



Link-Up is written by higher education careers advisers and published by the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) to provide information to staff in schools and colleges who deliver HE and post-16 advice. It is designed both to keep teachers and advisers up to date on specific issues and help them prepare presentations.

Prospects for graduates

Graduate vacancies

The Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) has reported in its latest survey of 226 blue chip employers (Graduate Recruitment Survey 2009 – Summer Review) a steep fall in the number of graduate vacancies for 2009 graduates. The 24.9% fall from last year's figure has far exceeded the 5.4% decline predicted by AGR employers six months earlier, in its 2009 winter survey. This dramatic change is in sharp contrast to the steady growth experienced since 2004 up until last year (2008) when only a 0.6% growth in vacancies occurred.

The AGR breakdown of vacancies this year continues to show that despite experiencing cuts, accountancy and professional services provided the majority of vacancies (24.4%), followed by banking and financial services (13.6%). Almost all sectors faced reduced intake, though the survey showed particularly investment banking, but also construction, IT and engineering to be the hardest hit. In terms of location, 59.7% of AGR vacancies were in London and the South-East, followed by the Midlands at 9.3%. The national average graduate scheme starting salary for these employers has remained, as last year, at £25,000.

Competition for jobs revealed 48.8 applications per vacancy (compared to 30.7 last year) with almost half (47.7%) of total participants receiving more than 50 applications per vacancy. The quality of applications and attention to each step of the process has shown considerable improvement this year. Advice to graduates seeking work is to be flexible, proactive and submit more applications of a consistently high quality.

Looking ahead to 2010

More than half (53.4%) of AGR employers who took part in the above survey expect to recruit similar numbers next year. 25.9% anticipate growth, 14.5% a lesser intake, 1.4% no new graduates and 4.8% don't know. High Fliers Research Ltd (July 2009) also surveyed the top 100 graduate employers (as selected by students) who showed similar expectations for 2010. About half are aiming to at least maintain their current level of intake, one fifth to increase and less than a quarter stated the possibility of further reduction. Carl Gilliard, Chief Executive of the AGR has pointed out that 'very few employers have abandoned their graduate recruitment programmes altogether and most are likely to reinstate recruitment levels at the first sign of an upturn in the economy'.

Bear in mind that these two surveys are conducted with large blue-chip companies and therefore are not representative of the UK economy as a whole. Increasingly many students work for small or medium-sized businesses (SMEs) but this information is difficult to track. The recent introduction by the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills of the Graduate Talent Pool, a funded internship programme for graduates, is likely to be a lead provision as part of the government's 'Back Young Britain' campaign. Many regional development agencies play an important supportive role in providing regional opportunities for graduates, as well as the Mayor of London's new Graduate Employment website 'Helping Graduates into Work'. In addition, the newly introduced Raleigh Graduate Bursary Award is available offering, 10 week voluntary opportunities overseas for those seeking to gain experience of this kind. These are not just measures to

alleviate unemployment but a real chance to gain added skills to graduates and their CVs.

In these times of recession, media hype plays an important part and influence on student perceptions. As the situation changes, keeping abreast of reports and updates by university careers services will help. National graduate organisations aim to give realistic and up-to date messages to prospective, current students and graduates alike.

Fast forward to the future

The annual Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education Survey provides information of all UK graduates within six months of graduating. See the annual 'What do Graduates do?' publication for more information on the destinations of graduates at www.prospects.ac.uk/links/wdgd.

Approximately 50-60% of all graduate jobs in the UK are open to graduates of any discipline. Therefore, a tremendous range of opportunities are open to graduates that are not necessarily linked to their course of study. This does not mean you shouldn't give careful consideration to which university course you wish to do. You should be equally aware that for many jobs, obtaining a specific degree is essential. To research career options go to www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations, and for more information on your degree choices go to www.prospects.ac.uk/links/options.

Gaining work experience is highly valued by employers and also provides the insight and opportunity to find out first hand what that sector or role is really all about. This will help you decide if it is the right path for you to follow. It can dramatically improve your chances of finding a good career after university as work experience, and many other extra curricular activities, are an excellent way of evidencing and enhancing your employability skills.

Employability skills are much sought after by employers and the recent report 'Future Fit: Preparing graduates for the world of work' by CBI/Universities UK (2009), reinforces the need for such skills to be evidenced by graduates. Launching the report, the CBI Director General Richard Lambert highlighted the importance employers place on employability skills such as: self management, team working, customer awareness and problem solving, when recruiting graduates, "even more important during the recession, graduates need to be better equipped to compete in the increasingly tough jobs market". David Lammy, Minister of State for Higher Education & Intellectual Property added that "today's labour market is bringing home to students the need to take personal responsibility for developing the skills they need".

At university you will find many ways and means of developing your employability skills, either within your course curriculum or via many opportunities provided by different parts of the institution. The careers service, students union, job shop, placement services, and enterprise centre are just some of the providers you should look for from your early days at university. It's never too early... you may have already started gathering and developing your skills and experience. You can find more on the subject of work experience in the last section of this issue of Link-up, and at www.prospects.ac.uk/workexperience

What have you got to offer?

If you take a glance at the latest UCAS application form, you will quickly realise that, not unlike employers, universities want more than your paper qualifications. The 'Personal Statement' requires that you provide examples of your interest in the subject you are applying for, work experience, achievements, career plans, and social, sports and leisure activities. In the same way, you will quickly find that after university, employers will want much more than your degree certificate.

Universities and employers have for a number of years been interested in the way students use their time at university. The word 'employability' has been used to describe the way students become more employable by developing skills both from their course and through other activities on campus.

All this really means is that being a good communicator, having lots of confidence and ambition, being able to apply yourself to work, learn quickly and get on with people, will be vital assets when you go to university and later start a job.

If you get used now to the idea of making the most of your spare time, it will help you settle into the often crazy world of university, where you could run the risk of joining a silly hats

society, or become a leading light in the society of your choice - or you could start your own!

University will provide you with a wide range of opportunities, serious and light-hearted, to fill your time as you wish. Some courses run their own subject-related societies that arrange presentations by employers (offers of work experience may be made), visits to research centres to find out the latest developments in the field, as well as social events.

Other opportunities could involve the Students' Union. RAG (Raise and Give) weeks - or variations of this fundraising initiative, are fun and popular. Money is raised for charity, perhaps via a themed event where bucket rattling or other cash collection activities are the order of the day - or night.

Cultivating interests, holding down a part-time job, being involved in team sports, music, art and making things will all go towards making an impressive application to university. In the same way, continuing to develop your personal skills and creative talents at university could be the key to your future career success.

...probably more than you think

You may be leading an active social life with every minute of your leisure time filled with action and fun, alongside homework commitments of course. You may not realise how many useful skills you are developing during your spare time activities. Using and developing these skills in your own time may tell you something about the kind of person you are and then perhaps the kind of career you should be working towards.

Why not make a list of the out-of-school activities you are involved in? See what skills you could be using...

| Activity | Examples of skills developed |
|--|---|
| Work experience (school + other) | Punctuality, responsibility, team working, initiative |
| Socialising with friends | Art of conversation, ideas, mediation, self-discipline |
| Hobbies | Commitment, curiosity, skills training, use of time |
| Sport/music/art/drama | Dedication, patience, teamwork, enthusiasm, stamina |
| Computers | Manual dexterity and coordination, competition, technical skills |
| Reading | Concentration, calmness, energy, curiosity, imagination, knowledge |
| Travel/holidays | Planning, budgeting, organisation, cultural sensitivity, adventure |
| Looking after relatives (younger or older) | Leadership, patience, responsibility, sense of humour, empathy, initiative |
| Prefect | Communication, confidence, diplomacy, listening skills, responsibility |
| Voluntary work | Social conscience, reliability, motivation, caring, sharing, responsibility |
| Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme | Fitness, determination, self-belief, resilience, initiative, imagination |
| Own business | Creativity, innovation, communication skills, networking, image building |
| Languages | Intellect, cultural sensitivity, verbal communication, listening skills, interpreting |
| First aid/sign language | Sensitivity, communication skills, gentleness, practicality, memory |
| Driving | Consideration, competence, safety awareness, responsibility, care |
| Youth clubs, scouts, guides, church | Discipline, loyalty, commitment, team spirit, personal development |

Think ahead to the future

There are many ways and means of gaining, developing and enhancing your skills by seeking out new experiences enabling you to explore different opportunities. As well as gaining valuable insight and experience, these will also be valuable in creating and building your own CV.

Just some of the many ways of gaining experience are provided here, including gap year experience.

No substitute for experience

State of play

With increasing numbers of people entering higher education each year, the true value of a degree as a passport to a career will inevitably decrease. Sad but true. There is, however, a battle going on between graduate recruiters to become the 'employer of choice', by attracting the brightest and best regardless of age, health, ethnic origin or social background.

Employers offer school students, through scholarships and sponsorships (and undergraduates via internships and sandwich placements), opportunities to gain first-hand experience of the workplace. This investment suggests how highly your record of work experience will be valued.

University careers services are ideally placed to help you find suitable ways to make contact with an employer. Their strong links with academic departments will ensure that they understand the link between work opportunities and your studies. Graduate employers often visit universities to give presentations or exhibit at recruitment fairs, or possibly even work experience fairs. The recent growth of student Job Shops means that, as an undergraduate, you can find worthwhile, local, part-time work to fit into your schedule so that you can earn while you learn from day one.

Multiple benefits of work experience

- **Develop skills:** business awareness, interpersonal skills, flexibility, initiative.
- **Travel:** a learning experience, environmental awareness, adaptability, cultural sensitivity.
- **Career tasting:** helps you decide whether the reality matches the gloss.
- **Putting theory into practice:** experience how your course translates into what you need to know and apply at work.
- **Test commitment:** in competitive careers (e.g. medicine, law, journalism) your interest must be genuine.
- **'A foot in the door':** a place on an internship or placement means you start to be known.
- **Networking:** making connections for careers where jobs are not always advertised (e.g. media, advertising, and publishing).
- **Work/life balance:** find out what type of work culture suits you best.
- **Earn money:** some work experience pays very well, although you'll probably earn it!
- **Enhance CV:** provides clear evidence that you have what companies are looking for.

Different types of work experience

Internships: a formal period of work experience of 8-12 weeks. Competitive route that may be a fast-track through the selection process for the offer of a job. Traditionally offered by banks and management consultants, but now law firms. Central and local government departments and the retail sector offer this type of short-term placement, which may also be called vacation placements.

Sandwich courses: a year-long work experience is an essential ingredient of these 4-year degrees, but placements can be also negotiated within traditional 3-year courses.

Project work: can be undertaken in any type of organisation, but formal schemes run as part of **Internships** and the STEP scheme (www.shellstep.org.uk)

Insight days or courses: chance to gain insight and work on business games, problem-solving, give presentations and work alongside practising managers.

Voluntary/unpaid: check out local registers of opportunities as well as high profile/exotic placements. Big 'blue chip' companies and law firms can be just as interested as charities in this kind of experience. Your university may also be involved in community projects providing local volunteering.

Working abroad: many structured placements require early applications e.g. IASTE (science and engineering), Stage/Praktikum (EC Directorate). Other options include Erasmus study and Leonardo work placement abroad.

Networking: using existing contacts and making new ones. Particularly useful when trying to get into publishing, media etc. where work experience is important, but very few structured schemes exist e.g. BBC Broadcast Journalism Traineeships.

Part time or vacation work: provides the opportunity to fulfil a working role and be paid.

Strategies for seeking and securing work experience

- Identify the role you want to experience (e.g. marketing manager or HR manager)
- Explore the range of potential organisations (e.g. engineering, finance, retail, public sector or a charity)
- Make a list of local addresses to contact (use www.yell.com or local council online business directories)
- Find the best person to contact in each case (websites, employer directories, phone the company)
- Before you make the contact, think about what you want (setting objectives will show you're organised and focused)
- Send a CV with a covering letter setting out your objectives (be specific on dates and produce a menu of possibilities – work shadowing, meeting, brochure, another contact – in case they are unable to offer you work experience)
- Telephone the person you sent the letter to if no response (be prepared to outline your requirements again)
- Arrange a preliminary visit to the company (shows keenness and prevents misunderstanding later)

Useful websites

www.prospects.ac.uk/workexperience - general advice
www.work-experience.org - search for work experience options online
<http://targetjobs.co.uk/work-experience/> - database of contacts
www.westfocus.org.uk - placements, jobs and advice if you're in the London area
www.skill.org.uk - advice for students with a disability.

Gap year profile

Need a break?

Gap year participation has continued to increase amongst young people both before and after university.

Well-planned and structured gap years can greatly enhance a young person's skills base and employability. Employers and universities appreciate applications from gap year completers and place a high value on gap year experiences and the interpersonal, organisational and communication skills developed as a result. They can therefore be strongly highlighted on graduate CVs.

Useful resources include the AGCAS Special Interest Series booklet *Gap Year* – an on-line version can be found here:

www.prospects.ac.uk/links/gapyear

Is it right for you?

Taking a break from study could be appealing to many. Deciding what to do is half the battle – getting yourself organised (ideally sorting out your university course before you take the break) is the real clincher. Only you can make the final decision on this, but help is at hand. Use the same strategy as you would when choosing a university course – consider what to do, where to do it, accommodation and travel costs. Explore the options and plan ahead.

The gap year and tuition fees

Every potential student considering a gap year should ensure that they understand the funding regulations and any fees which will apply in their proposed year of entry into HE. Refer to the Student Finance section of www.direct.gov.uk for detailed information and downloadable resources regarding financial issues, such as maintenance grants and university bursary schemes for new students. This site includes links to information for students whose home is in England and Wales, other parts of the UK, the EC and overseas.

Student finance

If students are concerned about managing their finances as new undergraduates, help is available from student finance centres in individual universities. In addition, UNIAID have produced free online programmes to give prospective undergraduates a taste of university life in advance, learning how to balance their money, time, studies and social lives to improve financial budgeting skills. Visit www.uniaid.org.uk

What is there to do?

There are plenty of options open to you if you are considering how to use a year out in a fun, constructive and challenging way

For example you can:

- improve on or learn a new skill;
- live abroad on a cultural exchange;
- be a volunteer in the UK or overseas;
- join a structured work experience opportunity;
- participate in an expedition.

Useful publications

Gap Year Guidebook - Withers, A (ed.) John Catt Educational (2008)

Green Volunteers: The World Guide to Voluntary Work in Nature Conservation - Ausenda, F. Green Volunteers (2009)

Hands on Holidays - Hobbs, G. Crimson Publishing (2007)

International Directory of Voluntary Work - Pybus, V. Vacation Work Publications, (2006)

Planning Your Gap Year - Vandome, N. How to Books (2005)

Summer Jobs Worldwide - Vacation Work Publications (2009)

Taking a Career Break - White, J. Vacation Work Publications (2003)

Teaching English Abroad - Griffith, S. Crimson Publishing (2009)

Working Holidays Abroad - Hempshall, M. Trotman & Co (1999)

Working in Ski Resorts: Europe and North America - Pybus, V. Vacation Work Publications (2006)

Work Your Way Around the World - Griffith, S. Vacation Work Publications (2009)

Your Gap Year - Griffith, S. Vacation Work Publications (2007) (Vacation Work Publications is now an imprint of Crimson Publishing. Details can be found at

www.crimsonpublishing.co.uk).

Useful websites

www.anyworkanywhere.com - gap year paid work opportunities in UK and abroad

www.bunac.org - summer camp and other programmes

www.ciee.org - Council on International Educational Exchange - study and work abroad

www.csv.org.uk - Community Service Volunteers

www.cybercafes.com - where you can surf the web

www.gapadvice.org - finding and preparing for a gap year

www.gapyear.com - general information on finding and

preparing for a gap year

www.globalchoices.co.uk - gap year and working holiday jobs

www.i-to-i.com - voluntary work, including TEFL

www.mv-online.gov.uk - Vinolved - voluntary opportunities

www.myplatform2.com - government sponsored programme for 18-24 year olds

www.projecttrust.org.uk - gap year volunteers overseas

www.prospects.ac.uk/links/gapyear - choosing and planning your gap year

www.raleighinternational.org.uk - Raleigh International

www.realgap.co.uk - paid and voluntary gap year vacancy site

www.savethechildren.org.uk - Children's charity

www.worldwidevolunteering.org.uk - extensive database

www.wwoof.org - in return for volunteer help, WWOOF hosts offer food, accommodation and opportunities to learn about organic lifestyles.

www.yearoutgroup.org - general information (includes information for parents)

www.yini.org.uk - Year in Industry

The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) is the association for careers professionals in higher education. Membership is open to both institutions and individuals. Most of its training programmes and products are also available to non-members. See www.agcas.org.uk for more information.

To give feedback about this issue of *LINK-UP*, contact Judith Peel, a member of the AGCAS Education Liaison Task Group j.peel@shu.ac.uk, Kerrie Barnett, AGCAS Senior Publications and Events Officer kerrie.barnett@agcas.org.uk or telephone AGCAS on 0114 251 5750.

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