

Work Experience

The facts!



Whenever employers are asked what they value in graduates, work experience always appears towards the top of the list. With more graduates entering the employment market every year, it is critical that you leave university with more than the knowledge you have gained through your degree or HND subject. Employers will expect you to demonstrate skills that will enable you to adapt quickly to new situations, seize opportunities and remain employable - and work experience is one of the best ways to both develop and demonstrate these qualities. In fact, for many graduate level jobs, work experience is now a prerequisite and some employers will even use work experience as a part of their recruitment process.

➤ What counts as work experience?

If you can get structured, project-based work experience then so much the better, but many employers believe you can learn a lot in any busy working environment. Any paid or unpaid work that you do, from a casual supermarket job to a structured one-year placement, can count as quality work experience as long as you exploit its potential. Types of work experience opportunities you might consider could include:

- volunteering
- work shadowing
- casual work (including part-time term-time jobs)
- project work (eg as part of your course)
- course-related and other placements
- vacation placements and internships

➤ The benefits - work experience helps you:

- **Earn money** - in many cases you will have the chance to earn money at the same time as gaining valuable experience.
- **Make better choices and improve your knowledge of work** - one of the best ways to finalise your career choice is to experience what it is like first hand. You can use work experience not only to evaluate objectively a role that you might be keen to go into after graduation but also to gain inside knowledge about individual employers.
- **Develop a range of employability skills and attributes valued by employers** - a degree on its own is not enough and, whilst you will develop many essential skills during your studies, nothing compares with being out in the workplace. It's also a great environment in which to develop your commercial awareness.
- **Put learning into practice** - many work experience opportunities will give you the opportunity to put the knowledge and skills learnt at university into practice and you will often find that your understanding is enhanced when you return to your studies.
- **Through the graduate recruitment process** - work experience enhances your CV and can provide you with a rich source of experiences when you are asked to provide evidence of a particular skill or personal attribute on application forms or at interview. It also shows that you have a genuine interest in a particular career area or organisation.
- **Build up a network of useful contacts** - many jobs aren't actually advertised, so don't underestimate the saying "it's who you know!"
- **Get ahead of the crowd** - employers are increasingly targeting students earlier in their courses as a way to secure the best graduates. Many use the work experience they offer as the first stage in their graduate recruitment process and, from an employer viewpoint, this is a good way of 'trying you out' to see if you are suitable.

- **Provide you with a reference** - you can ask your employer for feedback on your performance - although most placements and internships will provide formal assessment as a matter of course. If you perform well, your line manager will usually be more than willing to act as a referee for future applications.

➔ What should you be doing now?

It's never too early to start thinking about your future - you'd be surprised at how much you can do in your first year. Whenever you start, it is important that you:

- Take some time to think about what you want to get out of your work experience.
- Think about possible career options (occupations and/or sectors) in which you are interested and find out what work experience will be of most benefit to you.
- Consider what knowledge, skills and experience you already have and what you would like to develop further.
- Find out what relevant work experience opportunities exist and when you will have to start making applications.
- Look at other influencing factors such as time, location and your financial situation and decide how much time you can commit and when.

➔ Finding work experience

When it comes to taking the next step, you have lots of options available to you to help you find and get what you want from your work experience - and the Careers Service has a number of schemes and resources to help you get started. Further details are available online at - <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/careers/sourcing-work-experience>.

➔ Part-time work

Looking for a term-time job? The Careers Service advertises a wide range of student jobs in the local area and, whilst most can best be described as casual work, you may find something more career specific. The main motivation for most students is to earn extra money, but remember that you can develop important skills such as team working, communication and time management in all jobs. Remember also, however, that it is important to build on the experience you gain from casual work - whilst bar work is fine during term-time, for example, try to find something at a higher level during your summer vacation. Term-time work is advertised on our vacancy database AberConnections (<https://careers.aber.ac.uk>) but for more help, speak to staff in our office in the Students' Union.

➔ GO Wales

The GO Wales Achieve through Work Experience Programme is for young students on higher education courses in Wales who are facing barriers in securing experience. The GO Wales team works with all kinds of employers in Wales to create tailored, flexible work experience opportunities designed to fit around students' other commitments. Are you under 25 years old, in full time education? To find out more about the Programme and further eligibility criteria please contact your Aberystwyth GO Wales team gowales@aber.ac.uk.

➔ Year in Employment Scheme

Almost unique in British universities, the Year in Employment Scheme (YES) is a fantastic opportunity for you to take an optional year out between your second and third years to work in an organisation in the UK or overseas. You will have the chance to develop your employability skills during a period of sustained graduate level experience, take a break from studying and also earn some money. Visit www.aber.ac.uk/en/careers/sourcing-work-experience/yearinemploymentscheme/ for further details or e-mail careers@aber.ac.uk.

➔ AberForward

The University understands fully your need to gain relevant work experience and, as a result, developed 'AberForward', a learning and development opportunity for Aberystwyth University students and graduates! This exclusive programme combines full-time paid work within an Aberystwyth University academic or service department, professional development workshops and 1:1 support. Visit <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/careers/sourcing-work-experience/aberforward/> for further information.

➔ Vacation Placements/Internships

A vacation placement is a period of work experience undertaken during the university holidays - opportunities are available at Christmas, Easter and, more usually, over the summer vacation when they are available for up to 12 weeks. Placements/ internships demonstrate to employers that you have chosen to use your vacation constructively and have started exploring your career options early on - and they are often used by employers as a part of their graduate recruitment process. Sometimes restricted to penultimate year students, competition for these schemes can be very keen and the application process rigorous, so check closing dates (often December-February) and apply early! To get started visit our office in the Students' Union and search our vacancy database AberConnections - <https://careers.aber.ac.uk> for opportunities.

➤ Voluntary Work

Voluntary work is another popular way to complement your studies by gaining practical experience, but don't assume it's an easy option - commitment and enthusiasm are a must! Even though you are working for free, employers take voluntary work just as seriously as any other type of work and some sectors, particularly the creative industries, will expect you to undertake work experience of this kind to get 'a foot in the door'. For more information, visit the voluntary work pages at <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/careers/sourcing-work-experience/volunteering/>

Student Volunteers Aberystwyth, based in the Students' Union, recruits and supports students on a range of projects in the local community. For more information, visit - <https://www.abersu.co.uk/teamaber/volunteering/>.

➤ National Minimum Wage

Employers must pay their workers a minimum amount as defined by law. This is called the National Minimum Wage (NMW). There are however some exceptions to this legislation, for example work shadowing or when working for a charity, voluntary organisation, associated fund raising body or statutory body. More information on the National Minimum Wage is available at <https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage>.

➤ Applying for work experience

Work experience applications and interviews should be taken as seriously as those for any other position - especially those which are for graduate level opportunities. Visit the Careers Service to pick up helpful resources and speak with an Adviser.

➤ Speculative applications - widening the search

Even with the wide range of work experience options available, you may still need to broaden your search. Not all organisations advertise their opportunities and speculative applications are an effective way to gain both paid and unpaid experience. A speculative application is one you make directly to an organisation that is not currently advertising a specific vacancy - see <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/media/departmental/careers/pdf/speculative-applications-19.pdf> for more information.

➤ Make the most of it!

Most graduate employers ask competency-based questions at interview and your ability to reflect on and record your self development while undertaking work experience will be key to future success in the job market. Use AberGrad - <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/careers/undergraduate/abergrad/> or other personal development planning tools offered by your department to support you in this development activity.

➤ Top Tips



- **Plan in advance** - Do some research. Don't leave it to the last minute as closing dates vary and timing is crucial. Get your application or speculative letter in early and beat the competition.
- **Get the right experience** - Decide what you are looking for and identify a range of suitable opportunities and the best means of obtaining what you want.
- **The right application** - Put a lot of thought into your application - just as much as you would if applying for a permanent post.
- **Get a Careers Adviser** to check your CV or application form.
- **While you are there - make a good impression and get involved** - Give all tasks your utmost attention - every employer is looking for hard workers who demonstrate initiative and have the drive and determination to get things done. Offer to do something beyond your remit or comfort zone - you'll gain brownie points for enthusiasm as well as valuable experience. Try out new experiences if they come your way or create them for yourself by getting yourself known, keeping your ear to the ground and making sure you're in the right place at the right time.
- **Self-reflection and feedback** - Think about what are you good at and what skills you need to develop. Most employers will help you with this by providing formal feedback which will be invaluable for your future development. Don't worry if everything hasn't gone exactly to plan - sometimes you learn more that way! You can keep a record of your development in AberGrad to discuss later with your tutor.
- **Network** - Get to know as many people as you can and keep in touch - these contacts can often lead to opportunities later on - see [https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/media/departmental/careers/pdf/Networking-\(eng\)-2019.pdf](https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/media/departmental/careers/pdf/Networking-(eng)-2019.pdf)
- **References** - A successful placement can be the source of a glowing reference so, if all has gone well, ask your line manager if s/he will act as your referee for future applications.
- **Follow up** your experience with a letter of thanks - try and leave the door open for the future.
- **Remember** - successful work experience can often lead to a permanent job!

➡ How the Careers Service can help

As well as the schemes highlighted above, the Careers Service can help in a number of other ways...

- **Visit our website.** Details of the schemes and resources available for finding work experience can be found on our website at www.aber.ac.uk/careers. Follow the Sourcing Work Experience link from our home page.
- **Pick up copies of free resources** from our office in the Students' Union including our essential handouts and publications.
- **Use the drop in service**, available Monday to Friday, to have your CV or application form checked by a Careers Adviser.
- **Book an appointment with a Careers Consultant** if you would like to discuss your options in more detail.
- **Careers Service Events.** You may find it useful to attend some of the events run by the Careers Service, for example employer presentations, recruitment events or workshops. See the 'Events' section on AberConnections (<https://careers.aber.ac.uk>).

Location and Contact Details

- ➡ **Careers Service**
Students' Union (next to the Union shop)
Open Monday to Thursday 9.00 am - 5.00 pm and
Friday 9.00 am - 4.00 pm
Closed 1.00 - 2.00 pm
Tel: 01970 622378
E-mail: careers@aber.ac.uk