

Buyer

Introduction

As a Buyer you are responsible for purchasing almost anything from raw materials and equipment to goods and services for use by your organisation - for example, a shop, factory or hospital. You will need to make sure that goods and services are obtained at a reasonable price, and that the right amount of stock is held.

Also known as

- Purchasing and Supplies Officer
- Supplies Officer
- Procurement Officer



Work Activities

Buyers (also known as Stock Controllers, Procurement Officers, or Purchasing Managers) buy raw materials, equipment, services and other items for use by an organisation.

You might buy anything from socks to helicopters, timber for a shed manufacturing company to paper for a printing company, security services for a hospital to horses for the police force - the list is endless!

You'll need to carefully make sure that you get the best value for money, that the company is holding the right amount of stock and that it has the appropriate suppliers in place to deliver the goods and services needed.

Buyers consult with other departments to find out which goods and services they need and then find companies that might be able to supply these. You will obtain estimates of prices from possible suppliers and check on their past performance, for example, if they always deliver on time.

You will then negotiate with them to agree the best possible price and quality. Buyers have a budget and must try to buy what is needed without spending any more than this amount.

When you have carefully chosen a supplier, you'll agree the terms of the contract. You need to consider the legal aspects of buying and selling, and to understand the business needs and processes of their organisation.

Buyers check the performance of their suppliers and try to solve any problems that might occur. If problems cannot be overcome, you must find another supplier.

Increasingly, purchasing is an international profession and you might need to travel to meet suppliers across the world.

Being able to read, write and speak Welsh may be an advantage when you're looking for work in Wales.

Personal Qualities and Skills

To become a Buyer, you will need to have:

- excellent communication skills
- negotiating skills
- an aptitude for figures and the ability to manage a budget
- an analytical mind
- IT skills
- an interest in the activities of your own organisation
- the ability to build up a good knowledge of manufacturing and distribution methods and suppliers
- teamwork skills
- the ability to prioritise tasks and manage your time to meet deadlines

For some jobs, employers look for applicants with a technical or scientific background. Foreign language skills could be useful if you are buying from other countries.

Pay and Opportunities

Pay

The pay rates given below are approximate.

- Starting: £24,000 - £26,000
- With experience: £28,000 - £32,500
- Senior Buyers earn £35,500 - £40,000

Hours of work

Buyers usually work office hours, Monday to Friday, with occasional late evening or weekend work.

Where could I work?

Nearly all employers, medium and large, will have a requirement for Buyers, purchasing a whole range of goods, services and materials. These can be in, for example:

- manufacturing industries e.g. car or aircraft production
- the NHS
- electricity, phone and water companies
- gas and oil industries
- the retail sector
- financial services
- the armed forces

Opportunities for Buyers occur in some towns and cities throughout the UK. Most opportunities are with central buying departments, often located in London and in other large cities.

Where are vacancies advertised?

Vacancies are advertised in local/national newspapers, on recruitment and employers' websites, and on Find a Job (www.gov.uk/jobsearch).

Social media websites, such as LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook, are a great way to network, find vacancies and get in contact with possible employers. Make sure that your profile presents you in a professional manner that will appeal to potential employers.

Take a look at our General Information Article 'Finding Work Online'.

Entry Routes and Training

Entry routes

Many entrants have a degree or HND, often in business studies.

It might be possible to enter as a Junior Buyer or Assistant Buyer with A levels or through an Intermediate Level Apprenticeship or Advanced Level Apprenticeship in purchasing and supply management. You could then progress to a buying post after gaining experience. Higher Apprenticeships might also be available in your area.

A small number of universities and colleges of higher education offer degrees and foundation degrees in purchasing

and supply, or supply chain management.

Training

Training schemes vary according to employers and are largely on-the-job, with part-time study on a day-release basis.

Professional qualifications for people working in purchasing are obtained through the examinations of The Chartered Institute of Purchasing & Supply (CIPS). These can be studied in several ways, including part-time or by flexible learning at a number of colleges, or by distance learning.

CIPS offers five qualifications in purchasing and supply, from the certificate to the professional diploma.

Relevant courses or experience might provide exemptions from certain qualifications or units. A small number of universities offer degree or postgraduate courses that are accredited by CIPS. Contact CIPS for further details.

A great way to get into this career is through an internship. Take a look at our information article 'Internships', for more details.

Progression

Buyers can progress to Senior, Manager and Director posts.

Work Experience

Some entrants have developed relevant skills in retail/wholesale or sales, or as a Purchasing Assistant.

Qualifications

For entry to a degree course, the usual minimum requirement is:

- 2/3 A levels
- GCSEs at grade C/4 or above in 2/3 other subjects

You are likely to need GCSEs in English and maths at grade C/4 or above.

Alternatives to A levels include:

- BTEC level 3 qualifications (a subject such as retail, retail operations, or retail knowledge, will help you to stand out from the crowd)
- the International Baccalaureate Diploma

However, course requirements vary so check college/university websites very carefully.

Some universities accept the Welsh Baccalaureate as equivalent to 1 A level.

Adult Opportunities

Age limits

It is illegal for any organisation to set age limits for entry to employment, education or training, unless they can show there is a real need to have these limits.

Skills/experience

Some entrants have developed relevant skills in retail/wholesale or sales, or as a purchasing assistant.

Intermediate Level Apprenticeships, Advanced Level Apprenticeships and Higher Apprenticeships in Purchasing and Supply Management might be available in your area.

Access courses

If you don't have the qualifications needed to enter your chosen degree or HND course, a college or university Access course (for example, Access to Business) could be the way in.

These courses are designed for people who have not followed the usual routes into higher education. No formal qualifications are usually needed, but you should check this with individual colleges.

Distance learning

There are degree and postgraduate courses in business available by distance learning.

The Open University offers degrees in business and management.

The Chartered Institute of Purchasing & Supply (CIPS) offers a range of relevant qualifications by distance learning.

Birmingham City University offers a postgraduate degree in International Logistics and Supply Chain Management, by distance learning.

Further Information

Contacts

- **Apprenticeships: Get In. Go Far**
National Apprenticeship Service (NAS)
Tel: 0800 015 0400
Email: nationalhelpdesk@findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk
Website: www.apprenticeships.org.uk
- **Open University (OU)**
Tel: 0845 3006090
Website: www.open.ac.uk
- **Inside Careers**
Specialists in graduate careers
Address: Unit 6, The Quad, 49 Atalanta Street, Fulham, London SW6 6TU
Tel: 020 7565 7900
Website: www.insidecareers.co.uk
- **National Skills Academy for Food & Drink**
Sector Skills Council for the food and drinks industry
Email: info@nsafd.co.uk
Website: www.improveltd.co.uk
- **Tasty Careers**
Food and drink careers
Email: info@tastycareers.org.uk
Website: tastycareers.org.uk
- **People 1st**
Address: 4th Floor, 93 Newman Street, London W1T 3EZ
Tel: 020 7462 5060
Email: info@people1st.co.uk
Website: www.nsaforretail.com
- **Chartered Institute of Purchasing & Supply (CIPS)**
Address: Easton House, Church Street, Easton on the Hill, Stamford, Lincolnshire PE9 3NZ
Tel: 01780 756777
Email: info@cips.org
Website: www.cips.org
- **Graduate Guide to Procurement**

Publisher: Chartered Institute of Purchasing & Supply (CIPS)

Website: www.graduateprocurement.com

- **The Buying Game**

Publisher: Chartered Institute of Purchasing & Supply (CIPS) and Traidcraft

Website: www.thebuyinggame.org

- **Careers Wales - Welsh Apprenticeships**

Tel: 0800 028 4844

Website: ams.careerswales.com/

Related Careers

- Retail Buyer
- Procurement Manager
- Supply Chain Manager