

Careers in the pharmaceutical industry

Top tips for graduates

The UK's pharmaceutical industry is booming. Numerous companies, big and small, are developing new medicines every day. Whether you're working for big pharma, a healthcare agency or a small biotech start-up, a career in pharma can be highly rewarding.

This document will help you to consider what type of career may be right for you, what roles are open to you, and how to maximise your chances of success in the application process.

Information in this document is based on the PM Society's graduate event, which took place at the Royal Society of Medicine in London, on **12 February 2020**.

For details of future events please see [\[https://pmsociety.org.uk/events\]](https://pmsociety.org.uk/events)

Pharmaceutical company careers

There's a wide variety of roles open to science and non-science graduates alike. You may be interested in one of the following areas:



- Graduate schemes
- Research & development
- Medical affairs
- Commercial/marketing roles
- Sales
- Non-science roles

Do some reading and visit careers events to find out more about entry level jobs and career pathways. Consider the practicalities of each vacancy such as the location of the job and minimum entry requirements. A valuable tip is to research the company's values to see if they match with your own personal values - this can help you choose a company with potential to offer a long-term career.

A rewarding career

'If you're looking for an intellectual challenge in an industry that ultimately changes peoples' lives, this is for you'



Many pharmaceutical employees are driven by a sense of purpose - to help people in need of medicines. We're all patients at some point in our lives, and it can be hugely rewarding to contribute to the development of the latest life-altering treatments.

Despite negative attention from the media, the UK's pharmaceutical industry is highly regulated. Independent bodies such as the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (the ABPI) ensure that companies adhere to strict moral and ethical standards.

Healthcare agency careers

Pharmaceutical companies work closely with a variety of healthcare agencies to help bring drugs to market. This thriving healthcare sector comprises agencies of different types and sizes around the UK. Each provides its own specialised services to pharmaceutical clients, which typically fall within these broad areas:

- Medical communications
- Medical education
- Creative/advertising
- Public relations
- Market research
- Payer communications
- Congress booth design
- Digital services

There are so many reasons to consider a career in a healthcare agency:

- Exciting, fast-paced work environment
- High demand for good candidates
- Varied work
- Good pay
- Opportunities to travel
- Industry-leading opportunities for flexible working
- Vibrant office culture
- Training programmes
- Chance to specialise in areas of interest

Where to start

‘Start talking to people about what you’re interested in. Go out and start exploring the industry.’

Agencies vary widely in how they work and what they offer employees, so research what agencies interest you the most. Follow a few agencies on LinkedIn to see what they’re up to.

Then, ask yourself some questions to gauge your next steps:

Are you drawn to large, global networks with opportunities to try out different specialties? Or is a small, independent agency with a ‘family feel’ more your style?

Which type of role interests you most? Science graduates are likely to secure entry level positions in one of these broad departments:

Client services:

Client-facing, project management, budget management.

Medical writing:

Scientific understanding, research, approvals, content creation.

Some agencies offer hybrid roles or the opportunity to rotate within departments, so you can experience several roles before deciding which is best for you.

Recruiters specialising in the healthcare sector can also provide excellent insight into job openings and different types of agency.

The Do's and Don'ts of job applications

'Don't take a blanket approach to your job search. Apply to a few positions that you're really interested in, and do it well'

You've narrowed down the jobs you'd like to apply for, the first step is to read the application instructions. Should you complete an online form, or submit a CV? Do you need a cover letter? Perhaps a video interview? Adhering to instructions and application deadlines is the first step towards impressing your potential employer.

Here are more tips for navigating the application process:

DO follow the application guidelines. They'll differ for each company and for each job.

DO tailor your CV and application for each and every job application.

DO start your CV with a mission statement highlighting exactly what type of position you're seeking and/or your long-term career goals.

DO seek opportunities to make your CV more interesting to recruiters. Volunteering or work shadowing demonstrate drive and proactivity, for example.

DO create a professional LinkedIn profile. Use it to connect with people in the industry, and to follow companies you wish to learn more about.

DON'T wait for job vacancies to be posted. Contact companies you'd like to work for and ask about opportunities for internships or shadowing.

DON'T rule yourself out - it's possible to work in pharmaceutical companies without a science degree and without a PhD.

DON'T list irrelevant information or try to over-inflate your experience (going to the cinema is NOT a hobby you need to include!).

DON'T rush your application - but don't miss the deadline!

Tips for interviewing

‘Enthusiasm, passion, drive - these traits will make you stand out from the crowd’

Before the interview:

- Do your research so you know about the company and why you’d like to work there. Read reviews on recruitment processes on Glassdoor.com.
- Think of some examples of when you were at your best in a professional environment. What skills did you demonstrate? Can you use this example to highlight several different strengths or skills in the interview?

On the day:

- Arrive on time, dressed smartly and prepared for a variety of tasks – group activities, written assessments and competency-based interview questions.
- Communicate professionally and confidently.
- Show that you’ve done your research by using phrases such as ‘I saw in the news recently...’, or ‘I’d love to work for an award-winning company like this.’
- Don’t be afraid to show your personality and answer questions honestly. Interviewers may appreciate ‘out of the box’ thinking.
- Reiterate your desire to work in this job and this company, and what value you’ll add.

Resources

Firstmedcommsjob

Medcommsnetworking

PM Society

This report was created by Sarah Nelson, [Green Pen Solutions](#), with contributions at the PM Society event (12th February 2020) from Novartis, Pfizer, Allergan, Takeda, OPEN Health, SOL Life Sciences, CDM London, Publicis Health, Radical Departures, Blue Latitude Health, Havas Life Medicom, Syneos Healthcare, emotive, Cuttsy & Cuttsy, STAR Medical, Omnicom Group.

Many thanks to all these contributors for their support.

Please contact the PM Society if you have any feedback or a requirement for further information.