

PROFESSION BRIEF – HUMAN RESOURCES



1. What this job actually is

- Human Resources professionals manage the employment relationship between an organisation and its employees.
- Day to day work includes recruitment, onboarding, contracts, performance management, employee relations issues, policy advice, and compliance with workplace law.
- The role often involves handling complaints, conflict, restructures, and sensitive conversations, not just “people and culture” initiatives.

2. Where this role typically works

- Private companies across all industries including construction, health, retail, finance, mining, education and tech
- Government departments (local, state, federal)
- Not-for-profit organisations
- Large corporations with dedicated HR teams
- Small to medium businesses where HR may be a standalone role
- Labour hire firms, recruitment agencies, and consulting firms

3. How people usually get into this role

- Complete a Bachelor degree in Human Resources, Business, Commerce or Psychology
- Start in entry-level roles such as:
 - HR Administrator
 - HR Assistant
 - Recruitment Coordinator
 - Payroll Officer
- Progress to HR Advisor, HR Business Partner, or HR Manager roles with experience

The most direct pathway into HR roles is through relevant study combined with entry-level administrative or recruitment experience, which aligns with employer expectations for practical exposure to workplace systems.

4. Alternate or less-traditional pathways

- Career changers from:
 - Administration or office management
 - Recruitment or talent acquisition
 - Operations or line management
 - Industrial relations or union roles
- Leveraging experience in:
 - Managing staff
 - Rostering and workforce planning
 - Handling complaints or disciplinary matters
- Internal transitions from another department into HR

5. Qualifications and training

- **Required:** No mandatory licence in Australia, but employers usually expect relevant tertiary study
- **Common qualifications:**
 - Bachelor of Business (HR major)
 - Bachelor of Commerce
 - Graduate Certificate in Human Resources

- **Professional membership (optional):** Australian HR Institute (AHRI) certification
- Experience can substitute for formal study in some organisations, especially in smaller businesses

6. Skills that matter in practice

Technical skills

- Knowledge of Fair Work Act and employment legislation
- Award and enterprise agreement interpretation
- Recruitment processes and workforce planning
- HR systems (HRIS), reporting and documentation

Transferable skills

- Clear written communication
- Conflict resolution
- Interviewing and questioning skills
- Organisation and attention to detail

Often underestimated

- Emotional resilience
- Ability to stay neutral in high-conflict situations
- Comfort with documentation and procedural compliance

7. Interests and traits that fit well

- Comfortable working with policy and structure
- Interested in workplace dynamics and behaviour
- Able to manage confidential information
- Calm under pressure
- Struggle likely if you avoid conflict or want everyone to like you

8. “This job is for you if...”

- You can have difficult conversations without taking things personally
- You are comfortable applying rules consistently
- You like structured processes and documentation
- You can balance empathy with business needs
- You understand that HR represents the employer, not individual staff
- You are prepared for administrative workload, not just strategic work

9. This role may NOT suit you if:

- You avoid conflict or difficult conversations
- You prefer creative or unstructured work
- You are uncomfortable enforcing policy
- You want a purely “people-focused” role without administrative load

10. Things people are often surprised by

- A significant portion of the job is compliance and paperwork
- Early career salaries can be moderate compared to expectations
- You may be involved in redundancies, terminations, and investigations
- Progression to strategic roles usually requires several years of operational experience

11. Labour market reality

- HR roles are generally competitive at entry level, especially in corporate environments
- More opportunities exist in:
 - large organisations
 - government
 - high-turnover industries (e.g. retail, healthcare)

- Progression depends heavily on:
 - experience handling complex employee relations matters
 - exposure to restructures and investigations
- Contract and short-term roles are common early in career

12. Useful next steps for exploration

- Speak to an HR Advisor or HR Business Partner about their daily workload
- Review Fair Work Ombudsman resources to understand legislative scope
- Request to sit in on a recruitment panel or observe onboarding processes
- Explore a short course in employment law or workplace investigations
- Ask a local business how they currently manage HR and what challenges they face

This brief is based on:

- industry insights from HR practitioners
- general labour market trends in Australia
- publicly available information on HR career pathways

Information is current as of March 2026 and reflects industry insights and available data at that time.

This brief is designed to support career exploration. Experiences in HR can vary significantly depending on organisation size, industry, and role scope.

More career exploration resources at [curatedcareers.com.au](https://www.curatedcareers.com.au)