

Work Experience  
&  
Volunteering Guide

The advice in this publication is designed to help you plan your strategy.

Think about what you have read, turn it into action points and implement them.

Good luck!

**If you require a copy of this publication in large print or another format, please enquire at**

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## **Learning from Work: The importance of work and voluntary work experience**

### **Do employers really want work experience? Isn't a degree enough?**

These days being a graduate is no longer enough to secure a good job. With around 350,000 students graduating in 2013 there is a lot of competition for jobs and employers can afford to be choosy. Employers are looking for a wide variety of skills, often alongside related work experience.

### **What can I gain from work experience?**

You can:

- ☐ Develop the skills and experiences employers are looking for and show that academic achievements can be repeated in the work place;
- ☐ Experience the real world of work: know what it means to complete a job, to work under supervision and to relate to other employees;
- ☐ Show commitment and energy in finding and keeping work;
- ☐ Judge for yourself the type of work you do or do not enjoy doing and assess what you are good at;
- ☐ Take an opportunity to test out jobs and work environments to define and confirm career choices;
- ☐ Learn how to handle the transition from university to work;
- ☐ Make new contacts and develop networks;
- ☐ Make friends and have fun!

### **What skills, knowledge and experiences are employers looking for?**

The Graduate Prospects Website: [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) lists the most often sought after skills as:

- ☐ **Communication:** Ability to communicate orally, in writing or via computer / electronic means;
- ☐ **Team work:** Working well with others in order to achieve a common objective;
- ☐ **Leadership:** Being able to motivate and encourage others, whilst taking the lead;
- ☐ **Initiative:** Ability to see opportunities and to set and achieve goals;
- ☐ **Problem solving:** Thinking things through in a logical way in order to determine key issues. Creative thinking is useful;
- ☐ **Flexibility/Adaptability:** Ability to handle change and adapt to new situations;

- ☒ **Self-awareness:** Knowing your strengths and skills and having the confidence to put these across;
- ☒ **Commitment/Motivation:** Having energy and enthusiasm in pursuing projects;
- ☒ **Interpersonal skills:** Ability to relate well to others and to establish good working relationships;
- ☒ **Numeracy:** Competence and understanding of numerical data, statistics and graphs.

Prospects also states that, in addition to the skills listed above:

***'... employers like to see that applicants have some business awareness – having an insight into what is happening in industry or commerce and the impact this could have on the organisation.'***

To follow are just a few examples of the types of questions you can expect to find on the application forms of Graduate Recruiters:

- ☒ In terms of experience and/or ability, what strengths are you bringing to this career?
- ☒ What was your most beneficial period of work experience?
- ☒ Please describe an occasion where you implemented an improvement to make a job or a project more effective.
- ☒ Please describe a situation where you successfully communicated with and influenced others in order to reach a successful conclusion.

#### **What counts as work experience?**

Lots of things! There are many ways of gaining experience of work but the most obvious are the following:

- ☒ paid work (part-time/temporary/casual jobs, in term time or vacations);
- ☒ vacation placements (usually in the summer);
- ☒ placements/projects/electives as part of your course;
- ☒ voluntary work (either in the community or with an employer);
- ☒ international placements (e.g. teaching/coaching at summer camps);
- ☒ short taster visits or courses (usually 3 - 5 days);
- ☒ work shadowing;
- ☒ work done for student societies and the Students Union.

## Examples of Work Experience Opportunities

Placement Schemes – make sure to check entry criteria and deadlines

### 1. UCBC BLOG

[www.wblblackburn.wordpress.com](http://www.wblblackburn.wordpress.com)

### 2. Some External Schemes

☞ **Graduate Talent Pool:** <http://graduatetalentpool.direct.gov.uk> is a service set up by the government that matches graduates with internship opportunities. On this site you can search and apply for lots of internship vacancies posted by employers in the North West as well as other parts of the UK.

☞ **National Council for Work Experience:** [www.work-experience.org](http://www.work-experience.org) promotes work experience opportunities for the benefit of students and organisations. Check out the website for industrial placements and internships.

☞ [www.fledglings.net](http://www.fledglings.net) : offers industrial placements and graduate careers.

☞ **Shell Technology Enterprise Programme (STEP):** offers high quality project-based placements and is open to students (except first year) and recent graduates. This is a nationwide scheme, so you can specify where you want to do your project and the type of work you want (business, charity, environmental, manufacturing, IT, etc.). For students, projects typically take place over eight weeks during July and August. Entry is very competitive, but many UCLan students are successful:  
[www.shellstep.org.uk](http://www.shellstep.org.uk) .

☒ **International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (IAESTE):** provides science, engineering and applied arts undergraduates with training experience abroad relevant to their studies. There may be a small administration fee: [www.iaeste.org.uk](http://www.iaeste.org.uk) .

☒ **BBC Placements:** offer Work Experience across the UK. Centrally co-ordinated scheme with wide range of placements offered in all areas of the BBC. Placements are unpaid, and can last from a few days to 4 weeks. Applicants are advised to focus their application on a particular department and demonstrate a keen interest in the placement. Apply for placements up to 6 months in advance. **Competition for a placement is fierce with over 20,000 applicants each year.** The website lists where placements are available.

For students with disabilities there is a BBC paid work experience scheme called EXTEND – for details visit <http://www.bbc.co.uk/jobs/extend/> .

☒ **Civil Service:** <http://faststream.civilservice.gov.uk/> - you can apply for paid or unpaid work experience in a government department or agency. This will give you an insight into their work and way of working that will be invaluable when you come to make your long-term career decisions.

In addition, there are schemes through the Civil Service Fast Stream for students with disabilities and students from ethnic minority groups.

☒ **Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry:** provides information on a wide variety of companies that can offer part-time, full-time and work experience opportunities. See: <http://careers.abpi.org.uk>.

☒ **BT:** offers a variety of undergraduate placements in Business Management, Commerce, Engineering and Technology.

See: [www.btplc.com/careercentre/](http://www.btplc.com/careercentre/).

Relevant Professional Bodies can also sometimes provide details of opportunities, including vacancies and placements.

### **Regional Placement Sites**

The following regional websites include graduate vacancies and work experience placements:

<http://gradireland.com/graduate-jobs-> Ireland

[www.agcasscotland.org.uk/site.php?content\\_id=20](http://www.agcasscotland.org.uk/site.php?content_id=20) - Scotland

[www.graduatejobssouth.co.uk](http://www.graduatejobssouth.co.uk) - South England

[www.gowales.co.uk/](http://www.gowales.co.uk/) - Wales

[www.graduateadvantage.co.uk/](http://www.graduateadvantage.co.uk/) - West Midlands

[www.graduatesyorkshire.co.uk/](http://www.graduatesyorkshire.co.uk/) - Yorkshire

[www.graduatesforgrowth.co.uk](http://www.graduatesforgrowth.co.uk) - Edinburgh and the Lothians

Volunteering is an ideal way of developing skills, learning something new, making new friends and contacts and proving to an employer that you have the motivation and enthusiasm to do something worthwhile for free.

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☒ **Lancashire County Council** has Volunteer Hub which offers a wide variety of opportunities. For more information visit the website or email:

**lccvolunteering@lancashire.gov.uk.**

**[www.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/web/view.asp?Volunteer/20253](http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/web/view.asp?Volunteer/20253).**

☒ [www.do-it.org.uk](http://www.do-it.org.uk) – a database of local volunteering opportunities.

### **Speculative Applications and Networking**

It should be noted that you may also need to consider alternative approaches to developing work experience; making speculative applications and networking are two useful techniques.

The most common way of making a speculative application is through a CV and Covering Letter.

Top tips:

☒ Less is more! Focus on specific areas/employers;

☒ Tailor your application;

☒ Use a named person;

☒ Follow up – telephone a couple of weeks later.

***Prepare for your future today ....***

Networking is the ability to make and use contacts to help and advise you and is another excellent way to develop work experience opportunities; **tutors** for example, can potentially provide insights and advice.

### **Don't Just Do It – Record It!**

#### **Preparation**

Prior to applying for work experience, consider what you really want to achieve:

- ☒ Skills development;
- ☒ Technical knowledge;
- ☒ Variety of experiences;
- ☒ Responsibility;
- ☒ Training;
- ☒ Finding out about other careers.

Set yourself some goals that will help you. These goals should be specific, measurable, action based, realistic and set within a sensible time scale.

#### **Work Experience**

To help you prepare for completing those daunting graduate application forms and CVs and to help you out-perform others at interview, make sure that you record all your experiences, the skills developed, the responsibilities undertaken and with whom. It is so easy to undersell yourself because you have forgotten some vital examples from previous work experience.

One way of capturing this information is to build a portfolio and include a record sheet of experiences.

#### **The Portfolio**

Your portfolio should contain examples of work that you have done, eg. articles you have written for fundraising events or local newspapers, references from employers, or certificates from training days. You should have a section that contains the contact details of all the employers/voluntary organisations you've worked for, including the names of relevant individuals.

#### **The Record Sheet**

A simple record sheet can help you capture your experiences, the skills you used and the outcomes you achieved. Remember, a skill is not an activity - it is what you need to do to successfully carry out an activity; for example, successfully delivering presentations requires the skills of research, information handling, creativity, IT skills, oral and written communication and interpersonal skills. It may also have included team work and leadership skills. ***Prepare for your future today ....***

**Other Useful Resources**

The following web links have useful information including details of **international opportunities**:

[www.goinglobal.com](http://www.goinglobal.com)

[www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)