

CAREER PLANNING GUIDE FOR NEW GRADUATES

Careers help and support after you graduate



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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on successfully graduating from the University of Kent!

If you have a job or a postgraduate course fixed up already, even more congratulations – you can probably stop reading now!

If you don't yet have anything arranged, and maybe aren't even sure what you want to do after you graduate, don't worry – you are not alone and this booklet has been written to help you.

You can improve your chances of finding the job that you want by enhancing your range of skills, researching your career options and networking to develop your knowledge of career areas and opportunities. Your degree alone will not be enough to help you stand out from all the other graduates: it is everything else that you have to offer on top of your academic qualifications (including your enthusiasm and motivation) that will do this.

The rest of this booklet looks at the main options for new graduates: employment (permanent or temporary); further study and time out. It also refers you to resources, from the Careers and Employability Service and elsewhere that will help you in your career planning and job search.

With best wishes for the future from all the University of Kent Careers and Employability Advisers





MAKING CAREER CHOICES

There are two key steps to making career decisions: thinking about yourself and investigating the career opportunities open to you.

Thinking about yourself

Start by thinking about two key questions:

- **What do I want from a career?** (what would give me job satisfaction?)
- **What do I have to offer employers?** (what am I good at?)

Personality questionnaires

Understanding your personality, and its effect on your behaviour and interests, can help in choosing a career. The Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is an assessment tool that is widely used in personal development and career planning.

Prospects Career Planner

www.prospects.ac.uk/planner is a powerful program to help you choose a career by helping you to identify your skills, motivations and interests. Based on your answers to the questions asked you will get a list of occupations that are good matches with your profile and an explanation of the reasons why. You can then find out more about these occupations including job descriptions, work conditions, entry requirements, training and case studies.

Investigating your opportunities

- Our “**What can I do with my degree?**” pages at www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/degree will give ideas for careers where you may be able to use your degree directly, or where employers are particularly interested in graduates in your subject. You will also find information about careers entered by past Kent graduates in your subject.
- **Prospects** www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/what-can-i-do-with-my-degree also offers a range of ideas on how to use your degree. Don't forget, though, that many careers will be open to graduates in any degree subject, so your opportunities are very wide-ranging.



EMPLOYMENT

What is a “graduate job”?

Most graduates will be aiming at a ‘graduate job’ – but what exactly is it?

- You may be thinking of a ‘graduate training scheme’;
- You may want to enter a ‘traditional’ profession, such as teaching or law;
- You may want a job where you can make use of your degree subject directly;
- You may just want a job that requires a degree for entry and recognises the effort that you have put into achieving one over the last three or four years!

All of the above count as ‘graduate jobs’ – but so do many others. While a ‘graduate job’ is generally thought of as one where a degree is one of the essential selection criteria, this covers a very broad range of occupations. Graduates work in all kinds of roles, especially at the start of their career, and some very popular career areas, such as the media, have traditionally required graduates to be prepared to ‘start at the bottom’ to build up experience and contacts.

Today’s graduate job market is more diverse and competitive than ever before. The first job that you enter upon graduation may therefore be a useful stepping stone, or an opportunity to gain key transferable skills for your next job, rather than a permanent position.

Graduate training schemes

Graduate training schemes are typically offered by larger employers in business, finance, IT, law, technology, engineering and the public sector. They are also available, although in much smaller numbers, in areas such as publishing, public relations and advertising.

In most cases, graduates are recruited into a specific role, such as finance, marketing, human resources or IT, although some employers recruit graduates onto a ‘rotational’ management training programme. These comprise a series of short placements (usually four to six months) in different departments or job functions. At the end of the programme, graduates can choose where they want to specialise.

Although many employers recruit graduates in any degree subject, and will provide whatever training is necessary, graduates are recruited to do a real job and are expected to be able to take on responsibility quickly. As well as on-the-job training, the employer will usually support graduates to study for relevant professional qualifications.

These schemes are popular with graduates because they generally offer a structured training and development programme with a respected employer, a competitive salary and good longer-term career opportunities. They also have a high profile, being widely advertised on graduate jobs boards and directories and actively promoted through recruitment fairs and campus presentations.





However, only a minority of graduates actually start their career on one of these structured training schemes – more graduates will start their career in a ‘one-off’ job that is not part of a large-scale training programme.

While many employers advertise their graduate training schemes at the start of the academic year, and may have closing dates in December or January, others recruit on a year-round basis. Some employers will only start to recruit graduates at the end of the summer term, when they know that potential candidates are now going to be focused on job-seeking rather than study. Recent graduates are still eligible to apply for graduate schemes commencing a year or two after they graduate and are often positively encouraged to do so.

If you have taken a year out to travel or to gain further work experience, even where this has no connection with your future career, you will often find it easier to demonstrate the skills and motivation that employers want from graduates.

Other graduate opportunities

The majority of graduates will find their first role outside a formal ‘graduate training scheme’. These other opportunities may include:

- Opportunities with small and medium-sized employers (SMEs)
- ‘One-off’ jobs with larger organisations, where candidates with a degree are required, or preferred, for this specific role
- Specialist positions such as economist, psychologist or research scientist

These posts may arise at any time of the year and may combine two or more of the above types of opportunity.

There are many benefits for a graduate working for an SME. Smaller organisations offer variety, early responsibility and the opportunity to work on your own initiative: you are also likely to work more closely with a wide range of employees, which gives you a wider exposure to other job roles, including senior management. All this provides an increased insight into how the business is run overall and gives you a better view of the organisation as a whole. In a smaller business you are an individual rather than one of dozens – even hundreds – of graduates on a management scheme, so if you perform well you will be noticed: a survey by the Association of Graduate Recruiters found that graduates *not* on training schemes were developing faster, being assigned more responsibility and achieving earlier promotion to junior management level than those who were!

Temporary jobs and internships

Many graduates take a job that they see as temporary for various reasons:

- to try out a career area before making a decision;
- to gain experience that will help you into a permanent job or a postgraduate course (such as social work or librarianship) that requires relevant practical experience;

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- to earn money to fund travel or further study – or just to live on!

These jobs may be temporary in the sense that they are fixed-term contracts but, in many cases, they are only temporary in the eyes of the graduate who is doing the job! There is a great variety of 'temporary jobs', from those that require the same level of skills and qualifications as permanent graduate jobs to the same type of 'casual' work that most students do as part-time or vacation work. All of these can help you to build up the skills that employers look for in graduates.

Many employers are now offering **graduate internships**. Internships are short-term, career-related posts which typically last around three to six months. All kinds of employers offer internships, from large companies to small businesses and

from government departments to charities. They offer a good way to gain initial experience or to try out a career area that interests you, but there are many issues surrounding payment for these internships.

While many internships are paid at least at the national minimum wage rate, a number of employers offer unpaid internships. Although some of these, such as volunteer posts with charities, are exempt from minimum wage legislation, many are in effect illegal. There is increasing concern that many organisations are breaking the law and exploiting individual graduates through unpaid internships. Another issue is that, since the majority of graduates who can afford to take up unpaid internships are from wealthier backgrounds, these internships contribute towards restricted social mobility.

Completing an internship with any organisation does not guarantee you a permanent job there (although some interns do get taken on at the end of their internship) but will give you invaluable experience for your CV.

Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) are longer-term, but still temporary, positions. A KTP is a three-way partnership between a graduate, an employer and an educational institution, lasting up to three years. The graduate works on a project for their employer while receiving further training and development, often leading to a postgraduate degree. KTP has worked with over 3,000 organisations from micro-sized to large businesses and any degree subject is considered. For full information, and current KTP vacancies, see <http://ktp.innovateuk.org>

If you are looking for temporary work, for whatever reason, don't just restrict yourself to jobs that are advertised on a fixed-term contract as this will limit your opportunities. Most employers will not require more than one month's notice and, if you have worked for them for six months to a year, this is unlikely to be viewed by other employers as 'job-hopping'. You may even find that a job which you see as temporary when you take it up can offer a level of interest and career development opportunities that will make you want to stay with it!



FINDING A JOB

Employers and vacancies

The CES vacancy database and other national careers sites are good sources of vacancies targeted on new or recent graduates. Most of them have a free vacancy alert service for registered users.

The Careers and Employability Service vacancy database

- <https://careers.kent.ac.uk/student/home.html>

This lists all vacancies for graduates sent to us directly by recruiters, including voluntary work, internships and gap year opportunities. These vacancies are with a variety of employers, small and large: some of them are based in Kent but most are with employers throughout the UK – and also abroad.

National vacancy databases and resources

These chiefly focus on large corporate and public sector recruiters, both in the UK and internationally.

- **Prospects**
www.prospects.ac.uk/graduate-jobs
- **TARGET Jobs**
<http://targetjobs.co.uk>
- **Milkround** www.milkround.com
- **Grad Jobs** www.gradjobs.co.uk

Graduate Careers Fairs

These fairs give recent graduates, as well as current students, the chance to meet graduate recruiters and get information from them about their career opportunities and graduate recruitment processes.

They may be run by university careers services (some of these may restrict attendance to their own students and graduates) or by commercial exhibition organisers. They are held throughout the year and throughout the UK, but summer and autumn are the most popular times.

These events are always very busy and you need to prepare for them in advance by:

- Researching the employers who will be there, the positions they are recruiting for and what they look for in graduates;
- Thinking of questions that you can ask these employers;
- Preparing a CV that you can leave with the employers you have spoken to.

Most of the organisations attending these fairs will be the large corporate employers offering graduate training schemes (see page 6). The fairs are not good hunting-grounds for graduates aiming at careers in the media, or other specialised sectors, or SMEs – see page 11 for advice on targeting these recruiters through networking.

Recruitment agencies

Recruitment agencies can be a useful part of your job search, whether for a permanent graduate job or a temporary position.



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Recruitment agencies are used by all kinds of employers, both large companies who wish to 'spread their net' as widely as possible when recruiting graduates and by smaller ones which do not have the personnel resources to carry out their own recruitment. The agencies advertise the jobs, take applications from candidates and carry out the preliminary selection. They also match up candidates on their database to vacancies received from employers.

Frequently, employers expect agencies to put forward candidates with specific qualities or abilities related to the job. This can restrict opportunities for new graduates without significant work experience – some agencies specify six months experience in a relevant field.

Do not use any agency that tries to charge you a fee: reputable agencies charge the employer, not the job-seeker.

Don't rely on agencies alone to find you a job – you should also use our graduate vacancy database, other graduate directories and sites and make direct approaches to employers.

Networking

"Networking is making links from people we know to people they know, in an organized way, for a specific purpose"

That purpose may be to get a job or to obtain information. Networking is not simply a way of making potentially useful contacts: it can be used to help in your careers research and decision-making.

At its simplest, networking is just talking to people! You may feel that, at the moment, there are no 'people you know' who are likely to be able to help you begin networking. But just start to think about all the people that you do know – and all the people they might know. Anybody may be able to help you start a network: fellow-students; your friends and relatives; friends of your relatives; relatives of your friends; tutors and other academics; Kent alumni; people you work with, or meet through your work; members of clubs and societies.

If you start to tell everyone you know about your career plans, even at a very basic level such as *"I'm trying to find a job in publishing"*, sooner or later someone is likely to say something like *"My friend's brother works in publishing"* giving you the chance to ask them to put you in touch with that person.

And you don't have to restrict yourself to people you meet in person – online networking is an important tool for careers research, job seeking and marketing yourself to potential employers

LinkedIn www.linkedin.com is a business-oriented social networking site that provides opportunities to network online with professionals from all kinds of different employment sectors, as well as past Kent alumni. To get started, see www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/findajob.html?tab=using-social-media



MAKING APPLICATIONS

Completing an application form, or composing a good CV, is the hardest part of the application process: often, 90% of candidates will be rejected at this stage. If you have already made unsuccessful applications for graduate jobs, it is worth reviewing your technique and making sure that you are putting yourself over as effectively as possible.

Our website includes the following information, advice and tips to help you make good applications:

Application forms

- How to complete application forms www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/applications.html
- How to deal with competency-based questions. These are the tough ones beginning "Give an example ..." or "Describe a situation ..."

CVs and covering letters

- How to write a CV
- Common questions about CVs
- Different formats of CV
- How to write a covering letter
- All the above at www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/cvs.html

The careers and employability advisers are happy to look over your CV and/or application form and give you tips on how to improve them. This is easiest to do face-to-face, but we can give help by email or phone if it is not possible for you to visit us in person.



INTERVIEWS

Getting an interview is an achievement in itself. Only a small minority of applicants are selected for interview, so you have already made a positive impression to have got to this stage. Below you will find some advice, tips and resources to help you make the most of this opportunity.

The purpose of the interview

Interviews aim to help the employer to find out more about the applicant as a person, to assess how well they match the requirements of the job applied for and to get an impression of how they might fit into the existing team.

They also give the employer an opportunity to get further information about a candidate, in addition to that already given in their application.

It is also your chance to find out about the employer and to 'sell yourself' and your key strengths to them.

The interviewer will be seeking to assess:

- Your personal qualities
- How well you express yourself
- Your motivation and enthusiasm

There aren't any right or wrong answers to interview questions: how you come across is as important as what you say.

Thorough preparation is the key to success: research the career area and the employer to which you are applying; think of questions that they might ask you and plan your answers. This will help you to appear confident at interview (however nervous you feel inside!) and provide evidence of your motivation and enthusiasm.

Useful sources of information and help

- **Careers and Employability Service** web pages on interviews: www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/interviews.html. These include hints on the questions you might be asked, and how to handle them, questions you might ask the interviewer, advice on preparing for interview and feedback from past Kent graduates on their interview experiences.
- **Target Jobs** <https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice> includes advice on types of interview, interview questions and interview techniques



FURTHER STUDY

This does not just mean postgraduate degrees, but can also include vocational and practical skills training: for some career areas, this may be more relevant than a Master's degree!

You can return to university for postgraduate study at any stage of your career – you don't have to start a postgraduate degree immediately after completing your Bachelor's degree. Increasingly, graduates are working for a year or two after they graduate to help fund their future postgraduate study.

Further academic study

Even at this late stage, many universities still have places available for postgraduate study starting in September – but don't just drift into a postgraduate course without thinking about what you hope to gain from it and how it will benefit you in the longer term.

Our Postgraduate Study web pages www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/furtherstudy.html include advice on these issues plus links to a wide range of sites including databases of postgraduate opportunities.

Other areas of study

IT and office skills, particularly databases and spreadsheets, are important in almost any career area. The **European Computer Driving Licence** www.ecdl.com is a good way to develop these and other IT skills.

Driving is another useful skill, opening up jobs that require travel or are located in hard-to-reach areas so, if you don't yet have a full licence, it is worth trying to achieve this as soon as possible. Many driving schools offer student discounts, so sign up before your student card expires!

Languages are always useful and brushing up on your rusty GCSE French, through an organised course or through self-study, could be valuable. Another way to improve your language skills is through working or travelling abroad (see pages 19-20) which could also give you the chance to pick up a basic knowledge of a more unusual language.

Numeracy is important for many careers but is a skill that many graduates feel that they lack!

Business and finance courses can help you to build up the skills and knowledge needed for a specific career area, or just to develop the commercial awareness that graduate employers look for.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) If you want to teach English abroad, a recognised qualification will open up more opportunities. The CELTA or TrinityCertTESOL certificates are not cheap but they are recognised throughout the world, so taking a cheaper but unrecognised course could be false economy.

Local colleges of further education offer a range of vocational courses, often through part-time study. Most courses will begin at the start of the new academic year in early September, but some colleges offer short courses over the summer. Fees are usually reduced if you are unwaged. Distance learning is another option.

TIME OUT

Time Out

Taking time out after your studies doesn't mean putting your feet up after all your hard work. There are many opportunities to gain further experience, improve your confidence and skills and enhance your CV. These can include temporary jobs, casual work, travel, volunteering or a combination of all these – and more!

'Taking a year out' needs to be carefully planned. Otherwise, you run the risk of spending a year stuck in an unchallenging job (or series of jobs), gaining little in the way of skills, experience or satisfaction. The resources listed below will help you to avoid this trap, but first ask yourself a few questions:

Why do you want to take time out?

- To earn some money to pay off your debts?
- To travel?
- To decide on a career?
- To gain some relevant work experience?
- A bit of all the above?

What can you do?

Almost anything! But these are some of the most popular options:

- join an organised project
- find your own job or internship
- travel independently, working as you go
- follow a course to improve your skills or develop an interest

What will future employers think?

"Most recruiters look favourably upon people who have taken gap years, if they are able to draw on their experiences and show an employer how they might make them more effective in the role they are applying for" (Association of Graduate Recruiters)

"When looking for jobs I found it very easy to handle the questions on employers' application forms as I had gained so many skills from my gap year teaching English in China: teamworking, initiative, problem-solving and leadership to name just a few"

A lot will depend on what you have done during a gap year and how you present it. If you have spent a year backpacking around the world, your applications should show how you planned and organised the trip; how you dealt with any problems you met along the way, how you funded it and what you learned from the experience, rather than just listing all the exotic countries you visited.

Employers, though, are usually even more impressed if you have gained some rather more structured experience, through paid work or through volunteering, during a gap year. The following pages outline a few of the ways in which you can do this.

Au Pair Work

Good experience for anyone interested in a teaching career. Au pairs are required to be given time off

from their childcare responsibilities to attend language classes, so this can also be a way to develop your language skills (although au pair work is also available in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA). The British Au Pair Agencies Association www.bapaa.org.uk is a good starting point.

Working in Ski Resorts

There are many jobs that will allow snow-lovers to spend a whole season on the slopes. Most of these have nothing to do with skiing itself, but are based in hotels, bars and restaurants. However, you will get skiing time and some companies may also provide a lift pass among other perks. A site with a lot of good background information, as well as job listings, is Natives www.natives.co.uk

Volunteering abroad – without spending a fortune

Volunteering abroad is a great experience and a great way to improve your CV – especially if you hope to go into teaching, social work, healthcare, international development or conservation. Not many new graduates, though, can afford the four-figure sums that many organisations charge to arrange a volunteer placement.

Below, we list some that offer similar opportunities for a more manageable cost. This does not necessarily mean that the placement will be of a lower quality – many of these organisations cut costs by working directly with the project organisers and cutting out intermediaries.

CAREERS ADVICE AFTER YOU GRADUATE

Kent graduates are still welcome to use the Careers and Employability Service after graduation for information, advice and guidance.

Advice in person

The Careers and Employability Service, at Canterbury and at Medway, is open throughout the summer vacation and advisers are available to help with all your queries on career decisions, job applications, etc (see www.kent.ac.uk/ces/advice.html for details). For full details of our opening times see www.kent.ac.uk/ces/contact

Advice by phone

We can offer telephone interviews to graduates – please phone first to book a time to talk to a careers adviser.

Canterbury

T: 01227 823299

Medway and the Partner Colleges

T: 01634 202996

Advice by email

Canterbury

E: careerhelp@kent.ac.uk

Medway and the Partner Colleges

E: medwaycareers@kent.ac.uk

Advice from other careers services

If you live some distance from Kent but would like to talk with a careers adviser face-to-face, you may be able to use the careers service at a university nearer your home. Most universities in the UK can offer careers information, advice and guidance to graduates of other universities. These services are normally free of charge (although you should always check first with the university you plan to visit).

You should note that most universities based in London will not see graduates of other universities or, if they do, will charge for their services.



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