

EMPLOYABILITY

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*John Neugebauer &
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EMPLOYABILITY

Making the Most of Your
Career Development



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Preparing for Work

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Early Experience

A consistent theme in all our employer interviews has been developing early experience and showing passion for your proposed areas of work. Early experience helps you to ignite your passion for further study to achieve your ambitions. In later job interviews, early experience helps to focus attention on something to discuss during selection processes early experience will also demonstrate your readiness for work.

In Table 3.1 we give examples of how you can develop experience and understanding of your prospective areas of work. As well as developing experience, you will have the opportunity to develop contacts and networks for the future.

Remember, it is not simply turning up to these organisations but being able to explain, in covering letters and in interviews, how and why you are passionate about working in these fields. So be prepared to answer questions such as:

Employability

What did you do?

What did you enjoy?

What did you find more challenging?

How did you get on with other team members?

Competences

Understanding what is meant by ‘competences’ and being able to organise and articulate your competences in relation to organisation requirements are essential skills in employability. Therefore in this

TABLE 3.1 Ignite your passion by gaining work experience in your chosen areas

Here are some examples of the types of ways that you can gain early experience towards your chosen career.

Aviation and Aeronautics	Royal Aeronautical Society (Young Person’s Network) membership@ aerosociety.com
Charity	Start with local charity shops Volunteer at a hospice or with a local charity
Health, Social, Care and NHS	Excellent opportunities via your local hospitals and care centres and charitable organisations (Red Cross etc.) Check local hospices, many of whom have excellent schemes for volunteers
Media	Watch out for local events (e.g. BBC) requiring volunteers for the day/week Local radio stations (including university) may want assistants Charities often need media support and are worth contacting Offer to help run charity or organisation websites, social media or newsletters
Military	Local cadet units and university officer training units Reserve units also give valuable experience of whether the life is for you
Music	Local choirs and orchestras, National Youth Orchestra, National Youth choir
Teaching and Education	See if you can get experience in schools with after-school clubs, youth clubs, reading assistance etc. ... and from our Employability Panel: I chose a university course which was a year less, which resulted in more time in the classroom from the beginning of the course. I had a Saturday job in a wedding shop before going to university and kept this going when I returned from uni for holidays. I approached a local head teacher and went into school to listen to children reading. I worked in local holiday club through the school holidays – all ages up to 11 (Mon.–Fri.).

section we summarise the theory behind competences and suggest a practical approach to enable you to manage the practical presentation of your own competences to an employer's requirements.

Whiddet and Hollyforde offer a useful working definition of competences:

Behaviours that individuals demonstrate when undertaking job-relevant tasks effectively within an organisational context. (2003: 5–7)

Roberts (1997) distinguished between:

Natural competencies – looking at personality factors such as extrovert/introvert; emotional stability; agreeableness; conscientiousness; and open to variety of experience;

Acquired competencies – knowledge and skill acquired at, or outside, work;

Adapting competencies – how far an individual is able to adapt natural talents and skills to a new situation; and

Performing competencies – observable behaviours and outcomes

Competences have continued to develop, and by 2003 Rees noted that there was no single definition; indeed, even the spelling of the term causes some debate. Even so, competences are in widespread use. For example, having researched 168 organisations, Suff (2010) found that 75.4 per cent of organisations believed that competences were vital to support organisational mission and objectives, but 30 per cent found using competences problematic. Of the organisational problems in using competences, Suff (2010) found problems in ensuring that users understood about how they worked and with line-management scepticism. Overall, these problems suggest less about doubts with competence frameworks themselves and more about their implementation. Even so, the 'employable' graduate must be familiar with competences and skilled in their practical application.

Well-prepared competences are of benefit to both the employee and the employer. When competences are written and designed with the organisation's vision and goals in mind they provide an opportunity for managers and employees to understand what behaviours and standards are required by the organisation. In the workplace typical examples of competences would include factors such as:

- team work
- customer service orientation
- problem solving

- delivering results
- managing with diversity and so on.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

In the example in Table 3.2 we show generic types of competences which are often reviewed during selection and assessment. We have shown how, by using previous experiences, you can build up positive and developmental examples of your own competences.

This is a generic list. Before interview, check carefully that you can use this generic list to give examples – from the employer's own competence list – of how you meet the role requirements. In the list you are asked to show positive examples. Positive examples of competences are your best opportunity to show that you meet the job requirements. We also ask you to record development examples. Employers know that life isn't perfect – they want to see how you deal with setbacks and adversity. It is really important to think of examples where you can give a positive outlook to what you learned and why. If you managed to reverse a difficult situation, record that too. Prepare these examples in advance – don't get caught out with the worst thing that has happened to you and try to talk your way out of it. Employers look for learning, not dramatic impact.

We recommend that you develop a similar list. This will be for your own use. It will not be for showing potential employers. Instead, it will enable you to prepare thoroughly beforehand, and be in a much stronger position to manage during your interviews.

Time spent in preparing this list will be helpful for interacting with your CV and save you time trying to think of good examples during interviews. The development examples will be useful to develop your own individual learning plan for the future (see Chapter 5). During interview you may be asked to give examples of competences where things have gone wrong or where you have had lessons to learn. Use your development examples for this, but only use examples where you have successfully turned round a difficult situation – don't try to talk your way out of disasters!

When you discuss competence examples use 'I' not 'we' to describe what **you** have done.

It should be possible for you to come up with three to four good examples for each competence from your own student, intern, voluntary and vacation experience.

Once you are in a career role, keep this list up to date – at least every six months. That way, as role opportunities come up you will be more ready to submit a high-quality application in the short time before the final application date.

TABLE 3.2 Example of competence inventory

Competence	Positive examples	Development examples
<p>Customer (working with internal or external customers)</p>	<p>Complimented for manner of dealing with awkward customer (or client, user, patient) complaint.</p>	<p>Find it hard at times to deal with aggressive customers who won't listen to reason, but recognise the need to listen to their needs and resolve them – show examples</p>
<p>Team (how successfully you work as part of a team; have a look at group styles in Chapter 6 to understand different roles within groups and teams)</p>	<p>Nominated as employee of the month by colleagues for team work. Seen as a person who comes up with different ideas and resource support. Concerned that group continues to focus on delivery of task.</p>	<p>Learned in a team exercise event whilst an intern that team needs to be balanced, with all views taken into account. Ensure that dominant voices do not swamp out ideas and concerns from the overall team (Be constructive about team experiences – do not attribute blame and failure to others. Show what happened, what you learned, and how you would do things differently another time)</p>
<p>Delivering results</p>	<p>Always relied on to deliver to required quality and time standards. Volunteered to stay late to ensure completion of major project. Sales, income, costs which you may have managed.</p>	<p>Examples of when you did not deliver what was required. What did you learn from this experience? How would you do it differently another time?</p>
<p>Self-organising (including work prioritisation)</p>	<p>Always seek to plan activities for the following 6 months. In work situations, seek clear agreed performance targets with line manager. Keep line manager up to date at an early stage if time, cost, quality or other performance targets are likely to be compromised.</p>	<p>Failed to achieve xxx because I didn't balance needs of all the stakeholders. Managed to recover this, but it has taught me to ensure that stakeholders' views are taken into account and update them on progress</p>

(Continued)

TABLE 3.2 (Continued)

Competence	Positive examples	Development examples
Problem solving and using initiative	<p>Asked to come up with some fresh ideas to address a particular issue.</p> <p>Discussed with colleagues and did some web searches to come up with some new approaches which were then accepted.</p>	<p>Made some assumptions without fully investigating and understanding all the relevant factors; learned to map and check with all stakeholders in future</p>
Paying attention to diversity (how actively you ensure that everyone is treated fairly)	<p>Show how you have been exposed to a variety of gender, age and ethnicity groups through voluntary work.</p> <p>Volunteered with local charity as a support worker for disabled visitors to outside broadcast etc.</p>	
Leading others	<p>Limited experience to date at work.</p> <p>Helped induct and act as buddy to new colleague.</p> <p>At university, organised society speakers.</p> <p>Sports captain – had to remove friend from team.</p> <p>Student peer mentor.</p> <p>Trained new staff members in vocation work.</p>	<p>Difficulties with particular team members? How did you sit down and resolve these and work together in the future?</p>
Showing resilience (dealing with setbacks)	<p>Needing to re-sit exams, which taught me that I should never give up, even though it threatened my first choice of university.</p> <p>Disappointed not to be selected for [job title], but asked about gaps and later was successful in selection.</p> <p>Your strong desire to get into this particular organisation, and how you have prepared for it in studies, work experience etc.</p>	<p>Be cautious about wearing your heart on your sleeve for this type of question.</p> <p>If you are asked about a setback which caused you particular problems, find one where you overcame the setback</p>
Managing own learning	<p>Keep my own learning plan</p> <p>If you do say something, make sure you can show it! See example in Chapter 5.</p>	

Making the Most of Sources of Employment

To maximise your chances of finding the job that is right for you, you will need to make the most of the sources of employment available to you. In this section we examine what those sources may be, what our Employability Panel thought of them, and advice about how to maximise the use of the sources.

As you gain employment experience, in whatever capacity, ensure that you have contact details for the future of a person or office holder who can confirm your start and finish dates, and whether your employment has been satisfactory or, even better, give a reference if required.

Increasingly, employers seek to avoid litigation by not giving character references but only confirm employment dates. This is especially important if you are planning to develop your career in one of the many areas which requires pre-employment regulatory or security vetting and where a detailed record of your movements, often going back several years, may be required.

Starting dates can often be delayed for long periods when potential employers are unable to verify where you were and what you were doing, especially during gap periods overseas.

Using Careers Services

We asked our Employability Panel which methods they had found most useful in finding career work. The average (modal) results are shown in Table 3.3.

Careers services should be an early starting point in developing your employability. However, as you will see in Table 3.3, the

TABLE 3.3 Employability Panel: What were the most useful approaches in finding career employment? (N=50)

	Little/no use	Some use	Useful	Very useful
Careers services				
Employment fairs				
Employment agencies				
Networking				
Social media				
Other				
		Job adverts, including online		

majority view of our Employability Panel suggested this was the least useful support in finding career, although we should also say that a small number said the careers advice they received was excellent. We discussed these findings with a sample of university careers advisers. Their responses help us to discuss what to expect from the careers service and we hope that this will help you to make more effective use of this service. However, as we look at Table 3.3, bear in mind that really active searches would use all these opportunities to their maximum potential.

Despite the experiences of the Employability Panel in using these different sources, some of the weakest responses (e.g. use of careers services) came from poor use of the potential value rather than the intrinsic strengths or weaknesses of the resource itself. Therefore in this section we explain how to make the most of each employment resource. In Exhibit 3.1 we show what one of university careers advisers we interviewed offered in order to make the most of this resource.

Exhibit 3.1

Using University Careers Services

Brian Staines, Formerly Head of Careers Guidance at the University of Bristol, offers the following advice.

What types of service should a student look for from the careers service?

I would suggest that students actively start to think about the future, and to approach the Careers Service from their first year of study. This gives time to develop options, experiences, ideas and may mean rejecting early ideas which don't work out as they had expected.

Some students are crystal clear about what they want from their future careers. In this case the Careers Service can give access to employers, careers fairs, advice with CVs and interview techniques. In many ways, students who know what they want to do have a clearer pathway but can still benefit greatly in improving opportunities through the Careers Service.

Students who have less idea about their futures can be reassured – their position is not at all unusual. Here, the Careers Service can offer discussions and (where necessary) tests to distil some appropriate ideas on the future. But it has to be for the student to understand what they want and to take this forward; it is not for the Careers Service to push the student into a 'good' career, but to help them to understand what they want to do and help them get there – and if that means, for example, fulfilling an ambition to work in a fish canning factory in Norway, then so be it. The Careers Service may also offer appropriate

psychometric testing to help the student, using tests such as Prospects Planner, but there are huge health warnings about the value of psychometrics and the value of their use in shaping careers choices.

I also encourage 'unsure' students to go along to employers' presentations to hear about opportunities – anything to increase awareness of the range of opportunities. And even if the employers' presentation turns out not for you – well, learn from the experience, eat the food and then go away!

From all this, the 'unsure' student is encouraged to develop a range of ideas and experiences through work experience, volunteering, travelling and so on.

What about after graduation?

Many universities will continue to offer services to their alumni for up to three years after graduation. Some will also support students – usually for a fee – who are now home but attended a different university for their degree studies. So if you need help, it is worth investigating this.

Employment Careers Fairs

It is easy to underestimate the value of careers fairs, and too often students fail to plan for careers fairs. As a result they arrive ill prepared and assume that they are at the fair simply to find out about possible job opportunities. But employers rarely invest time and resources in careers fairs simply to extend their brand names – they are there to start the process of finding new talent who can be progressed on to initial job screening. So to make the most of the career fairs:

- Find out about careers fairs at your own university and at universities local to yours or near home. (If you get into careers fairs at other than your own university, you may meet employers who do not visit your own university. Check beforehand that you can get in without a university-specific ticket.)
- Plan these dates into your diary.
- Prioritise which organisations you wish to see and what you hope to get from them. Don't simply drift around.
- Go looking presentable. It is not a formal job interview, but employers will be forming an opinion of you and whether they could see you fitting within their organisation.
- Engage with the employer representative and have a couple of questions prepared in advance.
- Take copies of your CV to leave with potentially interested employers.
- Find out about selection criteria and development opportunities.
- Get contact details (name, role, contact address) of access points if your own area of interest is not represented on the employer stand that day.

Sometimes you will make contacts at careers fairs which will lead to future recruitment opportunities. At other times there will not be a significant development other than to find that you do not want to work in that organisation after all. In both cases, however, you will develop a sense of what is required for your future area of employment and the criteria which prospective employers will use to assess new entrants.

Employment Agencies

Agencies may help you find career opportunities which are less 'obvious', and are especially useful in finding specialist careers such as marketing or logistics. A good agency, working with you in partnership to find work, may also help in finding you shorter-term work to develop your experience, and be candid with you in giving advice about your strengths and weaknesses and how to position yourself more positively in applications.

In the UK the fees for finding employees through an agency are met by the employer. *A very few agencies may try to charge the job applicant too – we do not recommend that you use agencies who charge a fee to the job seeker.*

In the Exhibit 3.2 we show the value of using an agency (in this case, LeapUK) that does work in partnership with graduate applicants to find appropriate roles and gives supportive feedback to potential job seekers.

Exhibit 3.2

Using Agencies and Application Tips – Allie Whelan, Director, LeapUK

Why would a graduate wish to seek work through an agency rather than finding work directly?

You need to do these things: network; apply directly to organisations; use agencies (befriend relevant agencies and consultants and develop a good relationship with them to make sure they know you and are fighting your corner).

I see this as prioritising your search in three ways:

1. Approach the top three organisations you want to work for.
2. Approach agencies that work with your preferred top three organisations.
3. Keep an eye on professional and trade journals, magazines and job boards.

As an employment specialist, what would you consider to be the most important factors in successful work applications?

In no particular order:

- Be bespoke for the role for which you are applying.
- Really focus your application on that role, rather than a generalised application. This usually means you need to tailor your CV for particular job roles.
- Really make your CV stand out – adapt it to what that employer is looking for.
- Apply the ‘so what?’ factor. With a CV or application you probably have about 20 seconds of the reader’s attention, so:
 - make your application relevant to the job
 - make it relevant to your strengths (otherwise, don’t waste your time)
 - avoid over-long and complicated covering letters.
- Be realistic about what you really want. Avoid being general and vague. Stick to your passions and learn to use your time wisely.
- Get experience. If at the moment you genuinely don’t have what they are looking for, put yourself out into the market to get work experience – either in voluntary work or internships – to get the experience to use in interviews.
- Ask really good – brilliant – questions at interview.
- Prepare yourself thoroughly for the interview – know the organisation.

What are the most negative factors in not finding work?

- Lack of focus. Approach job hunting as a full-time job in its own right.
- Failure to use social media. Use LinkedIn, see what is being discussed, behave as if you are already in the role to which you aspire.
- Lack of attention to detail.
- Poor grammar and spelling in the application documents.

Good CV or good covering letter – which is more important?

Without doubt, a great CV. Your covering letter must be brief. Why are you the ‘go to’ person for this role?

Networking

It may be surprising that networking remains so important in finding a future role, especially as more structured advertising and selection processes are used to fill roles. Even so, our Employability Panel confirmed the finding of other studies that networking helps to find roles and better understand organisation requirements. At a more subtle level, it may also help you to tune in to the ‘language and culture’ of

that organisation: this is likely to help with any future job applications, or may make you realise it is not for you.

Networking exposes you to wider job opportunities than you may find through conventional advertising. Furthermore, as people within your networks share information with you they are more likely to refer you opportunities where they feel there is some degree of fit – and so prospects of finding a suitable role.

It pays to be prepared for successful networking. Networking can start with family and friends as well as alumni who have joined organisations ahead of you. If you are attending a formal event (careers fair, work exchange or a conference) check the attendance list to find ‘must see’ people. When you do meet them, actively show an interest in what they are doing rather than spend the time telling them about yourself (this is more flattering to the person, and if they are interested in you they will ask you). Get their business cards and make sure you send them a LinkedIn invitation within 24 hours of the meeting.

Careers fairs are, of course, also a good opportunity to network, but don’t kid yourself that you are looking around the stalls for interesting brochures. Employers will also be there to identify early talent, so go looking well prepared and well groomed, and take copies of your CV in case they are immediately interested. For careers fairs, make sure that you have read a bit about your target organisations before you go. Again, follow up with a LinkedIn invitation within 24 hours of meeting.

Once you are in work don’t simply give colleagues who move on a good luck card, but stay in touch with them. Former colleagues may be asked for recommendations for new recruits in their new places of work, and it could be you. Even without job recommendations, social media will give you an idea of their experiences in other organisations, as will periodically meeting on a social basis.

Social Media

We have already seen the importance of good networking as a way of enhancing employability skills. Our Employability Panel also found this to be one of the most effective ways of finding out about career opportunism (see Table 3.3).

Social media is a critically important part of good networking, both as part of networking and as a way to showcase your own suitability for work. We asked Helen Hammond of Elephant Creative why job search candidates should use social media as a central part of their networking and job search strategy. Her guidance is shown in Exhibit 3.3.

Exhibit 3.3

Using LinkedIn to Get Your Dream Job

Helen Hammond of Elephant Creative explains why job search candidates should use social media as a central part of their networking and job search strategy.

Not only is LinkedIn the leading social media tool for Business to Business (B2B) communications, bar none, it looks set to grow yet further. Predictions for expansion in 2016 and beyond include a greater emphasis on published content, SlideShare integration and the inevitable commercial opportunities for organisations to promote their wares. But why should you care about all this, personally?

The last three jobs that I have recruited for, for clients, have been placed entirely via LinkedIn.

It's a fact. That's why. In the majority of cases I never even saw a separate CV and there weren't any job application forms. Everything was advertised, applied for, scored and assessed using individual LinkedIn profiles.

The reality is that it simply isn't possible to ignore LinkedIn and expect to get the top jobs any longer. A 2013 study by the Society for Human Resource Management found that 77 per cent of employers were using social networks to recruit, a sharp increase from the 56 per cent who reported doing so in 2011. And amongst the recruiters using social tools, 94 per cent said they were using LinkedIn. When the study was repeated in 2015, 87 per cent of HR professionals said it was either very or somewhat important for job seekers to have a social media presence on LinkedIn and that in 2015 alone nearly two-thirds of organisations (65 per cent) had hired new employees who were sourced through social media sites.

Ok, so that doesn't mean they're all recruiting exclusively on LinkedIn, but they are using it to identify targets, make approaches and, crucially, research and assess shortlisted applicants. And when you think about that, can you really afford to wave it away as hype and digital frivolity?

Getting ahead of the game on LinkedIn, however, isn't complicated but it does take methodical, hard work.

1. **Put in the time:** You need to understand that your LinkedIn profile is, for many recruiters, replacing the CV. It's time to think hard about the things you want to say and to put the effort in to saying them well. Plan the different sections out in advance and don't be tempted to skip over sections.
2. **Support your arguments:** LinkedIn offers a real opportunity that traditional CVs don't, in that you can support your claims with evidence. One of the best things to see, as a recruiter, is a suite of documents demonstrating ability, experience and approach. These might include examples of work, reviews or articles you've written.

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3. **Don't forget the professional photo:** You need to note the word 'professional' here. I'm not interested in seeing the trout pout or your best holiday shot. I am looking for someone that looks professional and understands the importance of first impressions.
4. **Get others involved:** One of the best things about LinkedIn is the option to include recommendations. Don't be afraid to ask people for them. LinkedIn offers you the functionality to do this directly and to review recommendations before they go live. Importantly, try to demonstrate a consistent reputation for good work rather than just having recommendations for one role.
5. **Think about how people will find you:** You might be applying for a job directly from an advert but you'd be amazed how many recruiters use LinkedIn to speculatively search for possible candidates. When you are planning out each section, think about the key words you need to include to ensure that you come up in all the right searches.
6. **Include your contact details:** One of the most overlooked sections of the LinkedIn profile is the contact details section. Make it easy for people to contact you by phone and email.
7. **Don't forget your CV:** It might be tempting to think that your LinkedIn profile is going to replace your CV. I believe in a 'belt and braces' approach. Include a copy of your CV as a supporting document, so that those who want it can access it easily.
8. **Demonstrate that you're active:** Being positioned as attractive to potential employers isn't just about having a perfect profile, it's also about demonstrating day-to-day activity in the right areas. Make sure you're saying things regularly and showing that your expertise is current. That means commenting on articles in the press, sharing news and giving examples of projects that you're working on.
9. **Be proactive:** Sitting back and waiting for recruiters to find you is likely to be a slow process (unless you're really amazing). Once your profile is up to scratch you can use the job search function to set up alerts for suitable jobs, as well as doing research about potential employers.
10. **Engage:** At its heart, LinkedIn is about networking – and that means being brave enough to actually talk to people. Be bold. If you want to work in a certain organisation then find the right people (whether through searching for them directly or looking on company pages or in groups) and make contact. Similarly, keep an eye on the people who have looked at your profile. If you make contact remember to keep things clear, short and respectful. At the end of the day, if you show professionalism and respect, as well as a bit of initiative, most people will be impressed.

Job search

Finally, some advice on using the job-search section itself. LinkedIn offers you a wealth of ways to look for suitable jobs and, thanks to its cost-effective advertising and simple, direct application process, is becoming the go-to place for recruiters. There are a variety of ways to find out about suitable jobs:

1. A simple job search by key words and the advanced search by a whole load of options.
2. Jobs in your network – in places where you have connections or follow organisations.
3. Jobs you might be interested in – suggestions from LinkedIn that you can filter by location, organisation size and industry.
4. Following companies – so that their adverts show up in your news feed.

Best of all, it doesn't have to be a full-time job. You can save jobs to review later and set up email notifications for job searches. You can even take out a paid-for profile that will move your details up to being featured in applicant searches.

Internships and Placements

In this section we will look at some of the practicalities of placements – and if your course does not have a formal placement, then think about internships and related experience. In Exhibit 3.4 we share advice from careers advisers and employers on the value of getting started with internships and placements.

Estimates vary, but it is generally believed that at least 29–30 per cent of higher education students undertake some form of internship or placement, either as part of their course or during vacation periods. So important is the need for relevant work experience that some PhD programmes now require internship experience, recognising that not everyone will look for academic careers on completion.

Exhibit 3.4

Getting Started with Placements and Internships

Finding the right work is not just about going for 'the perfect role' but getting a start, establishing a track record and then adjusting from that to the path that is right for you.

(Continued)

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Employers usually think the placement/intern student is great and may offer work after graduation. Students who have done internships and placements usually do better in their degrees and develop practice-orientated learning.

Dr Tilly Line, Senior Careers Consultant, Employability and Enrichment Team, University of the West of England

Internships and placements are incredibly important. Even so, as aspiring internships and placements are arranged, there must be very clear learning aims which both the organisation and the intern can actually achieve. Both sides need to be clear about the boundaries, and especially that interns do not lose track of their studies and personal development.

Good internships can start from Year 10 in school; ideally, interns can then develop a relationship with the employer. This may include volunteering to increase employability or training and work as Health Care Assistants. Previous experience to the NHS really helps candidates to understand what it is like to work here, and shows the enormous range of opportunities we have. In these ways internships expand an understanding of the very wide range of potential future opportunities, help understand the trust's values and show long-term commitment.

Internships and placements are important, but we also offer other opportunities, such as work experience and volunteering. For potential clinicians we also offer competitive places to attend our taster days. **Jane Hadfield, Head of Learning & Development, Human Resource & Development Directorate, North Bristol NHS Trust**

In international aid and development work, we place a high premium on previous experience. When an international emergency occurs people will tend to run away from it, but at Tearfund our purpose is to run towards it. As such we cannot send inexperienced people. Therefore internships are crucial, especially since few academic programmes specifically prepare people for dangers and unpredictability of international aid and development work. Our internships prepare people for roles as aid practitioners as well as professional jobs such as Finance, Fundraisers, Human Resources and so on. Most international aid and development agencies have similar internship programmes but a few, such as Save the Children, are developing partnerships with universities to co-create qualifications designed as career paths for graduates wishing to specialise in international aid and development.

Our internships typically last 1–2 years. All our jobs are advertised internally and once internships are completed colleagues can apply for these roles.

Patrick Goh, Head of Global HR People & Organisation Development, Tearfund

In summary, the key reasons that you should consider a placement are:

- It will give you an opportunity to gain practical experience of an area of work which you may later pursue – or find it is not right for you.
- You will extend your network of contacts – in itself, this is an important contribution to finding work.
- You will demonstrate to your future employer your interest – your passion – for this type of work.
- In job interviews you will be able to discuss your competences and relate these to your chosen area of work – you have a much better chance of ‘speaking the same language’ as your prospective employers.
- Placements often lead to job offers at graduation. Some employers use internships and placements as a replacement for Graduate Assessment and put you directly onto the graduate scheme, provided that you have performed well.
- Students who have placements tend to perform better in their final academic assessments than those without this experience (e.g. see Mandilaras, 2004; Neugebauer and Evans-Brain, 2009; Mendez and Rona, 2010).

Employers also see the value of placements. In addition to having the opportunity to see a potential employee before making a permanent job offer, organisations also claim that former placement students are more likely to stay in the organisation than graduates who are recruited through traditional methods. Table 3.4 shows the diverse examples of what employers look for in placements and the types of opportunities they can offer.

TABLE 3.4 Employers and placements (what employers are looking for)

Organisation type	More about requirements and opportunities
Public Sector Agency	70 per cent of roles available do not require a specific degree subject. Competences required: self-management, team work, literacy, numeracy, business awareness, problem solving, customer awareness.
Supermarket Chain	May take graduate employees from placements. Specialist degrees are only relevant for a minority of specialised areas. Competences required include: drive, energy, willingness to learn, great customer service orientation.
Financial Services	Any degree subject may be considered, but corporate and specialist banking areas require maths, economics or related disciplines. Competences required include: judgment, drive, influence, working in teams. Job offers may be made on the basis of placements. <i>Top tip:</i> Find out about the organisation before you apply.

(Continued)

TABLE 3.4 (Continued)

Organisation type	More about requirements and opportunities
International Voluntary Aid Organisation	Volunteering is hugely important in developing experience and ensuring you build the experience required for access, after graduation, to a role. It also helps ensure that it is the right area for you to work in on a longer-term basis.
International Investment Banking	Internships are the best way for candidates to finalise their decisions on their careers and where they want to begin it, and the best way for companies to ensure they are hiring the right people for them. The earlier you can secure an internship position (many are offered for first-year students now), the better – it demonstrates proactivity, commitment and hunger. Many internships lead to other internships and eventually full-time employment, so they are worth taking seriously.
Car Rental	Take about 80 per cent of graduates from internship programme. No degree specified. Use competences from full-time roles to assess suitability. Whilst on placement, will learn about sales, marketing, operations, customer services and business management. Time on internships counts towards management traineeship after graduation, so there is no need to start as a basic trainee.
NHS Trust	'These [internships and placements] are incredibly important. Even so, as aspiring internships and placements are arranged, there must be very clear learning aims, which both the organisation and the intern can actually achieve.' (Jane Hadfield, Head of Learning & Development, Human Resource & Development Directorate, North Bristol NHS Trust)
Global Communications	Any subject, but for commercial areas tend to look at business-related degrees. For specialist areas, relevant professional degree (computer sciences, HRM, engineering etc.). Focus on key competences, such as customer skills, teamwork, interpersonal skills, self-development, integrity.
Our tip	As well as looking at established internship and placement programmes, don't rule out applying to organisations directly to see if they have internship opportunities. Personalise your application. You will need a good covering letter, clear objectives and flexibility with dates. Find the name of a person to write to in the organisation, and don't simply write to 'Dear Sir or Madam'.

Source: Authors' research

You may not have the opportunity for a placement as part of your course. It is still worthwhile to see if you can get related experience through internships during your vacation, or even shorter-term experience. These will not give you the scope of benefits of placements, but they are still of value.

Be an Entrepreneur!

Working in a salaried role for an organisation may not suit everyone, and an increasing number of working age people prefer to set up their own business.

Being your own entrepreneur is outside the scope of this book, but we wanted to show that it may be a natural outcome for some. Entrepreneurs will usually have:

- a driving passion and belief in what they want to do
- clear focus
- the ability to work on their own as well as with other people
- considerable resilience
- somewhere to work (many successful businesses have, literally, started on the kitchen table)
- start-up capital and the ability to manage cash flow (lack of cash is often the death of business ideas)
- the ability to manage 'the business' as well as the great entrepreneurial idea.

There are many business start-up agencies and incubators to help new small businesses, and some university courses are specifically aimed at developing entrepreneurial skills. There is no single route to being successful as an entrepreneur. We have examples of people who started their own business immediately on graduation (and may have even been developing it whilst studying), to those who took full-time work first and worked on their own or with partners in their spare time to set up their business.

We asked Ed Schofield to tell us more about his journey to setting up his own business, and this is shown in Exhibit 3.5. There is no single journey to a business start-up but Ed's experience, the help he got and the challenges he faced are typical of the ups and downs encountered in running your own business.

Exhibit 3.5

Setting up as an entrepreneur

Ed Schofield and Schofield Trading

Whether entering employment or setting up in your own business, we have seen that passion and resilience are critical in developing employability. In this case study, we hear how one graduate overcame setbacks, first to gain relevant work experience and then to set up as an entrepreneur in his chosen field.

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Having completed an Honours degree in Fine Art at the University for the Creative Arts, I worked towards a career as an artist and curator. This was what we were sold as the logical progression by our tutors, and why not? It became very obvious very quickly that this was not going to automatically bring in any income. I found on leaving university that the idealistic world described by our tutors and our place in it as new art graduates was misleading, and there was no suggestion of the reality that would come very quickly. Thinking back to what we were told about the potential open to us as prospective students before we enrolled and to our lectures about working as artists after university, it was in my view fraudulent at best. But it's easy to say that now.

I found it no problem finding work as a student to pay for my tuition. But after graduating, having tried to find a job stacking shelves to support myself whilst pursuing this 'idea' of becoming an artist, I found it impossible to find any work. The problem being that I was over-qualified. I found myself in a catch-22, no experience in any related workplace and too many qualifications to find an interim job.

The answer came in the form of unpaid work for 9 months with the Portland Quarry and Sculpture Trust, writing bids for funding, meeting with artists, helping geologists with stone carving and ultimately curating an exhibition of art, fossils, history and geology. This was an attractive prospect for a reporter, and ITV made a short documentary about my efforts. The key thing I learned from this is that, unlike our university's projected expectations, in the real world there is no place for art unless of course you have no need for an income. This was at the time of huge cuts to national arts funding, with centres and galleries closing left, right and centre. I did, however, take a lot away from this experience aside from the geological knowledge, in terms of integrity to a project. I learned that long-term vision is better than making a quick buck, and remaining focused on this long-term goal would indeed help to steer through difficult decisions.

Using this as a springboard (and in very need of money by now) I found a sculpture park in Surrey. They weren't advertising for staff but I walked in and asked for a job. I started off sanding wood and digging holes for sculptures to be installed, but before long I found myself at Sotheby's installing the sculpture we were selling, setting up a garden at Chelsea flower show and much more besides. I was then promoted into the company's interior design showroom, focusing on luxury interiors.

Here I found a very useful set of skills. Selling, buying, customer service and the logistics of running a small business on a daily basis. But what struck me the most was the limitations of it, the expectation that you would join a small company and stay for 10+ years with no real prospect of progression or development. Being expected to complete your duties and any others thrown your way day after day with no involvement or interest beyond the sale. As I'm sure with most businesses the bottom line is final, but as I have already explained the



FIGURE 3.1 Schofield Trading Co. logo

vision and ambition is, I think, more important. I did not feel there was any vision or chance of me achieving my ambitions, and this frustrated me. Wanting to achieve more than just make my boss richer. So I quit.

After four years of working for this company I decided to go it alone. In November 2014 I left the company and set up the Schofield Trading Company (see Figure 3.1) selling art, curios, sculpture, fossils and anything unusual I could find. I decided to do this as an online business (www.schofieldtrading.com) due to the global reach and comparative low cost. I approached the Prince's Trust for training and support, and was granted 'Prince's Trust Supported Status' in August 2015. The challenge has not been finding things to buy, but cash flow. I think any business will tell you this.

The Prince's Trust has helped me to structure my business, organise and structure a cash flow and how to organise the fundamental day-to-day financial running of a business; I would say that without this support and ongoing support from my mentor I would not have been as successful as I have been. Working in a business and running a business are two very different things. The demands you face every day to make the bill payments are a constant burden. However, the benefits far outweigh this. Your time is your own, your interests inspire you and your fascination within a subject makes your work feel like a hobby. It allows me to do what I want to do. In short, working for myself is complete freedom.

My long-term goal is to grow my business. My vision for the business is to be the top online retailer for unique and obscure items of note, selling the most interesting and desirable items on the market. In doing so I would hope to build up a substantial knowledge base on artefacts and art pieces. This in time will lead me to do a master's degree.

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In conclusion I think that university is fundamentally a good thing, but you need to study for your own self-development, not employability (at least that's what I have found). I personally think I would have benefited from some of the real world before going into full-time higher education as it gives a perspective on what it is being told and what you expect as an outcome.

I cannot speak for all courses, but from my experience and seeing my friends graduate there seems to be a large reality gap between university and working in the real world. But if universities are behaving as businesses and selling employability via self-betterment as a commodity, it would be detrimental and not in their own interests to highlight the contradictions in their sales pitch.

Additional Support – Graduates and Students with Disabilities

So far we have seen that graduate employment is highly competitive. Graduates and job candidates with disabilities and underlying longer-term health issues may find additional challenges despite the legal requirement (in the UK through the Equality Act 2010) not to discriminate on the grounds of disability.

Specialist support for job seekers with disabilities is usually available from university careers services, and you should make early contact with your careers services (first year of studies is not too early, especially for arranging internships and placements) to make full use of the resources available. In addition, there are many specialist websites which can offer support, advice and opportunities: a representative sample is shown in the further reading section at the end of this chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have discussed the breadth and depth of the preparations which we recommend to you in preparing for work. It's a long list, but not an impossible one. If you can do this effectively you are well on the way to building your employability portfolio. Do remember that although getting the experience is important, it is equally important to make sure that you record the experience so that you are able to explain in future applications how it is relevant for your application.

ACTION

Having read this chapter, we suggest that you think about the following action points:

- In looking for placements, don't only look at formal schemes – approach organisations which catch your imagination.
- When writing to an organisation about a potential placement or work experience, be clear about what you can offer the organisation, but also be clear about your objectives in requesting a placement.
- Keep your CV up to date.
- Keep examples of your competences up to date.
- As you complete working experience, ask for a contact who is prepared to verify your working dates (and possibly provide a work reference) in the future. This is especially important for overseas work.
- Be thoroughly prepared for and practise interviews, especially as you get closer to final selection.

Further Reading

There are several websites which have graduate opportunities, but also give candidate views of the selections procedures and experiences and what it is actually like to work for that organisation (e.g. see www.thejobcrowd.com/top-companies-to-work-for).

For information and advice on internships and placements, see Neugebauer, J and Evans-Brain, J (2009) *Making the Most of Your Placement*. London: SAGE.

For students with disabilities or underlying health issues there are many organisations which can help, including with offering placements with blue chip organisations, scholarships, advice and information and employer partnership events. For example, see:

EmployAbility at www.employ-ability.org.uk/

usemyability at <http://usemyability.com/index.php?p=2>

Disability Rights UK at www.disabilityrightsuk.org/careers-and-work-disabled-people

Scope at www.scope.org.uk/corporate-partnerships/our-partners

Blind In Business (for blind or partially sighted candidates) at www.blindinbusiness.org.uk/

Other organisations, such as the Business Disability Forum (at <http://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/>) give an idea of the scope of activities

which employers are undertaking to support job candidates with disabilities.

Look at the opportunities for placements and internships. There are many organisations out there to support you, including:

AIESEC: international opportunities, www.aiesec.co.uk/students/

Go Wales: work and placement experience across Europe, www.gowales.co.uk/

International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (IAESTE): an independent, non-profit and non-political student exchange organisation providing students in technical degrees (primarily Science, Engineering and the applied arts) with paid, course-related training abroad and employers with highly-skilled, highly-motivated trainees, www.iaeste.org/

Mountbatten Scholarships: one-year paid internship in London or New York, www.mountbatten.org/

Prospects UK: internships, placements and postgraduate study opportunities, www.prospects.ac.uk/

RateMyPlacement: lively site with placement and work opportunities and employer ratings, www.ratemylacement.co.uk/

STEP: organiser of paid student work placements and graduate internships, www.step.org.uk/

United Euro Bridge: a small UK-based non-profit organisation promoting work placements, self-employment and supports micro, small and medium businesses across Europe, http://unitedeurobridge.eu/new_site/

The small print: These sites are shown for illustration only. We feel they will be of interest to a wide range of students. We are not endorsing them. Check any site's conditions of use carefully. You should be able to find placement opportunities without paying any fees to an intermediate agency.