefully. Elegant formatting won't make up for poor spelling and grammar. Consulting recruiters will be reviewing your attention to detail and your ability to communicate in writing. Read through your covering letter out loud. This will help you identify verbose sentences that can be rewritten and will help you check the sense of your writing.

Don't miss the boat!

If you're a finalist, it's time to start applying. Many consulting application deadlines fall in the autumn. Make sure you don't miss any. If you're a penultimate-year student, an internship could be a great move – many deadlines for these fall in January 2021.

TIPS FOR A TOP CV

Like your covering letter, CVs should be tailored to suit each position. The content should reflect the position's job spec: by highlighting corresponding skills, employers will be able to imagine you more easily in the role. While structure is important, you also need to be creative so that your CV doesn't blend in with the others.

Know yourself

Before you start, have a think about your personal profile. You will need to prepare a list of application-friendly skills and personal accomplishments, so take a sheet of paper and write down all the examples you can think of for the following headings: personal goals; academic achievements; sector-specific work experience; other work experience (including part-time and voluntary work); and leisure, voluntary and extracurricular activities. Like the covering letter, each CV should be tailored to fit the job specification, highlighting your relevant skills and experience. The traditional CV is a chronological record of your education, work experience and achievements, while a skills-based CV presents your experience in a way that relates directly to the skills demanded by the job. For more information on CVs, including downloadable CV templates, go to targetjobs.co.uk.

Follow instructions

If there are no instructions other than 'email your covering letter and CV to email@job.com' then paste the main text of your letter into the email message (include your contact details as a signature at the bottom) and attach a copy of it along with your CV attachment. Watch for specific requirements, however. ©



10 ways to impress your interviewers (the general interview)

If your application has caught a consulting recruiter's eye, you will probably be invited to a general interview (often more than one, and usually, but not always, before a case study interview), either in person, on the phone or via video.

This will be an information-gathering exercise to find out whether you possess the competencies they are looking for and to explore your motivations for applying to the firm and for the particular role. Here are nine ways you can make sure you impress your interviewers:

1

Dress professionally

Make sure your appearance works in your favour by dressing the part and presenting yourself in the best possible light. Dressing smartly shows your interviewers that you will look professional when meeting clients or representing the firm in some other way.

2

Know your potential employer

You should expect to be quizzed on your knowledge of the employer, so make sure you know what kind of consulting they focus on, the types of clients they work with and how they are different from their competitors.

3

Practise answering questions

Prepare yourself for the typical questions – and possible tricky interview questions – and scenarios you will face. The TARGETjobs employer hubs and advice articles can help with your preparation. Get a friend to practise with you.

4

Listen

Listen to the questions carefully, don't interrupt, ask for clarification if you need it and make your answers clear and concise.

5

Show enthusiasm

You will certainly be asked why you would like to work for them, so spend some time thinking about an answer that does not rely on clichés or flattery! According to recruiters, the best candidates are those who can show they really understand the job and explain why they want it. Javelin Group, for example, wants to see that you have an enthusiasm for retail. Its recruiters suggest you 'think about the retailers you like and dislike, and why you feel this about them'.

6

Build rapport

Try to build a rapport with interviewers without being over familiar. Maintain eye contact as much as possible and, if it is a panel interview, look at all the interviewers when you are answering a question. 'Smile. Make direct eye contact and say your name clearly,' PwC recommends. If you are having a telephone interview, prepare as thoroughly as you would for a face-to-face one. It can be harder to engage with an interviewer over the phone. Convey your enthusiasm as much as you can, speak slowly and clearly, and try to keep the conversation flowing.

7

Ask a question (or two!)

You could have in mind, for example, three questions to ask about the consultancy and three questions to ask about the job itself. Don't ask questions you should already know the answers to, for example, information clearly stated on the employer's website or in recruitment information that you have been sent, or that has already been covered during the interview. It's not considered good form to ask about salary until you have a job offer.

8

Know your application

Before the interview, look through your written application and pick out several achievements and experiences that you can use to demonstrate you have the consulting skills they are looking for.

9

Be yourself

It sounds obvious but try to act naturally. 'Throughout the whole process, be honest and be yourself. If you get to the end of the interview process and we feel as though the company doesn't know your personality or you outside of work, no matter how good your CV is, we are unlikely to hire you,' a consultant at Newton Europe advises.

10

Avoid these pitfalls

We asked consulting recruiters what candidates should avoid doing during the interview process. Don't let yourself down by:

- Being over-polished. It's good to prepare but an employer wants to feel as though they've had a genuine answer from a candidate. Candidates who are over-polished come across as disingenuous and often you don't get to see their true personality. This is particularly evident in video interviews. Making a good impression is important, but don't try to be so perfect that you don't seem real.
- Rushing your answers. Take time to think through answers before speaking – there's no need to rush to respond. Ask your interviewer for a moment to think or to clarify anything you do not understand.
- Ignoring a dress code. If you're in doubt about the dress code for a selection day, ask for advice.
- LinkedIn stalking. It's fine to find common ground and it's good practice to use LinkedIn, but don't act as if you know the recruiter exceptionally well just because you have done a little bit of research on their background – there's a fine line to tread and sadly candidates can get it wrong! ©

An introduction to case study interviews



Case studies are designed to evaluate how you process information, solve problems and react to new and surprising situations, as well as show how you work within a team. Individuals or a small group of candidates are presented with a business problem and then given time to evaluate the information and brainstorm a solution. Case studies can be on almost any subject. 'The topic itself doesn't matter. No one expects you to know the market size for diapers in Southeast Asia offhand, for example,' says Roland Berger. 'But what is your approach? Can you estimate it? Educating yourself in basic data, such as average population sizes, will help prepare you for market estimation cases. Can you demonstrate common sense and make educated guesses?' Oliver Wyman advises: 'Think of the case interviewer as your client. Your interviewer wants you to solve the problem, and can help. Work together.'

What to do in advance

There is a lot you can do in advance of your interview to help yourself. Read the firm's graduate recruitment literature and check its website to see

if it has sample case studies (the vast majority of consultancies do, and they usually offer suggestions on how to approach them as well). Have a look at recent press releases to get a feel for the type of work the firm is involved with as well as what industries it works across. Read the business pages of newspapers and imagine one of the businesses to be your client. How would you advise them? What would you base your recommendations on? What factors would you and your client need to consider before proceeding to the next step? Also check with your careers service as many run workshops and presentations on how to prepare successfully for case studies and assessment centres. The message from almost all the graduates and interns we interview is: practise, practise, practise!

Advice from consulting firms

Through our research of top consulting firms we have come across some valuable nuggets of advice for succeeding at case study interviews, such as:

- 'Sketch out a structure: your path to the solution. If you go astray, it will help you get back on track' (from Roland Berger).



- 'Take a moment to think about the case and carefully define the problem being posed' (from BCG).
- 'If you need more data, ask for it. If you're stumped, take a creative leap' (from Oliver Wyman).
- 'Pause periodically during the discussion to give your interviewer a chance to course correct' (from Strategy&).

Interviewers will be looking to see how you deal with the unexpected as well as how flexible you are with processing last-minute information. Ask if you are unsure about something. Asking clarifying questions such as 'Does that make sense?' to the interviewer, will ensure you are on the right track and shows self-awareness. ☺

Thinking out loud

The TARGETjobs team has been struck by a common thread – almost everyone we spoke to stressed that applicants should talk through their thought process with the interviewer. As L.E.K. Consulting puts it, 'Formulate hypotheses – share your thought process as information is revealed.' It's a bit like making sure you show your calculations in a maths exam – it's not enough just to come up with the answer. Given that case studies tend not to have 'right' or 'wrong' answers anyway, making your thinking process transparent is particularly important. 'We do not expect candidates to actually solve the cases in interviews,' says OC&C Strategy Consultants. Instead, the person interviewing you must be able to understand how you reach your conclusions – how you have broken down the problem, analysed information and structured conclusions.

Expect the unexpected

Additional information may be sprung on you so be prepared.

EXAMPLE CASE STUDIES

We can't tell you exactly which case study you'll face, but we can give you a couple of examples of what it might be like:

Example A: Your client is a global organisation that manufactures and distributes a wide range of chocolate products. They have two ideas to expand the business: either to introduce a new range through existing distribution channels or move into a completely new business, which will involve building a set of retail stores.

To approach this, you will need to compare the returns of each of the different investments and decide which will be the better solution for the business. Make sure you can explain the reasoning behind your decision.

Example B: A supermarket chain has noticed a decline in its profitability. They have hired you to find out why this is and to recommend and implement a solution.

You'll need to work out why there is a decline in profitability – for example, is it specific sites or the entire chain's performance that is suffering? Once you have identified the problems, work out a cost-effective solution that will allow the supermarket to address each in turn.

All about consulting assessment centres

Many consulting firms include assessment centres, which usually last about half a day, as a part of their graduate recruitment processes. It is natural to feel nervous about attending one, but knowing what to expect should help to make you feel more prepared and in control. First and foremost, bear in mind that an invitation to a consulting assessment centre means you are doing well. You have sparked a firm's interest and have demonstrated on paper that you have the skills and qualities they are seeking. You can find detailed information about what to expect at specific firms in the TARGETjobs employer hubs, but below is a rundown of the most common elements you'll find at assessment centres. It is very likely that, due to the coronavirus pandemic, more elements than usual will take place online – make sure you also read our articles on virtual assessment centres, on [targetjobs.co.uk](https://www.targetjobs.co.uk).

Interviews

It is likely that you'll already have had an interview, either in person or over the phone, and you've impressed your interviewers enough that you've been invited to the assessment centre. The interview, or interviews, that take place on the assessment day will often be with a partner or someone at a senior level in the firm and will delve deeper than previous interviews have. Remember that at all interviews assessors will be looking to see that you can demonstrate a strong understanding of the firm and how you'll be a good fit.

Case studies

One of the interviews at an assessment centre may be a case study interview. You'll be presented with a business problem and asked to come up with a solution. Assessors will be looking at how you process information, solve problems and react to new and surprising situations. For more on case study interviews, see pages 22–23.

Aptitude and psychometric tests

Often candidates have taken a psychometric test when they first submitted their application. At some assessment centres they are asked to take a follow-up test, to validate their online score. In other firms, the test at this stage will be more about understanding how you approach problem-solving and can size up a situation, such as the McKinsey Problem Solving Game.

Group exercises

These are designed to see how well candidates perform in group situations. Typically candidates will be split into small groups. There will be an icebreaker so that each person can introduce him/herself. Each group will be given a large amount of information and asked to complete a series of tasks in half an hour. The team's effort is monitored by assessors, as is each candidate's performance. Assessors will want to see that you can hold your own in a team, but demonstrate confidence, not arrogance.

Presentations

At some assessment centres you will be asked to give a presentation, usually to a mixed group of candidates and assessors. It's helpful to bear in mind the following:

- A structure is helpful to prevent your mind from going blank and helps the audience keep track. Once you have a structure you can decide what kind of props you will use; notes are fine, but don't speak directly from a script.
- Be aware of your timescale and don't attempt to fit in too much information or your audience will switch off and you'll run out of time.
- Most of the message of your talk is transmitted non-verbally, by the way you present. Your body language can make a huge difference to your presentation so stand confidently, don't fidget and look at those whom you are addressing. Start with a welcoming smile.
- If you're using a flipchart, projector or PowerPoint slides to support your presentation, keep the text brief.

Role play

This is a less common element of consulting assessment centres, but it's good to prepare for it. A candidate will be put into a client-facing situation similar to one experienced by a consultant at the firm. The 'client', played by an assessor, may be difficult or unforthcoming with information. The assessor will want to see how the applicant is able to deal with such clients – can they exercise diplomacy and tact, but also stay on track with the project at hand?

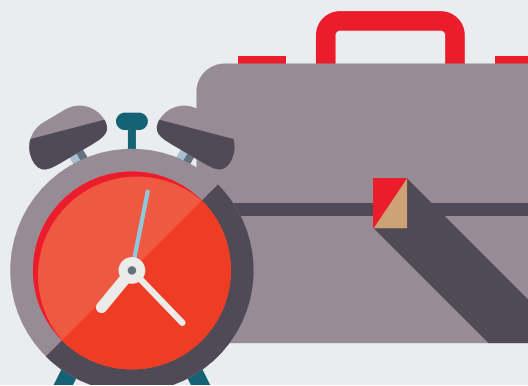
Remember...

The most common myth surrounding assessment centres is that recruiters use them to trip up candidates. This is simply not the case. Consulting firms invest a lot of time, effort and money in the recruitment process and they want to see you perform well. The experience is designed to give you a taster of situations consultants face on a daily basis, to see how you respond to the issues at hand. You're not expected to know the ins and outs of a consulting project or converse in business jargon – recruiters just want to see how you process and react to information, work within a team and deal with time pressures.

It is also important to remember that being at an assessment centre is a two-way process, so use the experience to ask questions about the profession, the firm and the type of work consultants are involved with. Make notes on what you thought went well and what areas need improving, and ask for feedback on your performance. Throughout the day, introduce yourself with confidence and take time to chat to other candidates. ©



Internships



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Consulting internships:

how to get one and make it work for you

Internships are usually offered to penultimate-year students and provide the unique opportunity to impress recruiters a year ahead of the normal recruitment cycle. The best internships act as an extended interview process, giving you the chance to demonstrate your abilities and talents fully across a range of scenarios. It's also an opportunity for you and an employer to evaluate each other and determine whether you're a good 'fit'. The experience could also improve your academic performance. Internships allow you to put your theory and knowledge into practice but also mean that when back in the lecture theatre you'll be able to apply the realities of 'real' work scenarios to the theories.

How do I prepare for applications?

Consulting is competitive and the application and interview processes for internships can be just as rigorous as those for graduate-level positions. Application deadlines for summer internships usually close at the end of January, although some can fall as early as November. It's important to spend time working on your application forms: recruiters are looking for interns who are commercially astute, enthusiastic and who have a genuine interest in learning about the profession, so be sure to provide evidence of this. Demonstrate a

keen interest in consulting by keeping up to date with any sector news. Be prepared for the application process to involve several stages including assessment centres, case studies and interviews.

What can I expect from an internship?

You'll start with an induction period that will get you up to speed on your role and brief you on your assigned project. Some firms will give you training on using Excel and PowerPoint, as well as on how to give presentations or run client meetings. Your team will have scheduled you real work for the duration of your placement. The type of tasks you'll be given will vary depending on the project, but you could be involved with collecting and collating data analysis; assisting with interviews; completing desk research; attending client meetings; preparing presentations; and working on a self-contained element of a wider project. As a full member of the team you'll have plenty of opportunities to observe and learn, as well as to contribute to the work. Make sure to ask for feedback from your colleagues so that you know what you're doing well and where you might need to improve. Being proactive and asking questions, as well as approaching every task with interest and enthusiasm, will impress recruiters and demonstrate that you are genuinely interested in the work.

How do I make my internship a success?

- Be responsible. Make sure you arrive on time and prioritise work over social activities.
- Demonstrate your initiative. If you have some free time, ask for something to do or enquire about something you'd like to have further information on. When given a task, clarify what you need to do and then use all available resources to get the job done.
- Network. Internships are a fantastic opportunity to gain exposure to a wide variety of people at all levels of an organisation, so be sure to chat with everyone and find out what work they're involved with.
- Observe. It's important to feel happy working for an organisation so use your time there to get a feel for what colleagues are like to work with, what the general atmosphere of the office is like, and try to gauge what responsibilities you would be given if you were a permanent employee.

What if I can't get an internship?

If you're not able to get a consulting internship, don't despair – plenty of graduates manage to get full-time consulting roles without having 'internship' on their CV. Consider voluntary work or part-time work – you'll be amazed by how many transferable skills you can build on or acquire, all of which boost your employability.

Not all consulting employers have the capabilities or resources to run internship programmes. For those smaller firms that don't offer structured work placements it's still worth sending off a speculative CV enquiring about work experience or work shadowing opportunities. All industry experience is good experience: not only will it enhance your CV, but experience of different-sized firms and working environments will help you make an informed decision about which type of employer suits you best. By the end of your placement you'll know whether a firm – and the profession – is the right choice for you. ©





Former consulting interns offer their top tips

We asked consultants who were offered full-time jobs at the end of their internships to offer their advice on getting hired as an intern:

What made your internship application successful?

- 'What I think helped me most was a very positive attitude and genuine curiosity to learn. For example, when I was stuck during a case, I was not afraid to ask for help. When I made a mistake and was corrected by the interviewer, I did not feel disheartened – instead I happily acknowledged my mistake and took it from there.'
- 'I'd done a lot outside of my studies at university. I was very involved with debating, running the administrative side as well as competing, and was also a member of the college hockey team and the choir... these activities demonstrated that I was able to look beyond the library and manage my time well.'
- 'I think it was a combination of my academic performance and being able to demonstrate a genuine interest in the application of economic principles on real-world problems during the interview process.'

What advice would you give to students looking for consulting internships?

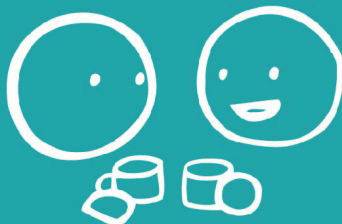
- 'Do a good amount of case practice, but don't forget the other components that will make a company want to give you an internship. In addition to people who can do the job, consulting firms want someone who is curious and interesting – definitely make sure to demonstrate both these traits throughout the application process.'
- 'Try to get a real sense of what is different about the firm you're applying to. At first glance many consulting firms can look the same, but narrow down what makes each unique.'
- 'Go for it if you have a genuine enthusiasm for the sector and for working on a variety of commercial issues. Show that you are comfortable using your initiative and, most importantly, that you have an open mind when considering how to tackle a problem. Consulting firms aren't looking for hands-on experience of the corporate world, but they are looking for people who are able to consider different ways of coming up with an answer.'

Thanks to consultants at **L.E.K. Consulting**, **OC&C Strategy Consultants**, **Oliver Wyman**, **Roland Berger** and **EY-Parthenon** for these tips.

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**STUDENT
SPACE**

Working as a consultant



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Employer snapshot: management consulting

NEWTON

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Employer snapshot: economic consulting

RBB | Economics

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*Joan de Solà-Morales, Partner,
Brussels Office*

FACTFILE

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What to expect when you start your consulting career

**James Brown, a consultant at Oliver Wyman, explains
what a graduate starting out in consulting can expect.**

The first weeks

On my first day as a consultant I met other new recruits from the UK and around the world. We were hosted by the London office for a two-week induction that would not only introduce the culture of the firm but also furnish us with a toolkit of skills to apply to our first client projects.

Learning and training are embedded throughout the career of a consultant, and although the learning curve is steep at the beginning, the training is designed to be accessible to everyone, regardless of pre-existing knowledge or experience. All new consultants receive a ten-day training programme which aims to build and strengthen key consultant skills, including problem solving, analysis, communication and EQ.

As well as training sessions, we were introduced to the various groups that contribute to the local office culture. Most people are involved in some way with these initiatives, which include volunteering opportunities in the local community, sports teams, and a social events committee. There are also networks for women, LGBT+, people of racial and ethnic minorities, and their supporters. Everyone is encouraged to get involved.

The first client project

Client projects can involve anything from multi-billion-dollar global businesses to small local charities to governments of foreign countries. No new project is the same, so it's important to read up on the industry and company as much as possible, as well as the information from the project's manager or partner. Being able to absorb new information quickly and think on your feet is a key skill to learn for any new consultant.

As a new consultant, I was supported in the team by a senior consultant and the project manager, both of whom shared their experience on the best way to conduct and structure the data analysis. This apprenticeship model allowed me to see how the knowledge and skills I had acquired in training could be applied in the real world, and allowed me to learn analysis tips and tricks from someone who had been in the role much longer.

Advisers and buddies

Even before my first day, I was assigned a buddy who had been with the firm for a couple of years. The buddy relationship is immensely important: it provides informal support for new consultants during

their early years at the firm. A buddy can act as a sounding board or agony aunt and is someone who will likely have had similar questions when they started out.

There is also more formal support provided by a career adviser. Again, every new consultant is assigned one. They are usually at the principal or partner level – so quite senior with a lot of experience to benefit from – and are there to provide mentoring and guidance. The career adviser provided me with an important sense of stability, especially when having to move between different projects and teams relatively rapidly.

Office culture

Every week there are activities to get involved in, for example exercise classes, working with local school children, theatre trips, volunteering at a homeless shelter, discussion breakfasts, as well as Friday Happy Hour. My advice would be to get involved with these as much as possible. And if there's no event or network that you are interested in, you'll be fully encouraged to use your entrepreneurial spirit and organise one yourself! ☺

How I became a lead consultant at Newton Europe

We chatted with Lois Kentish about her consulting role, work/life balance and involvement with diversity issues at Newton.

What made you choose a career in consulting?

I studied civil and architectural engineering at the University of Bath. I did a lot of summer work in structural engineering while at university, but I hadn't decided on a career yet. I read about Newton and loved the idea of working on the kind of problems they solve, so at my interview I really tried to showcase my passion for problem solving.

What have your major career steps so far been?

Since starting here I've had the opportunity to experience nearly all the sectors we work in: defence, hospitals, social care and retail. At first, I was working to deliver workstreams within these projects. Then I began to manage teams to deliver them, and recently I've been closer to supporting the set up and sale of my recent project, which has been a great step and learning curve.

What are your main responsibilities on a day-to-day basis?

If we're assessing a new project my roles typically include working with the client to understand the key processes in their business, the root cause of problems and how much opportunity there is to improve them. When we're delivering a project, I'm likely working with them to design and implement solutions that work for them. This includes analysis, holding workshops to design and test new ways of working, understanding how people in the business feel about the changes, building the tool and ensuring it'll be sustainable in the future. I'm also responsible for supporting anyone I'm managing.

Has anything surprised you about consulting?

I've learnt a lot about what 'good looks like' in a consulting role. We spend a lot more time thinking about specific things for our clients while they're having to balance all their other responsibilities. We can use that headspace to really put them in the best possible position to deliver improvements and sustain them long after we've left.

It's amazing the kind of exposure you get in different businesses and how agnostic we are to levels. You can be talking to stakeholders from every level in the business daily.

How do you balance work and home/social life?

I'm away much of the week, staying near the site I'm working on. I'm always home by 6.00 pm on a Friday and never work weekends. I love my time on site – there's always someone to go for dinner with if I fancy it, and I always make sure I'm staying near a gym. Most importantly, there is flexibility when you need it, for example getting home for an appointment midweek. More recently I've been working from home because of the pandemic. It's meant project fun nights have gone virtual, but it's also given me more chances to see friends at home.

What are the most exciting aspects of your job?

Variety – I've loved understanding and working with so many different industries, businesses and colleagues from a range of clients, and learning that a core understanding can be applied in so many different situations.



And the most challenging?

I'm constantly faced with new challenges – updating a more senior client, being given a more technical piece of work, or working across multiple sites – but I'm so grateful for the opportunity, and I know my line manager, development manager and colleagues are always there to help or advise.



To help companies improve it's so important to understand the pressure people in the organisation might be under.

Tell us about the work you've been doing with diversity initiatives at your firm.

Diversity is a challenge across the consultancy sector and has been historically, but I believe my firm is committed to being leaders in diversity and inclusion. Everyone at the same level is paid the same but we know we still have to push for better representation at senior levels. We've also worked to baseline our non-gender diversity, which again isn't compulsory, but knowing where we are now is so important to improving. I've loved getting involved in promoting diversity at Newton and went to present to women's engineering and technology societies at Bath last year. I think inclusion is the key to diversity and there's loads

of opportunities for the wider business to support this. We have Review Nights every fortnight where we do different activities as a company – these can be anything from go-karting, music quizzes or chocolate making classes; I loved our recent virtual Pride-themed one.

What exciting developments have you witnessed in your area of work?

There's talk of it everywhere, but definitely the use of data. We've got a digital team here (consultants who work on projects with us but specialise in digital), who help us deliver projects of a much greater scale than we could using less sophisticated analysis methods, eg meaning we can analyse transaction data for every supermarket in a chain across the country on a daily basis. I'm constantly learning from them where this can really support us adding value to our clients – data on its own doesn't do anything but if shown and understood in the correct way is so powerful.

Name the top three skills for a successful consultant.

- Drive – when you're working on something, you've got to want to do it and stick at it to get it done; if it was easy it wouldn't be a problem to start with.
- Empathy – to help companies improve it's so important to understand the pressure people in the organisation might be under and the challenges of their day-to-day jobs. It also helps you work in a variety of different teams.
- Energy – it can be a busy job, but the outcomes for our clients and us as individuals make it worthwhile. @

The best consultants combine top-notch academic rigour with practical experience, and consulting firms are keen for you to develop both throughout your career.

There are numerous ways to develop the specialist knowledge and skills necessary to become an expert in a particular industry or function, or to climb the promotion ladder.

Support

In addition to formal career development opportunities, good consulting firms will ensure that you feel supported within your organisation from day one. Following your initial induction period, you should find a number of additional support mechanisms in place.

Your manager will be an essential port of call for assistance with any work-related concerns. Managers are often partners or more senior associates, and you should

have regular catch-ups with your manager to discuss your progress – how often will depend on your particular task of the moment.

In contrast to the more formal work and social support systems, most firms operate a 'mentor' or 'buddy' system: that is, they will pair you with a more experienced consultant to help you find your feet and answer any queries on an informal basis.

Qualifying

It is possible (but not essential) to work towards becoming professionally qualified. The certified management consultant (CMC) qualification is awarded to consulting professionals by the Institute of Consulting (IC) in recognition of a consultant's experience, competency, skills and integrity. To apply, you need at least three years' industry experience and to be an IC member.

**Your
consulting
career:
where it can
take you**



Secondments and networking

Secondments or externships allow consultants to work in industry or with a client organisation for a fixed period of time. They are great opportunities to gain exposure to different working cultures and are popular with employers, as the experience improves relationships with clients and allows you to expand your expertise.

Networking is important in consulting: your personal contacts and reputation can make a huge difference to your career progression. You'll need to take advantage of the fact that you'll be working with colleagues at all levels within the firm – and that your fellow graduates could be the leaders of the future.

Masters and PhDs

A postgraduate qualification is a popular route to career advancement in consulting. The traditional route is the

masters of business administration (MBA), which is normally only open to applicants with at least two years' industry experience. Many organisations sponsor promising associates to pursue an MBA after three years' employment.

You could consider a masters degree or PhD before you apply. Relevant areas for a masters degree include HR, IT and accountancy. A doctorate allows you to complete research in an area of specific interest to you. However, for maximum benefit you must ensure your subject is relevant to the area you want to work in and will be valued by your future employer. Recruiters value practical experience and work-based skills as much as academic excellence, so find out what benefits a postgraduate degree will give you over other candidates. The university's reputation will also count with recruiters, as it is





Ask yourself

To get thinking about your future development, start with some self-assessment and consider your individual interests and skills:

- Where do I want to be in a year's, five years' or even ten years' time?
- What are my personal goals/aspirations?
- What type of assignments do I enjoy?
- Which sectors/functions interest me most?
- Which skill areas do I need to improve?
- What is the recruitment market like for the area I want to go into?
- Do I particularly value the technical knowledge gleaned from postgraduate study or the practical experience acquired from a secondment, for example?

seen as an indicator of quality. As a postgraduate you should not expect to command a better salary at entry level than graduates; however, those with postgraduate qualifications do tend to progress more quickly.

Work/life balance

Wherever they are in the world, consultants can often end up working long hours. But many top firms recognise that talented employees are their main asset, and so provide a suite of opportunities that help create a sustainable work/life balance. At Oliver Wyman, for example, these initiatives include:

- placements or pro-bono projects at charities and other non-profit organisations
- externships in other industries and businesses
- transfers to other offices, for the short or long term
- flexible working options, such as working from home and adjusted hours
- rotations into other areas of the business
- career breaks and sabbaticals of varying lengths.

It's up to you

In management consulting you direct your career and a flexible approach to your development is positively encouraged.

During the assessment process, don't hold back from asking questions about the support and development opportunities available at the firm. Intelligent questions show that you're making a thoughtful, mature career decision and are committed to working in the sector. Take advantage of the fact that, while other careers might pin you down to a predefined route, as a consultant how far and how quickly you progress is up to you. ©

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Find out more at [WorkAtNewton.com](https://www.workatnewton.com)