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Graduate Job Pack

The Institute of Student Employers' survey, out in autumn 2026, puts the 2025/26 round at 141 applications per graduate role. No trick beats that. A few dull things improve your odds, and the next page is what I'd start on Monday.

Priya Sharma, Graduate Careers Editor

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For UK graduates and final-year students applying now. Updated 3 November 2026.

What I'd do on Monday

This assumes you've finished your degree and you're looking now. If you've got a job to hold down at the same time, stretch it out.

Days 1 to 30, set up and start sending

1. **Open a spreadsheet.** One row per employer, with the job, the closing date, whether they review as they go, what the form asks for, what it says about AI, and where you've got to.
2. **Start filling it.** Get it to 25 employers by the end of week two, with no more than five big names, ten or so mid-sized firms and ten that are small or local. For those, try the job title plus your town on a general job board. The next page says why.
3. **Rewrite the first lines of your CV** and cut two or three versions.
4. **Ring your university's careers service.** Ask whether it still sees graduates, and for how long. If it does, book a CV read and a practice interview.
5. **Send anything already open that reviews as it goes.** The CV won't ever feel finished.
6. **If you've been on Universal Credit six months, or nearly,** ask your work coach about Youth Jobs Grant vacancies.

Days 31 to 60, apply and keep score

Two or three proper applications a week from week two comes to about 30 by day 90, so 25 employers is a starting list and you'll keep adding to it. I'd take that over twenty rushed ones a week. Add a column for where each one stopped, from no reply through online test, video interview and assessment centre to final interview. Practise whichever stage you're about to hit, with our guides to psychometric tests, video interviews and assessment centres. And message one person two or three years into a job you want, with one specific question they can answer in a minute.

Days 61 to 90, read that column by size of firm

Silence from the big names tells you little, because they get so many applications for each role. Silence from the small and local firms tells you more, so if those aren't replying either, it could be the CV or the list. Rewrite the one and add to the other. Stuck at online tests means practice, which is dull, and it's the most fixable of the lot. If you're reaching interviews and going no further, you're good enough on paper and you need somebody to interview you out loud, badly, until it improves.

And if it's day 90 and there's no offer, that isn't a verdict on you. Take paid work that gives you something true to put in those first lines, and drop to one or two applications a week.

If you're still in your final year

Do three things this term and leave the rest until you've got replies to look at. Build the spreadsheet and rewrite your CV's first lines, an evening or two a week. Book the careers service while you're still a student. Send anything already open on the graduate scheme deadline tracker, about one a week, and let your final-year work win when the two clash.

The sum behind that plan

141

applications per graduate role, in the Institute of Student Employers' (ISE) survey of 155 employers, published in autumn 2026 and covering the 2025/26 round.

Pretend for a minute that every application has the same chance. That's 1 in 141. Now say you're five times better than the average applicant, which is about 1 in 28.

Applications sent	Chance of an offer at 1 in 141	At 1 in 28
12	**about 8%**	**about 35%**
30	**about 19%**	**about 66%**

That's my sum, not the ISE's, and it's rough, because nobody's odds are really equal. But read it the other way up. At 141 applications per role, 12 applications with no offer is the likeliest result, even for someone a good way above average. If that's where you are, you haven't done anything wrong yet, and it's too early to rewrite everything.

Why ten of your 25 are small firms

The 141 is an average from employers who answer an ISE survey. It's 172 per graduate vacancy in London and 158 in financial and professional services. It says nothing about the eight-person firm in Stockport that's never heard of the ISE and would quite like a graduate. I'd expect that firm to get far fewer applications. Say it's 30, a number picked to show the size of the effect. Twelve applications at 1 in 30 gives you about a one in three chance even if you're only average. That's the whole case for capping the big names at five, and it's why silence from a firm like that tells you more than silence from a Big Four firm.

Should you wait for the market to turn?

I wouldn't. The ISE reported recruitment up 4% after an 8% fall the year before, and employers forecast 7% growth for 2026/27, but it says that's "again driven by only a few employers". And underneath that, "While 45% increased their graduate intake, 15% maintained it and 40% made reductions."

ISE figures on this page: Institute of Student Employers, 14 October 2026.

Your CV's first lines

Recruitment isn't a fair read of everybody's merits, and I won't pretend it is. I doubt anyone gives 141 applications equal care, so write your first lines as if they're all anyone will read. Put what you did at the top, with a number wherever there's a true one. "Driven team player with strong analytical skills" could be anyone, and it tells the person reading nothing they can check.

Before	After
Recent History graduate and driven team player with strong analytical skills, seeking a challenging role in a fast-paced environment.	BA History, Leeds, 2:1 (2026). Treasurer of the student newspaper for a year, on a £4,200 budget, and finished £310 under. Two summers on the tills at Morrisons, trained three new starters.

(That's invented, in case anyone at Leeds is worried. Yours has to be true, because somebody will ask you about it.) The till job stays in. I'd take someone who's trained three new starters over a third "passionate about" line any day. Then cut a version for each kind of job on your list. You don't need 25 CVs. Two or three will do, and the bit that has to change is mostly those first lines.

If you're using AI on it

Stephen Isherwood, joint CEO of the ISE, said on 14 October 2026, "Employers are faced with applications that look the same". He was talking about over-reliance on AI, and it changes what I'd tell you to do with it. The ISE's own tip is structure and proofreading, so use it for that, and write the facts and the numbers yourself, because they're the part that can't look like anyone else's.

In online assessments, interviews and assessment centres candidates usually aren't allowed to use AI, so check what each employer allows before you start.

Applying early

A closing date is the last day they'll take your form, and it doesn't tell you when they started reading. If an advert says applications are reviewed as they come in, or that it may close early, treat the real deadline as sooner and move it up your list. Dates move, so use the graduate scheme deadline tracker for what we last read, and go by the employer's own page if the two disagree.

What I'd spend less time on

The sixth pass at a cover letter, for one thing, especially for a firm whose form doesn't ask for one (read the form first, and our guide to its questions). Long messages to senior partners on LinkedIn are another. And don't send the same CV back to a firm that's just turned it down.

Quotes and figures: Institute of Student Employers, 14 October 2026.

Who goes on the list

Take the word "graduate" out of the search box. Plenty of jobs a new graduate can do are advertised as assistant accountant, junior analyst, marketing executive or junior buyer, by firms with no scheme and no careers fair stand. Try your local council, a housing association, an NHS trust and mid-sized firms near you. How to find graduate jobs has more on where to look. If it's audit and tax you want, BDO, Grant Thornton and Forvis Mazars are all on our graduate scheme deadline tracker, and so are the National Audit Office and the Bank of England if the public side appeals, or Lloyds and HSBC for banking.

The ISE found that "the majority of employers (82%) expect either no or minimal replacement of early careers roles as a result of AI". I'm less relaxed than that, and this is my view, not a study. Ask one question of any job on your list: what would you be doing all day in month three? If it's cleaning data, scheduling, reviewing documents or drafting something a senior person then rewrites, I'd expect employers to hire fewer people for it. If it's standing in front of people, signing something you're personally accountable for, or physically being somewhere, that's much harder to hand over. A job title won't tell you which. A "graduate analyst" at one firm builds things and at another formats them, so ask at interview what a first-year does now that a first-year didn't do two years ago.

If you're on Universal Credit

The Youth Jobs Grant pays your employer, not you, and it's narrower than the headline figure suggests. Since 30 June 2026 an employer can get £3,000 for each person aged 18 to 24 they take on who's been out of work and on Universal Credit for at least six months, and isn't yet eligible for the Jobs Guarantee below. The job has to be genuine paid work of at least 25 hours a week, lasting at least 4 months. It covers England, Scotland and Wales. Any size of employer can use it, but GOV.UK says "you cannot recruit your own people and then claim the grant", so don't bother mentioning it in a covering letter to a firm you've found yourself. Work coaches refer candidates to accepted vacancies, so ask yours which are near you.

The Jobs Guarantee is opening to 18 to 24 year olds on Universal Credit who've been looking for work for 18 months, and it's 25 hours a week of fully subsidised six-month paid work. A first phase has run since April for 18 to 21 year olds in six areas. Your work coach is the person who'll know whether it's reached you.

Before you say yes

If you're offered an apprenticeship, check the pay first. The legal minimum for an apprentice is £8 an hour from 1 April 2026, against £12.71 if you're 21 or over. At 19 or over, the £8 applies only in your first year, and an employer can pay more.

Then run the pay past your student loan. You repay 9% of income above £25,000 on Plan 5, £26,900 on Plan 1, £29,385 on Plan 2 or £33,795 on Plan 4 (2026 to 2027 tax year), and the earliest you start is the April after you leave your course.

ISE: What the stabilised graduate market really looks like. GOV.UK: Youth Jobs Grant employer FAQ and guidance, 7 August 2026; Jobs Guarantee, updated 21 October 2026; March 2026 package; minimum wage rates; what you pay; when you start repaying; thresholds for 2026 to 2027.

Written by Priya Sharma, Graduate Careers Editor at UniSorted. Got a question or a correction? Email hello@unisorted.co.uk with the source link and what you think is wrong, and we'll check it.

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