

Getting Work Experience

Careers & Employability Service

www.mmu.ac.uk/careers



**Manchester
Metropolitan
University**

This document is available in alternative formats – Please contact careers@mmu.ac.uk for details.

Why is having Work Experience so important?

- You can explore your existing career ideas and determine whether you are on the right path, before it becomes increasingly difficult to change direction.
- You will be more aware of the qualifications, skills and qualities required in different occupations, and how you match up to these.
- You can gain an insight into the relationship between your academic studies and their application in the workplace.
- You can write a fuller and more interesting CV, providing hard evidence of a range of skills helpful to a future employer.
- You will see how employers recruit. Remember too, a work experience placement can be the first stage in the selection process.
- You may be able to reduce your student debts!

Please note that Disability Toolkits www.disabilitytoolkits.ac.uk is available to help **disabled** students gain and make the most of work experience opportunities.

What counts as work experience and how to get it

Work experience can take many different forms with some employers offering established work experience schemes, but these may be limited to sandwich course students or focused on those from a particular subject or year group. If you don't fit a scheme's criteria for paid placements or you are struggling to compete for paid jobs because you have little or no relevant experience you should explore the range of other options for gaining vital work experience outlined in this leaflet.

There are numerous vacancy services advertising work experience opportunities but you may need to try a '**speculative approach**' by targeting employers of your choice and enquiring about opportunities. To do this, you must do some research. Try browsing the employer directories in the Business School Library or in the commercial section of the Manchester's Central Reference Library in St Peter's Square. Alternatively, try an online employer directory such as www.yell.com

Further information on making a speculative approach is available in our leaflet 'How to find local vacancies in Manchester and the North West'
www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides

If you are looking to target **local employers** it would be useful to look at First Move NW www.firstmovenorthwest.co.uk

If you are keen to work in a **specific industry or job role**, it is worth browsing Prospects occupational profiles www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations or see the industry/occupation-specific leaflets at www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides for useful leads for making speculative approaches. If you are interested in gaining **work experience abroad** then you can make a start by referring to Prospects country profiles at www.prospects.ac.uk/links/countries

Below you will find descriptions of the types of organised work experience available and suggestions on where to find each.

- **Placements as part of your degree course providing work experience relevant to your studies.**

This could be a sandwich year in industry, a teaching assistant role abroad or a few weeks working unpaid in a voluntary sector organisation. Your course tutors should be able to advise you of possible contacts.

It would also be helpful to check the Careers & Employability Service online vacancy and events service www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/coves which has full-time, placement and part time vacancies.

The Careers & Employability Service also has relevant leaflets to help with your placement search including “How to find Placement Opportunities“ www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides

If you are interested in gaining experience with a large graduate recruiter it is worth noting that these companies do tend to advertise structured work experience schemes during the Autumn or early Spring terms. It may, however, be worth looking at other times of the year or even trying a speculative approach using the graduate directories published by Prospects and Hobsons both of which are available in the Careers & Employability Service.

- **Summer Placement Schemes offered by large organisations in industry, commerce and the public sector.**

Many of these are advertised in Prospects Work Experience, available in hard copy from the Careers & Employability Service Information Rooms or at www.prospects.ac.uk/links/Workexp

Other useful sources of internships and work experience are:

www.targetjobs.co.uk/work-experience/
www.milkround.com/s4/jobseekers/zones/internships

The book ‘Summer Jobs in Britain’, available on reference in the Careers & Employability Service could also be a useful starting point.

It may even be possible to secure an ‘internship’ abroad. Ask at Careers & Employability Service reception for access to ‘Internships’ published by Petersons/Vacation Work.

- **Summer placements and work-based projects in small and medium sized employers (SME's).**

The national STEP Enterprise Scheme is a good starting point for applications www.shellstep.org.uk telephone: 0844 248 8242. Open to second year and penultimate year students and recent graduates. These paid placements begin in July and last between 8 to 12 weeks.

- **Vacation insight courses, such as those run by the major accountancy and legal firms.**

These generally last one or two days though sometimes up to a week and are featured on web sites such as www.prospects.ac.uk and on individual employer websites.

- **Work shadowing, where you spend time observing the daily routine of someone whose profession is of real interest to you.**

This is often arranged through personal contacts, so do ask friends, family and tutors if they can suggest suitable contacts to you. Refer to the detail above on how to make a 'speculative' approach to employers and the advice that follows on working without pay.

- **Mentoring schemes where you are paired up with a professional over a period of time.**

These enable you to tap into your mentor's professional expertise to develop your own knowledge and understanding of employment requirements (including work experience). Try MMU's Mentormatch programme www.mentormatch.mmu.ac.uk

- **Summer schemes abroad.**

Well established schemes include: -

BUNAC www.bunac.org.uk

Camp America www.campamerica.co.uk

Council on International Educational Exchange www.ciee.org

They can advise on your preparations, and help with organizing your travel arrangements and obtaining a visa. They can also assist if anything goes wrong whilst you are abroad and need to return to the UK earlier than planned.

In addition, the Careers & Employability Service holds a series of reference books providing details of thousands of opportunities for short-term work. Titles include:

- Summer Jobs Abroad
- Teaching English Abroad
- Work Your Way around the World
- Working in Ski Resorts
- Working with the Environment

- Working in Tourism
- Summer Jobs USA

Many organisations offering vacation work abroad abide by a clear contract of employment. However, in all cases you should check the conditions of service carefully. Please ask at the Careers & Employability Service reception for a copy of our volunteering service checklist for overseas placements if you are in any doubt about what you are being offered. It is advisable to view the country specific advice provide by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office www.fco.gov.uk

▪ **Part-time and vacation jobs.**

You may take these on primarily to help the bank balance, but they definitely count as valid work experience, even when it is stacking shelves or serving fast food.

If you already have office experience or word processing skills, employment agencies may be able to secure you work. The Careers & Employability Service produce a list of agencies www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides - there are many different types of agency and you can search for these at www.rec.uk.com/jobseeker

Jobs4students is a scheme run for current MMU students and offers a variety of temporary (short term) work assignments in administrative and people-facing roles in MMU's academic departments and central units. For details on how to apply to join this scheme contact jobs4students@mmu.ac.uk

There is also the opportunity to work as a student ambassador at university events such as open days and visit days. For more information contact the Recruitment & Admissions team at studentambassador@mmu.ac.uk

MMUnion receives vacancies throughout the year, including the summer vacation, which are posted directly onto their website www.mmunion.co.uk

Don't forget to regularly check the vacancies at www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/coves

Other web based vacancy advertising services aimed at advertising jobs for students include www.studentgems.com

▪ **Student Union activities and involvement in student societies.**

Getting actively involved in a student society provides useful experience to develop a range of valuable employability skills. The Union is also an employer itself providing a range of bar and security roles, whilst the management of people, funds and equipment demanded of Society officers can provide real learning opportunities. For further information refer to www.mmunion.co.uk

The Student Enterprise Society

<http://www.business.mmu.ac.uk/studententerprise/index.php> and SIFE www.sifeuk.org offer additional opportunities for participating in business development simulations and real community projects.

▪ **Voluntary work.**

Voluntary work is an excellent way of gaining experience (whilst providing an opportunity to meet new friends and make a difference to the local community). MMU students can undertake voluntary work and get support to set up their own projects through Volunteering MMU. A wide range of opportunities covering marketing, fundraising, performing arts, mentoring, administration, youth work, IT, sports and education are on offer. To register as a volunteer visit www.mmu.ac.uk/volunteering and to learn more about becoming a volunteer book a place on the volunteer induction sessions by emailing volunteering@mmu.ac.uk. In addition, Do It - Volunteering Made Easy www.do-it.org.uk is a comprehensive resource providing contacts throughout the UK. Voluntary Action Manchester www.vamanchester.org.uk supports local voluntary sector projects.

If you are looking for opportunities further a field, the reference book 'International Voluntary Work' and the 'Worldwide Volunteering' database are available at the Careers & Employability Service.

▪ **Working for Yourself or for the Family Business.**

Many students discount this option as 'real' work experience – but it is an invaluable source of gaining commercial awareness and business planning skills and, in many cases, taking responsibility for staff supervision and financial control.

If you are thinking of starting your own business whilst at MMU or shortly after graduation the Flying Start rallies will be useful www.ncge.org.uk whilst The Blue Orchid www.theblueorchid.co.uk offer a range of Manchester based business development advice and set up services. The national scheme Shell Livewire www.shell-livewire.org is also worth contacting, although you should note that a maximum age limit of 30 applies.

If you are already running a business MMU's own business incubator Innospace www.innospace.co.uk provides an M1 post code for your business, unlimited access to PC's, broadband, printing and telephones; library and networking facilities; and on-going free business training and mentoring support. Current MMU students can join as associate members and attend master classes and networking events which are organised on a regular basis. The current charge for this is £100 (there will be an increase in March 2010).

The Careers & Employability Service provides several relevant leaflets including 'Becoming Self Employed' available www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides

When to apply

Apply in plenty of time – for example, if you are looking for summer work, contact employers between January and Easter. Some of the structured schemes described in this leaflet have closing dates in the Autumn term so the earlier you start your research the better.

Many employers have no need to advertise vacation and placement jobs because they receive significant numbers of applications. Be pro-active and contact organisations that interest you with a well-prepared CV and covering letter. Follow this up a week or so later, if they have not responded, with a phone call.

How the Careers & Employability Service can help

- Literature and reference texts on vacation work in the careers information rooms.
- Free copies of Prospects Work Experience to take away plus copies of the Prospects and Hobsons directories.
- Information on the Manchester programme of recruitment fairs during the Autumn and Spring terms. Although the organisations exhibiting will usually be targeting final year students seeking permanent employment, most will not be adverse to you approaching them with enquiries about vacation work or structured placements www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/events
- Information on the annual spring term The Voluntary, Not-for-Profit and Public Sector Careers Fair which features 'alternative' career areas such as the environment, the cultural industries, health care, local government and the not for profit sector. The exhibitors will be able to advise on means of obtaining the work experience (usually on a voluntary basis) that is often pre-requisite for entry into these fields www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/events
- Advice on the options open to you, how to improve your applications and where to obtain further information. Please note that you will need to book an appointment with Careers & Employability Service reception or use our E-guidance service at www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/careersguidance

Advice on unpaid work experience

This is often the only means of securing work experience in popular areas such as teaching, social welfare and community work, museum and gallery work, conservation and the environment, law outside of the bigger company commercial firms, public relations and the media. Working for nothing may seem very unfair but remember that the quality of your work experience can matter just as much as the quantity - you could learn more in a few hours of work shadowing than in a week of doing the filing.

These kinds of arrangement should not be subject to a contract of employment (implied or otherwise) setting out your legal obligations (or those of the employer). You should, however, always be prepared to fit in with the employer's business when carrying out unpaid work experience - turning up at an agreed time, being willing and behaving appropriately. Reasonable expenses can be paid to individuals carrying out unpaid work experience – ask the employer about this. Where a contract of employment exists, the National Minimum Wage should be paid ('not-for-profit' organisations are exempt).

The most common method of finding unpaid work experience is to adopt a speculative approach – try researching the employers in your area of interest and send a CV and covering letter setting out your objectives. Gaining even unpaid experience can be a competitive process – be prepared to 'sell' yourself to the employer by outlining the contribution you can make. MMU Careers & Employability Service advertises short periods (4 weeks or less) of unpaid work experience www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/coves

Once you have completed an experience you'll need to reflect on what you've done, analyse your experiences and the skills you have developed and make the most of your contacts!