

## Press 3 for graduate jobs in call centres



Jack Grimston

“HELLO, I’ve got a 2:1. How may I help you?”

Call centres, once seen as the sweatshops of the British economy, are being flooded with job applications from university leavers who have found that traditional career opportunities wither in a recession.

Hays, a recruitment agency for call centre staff, said the number of new graduates seeking jobs as operators had trebled in the past year. Thousands of this summer’s graduates are now thought to be applying for jobs through Hays and other firms.

Those which have seen a surge in graduate applications for call centre jobs include O2, the mobile phone provider, and Denplan, the dental health insurer. Cambridgeshire county council has reported a similar trend.

- [Numbers cut on graduate training schemes](#)
- [BT suspends graduate recruitment programme](#)

Vacancies for degree-level jobs have fallen 25% in the past year, according to the Association of Graduate Recruiters, while some economists have warned that those aged 18-25 risk becoming a “lost generation” with nearly 1m of them already unemployed.

The fear of joblessness has led growing numbers of university leavers to enter careers not traditionally seen as suitable for those with a degree.

The call centre industry, which employs more than 900,000 people in Britain, insists that the boom in graduate interest is not simply a result of the recession but shows that being a phone operator dealing with customers is seen as a possible route to a high-flying career.

It has also continued to expand throughout the recession, despite the trend in recent years for companies to locate call centres in countries with cheap labour, such as India.

Peter Mooney, head of operations at Holiday Extras, which specialises in selling pre-booked airport car parking and hotels, said he had had 250-300 applications for 17 vacancies at the company's telephone sales centre near Hythe, Kent. They have included graduates from universities such as Leeds and York.

He added that the quality of applicants would mean a highly educated call centre workforce.

"It is partly because of the recession," said Mooney.

"But we expect some of the graduates to stay with us.

A lot will go via the call centre for a couple of years and will then be poached by other departments."

Elsbeth Hutchinson, 22, a Holiday Extras employee, graduated from Christchurch Canterbury University this summer with a psychology and history degree.

"When I first graduated, I was initially thinking I wasn't going to stay here long and I would go elsewhere and the recession wouldn't hold me back, but since then I've changed my mind."