

BEFORE YOU SIGN ON THE DOTTED LINE ...

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You've attended the final round of interviews and they want to hire you! Congratulations! The Careers Service helps you unpick what you need to know about contracts.

Once you have been offered a job, your new employer will present you with a contract and letter of offer. It's important to know what you are signing up for.

Whilst most employers are very thorough about the contract signing stage, you also need to know what is required of you, so that you can ask informed questions and avoid making incorrect assumptions.

CAN I NEGOTIATE MY SALARY?

As a graduate with relatively limited work experience, you are usually not in a position to negotiate a salary. Benefits and basic salaries are usually predetermined and aligned to other employees at that level or are market related. Some industries set an agreed starting salary for all trainees regardless of the firms they are at.

Luan McArthur-Grill, Graduate Recruitment and Talent Sourcing Specialist Lead at Accenture, had this to say on salary negotiation:

"Graduates need to be mindful of the fact that they are just as in need of a job as the company is in need of them. We have very high levels of graduate unemployment in this country, and should a candidate decline based on salary, you can be sure there is another very eager graduate waiting in the wings to snap up the job!"

You are in a different position to negotiate your salary if you are already earning a salary, or have previous related experience.

WHAT ABOUT MY BENEFITS AND RIGHTS AS AN EMPLOYEE?

In the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA), your rights as an employee are explained. Guidelines on leave and work hours are included. An internet search will bring up plenty of detailed sites about the BCEA. An accessible summary can be found on <http://bit.ly/Zob6ef>.

Benefits, such as medical aid and pension funds, differ from company to company. It is important to ask your prospective employer about them and to find out whether or not they are deducted from your salary. Also, find out if your medical aid is with a prescribed company or do you have the option to choose your own.

LETTERS OF OFFER AND CONTRACTS

Remember that you should never proceed on a verbal offer without it being supported by a written document. Some organisations have a letter of offer and a separate contract, whilst others incorporate them in the same document. Whatever you sign, make sure it is also signed by someone in the organisation, and make sure you keep copies of documents with both signatures.

A CONTRACT AND/OR A LETTER OF OFFER SHOULD CONTAIN:

- » Start date and duration of employment (if a contract position)
- » A detailed job description and reporting lines (where applicable, name and title of manager)
- » A clause on duties and responsibilities
- » Location of company and job
- » Work hours and overtime policy
- » Salary package and payment method
- » Description of company benefits and eligibility guidelines
- » Leave entitlement
- » Notice period

- » Repayment agreement (if training is involved)
- » Confidentiality agreements (where applicable)
- » Clauses pertaining to contract breaches
- » In some cases, relocation package
- » Company representative's signature to ensure validity. ❖

Graduates sometimes misunderstand OR don't read the terms and conditions of their employment contract. They don't ask the relevant questions pertaining to their employment terms. Sometimes they don't understand the position they've applied for or been placed in.

*René Andries, HR Manager,
The Foschini Group*

The devil is in the detail and this often gets missed – if there is a deadline date by which to submit the signed contract, make sure you meet it. If they ask you to initial every page, initial every page. If they need certified copies of documents, don't send uncertified copies! This is the employer's first impression of you and your level of attention to detail – don't start off on a bad footing!

*Cindy Long, HR Manager,
KPMG*

A common mistake is misunderstanding the total cost to company of a salary and benefits package. A graduate should understand the base pay plus benefits value of their package. If you don't understand, rather ask!

*Azvir Rampursad,
Talent Officer, Unilever*

Graduates do not always read the 'fine print' pertaining to company-specific benefits like their study policy and eligibility thereof. They often make the assumption that all company benefits are standard and they are 'entitled' to certain perks from day one. It is not always the case and graduates should always ask questions (before signing on the dotted line) if they are uncertain.

*Luan McArthur-Grill,
Graduate Recruitment and Talent Sourcing
Specialist Lead, Accenture*