

# CAREER PLANNING GUIDE FOR UNDERGRADUATES

*Steps to a successful career*



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# INTRODUCTION

## Welcome to the Careers and Employability Service!

Whatever the subject of your degree, and whatever stage of your studies you are at, we hope that this booklet will be useful in helping you to plan your future career and to make the most of your time at University.

It aims to give an overview of the Careers and Employability Service (CES) – who we are, what we do and how we can help you prepare for your future – and to signpost you to useful information on career choice, job applications and the skills employers look for.

You may already have definite career plans or, like many other students, have no idea what you want to do after University. Whatever your position, this booklet should be useful in helping you to make your next move.

In the space available, we can do no more than give a brief introduction to some of the most important issues, but our web and print information resources referred to throughout the booklet will help you to build on this and find out more. At any stage of your studies, and even after you have graduated, you can also discuss any questions or issues with one of the careers and employability advisers at Kent.

Career planning is not something that should be left until your final year. It is a long-term process and everything that you are doing now – study, part-time work or extra-curricular activities – will contribute to helping you make career decisions and successful applications. Students who begin to think about their career early and take advantage of the opportunities to find out about careers, gain

experience, and develop their employability skills are the ones most likely to succeed in a competitive job market.

Do make use of the advice and information offered by the Careers and Employability Service and take advantage of all the opportunities which the University of Kent offers. Your time here is not only for developing your academic skills and knowledge but also the wider skills and interests that, whichever career path you choose, will benefit you in the longer term.

With best wishes for the future



# TOP TIPS TO HELP YOUR CAREER WHILE AT UNIVERSITY

## Gain experience of work

This is essential: many top graduate recruiters warn that graduates who have had no previous work experience at all are unlikely to be able to demonstrate the skills and commercial awareness needed to apply successfully for their graduate training schemes. Even casual jobs such as retail, hospitality or customer service are of interest.

Students can find part-time or temporary work in a wide range of areas through Jobshop, a free service run by Kent Union. [www.kentunion.co.uk/employability/jobshop](http://www.kentunion.co.uk/employability/jobshop)

Students in a wide range of degree disciplines can spend a year in industry as part of their degree. There are many benefits to this, not least that students who have done a placement year are highly employable after they graduate.

For further information see [www.kent.ac.uk/employability/working/students/year-in-industry.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/employability/working/students/year-in-industry.html)

## Learn outside your degree

Some of your options for doing this at Kent include:

- Improve your language skills or learn a new language, either as part of your degree or as an extra-curricular course. [www.kent.ac.uk/languages](http://www.kent.ac.uk/languages)
- Improve your IT skills. The University offers workshops or online learning to help you improve your skills and work towards an internationally recognised IT qualification, the European Computer Driving Licence. [www.kent.ac.uk/itservices/training](http://www.kent.ac.uk/itservices/training)

## Get involved

Student societies, sports, volunteering and other extra-curricular activities will all help you to improve your employability skills and develop an impressive CV.

## Take the Careers Employability Award

This is an online extra-curricular module which helps you to reflect on your experience and skills and use them in your career planning and job applications. See page 5 for more details [www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/careersmoodle.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/careersmoodle.html)

## Collect Employability Points

Students who take part in employability activities can gain reward points which can be exchanged for prizes ranging from Amazon vouchers to paid summer internships exclusively available through the Employability points scheme. [www.kent.ac.uk/employabilitypoints](http://www.kent.ac.uk/employabilitypoints)



# WHAT THE CAREERS AND EMPLOYABILITY SERVICE OFFERS: CAREERS ADVICE



## Quick advice

Careers and employability advisers are available to help with quick queries at regular times.

A quick advice interview lasts about ten minutes. During this time you can get help with issues such as:

- CVs, covering letters, application forms or personal statements. The adviser will read through your application and suggest any ways in which it could be improved.
- Preparing for interviews.

- Answers to brief questions about job hunting, assessment centres or psychometric tests
- Introductory information on further study or funding
- Advice on getting started in choosing a career and referral to further sources of information

## Careers guidance interviews

If you have a more complex query or problem – such as 'I have no idea what I want to do!' – then book in for a careers guidance interview.

Here, you will have time to talk things over in more detail with the Careers Adviser for your subject. A careers interview typically lasts 30 or 40 minutes. Interviews are confidential and impartial.

You can book an appointment for a careers guidance interview in person or by phone.

# THE UNIVERSITY OF KENT CAREERS EMPLOYABILITY AWARD

This is open to all students at Kent at any stage of your studies. You gain the award by completing quizzes and assignments on Moodle, the University's Virtual Learning Environment. There is a wide choice of assignments, including:

- How can I develop the skills employers want?
- Getting a summer job
- Sandwich placements
- Choosing a career
- Researching careers
- Action planning
- CVs and covering letters

A few hours spent getting this will not only help you to improve your career planning and job-hunting skills and make the right career choices: it can transform your chances of getting a graduate job. On completion of the award, you will receive a certificate and 60 Employability Points.

*“The award has made me feel a lot more confident when it comes to applications and interviews in the future and has also made me think about skills I have that I didn't think I had before”*

*“It teaches you all the skills you require for every aspect of working life. It has a vast number of links, tips and webpages that are dedicated to specific topics of interest. There is no topic left untouched”*

*“It has given me much more awareness of the application process for jobs and made me realise that there is a lot to learn from academic and extra-curricular activities as well as work experience”*

*“Before I took the award I was uncertain how working part time in a retail store would really benefit me, in terms of the skills I would learn for future employment. However the various exercises have shown me that I have learnt a lot of transferable skills from this role which will help me in my future career. Doing the exercises has not only given me a wealth of information, but also reassured me that there is a lot of further information and help available”*

*“Before the course I had only a vague idea of my career path and opportunities. Now I am applying for summer internships, I know how to effectively sell my skills to a prospective employer and have a much more focused plan for my future”*

To find out more, and to register for the award, see [www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/careersmoodle.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/careersmoodle.html)



# CHOOSING A CAREER

## This involves four key stages:

- Self awareness
- Opportunity awareness
- Decision making
- Taking action

## Self awareness and opportunity awareness

Self-awareness involves looking at your **SKILLS, VALUES, INTERESTS** and **PERSONALITY** and analysing where your strengths and weaknesses lie. Once you have done this, you can relate your skills, interests etc. to different career areas and begin to research your opportunities. There are two programs that can help you to do this:

- My Prospects Career Planner [www.prospects.ac.uk/myprospects\\_planner\\_login.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/myprospects_planner_login.htm) 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 (including the skills required), salary, training and case studies.

These programs cannot tell you your perfect job! They simply take your responses and compare them with ratings for a variety of jobs to produce a list of possible matches.



You will need to find out more about these jobs through research, networking, events and discussion with careers advisers.

Our 'What can I do with my degree?' pages at [www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/degree](http://www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/degree) will give information on what past Kent graduates in your subject have gone on to do. Don't forget, though, that many careers will be open to graduates in any degree subject, so your opportunities are very wide-ranging.

'I want to work in...' [www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/workin](http://www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/workin) These pages give short introductions to over 100 popular graduate career areas, with links to sources of further information.

## Making decisions and taking action

Taking action can include **DEVELOPING** your skills, **GAINING EXPERIENCE** and **RESEARCHING** careers. This will help you to make decisions. An important part of making decisions is discussion with other people. Friends, family and academic advisers, as well as careers advisers, can all play a part here. Talking to people already working in your chosen career area will help you to decide if the career is really right for you, far better than by simply reading about it. See page 14 for advice on networking.

Once you have reached your decision, you are ready to take action in another way: by finding out about employers and vacancy sources, applying for internships, jobs or further study and attending interviews and assessment centres. The CES can help you to do all of these effectively!





# POSTGRADUATE STUDY

**Students undertake postgraduate degrees for many reasons. You may hope to improve your career prospects or just to explore your subject further.**

If you are considering postgraduate study, there is a lot to think about. There is a huge range of postgraduate courses available, both in the UK and overseas. Before starting you should think about what you hope to gain from further study and whether it is the right option for you.

Our Postgraduate study web pages [www.kent.ac.uk/ces/postgrad-study.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/ces/postgrad-study.html) will help you to do this and also provide information on further study.

They include the following sections:

- What is postgraduate study?
- Before you apply: questions to ask yourself and things to do
- Information sources on postgraduate study in the UK
- Funding and funding bodies
- Applying for postgraduate study, including personal statements and references
- Interviews for postgraduate study
- Postgraduate study abroad

Another useful site is [www.prospects.ac.uk/postgraduate\\_study.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/postgraduate_study.htm) which includes a searchable database of postgraduate courses and detailed profiles of universities and departments. There are also pages on funding postgraduate study, Master's degrees and PhD study, professional qualifications and teacher training.

The Careers and Employability Service holds reference copies of the Prospects Postgraduate Directory and of some university prospectuses. Copies of the Postgraduate Funding Guide are also available to take away.

Planning and applying for postgraduate study takes time, so start before your final year if possible and look at all the options – including what you hope to go on to after completing your postgraduate degree.



# TIME OUT

**Many students think of ‘taking a year out’ after they graduate, but, if you don’t plan ahead for this, 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 couple of 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”*

**Carl Gilleard**

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.

For further information and ideas, visit [www.kent.ac.uk/careers/alternatives.htm#TIME](http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/alternatives.htm#TIME)

A number of organisations offering gap year opportunities visit the University to make presentations and answer questions, especially during the Employability Festival and at the Careers Fair. Find out more at [www.kent.ac.uk/ces/events/index.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/ces/events/index.html)

Another way of using a ‘year out’ is to undertake an internship. These are not just for undergraduates: an increasing number of employers offer them to recent graduates.

# EMPLOYERS AND VACANCIES

## Useful recruitment sites

Most of these can be searched by type of work, location and vacancy type (eg graduate job, internships or placement year) and include background information as well as vacancies.

## PROSPECTS

[www.prospects.ac.uk/graduate\\_employers.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/graduate_employers.htm)

## TARGET Jobs

<http://targetjobs.co.uk/employer-hubs>

## Milkround

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

## Glassdoor

[www.glassdoor.co.uk/index.htm](http://www.glassdoor.co.uk/index.htm)  
Includes reviews and interview feedback.

## GradJobs

[www.gradjobs.co.uk](http://www.gradjobs.co.uk)  
Includes magazine and recruitment events.

## The Times Top 100 Graduate Employers

[www.top100graduateemployers.com](http://www.top100graduateemployers.com)  
As chosen by students.

## Inside Careers

[www.insidecareers.co.uk](http://www.insidecareers.co.uk)  
Covers actuaries, accountants, IT, management consultancy, patent attorneys and tax advisors.

## Gradcracker

[www.gradcracker.com](http://www.gradcracker.com)  
For technology and engineering students.

## Rate My Placement

[www.ratemylacement.co.uk](http://www.ratemylacement.co.uk)  
Internships and year-in-industry jobs and company reviews.



# NETWORKING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

## What is networking?

Through networking, you can gain a first-hand insight into jobs and careers that will help you to ensure that you have made the right choice. It can also be used for actual job hunting, and the contacts that you make through networking to inform yourself about careers may also be helpful in finding work experience or graduate jobs.

At its simplest, networking is just talking to people! Most people enjoy talking about their work and are usually happy to help others who are interested in that work. Events and presentations organised at the University, by the Careers and Employability Service, your Academic School, Kent Union or student societies, can be a good way to make contact with people – employers or Kent alumni – working in areas that interest you and to gather information from them.

## Social media networking

Social networking sites are not just for keeping in touch with friends and family: recruiters and students can also use it to recruit or search for jobs. You can use social media in many ways: for example, to develop a network of people in the career areas that interest you; to find jobs and work experience; to promote yourself and your skills or to research employers you'd like to work for. The following tips will help you to make the most of social media in your career planning.

## Set up a LinkedIn profile

LinkedIn is a professional social networking site with over 380 million members worldwide. It focuses on work and achievements so is more widely used by recruiters to source candidates than Twitter and Facebook. A personal profile on LinkedIn works in the same way as an online CV, allowing you to showcase your career goals, education, experience, posts of responsibility and skills (often more comprehensively than can be managed in a traditional two-page CV). Keep it up-to-date as you add to your experience and achievements.

## Use social media actively

Setting up a LinkedIn profile is just the beginning. The next step is to build your online professional network by adding connections. These could be from work experience, part-time work and volunteering as well as extra-curricular activities. In addition, you can gather 'endorsements' from your connections: recommendations from tutors, previous employers and co-workers that validate the skills you can offer.

## Don't let your online presence ruin your career search!

The personal material on any social media site that employers might see should be professional in appearance and content. You may want to consider setting up separate Facebook and Twitter accounts to use for career-related networking and job searching: this will avoid people who you want to network with you on a professional level seeing inappropriate messages from your friends and prevent your job search from getting in the way of your social life!

If your full name is distinctive, you may want to use a shortened version or nickname on your personal pages to prevent it being picked up by search engines. Even so, you should use high-level privacy settings and Google yourself regularly (or use alerts to notify you of any changes): friends and family might have added new photos or information even if you haven't.

Keep safe: don't give away any personal details such as address or phone number on your websites or online CVs – just your email address. This should be straightforward and professional: avoid anything 'funny' as employers may not share your sense of humour.

# PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS

**These tests (also known as aptitude tests) are used by many large graduate recruiters as part of their selection process. You may come across them at the application stage (some employers will make you take one of these tests online before you can apply) or at interview.**

The tests are designed to measure your intellectual capabilities, particularly your logical and analytical reasoning abilities.

The most commonly used tests assess verbal and numerical logical reasoning skills; some employers will also assess your diagrammatic reasoning skills, especially if you are applying for IT or engineering programmes.

Many students get very worried about taking these tests, especially the numeracy tests.

However, practising in advance can help you to become more familiar with these tests and to realise that you don't need to be a mathematician to perform adequately in them.

For more information and practice tests, see the following:

- Our Web pages on psychometric testing [www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/assessmentaptitude.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/assessmentaptitude.html), which include practice verbal, numerical and diagrammatic reasoning tests and links to many other sites where you can practise different types of test.



# 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

Essentially, it is for the interviewer to see if you match the requirements of the job. These will naturally vary with different jobs but are likely to include:

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

It is also your chance to meet somebody from the organisation and assess them: are they offering what you want?

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

## Preparation for the interview

This is the key to success: thorough preparation will help you to appear confident at interview (however nervous you feel inside!) and provide evidence of your motivation and enthusiasm by showing that you have taken the trouble to research the career area and the employer to which you are applying.

## Useful sources of information and help

- Careers and Employability Service web pages on interviews: [www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/interviews.html](http://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 and advice on preparing for interview. We also have lots of videos where employers talk about how they interview and what they look for in interviewees [www.kent.ac.uk/ces/protected/onlineresources.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/ces/protected/onlineresources.html)
- Books available in the Careers Resources Room
  - *Insider Guide to Successful Interviews*
  - *You're Hired! CVs, Interview Answers and Psychometric Tests*
  - *The Ultimate Interview Book*
  - *How to Succeed at Interviews*

The CES runs regular talks and workshops, on interviews, sometimes with input from graduate recruiters. See our website for further details.

If you have an interview coming up, ask if you can arrange a 'mock interviews' with a careers or employability adviser. Although this cannot reproduce the experience of a real-life interview exactly, we can help you practise some frequently asked general interview questions and also go through your application with you and suggest questions that you may expect to come up





# VISIT US ONLINE

[www.kent.ac.uk/ces](http://www.kent.ac.uk/ces)

## **Canterbury**

Follow us on Twitter: @unikemploy

Visit our Facebook page: University of Kent  
Student Employability

## **Medway**

Follow us on Twitter: @ukmemploy

Visit our Facebook page: University of Kent  
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