

## Retail work:

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Retail is an important industry, employing around three million people in the UK. It offers a wide range of careers and this leaflet gives an overview of the main opportunities available at various levels. Jobs range from those requiring very few qualifications, to those at degree level.

Retail businesses range from large chains dealing in high-tech goods, to small convenience stores.

### Some things to think about:

- Retail can give you the chance to carry over an interest into your working life. If you enjoy reading, you might be able to get a job in a bookshop, or, and if you love fashion, you could find an opening in a clothes store.
- You need to enjoy contact with people and have patience in dealing with demanding customers!
- There are clear training and career routes in larger companies.
- You need good communication skills and an awareness of customers' needs and expectations.
- There are a lot of jobs in retail that are behind the scenes, from warehousing to staff training.
- Large stores may have staff facilities, such as a restaurant.
- Weekend work is usually required but staff are given time off in the week instead. As some shops open long hours, you may have to work early/late shifts.
- There are opportunities for part-time and temporary/seasonal work.
- Staff spend a lot of time on their feet, so the work can be physically tiring.

The range of shops on our high streets and in shopping centres is constantly changing. Tough economic conditions in recent years have resulted in the closure of some well-known retailers and a change in our shopping habits. In some areas there's been a trend towards shopping locally for quality products. At the same time, there's been a spread in discount retailers like Lidl and Primark. The job opportunities available, therefore, also change and evolve.

Online shopping is a growth area. The jobs available range from those involved in building and developing websites, to digital marketing, buying, stock control and delivery. As well as organisations that deal only with online sales, most large traditional retailers also offer online shopping. TV shopping channels are another way of selling to the public. You may only see the presenter, but someone has to select, purchase and keep stocks of the goods shown, as well as handle payments, deliveries and returns.

### Types of store:

- Multiples - stores like Tesco, Primark, Asda - have branches all over the country.
- Department stores may be independent single-shop stores, or stores within larger groups such as John Lewis and House of Fraser. They are generally found in large towns and cities.
- Supermarkets - such as Aldi and Sainsbury's - have branches all over the country, but other chains are more regional. In the biggest stores there are managers specialising in either food or non-food items, with a general sales manager at the head.
- Small, independent shops cater for a variety of specialised and general needs. In specialist shops, staff need to know a lot about the goods they sell and the services they can provide.

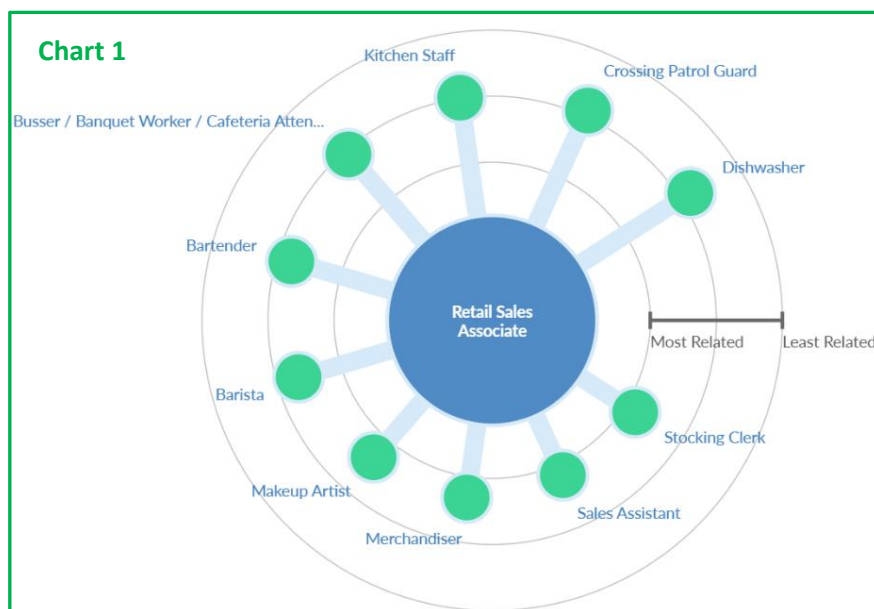
## What are the jobs?

**Supervisory and Management** staff need to be able to communicate with all sorts of people, as well as motivate and lead teams. Managers have to be commercially aware, and keep up with changing shopping trends in order to make sure their business continues to attract customers. In a small shop, the manager is likely to be responsible for all areas of the business including ordering stock, staff rotas and payroll, as well as working on the shop floor. Multiples have branch managers responsible for the day-to-day running of their store. They usually work to sales targets set by head office, and keep a close watch on sales figures. There are also area and regional managers, with overall responsibility for the stores in their patch. Within a large store, departmental managers are responsible for a particular section.

**Sales Assistants/ Athlete** (Nike store) - (*job titles do vary*) are the public face of retail - the ones who have direct contact with the customers and, as such, represent the store. They need to be enthusiastic, enjoy working with people and know about the things they sell. Depending on the store, the work can involve:

- Providing information or advice about products to customers
- Accepting payments - contactless, card and cash transactions
- Wrapping and packing goods for customers
- Dealing with returned items and complaints
- Arranging displays of goods inside the shop
- Collecting goods from the stockroom, checking stock levels and reordering when required
- Always making sure the shop floor is clean, tidy and attractive to customers.

**Chart 1 shows different starting roles including Sales Assistant:**



**Checkout operators** work mainly at till points in stores and supermarkets, usually using a scanner to read product bar codes so that information on purchases is recorded. They take payments, deal with loyalty cards or money-off vouchers, issue change if cash is involved, and may pack goods. Sometimes

**Replenishment assistants** (also known as shelf fillers or shelf stackers) are employed in large stores and supermarkets to check the shelves and record, often by electronic scanning, which items need

collecting from the stockroom. The shelves may be filled at night when the store is closed. Assistants check that the correct price is displayed and are responsible for cleaning the shelves and tidying away packaging. If they work when the store is open, they also help customers find things!

### **Other job opportunities:**

Within large retail companies there are other people working 'behind the scenes' at managerial and support level. You could also work in other areas for example, loss prevention and security, legal work or as a store designer.

**Buyers** seek out good suppliers and find the best deals. They need to know what will sell well in their area; mistakes can affect the company's profitability.

**Merchandisers** work with the buyer to get the right goods into the right stores in the right quantities, and at the right price. It involves looking at stock levels, buying trends etc and making predictions about what will sell.

**Visual merchandisers** deal with the physical layout and promotion of products, ensuring that the goods are displayed to their best advantage; visual merchandisers may also be involved in designing window displays.

**Marketing** - undertake a wide range of activities to ensure that goods are available at the right price and are being promoted effectively.

**Human resources** - dealing with staff recruitment, wage and reward policies, grievances etc.

**Training and development** - keeping staff up to date with new developments and producing induction and training programmes. May deliver the training themselves or bring in specialists.

**Finance** - the planning and control of the financial side of the business. This involves setting budgets, keeping financial records, paying suppliers etc.

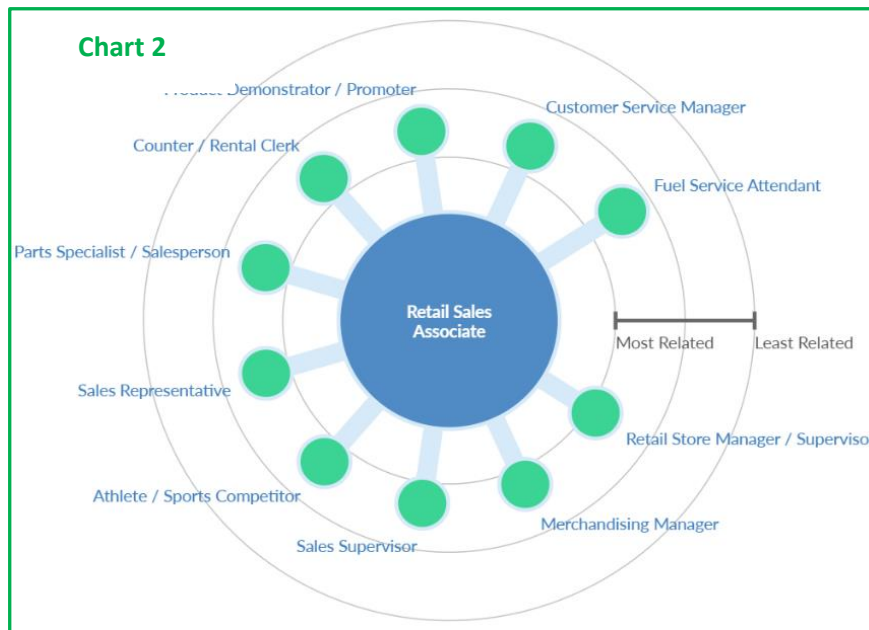
**Warehousing and stock control** - receiving and storing incoming stock, and making sure that there are sufficient goods available to fill the shelves without holding surplus stock that may be perishable or taking up space.

**Logistics** - dealing with the transportation of goods by land, sea or air.

**Computing** - digital systems are widely used to keep track of goods and sales, and for planning purposes. With the growing importance of 'e-retailing', specialists are also involved in developing and managing websites for online shopping.

**Personal shopping** - some large stores employ personal shoppers who devote attention to just one customer at a time. They show the customer around, suggest items suitable for their needs and offer advice. Related roles include gift list advisers who normally help couples draw up and monitor their wedding presents lists, and image consultants.

**Chart 2 shows progression opportunities from those in Chart 1:**



### Entry and training:

There are no set entry requirements for sales assistant, checkout and replenishment work, but for certain roles employers may ask for GCSEs or equivalent qualifications. A smart appearance and good communication skills are important. Relevant qualifications are available at every level. Some companies encourage staff to attend college part time or to undertake distance-learning courses to gain nationally recognised qualifications. There are also qualifications that can be gained mainly through assessment in the workplace. Full-time college courses may offer a route to employment or higher education. For example, courses in business are relevant and may include units on retail. It's possible to train in the workplace through an Apprenticeship.

In England, there are a number of relevant Apprenticeships including: at level 2 for retailers, at level 3 for retail team leaders, at level 4 for buying and merchandising assistants, and for retail managers, and Degree Apprenticeships in retail leadership and for assistant buyers/merchandisers.

Progression may be possible from one Apprenticeship level to another. Entry requirements are set by individual employers who will need to ensure that you have the ability to cope with the training, along with the right skills and qualities for the work.

For those with A level or equivalent qualifications there are relevant higher education courses (such as foundation degrees and degrees) in retail or business in general, and in more specialist areas of retail work, e.g. retail marketing, and fashion buying and merchandising. Find out more at [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com). Specialist qualifications/training courses are offered by organisations that represent particular types of shops/retail outlets, such as pet stores, opticians or pharmacies.

Many retail employers run their own management training schemes. Entry requirements vary, but enthusiasm and some relevant work experience are usually required. Most large organisations offer graduate management training programmes; any degree subject is normally acceptable, but a qualification in retail or a related subject would be useful.

## Prospects and pay:

In many retail companies, if you show the right potential there are opportunities for early promotion, e.g. responsibility for a particular range of products or for supervising staff. Experienced sales staff may also move to work in customer services, dealing with complaints, returned goods etc. Managers usually need to move to larger stores to gain promotion. If successful, there may be opportunities to progress to area and regional manager posts. Pay for sales staff may start at little more than the National Minimum/Living Wage, perhaps rising up to £20,000+ a year for supervisors. Starting salaries for graduate management trainees vary widely, but average around £26,000. Managers of smaller stores may earn around £25,000-30,000 and store managers with large retailers can earn up to £60,000; those in regional and head office management posts can earn even more. Employers often offer benefits such as staff discounts, subsidised canteens and bonuses.

