



TALKING POINT

Rare skills fire up CVs

Deciding which of your talents to squeeze into your CV is tough. **Carly Chynoweth** gets to grips with what employers want

MOST people know the rules for CVs by now: keep them short, sharp and easy to read. But with only two pages to play with, deciding which skills to highlight can be hard.

Simply having a degree is no longer enough to grab recruiters' attention, says Ross Eades, the chief executive of IT recruiters InterQuest Group. Neither is having generic skills such as computer literacy or teamwork — at least not if you want a job in IT. Graduates who want to work in this sector should list very specific skills such as programming languages or niche specialisms; he lists governance, anti-phishing software and risk and security as growth areas.

"The applicant would probably have had exposure to other software outside that but they will tailor [the CV] to show the in-demand rare skill," he says. This makes candidates more employable because it makes life easier for recruiters, who can see exactly where an individual's skills can fit an employer's need.

William Archer, the director of i-graduate, an education benchmarking organisation, recently co-wrote a paper about graduate employability. He agrees that IT recruiters want to see specific skills, but says that in most professional sectors it is vocational skills that mark out a graduate.

"Outside these very specific areas what makes you employable is ... how you

spent your time at university," he says. This doesn't mean CV-building by joining every club on campus, either. "What employers are saying is that the most important things are how [graduates] are able to interact with colleagues and their ability to hit the ground running. Any opportunity for work experience, any opportunity to demonstrate this ability — that's what employers are looking for."

It's very hard for graduates planning to move into accounting or financial services to show a high level of specialism on their applications, says Sarah Williams, an associate director at FSS, a recruitment consultancy. Aim for a good degree and strong professional qualifications — first-time passes in all exams — instead.

But graduates who are determined to move into a specialist area can build up relevant experience for their CVs while still studying. For example, a would-be investment banker might join an investment or trading club at university. "It shows that you are focused and committed to moving in that direction," Williams says.

She also warns accountants against over-emphasising their niche skills too soon. "There is a tendency to over-specialise and leave out key experience that people want to know about." In this case it's much better to keep general skills on the CV until you've achieved a significant level of senior,

specialist achievement.

One area where being specific definitely pays off is in choosing a post-graduate course, Archer says. If your masters degree isn't specifically sought by employers, chances are that you will end up no more employable with it than after your first degree.

Iain Rainey, a director of GR Law, a legal jobs consultancy, says that the level to which employers expect to see specialisation on lawyers' CVs depends on the level of the position. "The more junior it is the more general it becomes," he says. "If you have a tax vacancy you need a tax lawyer but if you look at someone who has just left university ... then getting a good grounding in general skills is very useful. If I had my time again I would try to improve my language skills."

What an ambitious junior lawyer's CV absolutely must show is academic ability — a 2:1 or better. At the interview, showing personality and common sense is key. And if you want to make it to partner, start cultivating a bit of panache and charisma as well, Rainey says. "Those who are good lawyers but don't have those communication skills often find themselves bumping up against the glass ceiling as they try to make partner."



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