



Pareto
Applying for your Graduate Job?
What comes next

Straight to work after Graduation

So you have your degree in hand and the world is your oyster. However, you're now – perhaps for the first time ever – in a situation where your next step isn't clearly mapped out for you. With a number of avenues and possibilities, sometimes it's tricky to know which way to turn or what to do next. So our Graduate Recruitment Team has created this guide, designed to take you through the next steps of your graduate career.

The first step after graduation isn't the same for everyone. Traditionally, choices fall into 4 main categories:

- Apply for a graduate job
- Gain (more) work experience
- Take time out
- Progress to further study (for example, a Post-graduate degree or industry-specific qualification)



Each choice is up to the individual; however, there are advantage and disadvantage points for each and every avenue open.

Work experience and PHDs are becoming increasingly valued in a highly competitive and unfortunately crowded graduate market, so in order to set you above the rest, these avenues are worth exploring. For specific careers for which you may not have sat the most relevant degree, additional qualifications can not only supplement your knowledge, but also strengthen your application by demonstrating drive and a proactive attitude to getting the position of your choice. Industry bodies such as the CII (Chartered Institute for Insurance) CIM (Chartered Institute for Marketing) and ISMM (Institute for Sales and Marketing Management) are amongst many who offer introductory certificates ideal for this purpose. Work experience relevant to your industry can be tremendously powerful, particularly if you are able to successfully network and gain exposure that can push you ahead or set you up for your future career. Unpaid internships and experience are perhaps not as popular or a feasible option for all, but if utilised correctly, can deem lucrative rewards outside of a salary.

Likewise, employers are found to value life experience, commercial awareness and industry knowledge, making 'time out' no longer simply a luxury opportunity to enjoy travelling or let off steam after the conclusion of exams, but an essential tool and point of differentiation to take you through to the next round.

Such steps may delay the commencement of your career and frequently lead to the accumulation of further debt as you postpone the real salary-earning point of the post-graduate process, but experience shows that on balance, those who invest further in strengthening their graduate application are statistically more likely to land a position with the top graduate employers. If you're embarking on any one of these paths, the ultimate goal tends to be the pursuit of a graduate career. Our seven steps to getting you there will take you along the journey to success.





Step 1: What do you want to do?

You may have had your ideal career path drawn up the moment you stepped into high school; you may leave university with no better an idea of what it is you want to do than when you entered. Don't panic. There are countless 20, 30, 40 or even 50+ year olds who still state the same. For some, a calling or vocation is clear: for others, it's a case of exploring until you find your niche, or perhaps progressing and growing into a position. The best course of action is to talk through your options. Meet with a careers advisor or take a trip to your careers service; explore which avenues are open to your degree subject and appeal to your specific skills or personality attributes.

Are you driven by money and looking for a position that offers lucrative rewards? Perhaps rapid progression to get into a position of responsibility is important? Are you looking for travel opportunities, enjoy working with children, have a passion for fashion? With the variety of industry sectors and markets out there, you are bound to find something that complements your goals. Most careers services will have an alphabetical catalogue of popular careers choices, outlining the foundational information you need to know: from entry requirements to typical role descriptions and the top employers, it pays to do your research. Who knows, perhaps the process will open your eyes to somewhere you never thought you would go.

Step 2: Selling Yourself

When it comes to laying the foundations for your graduate career search, you need to build a solid profile of yourself in order to sell your potential to prospective employers. For this, there are 3 key things to ensure are completed to the best possible standard:

- Your CV
- Cover letter
- Online profile

Your CV

The average CV receives just 7 seconds of attention while being sifted through a pile on any HR or management's desk. The power to make a positive impact lies solely in your hands and the more time and effort you can dedicate to producing it, the better. Seek support in structuring and proof reading your final copy, sell your key skills and achievements, and make it unique and personal to you. There is unlimited information available to guide you through the process and support available from a number of sources including careers services, recruitment agencies and job centres. For a comprehensive guide to writing a winning CV, you can download our free guide from our website.

Cover letter

Fundamentally, a cover letter serves as an introduction to your CV: a hook, taster and tailored explanation as to what you can offer and why you are the best candidate for this specific job. The key tip to remember when it comes to the cover letter is to make it specific: don't type up a generic letter and Xerox it out to every available job application. Some basic research of the organisation in question can go a long way, and personalise your application to demonstrate real interest. Don't re-write your CV: pick up key skills, achievements or attributes that go above and beyond the basics and match those to the organisation in question. Ensure the tone is formal and professional at all times, drawing the reader in with a hard-hitting opening paragraph that will incentivize them to learn more. For more in-depth tips and advice about writing an eye-catching cover letter, you can download our full guide from the Pareto website.





Online profile

An increasingly popular avenue of search for prospective employers and recruiters alike is your online presence. Some may perform a head search in order to seek out a perfectly matched candidate, whilst others use the likes of social media as a 'safety net' to check your background before inviting you to the next stage of the recruitment process. Your online presence typically comprises of your LinkedIn profile, Facebook, Twitter and online profiles for individual job boards, discussion boards, blogs and more.

At the simplest level, if you have photographs or information on your social profiles you'd rather a future employer didn't have access to, check your privacy settings and consider deleting the worst offenders. Ensure information stated on LinkedIn matches your CV and is current, up to date and reflects your jobseeking circumstances. Building a solid network on LinkedIn can also improve your visibility and gain you access to key decision makers or names within your industry; joining interest groups relating to those specific organisations or their markets can also form a small yet significant part of your online footprint. Don't be afraid to engage with peers and get your name out there; if you have a blog that could strengthen your application, it's worth shouting about this too. Just keep it clean and relevant where possible.

Step 3: Job Search

The process of looking for a job has revolutionised with the growth of the internet, making the avenues open to graduates far greater in number and reach than ever before. Just some of the potential options include:

- Online job boards, especially graduate or industry-specific
- Careers services
- Individual company or employer websites
- Careers fairs and events
- University job portals
- Email alerts or mobile apps, relating to job boards
- Jobcentre
- And more.

If you know your target organisation or graduate scheme, it may be more effective to cut out the middle man and go direct. If you are simply looking for a good opportunity in the right area, comparing the different job descriptions, salaries, locations and reputation of a number of different companies could be of benefit: and in a competitive job environment, it may help to spread your bets and apply for a few positions. The experience of undertaking applications and interviews won't be wasted.

The key is to act quickly and check regularly. Many graduate schemes or graduate programmes have closing dates before the conclusion of final year exams: start the process early and ensure you don't miss out.





Step 4: Application forms

The process of filling in an application form will vary according to each individual role applied for, and the avenue through which you have applied. In the simplest instance, it may merely be a matter of clicking 'apply' on an online recruitment site, attaching your CV and covering letter with some fundamental contact details about yourself. For higher-level graduate schemes or larger organisations, a personalised application process will often take this to the next level, with tailored questions matching the specific requirements of the industry and market and even the inclusion of competency-based questions, psychometric profiling or scenario questions that will look at how you will fit into the organisation and deal with common situations that occur in the day-to-day role.

When it comes to the likes of multiple choice or profile/psychometric questions, the rule of thumb is to go with your instincts and provide the answer that seems right to you, not what you think the employer wants to hear.

Step 5: Interview for Assessment

The job interview has been voted by an overwhelming majority as the top cause for sleepless nights along the graduate recruitment process. However, with due care and preparation, it can actually be an extremely interesting, engaging and useful process. The same goes for the increasingly-popular use of assessment days, particularly on behalf of larger blue-chip organisations or those offering multiple positions or a graduate scheme.

Our comprehensive 'top tips for the job interview' guide offers a more in-depth look at the process to help ensure you achieve success. However, as a quick summary you may want to consider the following:

Research and preparation: find out what you can about the company, the job role, review your CV. Facts are important.

- Practice makes perfect: try and organise a practice interview and have a stab at answering those awkward questions. Grab yourself some buzz phrases that you can call on, but don't try and learn a script.
- Where, what, when, how: Plan ahead with regards to the logistics. Consider how you're going to get there, when for, plan your time. Turning up late is the biggest faux-pas to start off on.
- Dress professionally. It's simple, but it sells.
- It's not just what you say: Remember to consider your body language and how you present yourself. A handshake, sitting upright and maintaining eye contact are all essential.

The graduate assessment day is typically more hands-on, where candidates will be assigned a series of tasks designed to identify competencies such as teamwork, leadership, communication and many more. Structures and specific tasks vary, making preparation ahead of the day a slightly tricky task. However, the fundamentals required for the standard interview carry across also. On the day, it's important to be yourself and try to keep a handle on those nerves: you are there to show yourself at your best, so adopting a false persona in line with what you think the employer is looking for is not the best approach. Deep breaths, think before speaking, don't be afraid to let yourself be heard and show enthusiasm, both in and outside the set tasks. At the assessment day, the assessors don't take a break: neither should you.





Step 6: Negotiating Job Offer

For the lucky (or simply well-prepared!) candidates who are offered a position, the job offer marks the point at which the finishing line comes into sight. However, not all is secure until you sign on the dotted line: and for some, this is where the process of fine-tuning the details comes into play.

Typically, a job advert provides just the bare basics of a role description. Therefore, be sure to obtain a comprehensive copy of your role description and responsibilities before committing. If there is anything you feel needs further explanation or clarification, open discussion and find out more. Your potential employer will appreciate your interest and professional approach. If there is anything about the job offer that you aren't entirely happy with, now is the time to negotiate: but it's important to approach this carefully. Always demonstrate enthusiasm about the offer and thank the employer. Employ tact when addressing potential grey areas: for example, opening with "I'm not happy with the salary being offered" will immediately generate ill-feeling and agitation. As an alternative, trying "This sounds like a great opportunity and I am extremely interested in the position. I was however expecting the salary to be higher given the high responsibilities of the job."

It is important to recognise that the employer has chosen YOU: you have the right skills they are looking for, and they want to employ you. However, each business comes with budgets, restrictions and red tape. You may not get everything you are looking for but, handled correctly, there is rarely any harm in asking.

Step 7: Start your career

Success! You've secured your position, made it through the recruitment process alive and now is your time to shine. Don't forget that first impressions matter: make your first day count. Turn up smart, be enthusiastic, engage and ask questions. Demonstrate your dedication and clue yourself up about the company ahead of the day. But most importantly, don't forget that this is just the beginning and with the right approach and attitude, greater things lie ahead of you: if only you have the drive to go for them. Never stop learning and never stop aiming high. The only barrier to your future success is yourself.



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