

# Internships, Vacation Work and Work Experience

**Working during** your degree is a golden opportunity to improve your CV even if its primary purpose is to improve your bank balance!

## **WHY DO IT?**

### ***It looks great on your CV***

It does not matter if your job is relatively low key such as bar work or shelf stacking; any employment demonstrates to employers that you have a responsible attitude to work and that you have experienced life beyond academic institutions.

### ***It demonstrates and develops transferable skills***

All work experience teaches you something and helps you to assess which skills you already have and those you need to develop. Skills that employers value, such as teamwork, flexibility, communication and dealing with pressure, can be demonstrated by a huge range of jobs, for example, working in the retail and hospitality sectors.

### ***It might make your chosen career path more accessible***

If your work experience is directly linked to your chosen career path then it is particularly valuable. Future employers can see from this that you are really committed to the field and you have first-hand understanding of the particular competencies and skills needed for that role. If you cannot find work that directly relates to your chosen career it is still valuable and useful to gain alternative employment.

### ***It helps you with your career choices***

Ultimately, the only way you can know for sure if a job is for you is by trying it; work experience provides a perfect opportunity to sample a job or an industry area to see if it suits you. Finding out what is not right for you is just as valuable as discovering what is suitable; by the end of your work experience you will be more realistic and informed about future career choices.

Even if you do not yet know what you want to do, you can still learn many things about yourself that will help with career choice. You may discover which sort of activities you value, what sort of working environments are most comfortable for you, how you work in teams and how you respond to colleagues. In fact, in terms of learning about yourself and the world of work, it is often better to try something different rather than continue work experience that you have done previously.

### ***It may prove vital for entry into some sectors***

Graduate employers, particularly in competitive fields such as the media and investment banking, increasingly view relevant work experience as a must. Large graduate employers now often recruit their trainees from the students who have been on their internship schemes. Either way, placements can be an ideal way of making valuable contacts in the field who may prove very useful later.

### ***It can earn you money***

Pay and conditions for work experience differ, but many of the larger internship schemes pay extremely well and on some 'working abroad' schemes you may earn enough to fund your travels afterwards.

## **WHAT'S AVAILABLE?**

### ***Internships***

These are work placement schemes offered by large organisations and companies. Typically they are well structured and provide a diverse range of experiences, that are challenging and demanding. They are most commonly found in sectors such as IT, finance and law.

Internships are often aimed at penultimate year students and are very competitive (sometimes more so than graduate training schemes), so it is vital that you apply early. The process can be long, involving application forms and two rounds of interviews. Most internships are offered during the summer period but application deadlines start from as early as October of the year before and run through to February. To avoid missing deadlines, pick up free copies of employer directories from your careers service (eg Vacation Opportunities booklet, produced by The Careers Group, University of London, and relevant sector titles from the Target series [www.targetjobs.co.uk](http://www.targetjobs.co.uk)). Some organisations do have Easter/Christmas placements and increasingly companies in finance are offering 'Insight Programmes' for first years. Employer websites and directories are the best source of up-to-date information on these.

### ***Other work experience placements***

There is a vast range of organisations offering work experience to students. These placements are usually less structured than internships and they vary hugely both in type of work and pay scale. Unlike internship schemes, they are advertised as and when vacancies arise. Some opportunities are not publicised at all, so it is often worthwhile sending a targeted speculative letter and CV to organisations where you would like to gain experience; your careers service can help you prepare these.

### ***Work shadowing***

Sometimes organisations are not able to offer work placements but will allow you to 'work shadow' someone. This involves spending time with a professional, watching what their role entails. It may be for one or two days but if you make yourself indispensable for that brief time, they may invite you to stay longer. In order to identify work shadowing possibilities you will need to pinpoint the career area(s) you would like to research and then look for suitable people to shadow. Try to find a contact via family and friends or if that is not successful, make speculative applications to individuals working in organisations that attract you. The key to a successful shadowing placement is being proactive.

### Temping

If you have firm commitments over the vacation break or need to earn cash to fund future travelling or unpaid work experience, recruitment agencies offering temporary placements can be a good source of paid work. Many are flexible in terms of timing and location, and you may even find yourself based in a sector related to your interests. Download The Careers Group 'Recruitment Agencies and Online Job Boards' booklet from [www.careers.lon.ac.uk/files/pdf/RecruitmentAgencies1011.pdf](http://www.careers.lon.ac.uk/files/pdf/RecruitmentAgencies1011.pdf) or look for opportunities on websites such as [www.e4s.co.uk](http://www.e4s.co.uk).

### Going abroad

You may not want to assist at an American summer camp or pick fruit in France for the rest of your life, but working abroad on these type of schemes may have long term benefits. These opportunities are a great way of expanding your horizons, developing skills and exploring interesting alternatives in an unusual and fun environment. To find out more about opportunities to work abroad see [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk), under 'Jobs and work' go to 'Explore working abroad'.

### Voluntary work

Voluntary work often involves greater variety and responsibility than you may find in a salaried job. Whilst you may not be able to afford to volunteer long term, you could look for a short voluntary post after you have earned some cash. Most University of London colleges have their own volunteering centre and your careers service will have further information about where to find opportunities. Your local library will also have information on the Volunteers Bureau in your area or alternatively go to [www.do-it.org](http://www.do-it.org) to find out about a range of voluntary opportunities throughout the country.

### WHEN TO APPLY

If you are looking for a summer job it is best to start before Christmas, when vacancies are first published in the Vacation Opportunities booklet (only available to University of London students). For Christmas or Easter jobs, begin your search early in the autumn term. However, not all employers will fill their vacation jobs so far in advance, and it is often possible to find last minute jobs. Check out The Careers Group, University of London website, ([www.careers.lon.ac.uk/jobonline](http://www.careers.lon.ac.uk/jobonline)) and your college careers service, for immediate opportunities. If you are looking for term-time work experience start looking as soon as you decide you need to work.

### OVERSEAS STUDENTS

If you are a citizen from the European Economic Area (EEA) or from Switzerland, or the spouse or child of an EEA/Swiss citizen living in the UK, you may work here without a permit.

If you are not one of the above, it is still probable that you will be able to work in the UK during university vacations but with some restrictions. Check with the relevant office within your college for further information. Alternatively [www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk) holds information for students looking for jobs in the UK.

If you would like to know about vacancies in countries outside of the UK, look on International Futures at [www.careers.lon.ac.uk/international](http://www.careers.lon.ac.uk/international).

### WHERE TO FIND VACANCIES

From your careers service:

- The Careers Group, University of London online

vacancies website [www.careers.lon.ac.uk/jobonline](http://www.careers.lon.ac.uk/jobonline) and International Futures website [www.careers.lon.ac.uk/international](http://www.careers.lon.ac.uk/international) - regularly updated range of vacancies including placements, internships and voluntary work

- careers notice boards and websites
- vacation work files and information on employer vacation schemes in your careers service library
- *Vacation Opportunities* booklet produced by The Careers Group, University of London
- [www.careerstagged.co.uk](http://www.careerstagged.co.uk) a unique resource designed by the Careers Group. Search the information you want by typing in tag words like 'work experience'.
- internships and work placement fairs
- newspapers (national and local)
- *Graduate Talent Pool* [graduatetalentpool.direct.gov.uk](http://graduatetalentpool.direct.gov.uk)
- *Helping Graduates into Work* [www.london.gov.uk/graduates](http://www.london.gov.uk/graduates)
- *Prospects* [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)
- *Realworld* [www.realworldmagazine.com/sectors](http://www.realworldmagazine.com/sectors)
- *Target: Work Experience*, (free from your Careers Service) or online at <http://targetjobs.co.uk/work-experience> - work experience and internships in the UK and Europe
- *Summer Jobs Worldwide*, Susan Griffith, Vacation Work Publications, 2009 (available for reference from your Careers Service)

Elsewhere:

- local job centres [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)
- specialist recruitment agencies such as [www.e4s.co.uk](http://www.e4s.co.uk) (range of vacation, temporary and gap year opportunities in the UK and abroad) and [www.justjobs4students.co.uk](http://www.justjobs4students.co.uk) (temporary and part time opportunities worldwide)
- high street recruitment agencies which offer a range of temporary employment. Find a list of agencies in The Careers Group 'Recruitment Agencies & Online Job Boards' booklet downloadable from [www.careers.lon.ac.uk](http://www.careers.lon.ac.uk)
- advertisements in shop, restaurant and bar windows
- seasonal events, eg Wimbledon or Ascot (apply early, as much as four months ahead)
- Your college website for any on-campus work opportunities during the vacation
- word of mouth
- networking (personal contacts) as many jobs are not advertised. It REALLY pays to make use of existing contacts. Ask family and friends if they know of any suitable vacancies. See the *Networking* leaflet in this series
- [www.work-experience.org](http://www.work-experience.org) The National Council for Work Experience website includes information on finding different types of work experience and student case studies
- [www.do-it.org](http://www.do-it.org) the only national database of volunteering opportunities in the UK
- [www.step.org.uk](http://www.step.org.uk) a UK wide programme offering undergraduates (mainly in their penultimate and final years) project based work within small to medium-sized businesses

The Careers Group is committed to providing information in accessible formats. An electronic version of this document is available at [www.careers.lon.ac.uk/cep](http://www.careers.lon.ac.uk/cep). For further formats, please contact your college careers service or email [cs@careers.lon.ac.uk](mailto:cs@careers.lon.ac.uk).