

Writing the successful CV

An opportunity to hear about the principles of good CV writing and how to emphasise your strengths. Bring your CV and work with colleagues to receive and offer constructive criticism.

Workshop facilitated by Vicki Fagg, Principal, College of North West London, Chris Tyler, Colleges Specialist, Association of School and College Leaders, Thalia Marriott, Director, Women's Leadership Network

Vicki, Chris and Thalia talked through the following questions designed to help individuals to evaluate their CVs. The questions raised a number of issues and discussions around whether or not there is an ideal format for CVs, their use in the current job market and how to ensure that they are effective and fit for purpose. CVs are often used at the "long list" stage when recruitment agencies are assisting a college in making an appointment.

Participants were also given a simple grid to help them evaluate their CVs and to get feedback from a third party if they so wished.

1. What is the first impression? Look at your CV through another person's eyes.

- Is it easy to read through and to navigate around?
- Can the reader find what they need to know at a glance?
- Is there sufficient "white space"?
- Is the layout attractive and easy on the eye?
- Is it too long? Consider the number of CVs that will be received for the post – if it is longer than three or four pages, will it receive the attention it deserves?

2. Is your CV fit for purpose – is it relevant and appropriate for the post for which you are applying and are the language and assumptions suitable for your reader?

A one-size-fits all approach to CVs is not advisable. There may be things that you can leave out, depending on the post description and criteria. For example, you may have served on a number of external committees – if this is relevant to the criteria, mention some of them. For many posts, recruitment agency consultants and/or lay governors will be reading your CV. They may not understand FE jargon or issues.

3. Have you thought objectively about all aspects of your personal experience so that the reader sees them as a positive?

Two examples:

- In FE, starting your career as a Hairdresser or Motor Vehicle mechanic and reaching management status brings with it advantages and a depth of understanding that those coming through the sixth form/HE route may not have.

- Those with Open University degrees obtained while working and / or child-rearing can show evidence of single-mindedness, motivation and hard work.

4. Are there any gaps in your CV that might lead the reader to wonder what you were up to?

Consider giving reasons for gaps where you can, for example gaps for child-rearing or other care responsibilities. Evidence of a full, varied life will show your ability to organise and to empathise with learners.

5. Can the reader discern your values, what you feel strongly about?

Most selectors will want to know what matters to you – have you managed to reflect or project this in your CV?

6. And lastly, have you sold yourself sufficiently?

Here's a test: think of someone who has been successful in job applications and whom you regard as honest but assertive. Now consider your own CV – would he or she have produced it? Make sure that you have not under-sold yourself.

A few more questions for consideration

Have you made sure that your CV reflects your abilities, skills and experience better than an application form?

For example, is there an opportunity to mention research, publications or experience in other sectors where relevant to the post?

Does your CV reflect your personality?

Consider that you will be working with others and they may want a glimpse of your true personality.

Does your CV intrigue?

Does it leave a few things which the reader might want to know more about?