Choosing what’s next after graduation

Not sure what you want to do after leaving university? Feeling confused? You are not alone, many students find themselves in this situation.

Choosing what to do next isn’t about deciding on your one perfect job, but about exploring a range of options that suit your skills, preferences, values and personality. Career choice is subjective – what makes one person happy (salary / helping others / progression into leadership/ travel) won’t necessarily be the same as the next person and it is likely that a number of different jobs could fit your criteria.

Experiencing the working world will develop your understanding of jobs and allow you to discover what your skills and work values are. It’s probable that your first job will not be exactly what you want to do in the long run, or be the exact job role you were looking for, however every opportunity will be one you can learn from. Remember you can transfer skills you gain into other job sectors, so experience from customer facing roles, for example, will be useful for account management jobs.

How to be in control of the choices you make?

Sometimes your options seem determined by your course, however many employers in the UK look for ‘degree-level’ skills (e.g. problem solving and analytical skills), experience, and motivation from potential candidates more than their course. This means there could be more options available to you than you might think.

As well as considering your skills and interests, knowing the range of opportunities available is an important part of deciding what to do next. Browsing job adverts online, attending careers events, and speaking to people about their work are all ways to discover different options.

Remember that marketing jobs don’t just exist in marketing companies, but in all industries from finance and engineering firms, to museums and in healthcare. Don’t limit your choices by only considering roles in certain industries.

Remember, there is probably not just one career you could enjoy, there may be many. Sometimes the uncertainty of career exploration can seem too stressful. It can be tempting to go for whatever idea comes easily to mind, just to feel like you have a plan. However, time spent actively exploring and researching will not be time wasted. Sometimes it can feel easier to start by working out what it is you do not want to do. This is also a good way to refine your options and will help you identify what it is you do want to do.

Turn over to view some of your options.
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Employment and work experience
Practical experience is an important part in deciding if a job or company is right for you. From volunteering, part time work, internships and work shadowing, gaining a range of work experiences, whether it is in the sector you are interested in or a seemingly unrelated area, will give you plenty to reflect on to help decide on your next step. Ask yourself: which elements of the job have I enjoyed? What am I good at? Not only is work experience highly valued by employers, but it will allow you to develop skills, make contacts and discover new opportunities.

Starting your own business
Whether it’s designing websites, constructing new apps or selling your artwork online, transforming your idea or passion into a business is an option well worth considering. You may be eligible for university funding or specialist grants for social enterprise to help get your business of the ground. Being your own boss means this is a flexible option you can pursue alongside study or whilst gaining work experience, and will allow you to develop skills such as negotiation, problem solving and business planning.

Further Study
There are many reasons for choosing this option, but additional study will not guarantee you a job on completion of the course. If your main motivation is to improve your chances of entering your chosen career area, find out which qualification (if any) is required by the industry - especially as in some sectors recruiters prefer practical experience. Keep in mind you can study part time whilst working or return to study later on.

Travelling
Taking time out after graduating, whether for a few months to a year, is an opportunity to travel, experience new cultures and perhaps work in a different country. Remember employers will be interested to know your reasons for taking this time out and how it has helped develop your skills.

You have a choice
Remember you don’t have to choose only one of the options listed. In fact you could choose to do more than one at the same time, such as working and studying part time, whilst taking part in some ad hoc volunteering activities. You can always return to these options at a later stage in your career, for example if after working for a few years you decide to gain further qualifications or experience in a new industry. Each option will allow you to develop transferable skills and give you experience that will be useful in your future choices.

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TOP TIPS

> Ask for help and advice from your Careers Centre. Make the most of their resources and appointments.

> Devote some time and energy into researching your options and reflecting on your work experiences.

> The process can take time, so be patient, persistent and stay positive.

> Some useful links for inspiration and information about different roles: www.careerstagged.co.uk, thecareersgroup.co.uk, targetjobs.co.uk, prospects.ac.uk

> While looking for permanent employment you can ease financial pressure by taking on a temp job. This also shows that you have initiative and a proactive attitude. You could find that it opens up new opportunities and career ideas.

> If you find yourself panicking, focus on what you need to do in day-to-day life and in the long term. Exercise and a routine often helps with bringing a situation into perspective.

> If you find that you are not getting short-listed when you make applications it might be time to take a step back. Are you applying for the right type of roles appropriate to your level of skills and experience? Is your CV or application effective? Consider taking a course or gaining experience in an area that recruiters in your chosen industry value. Find this by browsing job descriptions and speaking to industry representatives. Make an appointment to speak to a Careers Consultant to discuss your options.