

The Retail Sector

As the economy recovers, new jobs will become available. The basic skills required for many of these jobs are expected to rise – it is estimated that by 2010 around 95% of all new jobs will be at Level 2 or above. These fact sheets have been designed to support people in making informed choices about future employment and / or training to make the best of these new opportunities.

The North East Retail sector

The Retail sector sells products to both the public and other businesses, and includes selling food and drink in supermarkets and food stores, selling medical and pharmaceutical goods, cosmetic and toilet articles, second-hand goods, and specialised goods through mail order catalogues and/or websites. It also includes the repair of personal and household goods.

Job roles across the Retail sector include customer service advisers, sales advisers, fashion/product designers, logistics and distribution coordinators, market researchers and marketers, retail managers, buyers, merchandisers, wholesalers and store manager/owners.

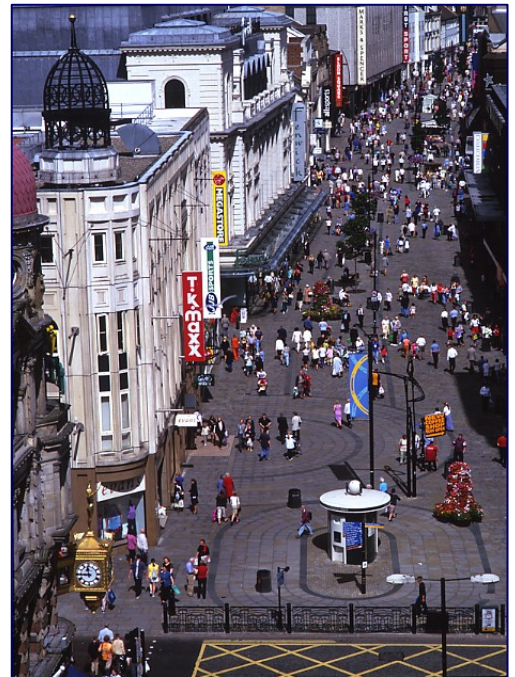
The North East Retail sector employs roughly one tenth of the entire regional workforce. The Metrocentre in Gateshead is one of the largest shopping centres in the European Union, although most retail businesses are small and employ less than 10 people. They are also important employers in rural areas.

The Retail sector has had mixed fortunes over recent months, and sales are currently lower than they were at the same time last year. The recession means that people are being more careful with their spending, and are spending less in shops and retail businesses.

Although a number of well known national stores such as Woolworths have shut down, many large supermarkets have created thousands of jobs nationally, which will benefit the North East Retail sector. Tesco has already announced plans to create 2,500 jobs in the region. Another encouraging sign is that Eldon Square, one of the biggest shopping centres in the region, has witnessed a significant increase in shoppers this year and is planning a huge expansion. Other developments include the Oval in Darlington and major retail expansion in Durham City as part of the 2020 Vision for the city's regeneration.

There is a definite trend towards a smaller number of large shops on the high street. Recent research has shown that retail sales in early 2009 were higher than expected. However, because sales have fallen in the North East, few Retail sector businesses – other than the large supermarkets - are actively recruiting at the moment. It may be some time before the previous high levels of consumer spending are seen again, meaning that large numbers of new Retail sector jobs are unlikely to be created rapidly in the future. However, jobs will arise as individuals retire or move to work in other sectors, leading to opportunities for more people to enter employment in the retail sector.

The increase in online retailing or 'e-tailing' means that people with IT skills will be more highly valued in the Retail sector in the future. Many retailers recruit more staff at busy times of the year, providing frequent opportunities for those interested in working in the sector, as well as for those looking for seasonal work.



Skills required in the Retail sector

The skills required in the Retail sector centre upon 'people skills' – the ability to connect with a variety of people and help to identify and find what they are looking for. Understanding of business principles is also useful, as is management level experience.



Employers in the industry look for skills including:

- Customer services skills
- Team working
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Managerial and supervisory skills
- Cash handling skills (including good numeracy)
- Communication skills
- E-commerce and ICT Skills

Because Retail sector businesses rely on staff with good people skills, it can be relatively easy to gain a job in the Retail sector even without previous experience. This makes it a good sector to develop a career in. Most types of qualifications are valued by employers including NVQs, Diplomas and Degrees. Common examples include the NVQ levels 1 and 2 in Retail Skills, and the NVQs in Sales, Customer Service and Retail Management. The Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) management qualification is also useful. Retail Apprenticeships provide work-based learning and development for 16-24 yr olds and the qualifications that Retail Apprentices work towards are widely accepted by retailers as confirmation of knowledge, understanding and ability to do the job.

Training provision for people interested in the Retail sector is good – in terms of both quantity and quality - in the North East and there are many opportunities to develop skills which will be in demand in the future. For example, Retail Apprenticeships provide work-based learning and development for 16 – 24 yr olds. Qualifications resulting from these apprenticeships include NVQ Level 2 in Retail Skills; Key Skills Qualifications (Communication Level 1 and Numeracy Level 1); and City and Guilds Certificate in Retailing Level 2.

The region also benefits from a Skills Shop – run by the National Skills Academy for Retail - located in Eldon Square. This is a one-stop walk-in skills shop that provides advice and tailored training for the retail sector.

For more information about the Retail sector please see the following websites:

- The National Skills Academy for Retail (www.nsaforretail.com)
- Retail Skills Shop (www.retailskillsshop.co.uk)
- Skillsmart Retail, the Sector Skills Council for the Retail Sector (www.skillsmartretail.com)