



Finding Placements and Work experience

Why are work placements worthwhile?

- Enable you to gain insights into different work areas.
- Help you decide what you are looking for in a job and what you want to avoid.
- Enhance your studies and allow you to apply your skills and knowledge to real situations.
- Strengthen your applications for graduate jobs when you finish your studies.
- Enable you to earn money.
- Sometimes lead to you being offered work with the same employer when you graduate.

What kind of placement?

Generally speaking, work experience of any kind is invaluable in making you a more attractive applicant in the eyes of a future employer, so be prepared to consider anything from a paid, formally structured 12 month placement to a summer internship or a series of shorter voluntary placements during your vacations.

Practical Issues

There are a few practical issues to consider if you are thinking of trying to find a placement for a whole year.

You must discuss your plans with your Department or School at the earliest opportunity. If they have staff available to assist you, make contact with them to find out what the Department procedures are. Even if there are no departmental placement officers, the department still needs to know about your plans.

If you are a UK or EU national and receive any support for your course e.g. course fees, you need to contact the funder and make them aware that you plan to take a year out in industry as your payments may need to be adjusted accordingly.

If you are an international student, it is very important that you seek advice and clarify your situation relating to immigration status and your right to work in the UK. Talk to the International Student Advisor for advice and information.

When should I start looking?

The best time to start is in the autumn the year before you hope to start the placement. So if you are planning to take your year out between the second and third year

of your course, you need to start researching at the beginning of your second year.

Some large companies offer formally structured placement schemes and they can start their recruitment quite early -you may find you have to be making applications during the autumn term. Others will look for applicants during the spring term. A few opportunities may come up during the summer term but this is much less likely and you should not rely on this.

If you are approaching companies direct, including those that are not advertising, you could start your research in the autumn. Look at company websites for information on any placement opportunities. If there is no mention of placements, you can still ring them to ask about the possible opportunities and about when and how to apply.

How should I research and apply?

Most companies will advertise if they offer placements. This could be in a variety of ways:

On their website.

Direct to university departments.

Direct to university careers services.

On websites targeting university students, e.g.

www.work-experience.org

In job directories and publications targeting university students (available in the Career and Skills Development Service).

Companies may choose one or more of the above options to advertise. It is important that you check all of these resources regularly. If your department offers help with placements, ensure that you check the vacancies that they receive and are clear about how the process works in your School. For example, applications may have to go through the individual staff member who is responsible for placements.

Even if a company is not advertising placements, it can be worth approaching them direct to ask. Some may have a formal placement programme, others may not but may be prepared to consider offering a placement if you can persuade them to take you. You could consider making a speculative application to a company you would like to work for. Research the company first and ensure that you know enough about them.

For example:

Where in the company would you like to spend your year (i.e. which department)?

What skills/knowledge/experience might they need?

How can you show that you meet these requirements?

Who should you write to about this?

When you have done your research and identified your objectives with that company, prepare a CV and a cover letter that explains briefly what you want from them (i.e. a placement during a given period) and what you have to offer them (that matches their needs). This should be backed up with evidence in your CV that demonstrates you have the skills you claim. You should be able to do this in your descriptions of your degree, possibly previous studies, your work experience and other experience (e.g. voluntary/community work, interests).

Other strategies

Think about sources of job vacancies (not just industrial placements). You might be able to find a short-term position with a company that would fit your needs. Look out for short term jobs being advertised and also try: Recruitment agencies, especially those specialising in the areas of work that you are interested in, and/or specialising in temporary work. They are not always able to help with placements, but are worth trying. You can also try local job centers, local and national Newspapers, national job websites.

Networking is a good strategy for finding long term work, but could also result in a placement, if you start early enough. It involves building a network of contacts related to the area of work you are trying to break into. You may initially contact them for advice (e.g. on how to enter, how to present yourself in applications) and maybe even to arrange a short period of work experience or work shadowing. The point is you do not necessarily ask them for work at the initial stages – your main purpose is to leave them with a positive impression. You can contact them again after a few months to enquire whether other opportunities with their company may have come up. Attending the City University Career Fairs in October is a good way to make contacts and find out more about different organizations and the opportunities they have on offer.

Remember to keep a record of all the applications that you make, whether for advertised placements or speculative approaches. If you are called for interview, you will need a copy of your application to review beforehand. This will also be useful if you wish to make any follow up calls to companies if you do not hear from them (so keep a record of the dates of applications).

What if I don't find anything?

You will have to set yourself a deadline to obtain a placement. Check with your School whether there is a deadline by which you have to commit to a year out or to returning to your studies. If you have not succeeded in finding a placement by that time, you will have to rethink your plans. You should try to avoid taking a whole year out of your studies and only doing occasional low-level temporary work during that time. You should explore other ways of getting work experience such as a shorter summer placement or internship at the end of your second year. However, you will need to apply for these early in the academic year, too (alongside applications for placement). It would be a useful strategy to apply to industrial placements and also for summer placements.

Alternatively, a summer job which you can look for through the University's Vacancy Board could give you some extra experience.

Sources of Help

Check with your Department

- Whether they have a member of staff responsible for placements.
- Who you should notify of your plans.
- Whether they receive placement details from companies and where they are advertised.
- Whether they have employer contacts you could try.

Visit the Career and Skills Development Service.

- Check our website for placements.
- Use our employer reference materials to identify companies to whom you could make speculative applications.
- Use the **Careers Network Online** to get in touch with City graduates who can help you in your research and to build up useful contacts in the Centre.
- Attend our **career fairs** and **employer presentations**. Most of the companies attending these events recruit for placements, summer internships or offer short-term work experience opportunities.
- **Attend our workshops** on job search tactics to help you with your application and interview techniques. Take one of our **practice aptitude tests** which are similar to those some companies use in their selection processes.
- **Book a mock interview** if you anticipate a job interview coming up.
- Book to see a Careers Consultant to talk through your plans.

Useful Websites

www.city.ac.uk/careers/
http://delicious.com/City_Careers/Internships
http://delicious.com/City_Careers/Internships+WorkExperience
www.prospects.ac.uk
www.work-experience.org

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