



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 219 blue chip employers (Graduate Recruitment Survey 2008 – Winter Review) another positive recruitment outlook with graduate vacancies predicted to rise by 16.4% in this recruitment cycle. Moreover, these figures show the highest percentage growth in a decade as well as making 2008 the fifth year on year rise in succession. If 2007 graduate vacancies are broken down according to type of work, it emerges that accountancy and professional services provided the majority of vacancies (23%), followed by banking and financial services (12%) and then industrial and engineering firms (9%). In terms of diversity in the graduate labour market, AGR report a fall in the proportion of females recruited in 2007 by 3.5% to 39.1%. The proportion of ethnic minority graduates recruited rose from 15% in 2006 to 27% in 2007 as employers strive to improve the ethnic mix of their workforces. In terms of location, 57% of AGR vacancies were in London and the South-East. 64% of recruiters asked for a 2:1 as a minimum qualification.

Incomes Data Services (IDS) are also predicting a growth in new graduate appointments in their annual research report 'Pay and Progression for Graduates 2008'. From their survey of 69 employers, they point to a 12% predicted graduate recruitment growth. 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.

More information on the destinations of graduates can be found at www.prospects.ac.uk/links/wdgd.

Graduate salaries

The average graduate starting salary, using figures from the Prospects Directory of graduate opportunities 2007/8, stands at £24,048, an increase of 4% on last year's figures (median salary of £23,500).

AGR employers (predominantly blue chip organisations) report an expected median starting salary for 2008 graduate recruits of £24,000, and an actual rise in 2007 graduate starting salaries of 2.4%.

IDS data from reveals an average salary of £23,800 based on their survey of 69 large employers (up 6% from 2007).

In contrast, HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) national salary data for the Class of 2006 showed a median salary to the nearest thousand of £18,000, while the 2007 Natwest Student Money Matters Survey reports a much lower average graduate starting salary of £14,515 (up from £13,860 in 2006).

Why the difference in these figures? AGR, IDS and Prospects figures represent salaries paid by graduate recruiters, whereas

the HESA and Natwest figures are based on actual earnings of graduates and include those working in a wide range of public sector jobs, SMEs and transitional employment, as well as in blue-chip organisations.

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) reported in 2006 that, despite a growing pool of graduates in the UK, the earnings value of a degree continues to increase. The difference in salary between graduates and non-graduates in the UK was 58% in 2004, up from 53% in 1997. This suggests that the market value of a degree is increasing and perhaps that the marketplace for graduates is not 'saturated'.

Job applications

AGR employers reported receiving an average of 29.2 applications per graduate vacancy in 2007. This compares with an average of 28.4 a year ago and is the first year that a slight increase has been recorded in the last five years.

Employability skills & qualities

AGR employers consider the most important qualities in a candidate to be commitment, drive, motivation and enthusiasm. The skills most desired by employers were problem solving, teamwork and oral communication, but the most difficult skills to prove to employers were commercial awareness, risk taking/enterprise and leadership.

Fast forward to the future

Encouragingly, approximately 60% of all graduate jobs in the UK are open to graduates of any discipline. Thus, graduates are able to choose from a tremendous range of opportunities 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, and for certain 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/preheoptions.

Relevant work experience is highly valued by employers. It can dramatically improve graduates' chances of finding a good career after university. A recent employer survey undertaken by KPMG found that nearly 60% of respondents were seeking entry-level candidates with relevant experience. Research conducted in 2006 by the University of Hertfordshire with over 500 employers found that almost half (46%) regarded work experience as the key factor they looked for when recruiting graduates. Nearly 75% of the respondents thought that graduates who had relevant work experience would find the adjustment to working life easier as a result of that 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/links/workexp.

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, so they can be strongly highlighted on graduate CVs.

'UCAS knows that many higher education institutions value the skills and maturity which students can acquire through a well-structured gap year experience.'

Anthony McClaren, Chief Executive, UCAS

Useful resources include the AGCAS Special Interest Series booklet *Gap Year* – an on-line version can be found here: <http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/gapyear>.

The Independent online also has a valuable 'Gap Year' resource featuring a collection of articles designed to help you make up your mind:

http://education.independent.co.uk/gap_year

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 Department for Education and Skills (DFES) website www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance or the linked website, www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk for detailed information and downloadable resources regarding financial issues such as maintenance grants and university bursary schemes for new students. Both sites include links to information for students whose home is in England and Wales, elsewhere in the UK, in 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, AGCAS Special Interest Series booklet
Opportunities in the Gap Year – Anna Alston, ISCO Publications, 2004

A Year Off...A Year On – Eileen De'ath, Tessa Doe, Lifetime Careers, 2004

Summer Jobs in Britain 2006 – David Woodworth & Guy Hobbs, Vacation Work Publications

Summer Jobs Abroad 2006 – David Woodworth & Victoria Pybus, Vacation Work Publications

The Gap Year Guidebook 2006 – Alison Withers (ed.), John Catt Educational

International Directory of Voluntary Work – Victoria Pybus, Vacation Work Publications, 9th edn, 2005

Planning Your Gap Year – Nick Vandome, How to Books, 2005

Taking a Gap Year – Susan Griffith, Vacation Work Publications, 2005

Gap Years for Grown Ups – Susan Griffith, Vacation Work, 2004

Useful websites

www.prospects.ac.uk/links/gapyear - general information.

www.gapyearshow.co.uk - Comprehensive gap year exhibition

www.gapyear.com - Company offering stacks of ideas on how to spend a year off

www.findagap.com – Stacks more ideas for a gap year

www.gapyeardirectory.co.uk and more

www.realgap.co.uk – and even more

www.projecttrust.org.uk - Gap year volunteers overseas (cost involved)

www.yearoutgroup.org - Information, advice and contacts

www.worldwidevolunteering.org.uk - Extensive database but note there is a cost involved

www.gap.org.uk - Volunteering experiences overseas for 17-19 year olds (cost involved)

www.wse.org.uk - Advice on international development opportunities

www.raleigh.org.uk - Environment & community projects around the world (cost involved)

www.bunac.org - Summer camps and other programmes

www.campamerica.co.uk - Cultural exchange programme

www.do-it.org.uk - Directory of UK volunteering opportunities

www.csv.org.uk - Community Service Volunteers

www.btcv.org - British Trust for Conservation Volunteers

www.yini.org.uk - Year in Industry scheme

www.placenet.org.uk – Placements in Industry Network

www.fco.gov.uk - Foreign and Commonwealth Office – advice for safe travel; 'Know before you go'

www.raileurope.co.uk – To book rail tickets through Europe

<http://thorntree.lonelyplanet.com> - Hook up with other gap year travellers

What have you got to offer?

If you take a glance at the latest UCAS application form, you will quickly realise that 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 becoming a leading light in the antique beer mat collectors association!

But seriously, 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, and social events.

Other opportunities could involve the Students Union. RAG (Raise and Give) weeks are fun and popular occasions for the whole university. Money is raised for charity and students volunteer to work in the local community. Dressing up and bucket rattling is the order of the day.

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 & 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

Find out more on the web

SKILLS AUDIT	EMPLOYABILITY	UNIVERSITY
www.prospects.ac.uk (Prospects Planner)	www.ssda.org.uk	www.ucas.com
www.channel4.com/brilliantcareers	www.prospects.ac.uk	www.unistats.ac.uk
www.connexions.gov.uk/jobs4u		www.ukcoursefinder.co.uk

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, 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. Guarantees a fast-track through the selection process, if not 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. Check websites.

Sandwich courses: 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.step.org.uk).

Insight: 3-4 day courses run by universities for undergraduates. Chance to 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 are just as interested as charities in this kind of experience. Your university too will probably be involved in HE Active Community Fund Projects providing local volunteering.

Working abroad: many structured placements require early applications e.g. IASTE (science and engineering), Stage/Praktikum (EC Directorate).

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.

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/links/workexp - general advice
www.work-experience.org - search for work experience options online
www.doctorjob.com/workexperience/search.asp - database of contacts
<http://www.westfocus.org.uk/> - jobs and advice if you're in the London area
www.graduateadvantage.co.uk - or in the West Midlands
www.skill.org.uk - advice for students with a disability.

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 Guy Townsin, of AGCAS's Education Liaison Task Group (<mailto:guy.townsin@port.ac.uk>), David Neale of AGCAS (<mailto:david.neale@agcas.org.uk>) or telephone AGCAS (0114 251 5750).

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