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Consulting Industry Insights

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Introduction

This publication has been created with the intent to provide resourceful insights into the process of recruitment for the consulting industry. We have had the wonderful opportunity to speak with six individual Queen's students and alumni to gather a look into their stories of recruiting and their advice for those hoping to pursue consulting sometime in the future.

We hope that all Queen's students are able to take away invaluable information from this guide and feel better about their personal journey in recruiting. Overall, we hope that each individual story will provide readers with a lesson for learning to take with them in whichever path they decide to choose.

Sincerely,
CREO Publications

Bain & Company

A Conversation with Callum Dye



Callum Dye, Commerce '23

Can you share the interview structure in the recruitment cycle?

Regarding the accelerated recruiting cycle, the process for Bain and BCG were very similar. In Bain, there are two pure case interviews and one behavioural in the second round. Whereas for BCG, the second round is two hybrid interviews where they combine the behavioural and case.

How did you prepare for the interviews?

I knew from the beginning that I wanted to start my preparation quite early. I was fortunate to have my internship start a bit late, so I used the first month of summer to begin my case prep. I first tried to focus on "what is a case and how do I do a case?" I used resources such as the LOMS Podcasts by Victor Cheng to really develop this fundamental understanding. I would practice the specific components, such as mental math, structuring, etc.... before going and doing an entire case. I then did my first five full cases with upper years who had successfully gone through MBB recruiting in the past. This helped me get targeted feedback early on, and I kept track of all of this feedback to determine my pain points and where I was strong. Once I felt comfortable, I contacted my buddy network and did case prep with friends. Overall, I only had to do 20-25 cases, primarily because I focused on building this fundamental understanding before going and doing full cases. This process was for both Bain and BCG, but I focused more on natural resources and PE cases for Bain and financial institutions and consumer cases for BCG. Bain was also significantly more math-heavy. In terms of behavioural, BCG was a lot more situational-based questions, but Bain was completely different. Bain really wants to know who you are as a person and what motivates you, so they will ask questions to dig deep into these core ideas. While the questions may be slightly generic, they require some thought, and you should prepare yourself for how you would like to express yourself to the interviewer.

Bain & Company Cont.

A Conversation with Callum Dye

How did you approach networking?

No matter what others say, networking will only help you. One thing to point out is that networking in consulting is more quality than quantity. Having a few strong connections that you've had multiple chats with can benefit you in the recruitment process, and they can provide you with some recommendations and tips. It also provides you with the possibility of casing with people at the firm, but this is a connection that you must develop before the recruitment cycle begins, so it's essential to target your networking early on.

What advice would you give to those who are going through the process?

The one thing I would say about MBB and recruiting for consulting is that there are tons of opportunities, not only at different firms, but also at different times. Third year recruiting is only the beginning. The class size essentially doubles after with full time recruiting and there are still experienced hire opportunities. These firms are growing extremely quickly, which will only lead to an increase in opportunities. In terms of stress, I believe it is a symptom of not being prepared. If I did not feel prepared, it would have led to significantly more stress, but knowing that I did everything I could helped alleviate this pressure. Staying disciplined and tactical with my preparation allowed me to feel a sense of excitement going into the interviews to display the knowledge and skills I developed. Also, worst case scenario, if you put in the effort to develop your skills and invest in the process, whether you are successful or not, you will come out on the other side as a smarter individual and that in itself will help you down the road.

BCG

A Conversation with Avina Patel



Avina Patel, Commerce '23

How did you approach recruiting?

My approach was a little unstructured; I did not have a specific idea of where I wanted to work, but I knew some firms had a lot of values that excited me. I had considered applying to all MBB firms but only ended up applying to BCG. The accelerated and fall recruiting timelines steered me towards BCG but most firms have a similar schedule. Considering this, I didn't want to put all my eggs in one basket and knew I had a lot I wanted to work on in terms of case prepping and feeling confident. Therefore, I only applied to BCG because it was the best timing-wise and thought I would maybe do other applications in the fall. I applied at the end of June and did interviews in July, which is also when I completed all of my preparation. It was all condensed into a short period, which was stressful but also helpful as I got to put my head down and really learn about how the casing and consulting world works at once. I spoke with many people through networking with various firms, and although everyone was super kind and supportive, I felt most supported and inspired by BCG alumni due to their culture and fit. From speaking to people, it seemed as though a heavy emphasis was placed on mentorship, which meant a lot to me. At the end of the day, all the firms are amazing in terms of opportunities, but BCG turned out to be the best fit for me.

What are your recommendations for networking and reaching out to firms?

Interestingly enough, I went to as many Queen's events with MBB representatives (ie. firm days) as I could but ended up only coffee chatting one person at BCG. I think a lot of people see networking as a numbers game, which is a misconception - quality should be prioritized over quantity in my opinion. The reason I only spoke to one person was because I approached it [networking] in a way where I did want to leverage my resources, such as the various events hosted by Queen's, but did not need to talk to a lot of people.

BCG Cont.

A Conversation with Avina Patel

One thing I wanted to do while networking is that I wanted to make both parties' time worth it and make genuine connections. I wasn't speaking with alumni and firm representatives for the sake of it, or for the sake of speaking to as many people as possible but rather connecting with people I thought I could genuinely build relationships with. My recommendations would be to utilize the resources provided to you (OCR, firm days etc.) because it goes to show that you don't need to be on a specific club to meet cool people. I did not have it at the time, but I would also highly suggest leveraging any club networks you may have. Also, a quick google search can help you find anyone, so find people doing things that excite you and reach out!

During your interview, did anything surprise you? What is it like once you receive an offer?

Casing is pretty predictable, but I didn't really prep for a specific level of difficulty and what it would be like to case with someone who has more contextual experience. For example, in one of my interviews, the partners had already worked through the case that I was given. In this case, the process was more like picking my brain to understand my thought processes and creativity rather than traditional casing skills. It wasn't anything like producing a very specific answer but rather chatting through a problem. When you case on your own, you usually develop a rubric in your head (structure, math etc.), so personally, I didn't prepare as heavily for that level of discussion, but it was great learning, nonetheless. Even though it was scary, I think this process helps the team identify an interviewee who can just case well and someone who can put aside the mental rubric of casing and remain present in the interview. If you are successful and receive an offer, there is an immediate influx of support. I went through a second cycle of reaching out to people I had spoken with earlier in my recruiting cycle to thank them for their time and provide an update about how the process had gone. For me it was virtual, but the firm had social events where leaders came together, and there were a lot of cool opportunities to help refocus your mindset into the upcoming summer. Going in, I was very interested in social impact, and sustainability but was also open to anything new in terms of being staffed on projects. Overall, between getting the job and starting - it is quite stress-free.

BCG Cont.

A Conversation with Avina Patel

What else would you like others going through this process to know?

I believe it's also important to steer away from glamorizing certain aspects of recruiting. My experience with recruiting was not pretty – only the result that people hear about. I had a lot of anxiety, felt overwhelmed, and dealt with imposter syndrome during the application process and still feel it on the job even now. This is not a unique experience; however, it should be spoken about more. During recruiting, it's easy to compare yourself to others, and even easier to focus on the negative aspects. I try to be transparent about my experience, and I remember feeling very incapable at some points. To overcome this, I would remind myself that everyone is on a different timeline, and that no matter the outcome, I would be learning. Also, I made sure to remind myself that MBB/Consulting isn't the end of the world, and it doesn't make anyone better than others or indicate a certain level of intelligence. Some of the smartest people I know are on different paths, and there is no shortage of wonderful opportunities out there that are also just as good if not better for you.

Kearney

A Conversation with Noah Faulkner



KEARNEY

Noah Faulkner, Commerce '22

What was your recruitment process like and how does Kearney differ from MBB firms?

Overall, I had a really good recruitment process. The difference among them was mainly between the rounds. So, Bain and BCG have candidates do two cases in the first round and then two more in the second round, followed by a partner behavioural. I found Kearney, as a firm, placed a lot of emphasis on teamwork, which is why I think they have candidates do one case and a full behavioural in the first round instead, and then they have a similar second round. One cool thing about Kearney is that they have a global staffing program, so interviewers can be from any of their offices. Most firms will have interviewers from the local office, so in this case, Toronto; however, my Kearney interviewers were from Texas and NYC, while my final partner interviewer was from Toronto. I found that Kearney put heavy emphasis on their behavioural interviews, which is because they really care about how you will fit into their team and want to solidify that aspect. Case-wise, the decks and difficulty level were around the same, and because they are interviewee-led, you have to drive the cases yourself. During the application process, Kearney is known to be searching for uniqueness - they may not care much about where you have interned in the past. I honestly had a great experience in all of the interviews, and everyone was super nice.

How did you prepare? Would you have done things differently looking back?

By the end of all of my case prep, I probably went through 80-100 cases. Some people have a certain number they want to do, and some say you can overdo it, but it took so long for me through all the processes, so I just kept going through them. I wouldn't have changed anything that I did in terms of casing, but I would have changed my mindset going into recruiting.

Kearney Cont.

A Conversation with Noah Faulkner

Sometimes I would go into interviews feeling worked up and wondering if I had done enough. Looking back, feeling unprepared is going to be okay because you are never going to know all of the possible cases you may receive. It's normal to feel that way even if you have prepared a lot, and I think I would have tried to be calmer in that situation. Other resources that helped me through casing included Prepp'd, which is something I recommend and doing a lot of mental math practice. A case interview has so many variables, and there are many really great candidates that do not get interviewed. If you get an interview or even make it to final rounds, you are supposed to be there because it's just about the hand you get dealt - some people get cases they know everything about, and others may get cases they have not a single idea about. I don't think I would change anything about my experience except accepting the fact that most of the process is out of your hands. If you have put in the work, and it didn't work out, then it's unfortunate; however, it is what it is.

How did you approach networking, and did that play a role in choosing Kearney?

I never did networking for any other industry, such as finance or tech, but my experience networking for consulting was truly invaluable. I think networking is important for two reasons: first, you get to truly understand the person you are talking to and their experiences. Learning about the kinds of projects they have worked on helps provide a better understanding of how the process at a particular firm works, which can aid in helping figure out if you genuinely want to work at these specific companies. A good way to approach reaching out to people is going on LinkedIn and filtering through categories to find people who are recent alumni. Those who are currently 1-3 years out of school will likely be the ones to know the current workings of the application process, review your resume, and tell you about the new-grad experience working at these firms. Coffee chats and calls are always good, and it's even better if you can join clubs with strong, built-in alumni networks. Culture-wise, both companies were amazing, and the people were very nice all-around. However, there were two primary reasons that I ultimately chose Kearney. One of those reasons was the global staffing model that Kearney employs. As I mentioned above, project teams can be formed locally or globally, and my team members can be from any city Kearney operates in. Coming back from exchange, I had the biggest travel bug, and I knew Kearney would allow me to travel the world and meet as many people as possible. In combination with the type of work Kearney specializes in, which is high-level strategy with retailers and sports companies, I thought Kearney aligned better with my goals for the future.

Kearney Cont.

A Conversation with Noah Faulkner

How did you deal with other opportunities not working out, and what would you say to those facing a similar situation?

This was a big thing for me because I didn't get MBB offers going into my third-year summer, which felt like the world was ending. However, I got another really amazing opportunity with Deloitte, which was good. I tried again for full-time MBB roles, but it didn't work out; regardless, I got an offer for Kearney, which turned out really well. The biggest thing is that in the bubble of Queen's and Commerce specifically, it's like you feel pressure from all around you. It can feel like you've failed if you aren't at those top companies and in those top roles, which is what I experienced. For me, the biggest reality check was talking to friends from home. I would be talking to them about how I didn't get an offer at BCG, for example, and they would be like, "Dude, what the heck is a BCG?". It really put into perspective that a total of 50 people might care about what those three letters mean, but getting absorbed in the bubble makes it feel so much worse. There is an aspect of luck in everything, and you really have to think about the fact that long-term, your first job out of university frankly won't matter. It isn't the end all be all because there will always be future opportunities where you can try again until it does work out. There are also so many successful people out there who have done anything but MBB consulting, so take it as it is - if they don't take you, then it's their loss.

McKinsey & Company

A Conversation with Adam Trotman



McKinsey
& Company

Adam Trotman, Commerce '24

Can you share your recruitment experience and why you chose McKinsey?

Firstly, what drew me to consulting, in general, was my interest in entrepreneurship. The versatility and the opportunity to work on a variety of engagements ultimately led me to decide that consulting was the right fit. I then asked myself which firms provided me with the best opportunity to be exposed to the type of work that I'm interested in, and reputation was also an important factor that I considered. What drew me to McKinsey specifically was the sophomore program, which essentially allows me to work for McKinsey in my second-year summer and explore something else I'm interested in for my 3rd-year summer before coming back full-time. As someone interested in start-ups, I see this as a massive advantage of working with McKinsey. The firm also works with start-ups and green tech companies, putting it at the top of my list.

How did you approach networking?

I first reached out to those I was friends with, including CREO members and people I got in contact with throughout my time on SBBA. For those who don't have these networks through extracurricular clubs, I recommend reaching out to people who have been at McKinsey for 2-3 years and are specializing in an area that you have a desired interest in joining. Typically, it is possible to find what area the business analysts are specialized in through their LinkedIn activity or simply reaching out. You can reach out for a coffee chat by sending an article related to their field and finding unique ways to express your enthusiasm in their area of expertise. While they may not all answer, once you get one person, they can be a valuable resource in connecting you with others.

McKinsey & Company

A Conversation with Adam Trotman

How did you prepare for interviews?

My interview process was pretty smooth. I took a slightly different approach as I didn't do a high number of cases. I built a solid foundation of the case fundamentals, and once I felt comfortable, I didn't do too many to keep a fresh and well-rested mind. While this may have worked for me, it's also important to remember your study style and how you best learn. If you are someone who needs a lot of repetition and practice, you should be using a similar approach to your casing and interview prep. My final piece of advice is to not get caught up with what other people are doing in their prep. In terms of the PEI, it is essentially one dragged-out story with many probing questions to find out how you deal with a challenge. McKinsey truly does place value on this, and you should not discount its importance since it is viewed equally to the case interviews. While you have prepared for tons of behavioural and you're simply trying to share who you are, it is important to think about how you're going to communicate this in your PEI in a way that best describes you to the interviewer.

How has your experience been at McKinsey?

Overall, my experience has been fantastic. The people have been phenomenal, and the intern class and the teams I've been placed on have exceeded my expectations. I believe the biggest thing that has allowed me to enjoy my experience is being honest with myself about what is to be expected. While the people are great and the work is interesting, there is still a standard that must be met, and it can be demanding at times, so being prepared for this allowed me to truly enjoy my time.

How would you recommend staying positive throughout the process and limiting stress?

I was able to reduce the amount of stress I had by knowing how I work and preparing based on this working style. While others may look like they're more prepared because they started casing months before you, if you work better closer to the deadline, you have to trust your process. Now if you don't land McKinsey or MBB, there are a ton of other great opportunities. Being the Commerce program, we always compare ourselves to others but not putting the weight of the world on these jobs is really important. Many people who are unsuccessful find another great opportunity elsewhere and if you still have an interest in McKinsey down the line, there are plenty of opportunities for full-time or experienced hires.

McKinsey & Company

A Conversation with Angie Tang



McKinsey
& Company
Angie Tang, Commerce '22

What was your recruiting process like?

I recruited for McKinsey twice – once going into my third year, and then again for full time. In my third year, I was debating between two very different pathways: consulting or law school. So, instead of participating in the summer recruiting cycle, I decided to write my LSAT. This meant that it was better for me to participate in the fall recruiting cycle. While I did not receive an offer the first time I went through the recruiting process with McKinsey, the consultants I met and the experiences they shared really stood out to me. Specifically, the consultants I spoke to were very emphatic about how effective McKinsey was at supporting their professional and personal development.

After spending a summer at another consulting firm, I solidified my understanding and interest in consulting which led me to consider going through the full-time recruiting process with McKinsey. I ended up reaching out to one of my interviewers from the previous cycle, who encouraged me to give the process another shot. For the full-time recruiting cycle, I applied during the summer and completed a total of 5 interviews - two in my first round, and three in my second round. Although not without stress, I really enjoyed the interview process as it was a great way to learn more about the firm and hear about the experiences of individual consultants.

McKinsey & Company Cont.

A Conversation with Angie Tang

How did you prepare for interviews?

Focusing more so on how I prepared for full time recruiting. Going into the interview preparation process, I aimed to be intentional about my preparation. Given that I had already gone through the recruiting process before, I focused on building on top of the basic fundamentals that I had developed. As a result, I prioritized quality over quantity making sure that each case helped me improve on an area of growth.

In terms of how this can be extrapolated as general advice, when it comes to preparation, I think it is really important to consider your learning style. Some may prefer doing more reps, while others might prefer to read up on guides before jumping into practicing. It's also important to remember that the first approach you try might not be what works best - don't be afraid to change your approach if it's not working!

During the final weeks leading up to my interview, I also worked to prioritize working on the behavioural portion of the interviews. McKinsey uses what's called a Personal Experience Interview (PEI) to give candidates an opportunity to share experiences. The PEI portion focuses on three character traits which are entrepreneurial drive, personal impact, and inclusive leadership. These are used to ask about experiences where the traits were specifically demonstrated. For my interviews, I liked to write out the stories I wanted to tell. In total, I prepared four stories and wrote about my experience, outlined the specific things I did, the results of my actions, and the key takeaways. I also spent some time practicing how to get through questions and predicting potential follow-up questions that would arise. It's important to not discount the behavioural portion of an interview as it is viewed as equally important as the case at any firm. Also, remember that it is important to communicate the impact that you've had throughout your experiences.

McKinsey & Company Cont.

A Conversation with Angie Tang

What would you tell those who feel daunted by this process?

My best piece of advice would be to approach the process as a learning experience. No matter where you are academically or professionally, there will always be opportunities, so prioritize showcasing that you are willing to learn because that is what firms are really looking for. Remember that there are people behind every firm logo that are incredibly willing to help, and that there are great resources for demystifying the process. Queen's alumni are also super willing to help - myself included - as we all benefited from help when we went through the process, and we're happy to pass it forward, so don't be afraid to reach out to them.

I think one thing that is especially important is to focus on yourself instead of what everyone else may be doing. Regardless of how well or how poorly someone does, it truly does not affect you, and as a result you should do your best to focus on your own practice and learning. Additionally, there is no point in comparing your progress because from the firm's perspective, it is more about meeting a bar or a standard rather than just filling a certain number of spots. Overall, remain intentional about the recruiting process and focus on yourself.

Oliver Wyman

A Conversation with Alex Hook



Alex Hook, Commerce '23

Can you tell us about your recruitment process?

Oliver Wyman has a slightly different recruitment timeline than other consulting firms. Applications and interviews occur in September, which allowed me to focus primarily on recruiting for Oliver Wyman. In terms of my approach, I knew that this firm weighs networking a bit more heavily than other firms, so I tried to focus on that early on. They want to determine if you're a good fit for the company, so they may pick apart your questions to dig into who you are and why you're interested through these coffee chats. For case prep, I started quite early since it was an accelerated process for other firms. In terms of the actual interview, it is very short, with only one round that consists of a 30-minute case and 30-minute behavioural. While it's nice that it's only one round, there is a bit of added stress because you need to be as sharp as possible and put your best foot forward. The biggest thing about being successful in the behavioural is understanding what makes Oliver Wyman different from the other firms such as MBB and playing to those differences. Also, OW weighs your CV extensively so making sure that you clean it up and quantify everything will help show how you provided value in your roles.

How did you approach case preparation?

I knew I wanted to go through recruiting pretty early on, so I started casing about 3 months before the recruitment cycles. Based on the way I learn, I found that doing a case top to bottom was not the best use of my time. I only did about 10 full cases to determine where my areas of strength and weakness are and based on these full cases, I allocated more time towards the areas that needed more work. Once I brushed up on those areas, it allowed me to go through full cases more smoothly, and it made me more comfortable.

Oliver Wyman Cont.

A Conversation with Alex Hook

What has your experience at Oliver Wyman been like?

There are four things I really like about Oliver Wyman and why I'm looking to return. This includes the type of clients and projects, their culture, their brand, and their compensation. OW covers many industries and subcategories, and this was something that I prioritized to maximize my learning opportunities. While everyone says they love the culture of the company they work for, I find it important to find the right fit for you personally, and I have been lucky to get that at OW. The firm also has a high level of expertise and execution in comparison to other high-tier firms. Sometimes, when in such a prestigious school, we feel obligated to pursue specific careers and companies, but it is essential to focus on what we truly want. Additionally, the salaries at OW are very competitive with other high-level firms such as MBB firms.

How did you manage the stress and pressure surrounding the process?

The biggest thing to acknowledge is that the decisions you make right now will not cement the path for the rest of your life. There are many opportunities down the line, and everything will work out how you want it to. You will naturally gravitate towards the type of work you enjoy and that interests you, so even if you don't land your desired job right now, you must believe there is another path that is right for you to lead you to your desired outcome. I also think that ensuring every hour you spend on case prep is valuable and productive because once you feel like you aren't improving your skills, it will only add a bit more stress. Being thoughtful and intentional with all your prep will reduce stress and make you feel more prepared.



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