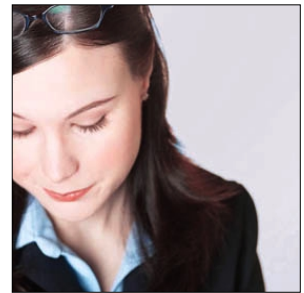


# Work experience guide

Why you should do it and what you could gain



Nottingham Trent University

Careers Service &

School of Arts, Communication and Culture



3

### **Why do work experience?**

Temping, volunteering, placements, vacation jobs... you can derive something extra from this work.



3

### **A guide through the maze of work experience**

If you want to get some work experience, you already have some decisions to make...



6

### **How to plan it and what steps to take**

Not getting round to it? Struggling for time? You need some good information and a bit of forward planning.



8

### **Figuring out what you get from it**

This is the most important bit.



13

### **Opportunities**

Paid, voluntary, UK, abroad, term-time, vacation, gap year... Where to look for vacancies.

# Work experience guide

Why you should do it and what you could gain

## 1 Why do work experience?

---

Many students work while they're studying. Some work for an income, others for their CV, others to make a contribution to the community. Any type of work can provide you with a useful **opportunity to learn**, if you approach it in that frame of mind. Working is very useful for your CV, not just in terms of showing commitment, but in terms of skills for **employability**. Additionally, many students say working keeps them '**grounded**' while they're at university.

Whether you do **bar work** to pay the rent, do some **voluntary** work in term-time, go on a one-week **placement** visit or plan a summer **working abroad**, you can derive something **extra** from this work. This could be knowledge related to your study or intended career, or it could be useful skills, insight into an organisation, or it could be the realisation of what you *don't* want to do for a living later on.

## 2 A guide through the maze of work experience

---

If you want to get some work experience, you already have some decisions to make, as there are a whole **range of types** of work experience you could consider. To start with, it might be useful to get familiar with the **language** used. Employers and organisations may use a variety of terms to describe their work experience opportunities, including an internship, a "placement/industrial/vacation placement", or a period of "work-based learning" or "work shadowing".

Let's take a look at what some of these terms mean.

### **Internship**

A term often used by large multi-national organisations to describe a period of work experience in their organisation which is often **competitively recruited** to and in a **paid** capacity. The successful candidate works as an "intern" often from six

months to a year. You could look at the Prospects web site to identify potential organisations. ([www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk))

### **Vacation placements**

This is a period of work experience spent during the University **holidays**, which is either **paid or unpaid**. Clearly, if you undertake an unpaid placement, you may have to combine this with part time paid casual work to survive! Typical organisations that take on students for unpaid work experience include a range of those in the **media** industry, for example, publishing houses, newspapers, PR and advertising agencies and media production agencies. For all these organisations, relevant work experience is a pre-requisite for graduate entry. Some of these organisations may pay a basic salary and/or expenses. A **speculative approach** is often necessary to secure such a placement.

*STEP* is probably one of the largest providers of **structured vacation placements** in the UK. They arrange placements for eight-week periods and pay £180 a week, but it may not always be in the work area you are interested in. ([www.step.org.uk](http://www.step.org.uk))

### **Sandwich placements**

This normally refers to the period of structured work experience, normally one year, as **part of your degree** course. If you are not on a sandwich degree, it may be possible to negotiate a year out to undertake such a placement. You will need the agreement of the University and may have to plan and organise the year yourself, well in advance.

### **Work shadowing**

This is a short period of time (usually from half a day to a week) in which you **closely observe** someone in a working role. It can give you a good insight into a particular job area. Our Careers Advisers often recommend this as a starting point for students who express an interest in a range of careers, including teaching, law and town planning.

It can be a **good compromise** if an employer does not feel that they have the time to devote to providing work experience. However, it is important to realise that

although shadowing is valuable for giving an insight into different occupations and the latest developments/issues in different sectors, it won't necessarily provide you with skills of your own. You'll need to organise structured work experience for this.

### **Part-time casual work**

This is the most underrated of all work experiences by students and yet it can be the most **valuable**, not just in terms of pure income generation, but also in terms of helping you to recognise your own skills and strengths. Believe it or not, **employers really do rate** part-time casual work, particularly if you are able to reflect on it and comment on the skills you have gained in real terms.

The Careers Service is occasionally notified of casual work, but it's also a good idea to register with the Student Union **Employment Store** at [www.trentstudents.org](http://www.trentstudents.org).

### **Voluntary Work**

This is a period of **unpaid** work experience often in a charity, voluntary or public sector organisation. You can, of course, do voluntary work in a block during the vacation, or as a regular weekly commitment. It qualifies as a form of work experience simply because you will be learning things and reflecting on your skills through experience.

Again this is often underrated by students to the point that many leave it off their CVs, and yet it is **considered valuable** by employers.

Here at Nottingham Trent there are excellent opportunities to undertake structured voluntary work, through the Student Union **Junction** and the **Active in the Communities** project (described in the *Opportunities* section, below).

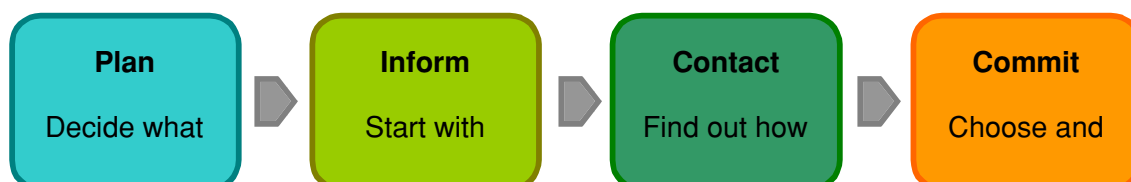
### **Gap year**

You may wish to take a gap year immediately after University, to go travelling, work on an overseas project, or join a work/summer camp. Provided that you **use your time productively**, employers value this experience, as it is considered that such broadening of horizons may result in increased maturity.

### 3 How to plan it and what steps to take

---

Some students feel they would like to work, but never quite get round to it. Others take on too many commitments and find themselves struggling for time. But many do manage to find work that matches their needs, aspirations and practical considerations. The difference is a bit of **forward planning** and **good information** gathering.



#### Planning issues

1. Know **why** you want to do some work, if not what you want to do yet. So, do you need to work for money, or could you consider voluntary work? Do you have specific career aspirations that would make certain work more useful for your CV? (The *Prospects* website has a useful listing of the experience needed for different careers: [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)) Do you want to learn specific skills or knowledge?
2. Figure out **how much time** you'd like to commit, then how much you actually could. Additionally, do you want regular work, or a one-off commitment? Do you need flexible hours? Evening work? What other commitments do you have? There are strong indications that working 16 hours or more a week can affect your study, so you should plan to stay below 10, if you're thinking of regular work.
3. Review your current skills, knowledge and experience. What you're **already good at** could influence what sort of work you can get. Be realistic about your options—this means not being under-confident as well as over-confident. Many work-based learning schemes offer training, so you may well be able to do something entirely new.

4. **Personal values.** Think seriously about this, as it could affect your commitment to work undertaken and your happiness while you're working. This isn't just issues like not wanting to work in a meat factory if you're a vegetarian, but also relates to the type of organisation you work for and organisational culture. So, for example, you might really want to work for a non-profit organisation, or you might not mind.

## Planning tools

- **Time calculator.** Thinking of doing term-time paid or voluntary work? Well, there are 168 hours in a week. You need to figure out how many of them you could really, comfortably work. This spreadsheet will help you. [[open the calculator](#)]
- **Practicalities.** The National Council for Work Experience has a guide on things to think about when finding work experience. This includes advice on contacting employers, pay, tax, equal opportunities, working conditions, and work permits for overseas students. Available at: [www.work-experience.org](http://www.work-experience.org), in the 'student' section.
- **Need a CV?** The NTU Careers Service website has a step-by-step guide to help you build one. Available at: [www.ntu.ac.uk/careers](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/careers), in the 'Student careers advice and employment' section, under 'Assess your skills' > 'Effective applications'. Once you know what you're doing, you can create and store your CV online with the CV Builder the in VLP (via 'Resources').
- **Personal goals and values.** Do you know what you want, or what your core values are? This may well affect the type of work you wish to undertake. *MyFuture* ([www.myfuture.edu.au](http://www.myfuture.edu.au)) has some quizzes to help you think about this in the 'identifying' section. (This service is free, but you need to register to use it, so please read the Terms of Use statement before signing up.)
- **Gap year planning.** The *Doctor Job* site has some useful starting information about what to think about if you're planning a gap year. At [doctorjob.com](http://doctorjob.com), in the 'Advice' section (or direct at: [doctorjob.com/gapyear](http://doctorjob.com/gapyear) ).

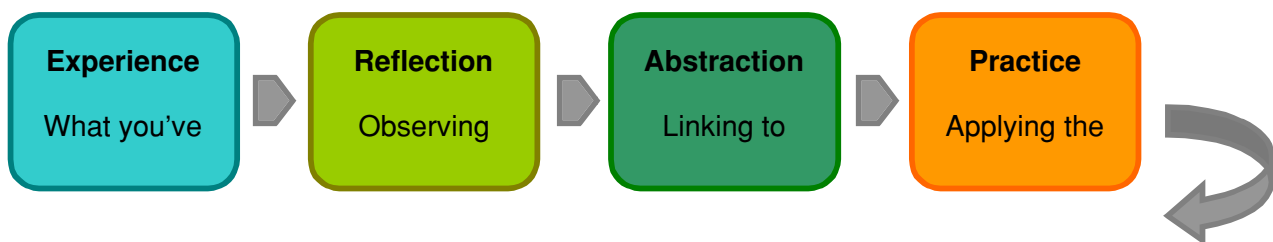
## 4 Figuring out what you get from it

---

This is the **most important bit**. At University and afterwards, you'll be asked to show what actual benefits you've gained from work experience. Employers expect you to articulate this in their language.

Many students find they need help **decoding** in particular the skills they gain from paid or voluntary work. Most people recognise the '**big six**'—numeracy, communication, self-development, IT, problem solving, team working—but find it difficult to break these down further, or **articulate** what they mean specifically. Additionally, **reflection** itself—thinking about what you've done and learning from it—is a difficult skill that many people don't have even much later in life.

So a key element in the success of work experience or work-based learning is the 'learning' part, as opposed to the 'work' part. You'll probably need some **tools** to help you here.



### Reflection tools

These help you **identify and articulate** what skills and knowledge you've developed, by prompting you with questions, or with structured forms to fill in.

Remember that skills could be anything from **learning to use a spreadsheet** (to what level? how do you know?), to **working in a team** (but what role did you play? why?) to developing your **ability to think critically** (what does that mean? how can you show it?)

Whenever you articulate a skill gained, you should try to say what you did to develop this ability, to what level you have developed it, plus have a piece of evidence that shows how you applied the skill. (This is best done straight away, before you forget.)



Later, you can think about how you could develop it further, or begin to identify the skills you don't have and how you can get them.

Reflection is actually quite difficult, but it gets easier with practice, it'll help you throughout life and it should save you from the big, awkward silences at job interviews.

- **Personal Development Planner** (Centre for Academic Practice & the Keynote Project)

Via 'Resources' in the VLP, or at [pdp.ntu.ac.uk](http://pdp.ntu.ac.uk).

Not just a way to record what you've done, but a useful reflection and planning tool. Includes templates, guidance, quizzes and examples of skills. Don't forget to record knowledge gained as well, and that skills run from practical competencies to higher cognitive abilities.

- **Community Volunteer Award** (Active in Communities)

Available to volunteers through Junction and the Active in Communities Project. If you choose to do volunteer work through the University or the SU, you can elect to take part in this Award. It gives formal recognition to the significant learning and development you can gain through volunteering, and will enable you to get the most out of the work. It includes guidance and a series of question-based templates to help you record and reflect on your experience, identify what skills and knowledge you've acquired and plan your future development. It also has help on securing a reference from your volunteer placement and can form the basis of a certificate describing your achievement.

- **Key Skills: Standards 2004** (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority)

[www.qca.org.uk/6507.html](http://www.qca.org.uk/6507.html)

Don't know your negotiation from your evaluation skills? These specifications are a really useful and very specific articulation of different levels of skills. So, for example, in stead of saying "I have experience in team-working" (what on earth does *that* mean?), you can say "I took a leading role in helping my co-workers develop an effective strategy for co-operation on this project".

- **Getting started on career planning** (*Which career?* Careers Service)

[www.ntu.ac.uk/careers/student/whichcareer/index.html](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/careers/student/whichcareer/index.html)

Career planning isn't scary, but it is a gradual process that's best not left to the day before you need a job. If you haven't got a clue what you'd like to do with your life, or you've got a bit of a clue, but would like some help, or if you know what you want but not how to get there, you could try this guide. Includes: information listings, tools for self-assessment and for generating ideas.

- **What am I like?** (Various online resources)

Self knowledge may or may not be the ultimate goal of existence, but it can certainly help you make decisions about your life. Many of the following sites offer online quizzes that claim to give an indication of your personality type, emotional intelligence, behaviour, or learning style. You might find them fun or even useful, but please don't base your life around them.

**Note:** some of these are commercial sites that provide limited facilities for free, if you register. Please read the Terms of Use statement at each site before signing up.

Belbin team roles—no free test here, but there is a useful shorthand guide to the widely-used team roles model (see 'About Belbin team roles').

[www.belbin.com](http://www.belbin.com)

Jung—Myers-Briggs typology test at *Humanmetrics*. Online personality test based on this widely used typology (Extroversion—Introversion, Sensing—Intuition, Thinking—Feeling, Judging—Perceiving).

[www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/JTypes1.htm](http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/JTypes1.htm) There's also an overview of the Myers-Briggs typology at the *Team Technology* site (see Working out your Myers Briggs type: [www.teamtechnology.co.uk/tt/t-articl/mb-simpl.htm](http://www.teamtechnology.co.uk/tt/t-articl/mb-simpl.htm)).

Prospects Planner is a tool to help you think about what sort of jobs would suit you, based on your motivations, interests and skills.

[www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) (in the 'What jobs would suit me?' section).

Similarminds.com—a wide selection of tests on personality type, using different models. Also the slightly more light-hearted 'What classic movie are you?' test. [similarminds.com](http://similarminds.com)

VAR K: a guide to learning styles—educational tool that aims to help you develop more effective strategies for learning and development. [www.varknlearn.com](http://www.varknlearn.com)

### Case study 1

Name	Eve
Work done	Summer job as a clerical assistant for a county council.
Example of skills learnt	"This was my first office job, so of course I had to do filing and so on—basic office skills. But the most important thing I learnt was how to cope with office politics and get along with everyone. I also had to speak to irate farmers, so I got quite good at calming them down!"
Restated in CV language	Information management skills (filing and clerical). Ability to support co-operative ways of working. Developed successful strategies for dealing with interpersonal conflict.
Future development?	"I found I enjoyed working in that environment—even though I'd be aiming for a more senior job—so I'm going to look into Public Sector careers."

### Case study 2

Name	Mandeep
Work done	Student host for NTU open days, during term time.
Example of skills learnt	"I had to be really organised to get the prospective students and their parents around campus in the time allocated. I also had to talk to the groups and answer their questions, so I certainly developed my confidence."
Restated in CV language	Oral communication: public speaking and listening skills.

	<p>Interpersonal skills: ability to establish a rapport quickly with new people.</p> <p>Organisation and time management.</p>
Future development?	"I know now that I'm really good at talking to people, so I'd like this to be a big part of my first job."

### Case study 3

Name	Lyn
Work done	Part-time evening bar work in local theatre during term time.
Example of skills learnt	<p>"You really have to be very cool under pressure as the audience descend on you at the interval demanding drinks! Organisation and team work are critical when this happens , particularly when the curtain comes down five minutes earlier than expected."</p>
Restated in CV language	<p>Time management.</p> <p>Team work: effective co-operative working and team communication.</p> <p>Initiative under pressure.</p> <p>Flexibility in responding to change.</p>
Future development?	"I have proven skills in thinking on my feet and now feel a lot more confident in making decisions under pressure."

## 5 Opportunities

---

### Term-time

- **Students in Classrooms** (Progression Partnerships)

[education.ntu.ac.uk/prog\\_part/sinc/index.htm](http://education.ntu.ac.uk/prog_part/sinc/index.htm)

**What is it?** Hundreds of vacancies for students to work in local schools in a variety of roles. This is paid work with flexible hours that is personally rewarding, a very good way to develop your skills and is great for the CV.

Includes: Student Associates Levels 1 & 2, Student Associates Aimhigher (these have language opportunities), the Primary Literacy Scheme, Student Host work and the Inspire Mentoring Scheme.

**More information:** Have a look at the website in the first instance. You can also email [jamie.marshall@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:jamie.marshall@ntu.ac.uk), or telephone 0115 848 2926.

- **Volunteering** (Junction & Active in Communities Project)

[www.trentstudents.org](http://www.trentstudents.org) (go to 'Get Involved', then 'Junction')

[www.ntu.ac.uk/progpart](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/progpart)

**What is it?** Volunteering opportunities for students in the City of Nottingham, in non-profit organisations. This could be on a one-off project, or regular weekly work. You can volunteer either through the Union of Students (Junction) or through your course (Active in Communities Project). Active in Communities is supported by a learning diary and you can also gain an award demonstrating your commitment and experience.

**More information:** Have a look at the websites in the first instance. You can also email [caroline.bell@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:caroline.bell@ntu.ac.uk), or telephone on 0115 8482379.

- **Work experience placement database** (National Council for Work Experience)

[www.work-experience.org](http://www.work-experience.org)

**What is it?** This site has a database of opportunities, which includes employers offering fixed-term work placements, shadowing, and year round part-time work. There is also some very useful advice and a practical guide to download.

**More information:** Have a look at the website, download the guide and search the database.

- **Opportunities listings and advice** (Careers Service)

**What is it?** The NTU Careers Service resource rooms also have files on work experience and voluntary work opportunities. There is also a useful guide to getting work experience, which includes listings of further sources of opportunities.

**More information:** Visit one of the Careers Services resource rooms and ask for the work experience *Guide*. (City: Hollymount House, Clarendon Street—Clifton: Student Support Centre, George Eliot Building—Brackenhurst: Bramley Building.)

- **Employment Store** (Students' Union)

[www.su.ntu.ac.uk/student-services/employment-store](http://www.su.ntu.ac.uk/student-services/employment-store)

**What is it?** The NTU Students' Union has extensive listings of vacancies for part-time work. You need to register with the service first, but then you can browse the vacancies online and get details over email.

**More information:** Have a look at the website in the first instance and to register. Or you can drop in (City: Union Central, 1st Floor, Byron House. Clifton: 1st Floor, D.H. Lawrence House), phone (0115 848 6263) or email ([empstore@su.ntu.ac.uk](mailto:empstore@su.ntu.ac.uk)).

- **Local newspaper listings** (Nottingham Evening Post)

[www.thisisnottingham.co.uk](http://www.thisisnottingham.co.uk)

**What is it?** The *Nottingham Evening Post* carries adverts for job vacancies in the local area. These are listed in the paper itself, but you can also browse vacancies on the affiliated website (*This is Nottingham*), or register for email listings (do read the terms of use statements before you register with any site). If you haven't heard of the employer before, or have any doubts about the suitability of the work, it's advisable to do a bit of checking up.

**More information:** Have a look at the website, or in the paper itself.

## Vacation jobs

- **Structured vacation placement programme (STEP)**

[www.step.org.uk](http://www.step.org.uk)

**What is it?** *STEP* co-ordinates paid eight-week placements with small companies and non-profit organisations in the UK. It specialises in developmental business and technical projects and offers training in things like report-writing. You need to register at their site before you can make an application.

**More information:** Have a look at the website in the first instance. You can also visit one of our Careers Services resource rooms to ask about the programme. Careers advertises the placements from around Easter onwards. (City: Hollymount House, Clarendon Street—Clifton: Student Support Centre, George Eliot Building—Brackenhurst: Bramley Building.)

- **Local government temporary employment registers** (various)

**What is it?** Many councils keep a temporary employment register for work of varying duration. The focus is usually on administrative and clerical work.

**More information:** Look at local council websites. For example, you can apply to Nottinghamshire County Council's register online:

[www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk](http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk) (the register page is at:  
[www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/home/jobs/temporaryemployment-info.htm](http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/home/jobs/temporaryemployment-info.htm)).

- **Work experience placement database** (National Council for Work Experience)

[www.work-experience.org](http://www.work-experience.org)

**What is it?** This site has a database of opportunities, which includes employers offering fixed-term work placements, shadowing and vacation work. There is also some very useful advice and a practical guide to download.

**More information:** Have a look at the website, download the guide and search the database.

- **Opportunities listings and advice** (Careers Service)

**What is it?** The NTU Careers Service resource rooms also have files on work experience and voluntary work opportunities. There is also a useful guide to

getting work experience, which includes listings of further sources of opportunities.

**More information:** Visit one of the Careers Services resource rooms and ask for the work experience *Guide*. (City: Hollymount House, Clarendon Street—Clifton: Student Support Centre, George Eliot Building—Brackenhurst: Bramley Building.)

- **Employment Store** (Students' Union)

[www.su.ntu.ac.uk/student-services/employment-store](http://www.su.ntu.ac.uk/student-services/employment-store)

**What is it?** The NTU Students' Union has information about summer vacation opportunities in the UK and overseas, including summer camps. There is general information on the website. If you want to apply for vacancies, you need to register with the service first. After that, you can browse the vacancies online and get details over email.

**More information:** Have a look at the website in the first instance and to register. Or you can drop in (City: Union Central, 1st Floor, Byron House. Clifton: 1st Floor, D.H. Lawrence House), phone (0115 848 6263) or email ([empstore@su.ntu.ac.uk](mailto:empstore@su.ntu.ac.uk)).

- **Local newspaper listings**

**What is it?** Local papers are a good source of vacancy listings for temporary work. Many of them also have websites, in case you can't get a copy of the paper itself. If you haven't heard of the employer before, or have any doubts about the suitability of the work, it's advisable to do a bit of checking up.

**More information:** Have a look online, or in the papers themselves.

## **Gap year**

- **Gap year providers listing** (Careers Service)

**What is it?** The Careers Service produces a listing of organisations and companies that provide gap year opportunities and placements in the UK and overseas. These include volunteer and paid work, expeditions, conservation, teaching and community projects.

**More information:** Download the listing [[open the listing](#)], or drop into one of the Careers Services resource rooms and ask for it there. (City: Hollymount



House, Clarendon Street—Clifton: Student Support Centre, George Eliot Building—Brackenhurst: Bramley Building.)

---

Jane McNeil, School of Arts, Communication and Culture

Angela Vesey, Careers Service

*With thanks to the students and colleagues who kindly provided us with information.*

**Nottingham Trent University**

Updated September 2005