A Graduate's Guide to Tackling Lack of Experience and Skill Shortages

Starting your career can be daunting, especially when job descriptions ask for experience you haven't had the chance to gain yet. But the truth is, every professional has to start somewhere. At Carrington West, we work with graduates every day who are facing the same challenge, and we're here to help.

It's easy to feel like you're already playing catch-up if you don't tick every box on a job spec or advert. But when employers recruit graduates or junior professionals, they don't expect a perfect CV, they look for coachability and the willingness to learn.

Transferable skills

You might not have worked full-time in the industry yet, but chances are, you've developed highly relevant skills through other avenues:

- University projects that show analytical thinking, problem-solving or technical knowledge
- Part-time jobs or volunteering that demonstrate teamwork, customer service or time management
- Student societies or sports teams where you gained leadership, collaboration, or communication skills

We always recommend using practical examples and linking them clearly to the job you're applying for. Show how what you've done is relevant, even if it didn't happen in the industry.

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Addressing skill gaps

If you're seeing skills on job descriptions that you don't have yet, don't panic. The important thing is showing you're actively learning.

Here's how to do that:

- Identify key industry skills by looking for trends in job descriptions
- Upskill with free platforms like LinkedIn Learning, YouTube or even TikTok!
- Mention your learning efforts in your CV and cover letter as it shows initiative and drive

Example: "Currently completing an online course in AutoCAD to build foundational design skills and prepare for entry-level roles in infrastructure planning."

Apply for roles strategically

We see graduates applying for hundreds of roles without tailoring their CVs. The result? Silence.

Try:

- Tailoring each CV and cover letter to the job you're applying for
- Mirroring keywords from the job description in your CV
- Emphasise transferrable skills that match the employer's needs

Your application doesn't have to be long, it just has to be relevant.

Be open to entry-level roles

Remember, your first role is just that first step, not your final destination.

We often advise graduates to consider:

- Contract or temp roles as stepping stones into permanent opportunities
- Graduate schemes or internships for structured learning
- Roles that offer mentorship or on-the-job training to build confidence and skills

Once you're in, progression happens fast, especially if you're proactive.

At Carrington West, our consultants are here to guide you through the process. We offer:

- CV and cover letter advice
- Interview preparation

We work across key sectors like transport & infrastructure, water & environmental, highways, rail, planning, and more, so we know what hiring managers are really looking for.