Career planning in a competitive job market

The key to success is to start preparing yourself as soon as possible, ideally in Year 1, and to develop valuable skills and work experience to offer employers together with your degree.

**Be the best**

Many employers are looking for high academic achievement, and may specify a 2:1 or above. Aiming for the best possible result in your degree is a sensible first step.

In addition employers will always look for ‘well-rounded’ applicants who have experience beyond study and can demonstrate they have useful skills, relevant to the needs of the employer and the job.

If you have obtained an academic grade below a 2:1, use your time to enhance your skills through work experience opportunities (internships, work shadowing, mentoring) and volunteering.

**Work experience**

Internships, short placements and one year industrial placements can be invaluable and are often part of the selection process for many major employers of graduates. Relevant experience is ideal, but do not undervalue other experience including voluntary work or involvement in a family business.

**Extra-curricular activities**

Many employers (especially large graduate recruiters) take this section of your CV or application form very seriously as this is how you differentiate yourself from the competition. This section can also illustrate application of general skills such as organisng and teamwork, or experiences that may have relevance to the job. So make the most of your spare time to engage in activities outside of work and study.

- Take part in university societies and activities - help to organise if possible.
- Join relevant professional or student organisations
- Volunteer in the local community
- Become a Course Representative or Student Ambassador
- Take part in City’s Professional Mentoring programme or Snapshot – City’s Industry Insights Scheme.

Professional Mentoring: [www.city.ac.uk/careers/for-students-and-recent-graduates/professional-mentoring](http://www.city.ac.uk/careers/for-students-and-recent-graduates/professional-mentoring)

Snapshot Scheme: [www.city.ac.uk/careers/for-students-and-recent-graduates/insight-into-industry](http://www.city.ac.uk/careers/for-students-and-recent-graduates/insight-into-industry)

Volunteering: [www.city.ac.uk/careers/for-students-and-recent-graduates/community-volunteering](http://www.city.ac.uk/careers/for-students-and-recent-graduates/community-volunteering)

**Do your research**

You need to be well informed about the nature of the organisation and the job.

- Read their website any information about what they do and what they look for in applicants. Understand their company culture and core values.
- Keep up to date with events affecting the organisation. Read major newspapers and specialist publications, follow business leaders and journalists writing in the field on Twitter.
- Search news archives for recent items about the organisation and the sector. NexisUK and Factiva can be found on
Career planning in a competitive job market

the Library database and have over 12,000 news sources.

• Be clear about where they are in their sector. Who are their customers? Who are their competitors and how do they compare?

Stay up-to-date
Fluctuation in global economies affects every country and sector. Technological advances can influence the nature and availability of types of work, and so can government policy.

Stay in touch by:
• Looking out for relevant news items
• Networking with contacts working in the sector
• Becoming a member of an appropriate professional body
• Talking to relevant employers

Use your networks
As finding a job becomes increasingly competitive, establishing and developing a network of useful contacts is all the more important.

Some jobs may never be advertised but are filled by individuals already known to the organisation. Perhaps they have worked there in a paid or unpaid capacity, or they have had substantial contact with the organisation in some other way.

Make use of any contacts you have, such as friends, relatives, colleagues, fellow students etc. If you need to build on this:
• Use the Ask Alumni database in the Career and Skills Development Service.

• Attend employer events. Recruitment fairs, employer CV checks, workshops and presentations are all listed on CareerHub.
• Try direct approaches to organisations.
• Network using LinkedIn.
Contacts might be able to advise you how to:
• Find a job or work experience in their sector
• Complete sector specific applications
• Identify issues affecting the sector and their implications.

Make a good impression; contacts may remember you if they hear of an opportunity coming up that might suit you.

Be realistic about choices
Achieving that dream job is rarely easy. Identifying alternatives is a standard strategy in career planning. Consider what those alternatives might be.

• Review what attracted you to your dream job. Are there other jobs that have some of the same characteristics and attractions?
• Many roles for graduates can be open to all, regardless of degree subject. Keep an open mind about jobs that might suit you.
• Small- to medium-sized organisations can offer good opportunities, not just the well-known graduate recruiters.
• Not everyone finds a ‘graduate job’ and many graduates choose jobs that do not require a degree. They may still progress and develop successfully, applying the skills and knowledge gained from their study.

If you need to go back to basics with your career choices, you could begin by looking at your strengths. Try the EY Strengths Test.

http://www.facebook.com/EYUKcareers/app_219886381467405

Then try job matching exercises such as Adult Directions, Prospects Planner or Target Jobs Career Report to review your skills, interests and motivations. Email us for the link to Adult Directions.

Prospects Planner:
www.prospects.ac.uk/myprospects_planner_login.htm

TargetJobs Careers Report:
http://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-report

Other web based resources include the Windmills Virtual Career Coach at www.windmillsonline.co.uk/interactive/.

A one-to-one discussion with one of our career consultants can also help you to plan.

Make informed decisions
Fully research the areas of work that interest you including the competition. Be clear about entry requirements. Read up on careers information, explore websites for organisations you want to join and talk to people working in roles that interest you.

Job profiles:
www.prospects.ac.uk/types_of_jobs.htm

Sector profiles:
www.prospects.ac.uk/sectors.htm

Considering further study?
Talk to potential employers and Career Consultants to find out if further study is

Contact
Careers, Student Development & Outreach
Northampton Square, London EC1V 0HB
Email enquiries careers@city.ac.uk
Telephone enquiries 020 7040 8093
Find out more, visit www.city.ac.uk/careers

CityCareers
CAREERS, STUDENT DEVELOPMENT & OUTREACH
Career planning in a competitive job market

necessary and if so, what course or courses will be recognised. Check with professional bodies for accredited courses. Careers fairs, company presentations and other events present an opportunity to talk to employers, but you can also make direct contact. If you are considering further study because you cannot find a job or are not sure what to do next, this may not be the best strategy and could be a costly mistake.

Be Prepared
Many job applicants fail at the first hurdle by not submitting an error free CV or application form that demonstrates clearly how they meet the entry criteria using examples of their experience. Make sure you know how to present yourself well at every stage of selection.

RESOURCES

Finding Work Experience and Internships
www.city.ac.uk/careers/for-students-and-recent-graduates/browse-jobs

www.prospects.ac.uk/work_experience.htm

www.step.org.uk
www.placement-uk.com
www.milkround.com
www.targetjobs.co.uk

Support from the Career and Skills Development Service
Full details of our services, including booking procedures, and forthcoming workshops and employer events, are on our website.

www.city.ac.uk/careers

Further resources
You will find useful resources on CareersHub. Look under “Career Choices and Planning” or under the job field you’re interested in.