

Back on the HR career path

Human resources staff lost out in the financial crisis, but now plenty of opportunities are opening up to graduates, writes **Rachel Lebihan**.

Last July an unemployed human resources graduate going by the online persona "Desperately Jobless" made a plea in an internet forum for assistance finding a job.

"Hi everybody. I am quite desperate for a junior/graduate role in HR [human resources]. I have been searching since May 4th," the despairing job seeker's plea began.

"Junior HR roles are non-existent. Graduate roles in HR are few and far between. HR temp roles require experience. It's my third month of unemployment and a new wave of graduates are coming in.

"I need help in securing a HR role ... I am willing and able to work for free."

The story is a different one for HR graduates this year.

The chief executive of graduate recruitment communications specialist Unimail, Andrea Culligan-Dring, says the HR profession is rebounding after a period of cutbacks during the global financial crisis.

Recruiters and HR managers were among the first positions to be culled as the employee ranks they helped supervise were downsized.

"HR is the area that the GFC really cut down," Culligan says. "Now it's starting to rebuild and the numbers are on the rise."

A recruitment consultant specialising in graduate positions at Sydney's Ashworth Recruitment Consulting, Francis McCarthy, agrees the market is more buoyant this year, particularly in the area of recruitment and consulting in which Ashworth specialises.

"Compared to 12 or 24 months ago, there are plenty more jobs available [for those] coming straight out of university and also for those who have been out of university from anywhere from one to three years," McCarthy says.

"For our clients, who are recruitment agencies, a lot of experienced recruitment professionals left the industry during the GFC and a lot of them have moved on to different areas and that has created a gap in the market for graduates to be trained up into those roles."

Graduates in recruitment roles can expect a starting salary of



Foot in the door ... many graduates move from recruiting roles to more general HR positions.

Photo: MAYU KANAMORI

between \$40,000 and \$50,000, plus superannuation, McCarthy says. They can also earn commissions.

"In their first year it is very realistic for them to earn anywhere between \$60,000 and \$70,000, inclusive of base cost commission," he says.

"That is one differentiator from HR, because typically ... graduates going into generalist HR roles will have a similar starting salary but not as high earnings potential because there are no real bonus or commission opportunities."

The Australian Human Resources Institute lists a range of graduate salaries on its website. A human resources manager can expect to earn between \$55,000 and \$80,000, and a human resource professional can earn between \$41,500 and \$54,000.

The salary of an occupational health and safety adviser ranges between \$46,500 and \$72,000, and between \$44,000 and \$65,000 for a training and development professional.

McCarthy says those in general HR roles will deal with procedural and administrative work, whereas recruitment-consulting roles cover business development and sales.

A graduate recruitment consultant will spend their day meeting clients to understand the

roles they need to fill, writing job advertisements and posting them on online job boards, screening applications and organising and conducting interviews.

Many graduate recruiters move on to more general HR roles.

"It is certainly a way to get your foot in the [HR] door," McCarthy says. "One caveat is that they would need to be comfortable or even preferably excited about doing business development and developing some sales in the short term to get their runs on the board and build their reputation in the market."

International job opportunities also abound for recruiters, McCarthy says. "There are a lot of multinational agencies based in Sydney ... so if they establish themselves as a top performer in the Sydney office over a two to three-year time frame, they'll certainly be in a position to put their hand up for an overseas posting."

Professor of HR management at the Australian Catholic University, Robin Kramar, says HR graduates were particularly attractive in the job market because they had a good grounding in general management.

"Also, just because the job market is growing there's more recruiting and selecting, there is more training going on, and so

there is greater demand for HR professionals," Kramar says.

She says HR graduates tended to go into specialist roles, such as recruitment and selection or training, or occupational health and safety, "learn the nuts and bolts", then go on to another specialist role "so they get a good grounding in the general area of HR".

"When graduates go in at the bottom and learn all the different areas, there really are good opportunities to progress up into more broader roles," she says.

"But if they do that, they really do need broad knowledge around business and finance and marketing."

The buoyant jobs market had little impact on the taking up of postgraduate HR studies, Kramar says. "There is still a demand for postgraduate management education," she says.

"My opinion is they're much better off getting some work experience first if they're then going to do postgraduate management education because then they are able to frame what they have learnt in the context of work experience and they are able to do assignment work that they can then apply back into the workplace, so I actually think they get more out of it."