

Applying for Jobs

Continuing our informal series of practical advice, **Aileen Fyfe** offers some tips from her recent (and finally successful!) experience of applying for lecturing jobs (whether permanent or short-term contract).

Finding jobs to apply for

Don't just think 'history of science'. You've surely realised there are very few explicitly HSTM lectureships on offer, so search the jobs websites under 'history'; and your geographical and chronological specialism. (But see also my final point, about being convincing when applying for these broader positions.)

The cover letter

Think of this as a means of 'pitching' yourself. The letter should make clear what your research area is (preferably in broader terms that might interest a general history department); and what your research, teaching and administrative/professional experience is. Indicate what modules you might teach, or what programmes you might contribute to, and make it clear why you would be an asset to the hiring department. If a person specification has been supplied, indicate how you meet some of the more interesting requirements (things that might not be obvious enough from your CV). I remember being told that a cover letter should be no more than two pages; I'm now a fan of even greater brevity for packing maximum punch.

The CV

Like the covering letter, you want this to be clear, easy-to-read and an effective marketing pitch. You may have heard that academic CVs don't have to stick to the usual 'two-page rule', but don't be misled: you can have extra pages to list your publications, your conference/seminar papers, and your outreach work etc, but you should still aim to get the key facts on the first two pages. You don't need to include your gender or date of birth (or your hobbies or clean driving licence). You should consider headings such as: education; teaching experience (if you don't have any/much, list the fields you feel qualified to teach); awards/prizes/fellowships; professional activities (e.g. serving on BSHS

committees, or organising conferences); and, if you're currently in an academic job, consider headings for administrative responsibilities, graduate/research supervision and external funding awards (give the grant values!). As you gain experience, it becomes more of a challenge to fit all this on two pages, so it's worth being ruthless about more distant or low-level items in the interests of an effective opening to the CV.

Research statement

You may be asked for a statement of your current, past and future research interests, or you may choose to include one (it can be a way of keeping your covering letter from getting too long, especially if you have more than your PhD project to talk about). If no word limit is mentioned, keep it to one page. Try to make your past and current projects seem organically related; and make sure you have some future plans.

Names of referees

You usually need three referees, which, for most junior academics, usually means your current head of department, your PhD supervisor and someone else who ideally comes from a different institution (or country!) from the other two. You might select different referees for different applications, as a way of demonstrating your appeal to different audiences (e.g. history of science, British history, Victorian studies, cultural history). Always brief your referees, so they know what sort of a job they're trying to write you into.

Application form

Most universities now have standardised application forms, which tend to be the most time-consuming part of the whole application because they're usually designed to cover all possible university roles and they often ask you to repeat things that are on your CV. If it has to be sent as hard-copy, do type it (I'm amazed how many applicants to my own university handwrite these forms!).

Online applications

Many universities now let you apply electronically. It may be a case of emailing a set of attachments to the HR department, but it often involves an online web-form. If emailing or uploading documents, convert them to PDF first to minimise the chances of your careful formatting being garbled by someone else's computer. Beware of text boxes which allow only a limited number of words or characters, and be aware that you might be allowed to upload only one document. If you're only allowed one document, you'll have to combine your covering letter, CV, list of publications, etc, into a single document, and that can be a formatting nightmare. Ideally, convert each document to PDF and then merge the PDFs (you can download free software for these sorts of tasks, e.g. PDFill Tools). Never be tempted to leave an online application until 5pm on the day of the deadline!

And finally, some longer-term tips...

If you're job-hunting over a prolonged period, there are some ways in which you can make yourself more convincing as an applicant for non-HSTM jobs. If, for instance, you're going to claim to be a British historian, you should consider teaching some modules that look like British history; publishing articles in the appropriate journals; and going to different conferences. If you routinely present at BSHS, publish in BJHS and give modules on the Scientific Revolution, it will be difficult to convince a hiring department that you can teach beyond your specialism and have research interests that mesh with non-historians of science!

Good luck!

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