

Alternatives to Graduate Schemes

Graduate schemes are not the only option available to university leavers, so find out about the range of possibilities and how to find them.

It's rare for a graduate to leave university and walk into their dream job. It is however increasingly common for graduates to have several short term or temporary roles as they build experience, accumulate skills and find out more about what they want from work. This experience can help you realise what you really want from your career, whether that leads you to a graduate scheme or something else.

For related information see our titles on *What's next after graduation*, *10 ways to find a job*, and *Internships and work experience*.

Graduate schemes

A graduate scheme typically lasts one to two years and is a job that includes study and training, which usually leads to a professional qualification in that field. Deadlines are early, usually from September to November of the previous year and there are usually a number of stages in the recruitment process, such as psychometric tests, assessment centres and several interviews. Competition is fierce and entry requirements tend to be high.

These schemes tend to only exist in larger organisations and in certain industries e.g. finance, consultancy and retail. This type of role only makes up around 5% of total graduate vacancies, so very few graduates follow this pathway.

Graduate or entry level jobs

The majority of vacancies available are graduate or entry level jobs. A graduate job requires the candidate to have a degree. Some will require a specific degree, while many are open to any – this will be listed in the job description.

Examples of graduate job titles include Marketing Officer, Project Coordinator, or Graduate Analyst. Entry-level jobs are junior positions, where example job titles might include HR Assistant or Account Executive. Both these types of roles allow graduates to learn about the industry and develop skills in order to “work their way up” and gain promotion either in the same organisation or elsewhere.

Why this might be the right option for you

- This is the common way to enter industries such as charities and the media where graduate schemes are rare.
- These roles exist in all types of organisations, from large to small and in all industries.
- Graduate jobs may be more flexible, especially in smaller organisations, potentially giving you experience of different areas of work and greater responsibility.
- Start dates are all year round and tend to be shortly after the application deadline.

Finding vacancies

- See your university careers department website for vacancies.
- www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles has job profiles which provide information about how and where vacancies for different roles are advertised.
- Networking online and in person is a useful way to find unadvertised roles, make contacts and discover potential companies to apply to.

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs)

Most vacancies are found in smaller organisations. An SME is an organisation with fewer than 250 employees and, according to the Government, at last count in 2019 there were 5.9 million in the UK, which makes up over 99% of all businesses. SMEs cover all industries and include anything from a local high street law firm to a successful technology start-up, offering a diverse range of opportunities for graduates.

Why this may be right for you

- The recruitment process tends to be shorter and interview based.
- Vacancies are advertised across the year, with start dates shortly following interview.
- SMEs are likely to focus on an applicant's skills, experience, and attitude rather than grades.
- As teams are smaller, staff tend to have responsibilities in different areas, giving you the opportunity to gain a range of experiences.
- More contact with senior management is likely, often providing exposure to how the business functions as a whole.
- There may be more opportunities for earlier responsibility and promotion.

Finding vacancies

While SMEs may advertise their vacancies online, many candidates are found through recommendations and contacts made through networking. This is where you make contact with an organisation, either in person at events or online (e.g. through LinkedIn or Twitter), where you ask questions to find out about the work the organisation does, what skills they are looking for, and how they recruit.

You can then use this information to make speculative applications, which is where you contact a company directly to find out about potential opportunities, even if no job has been advertised. This approach is particularly effective if you already have had some contact with the organisation. Think about targeting organisations that match your interests/ degree specialism.

See our titles *Applying for unadvertised jobs and work experience*, *Networking*, and *LinkedIn and social media* for further information.

Internships and temporary work

Don't discount short term roles as a way to get your foot in the door. Internships and temping (a series of temporary jobs in different organisations through an agency) are excellent ways of gaining skills, experience and growing your network. And if you perform well in the role it could be the stepping stone to other opportunities or a permanent job.

Why this might be the right option for you

- If you are not sure which direction you want to take after your studies or want to take 'time out' whilst developing your skills, this is an excellent option. Trying different options can help to identify (or rule out) your next step.
- If you want to earn money and gain industry experience before taking further study or whilst starting your own business / working on a freelance basis.
- Roles become available throughout the year and, particularly with temping, start dates can be immediate.

Finding vacancies

- Check your careers department's job board for short term and temporary vacancies. They may have their own temp agency for students on campus.
- Use your network to find about short terms roles that may become available. It is very common in media and the arts for example to find out about future projects through colleagues from previous opportunities.
- Search the Agency Central website www.agencycentral.co.uk for specialist recruitment agencies. It is helpful to know the type of work or organisation you are interested in, so you can be specific about what it is you are looking for. Specialist recruitment agencies may require you to have previous work experience.

This resource is available in alternative formats.

Please contact your careers service or email careersgroup@careers.lon.ac.uk