



SHUKATSU - The Road to a Job in Japan

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The Road

The yearlong process that Japanese students must face in order to secure a position with companies in Japan is known as 'Shukatsu' (就活). 'Shukatsu' is the common shortened word of 'Shushoku Katsudo' (就職活動), meaning job hunting by college students in Japan.

The job hunting begins in the fall of the 3rd year of university and lasts until the early summer of 4th year, or in some cases longer. The process is lengthy, time consuming, and facing mounting pressures to adapt. Recent changes by corporations and some leading Japanese universities have clearly identified changes taking place in the near future.

In April of the 3rd year, as students start classes, they begin preliminary research into their own interests, skills, strengths, and possible career paths. Self-analysis testing is commonly undertaken to gain a better understanding of one's aptitude. Additionally, students begin approaching the "Career Centre" in their respective universities to ensure they are keeping abreast with upcoming seminars and events both on and off campus.

Industry-wide seminars are amongst the many events that are organized to attract students. These seminars are organized to attract and encourage students to learn and develop their understanding of the industry. It is hoped that this will assist students in writing meaningful application. Companies can eventually filter students enthusiastic to work in their own companies using these sorts of methods.

In 2011, Keidanren, the Japan Business Federation, has introduced new guidelines asking companies to delay their recruitment practices in order to allow students to focus on their studies. The new rules, enforced by a gentleman's agreement, will call on companies to begin recruitment in December of the third year.

It is hoped that by December of a student's 3rd year, they will have a strong grasp of the companies hiring, and the type of positions available. But as is common in Japanese recruitment, students will not be hired for particular positions; instead they are general new hires that will eventually find a role that suits the company, ideally but not necessarily, in line with the individual's strengths.

Between December and March, once a student has determined a list of companies they are interested in, they will submit an "Entry Sheet." This is similar to a cover letter in western countries, where students are asked to write essays on why they want to join the company - many companies utilize the "Entry Sheet" as the first round of the screening process. Determining the students motivations for joining the company and understanding how a candidate intends to connect their experiences and education to the company are of particular importance at this stage. It should be noted that the most recent DISCO survey, conducted in January 2012, revealed an average of 46.9 "entry sheets" submitted per candidate.

If a candidate meets the initial screening requirements, they will proceed to the next round of the recruitment process; invited to write tests and interview with the company. Most companies will conduct multiple rounds of interviews, with the final interview usually carried out by senior management or the CEO. Successful candidates will receive a *'Nai-naitei'* or informal offer. The informal offer will become a formal offer in October of the 4th year, under an agreement struck by Keidanren. This system was developed to ensure companies were not overly aggressive in their recruitment practices of university students. Students with a *'Nai-naitei'* can confidently expect a *'Naitei'* (formal offer) immediately following the Keidanren agreed upon date of October 1st.

Changes for the Future

The Shukatsu calendar is an integral part of the recruitment process for students, institutions, and industry. Recently, high-ranking institutions such as the University of Tokyo and Waseda University have announced they will align their school year with that of foreign universities, meaning a September start for classes. Japanese universities are increasingly focusing efforts on attracting international students – both for survival during the demographic shift and to compete for talent. This will once again affect the Shukatsu calendar and how and when companies will recruit students. As Japan embraces globalization, it is expected that further changes will ensue.



SHUKATSU Calendar - Job Hunting Steps for New College Graduates in Japan

