The Careers and Employability Service will support you throughout your course and after graduation

**EmployableMe:** Our innovative and fresh approach to careers and employability at the University of Huddersfield is about taking control of your own career planning – with support from your professionally qualified and experienced award winning careers team. Look out for the green EmployableME character around campus and particularly within the careers centre in Student Central.

**MyCareer:** MyCareer is the hub of everything you do within careers. From here you can access everything! Including:
- JobShop
- The Huddersfield Graduate Programme
- Careers events on campus
- Resources

You can access MyCareer through the Student Hub via the Jobs and Careers tab.

**Career Resources:** The Careers and Employability Service provides you with access to personalised career resources. You can create a CV, listen to experts discussing job interviews, explore career options and test your skills through online assessments before facing the real thing.

You will be able to find:
- CV Builder
- Interview training
- Preparation for assessment centres
- Practice psychometric tests
- Short videos to help you with applications

You can access these resources from your MyCareer platform.

**Grad Jobs Bureau:** The Careers and Employability Service is here to help you with your future; whether that be moving into a graduate job, exploring postgraduate study options or training for a particular career. We continue to support you after you have finished your course to aid your transition from final year student, to graduate of the University of Huddersfield.
Introduction:

The application form is usually the first hurdle you face when applying for a job. Although companies are increasingly asking for online forms to be submitted, the old fashioned paper form or downloadable document versions are still used by the majority of employers. Unlike a CV or cover letter, where you can determine the structure and content, the application form tends to be very specific and focused on what the employer needs to know about you. There is limited room for individuality aside from the ‘personal statement’ or ‘supporting information’ sections where you can directly evidence your suitability for a post. Exceptions to this rule might include online forms where each question has a word counted answer e.g. ‘Describe your IT literacy (100 words or less)’.

Graduate schemes, particularly those run by multinational organisations, can have thousands of applicants for a limited number of posts; even jobs that are advertised solely in local newspapers can have many people applying. Application forms are therefore used to ‘sift’ candidates to ensure that only those who meet the job criteria on paper will be selected to progress to the next stage of recruitment.

Sifting can happen in many ways for example:

• Scoring: a recruiter matches your form against the criteria set out for the job.
• ATS (applicant tracking system): computer software scans your application for key words before selecting a given number for human checking. For more information on ATS read our booklet on CVs.
• Shortlisting: when one or more recruiters read the forms to check what you’ve written and then compare notes and pick candidates to interview based on their aggregated scores. This is called ‘norming’.

All systems should ideally be as free from potential discrimination or bias as possible – and for this reason certain information e.g. date of birth, ethnicity and gender, will not form part of any sifting and, if requested, will be removed before any scoring process.
Before you begin

Read the job description and person specification. These two documents are related but very different. The job description focuses on the tasks that are to be carried out within the role whereas the person specification is often a list of desirable and essential skills, qualities, qualifications and experience that are required of a successful applicant.

Consider the employer’s perspective: what information might they be hoping to gain from your application? The MyCareer website features short video clips from employers explaining their application process as they see it.

The application form is a document designed to market yourself to a prospective employer; you want it to show you at your best! Remember too that the form needs to display your skills and strengths; our Career Planning booklet covers self-assessment in more detail.

To enhance your chances of being shortlisted you should be able to evidence that you have the relevant experience and capabilities to address both the job description and the person specification as far as possible; if you have any questions ask either the employer or a careers adviser.

Think about how you will submit your application: is it online, via email or do you need to send a printed copy through the post? If you are mailing your form: should it be sent recorded delivery, and does the advert specify the colour of the paper on which you need to print?

Give yourself plenty of time. Completing an application form and checking it for errors can take more time than you might think, certainly a few hours at least. Even completing initial sections with your name, address, qualifications and employment history can be time consuming.

Carefully read the instructions: it is important not to skip these. Make sure that you understand what the employer expects from you.

Your form can be rejected for basic reasons such as:

- Failure to provide evidence when referring to relevant skills/abilities. It is not enough to claim that you have a skill; you also need to provide evidence of how you acquired it.
- Lack of attention to detail. Employers won’t be impressed if you get their name wrong.
- Poor writing style – spelling, grammatical errors and repetition of particular words or phrases.
- Sentences that are too long-winded and rambling.
- Including irrelevant or vague information. This can easily happen if you copy and paste from a different application.
- Failure to follow basic instructions such as ‘complete form using black ink.’
- Remember the form is about what the employer wants to know about you, not what you think they ought to know.

Honesty:

You might think that a fib or two will make you more employable. But where does harmless exaggeration end and outright deception begin? Tempting though it can sometimes be to distort the truth, it’s never okay to lie on your application form.

There can be many aspects of your life that you might wish to conceal such as:

- Poor exam results / resits
- Reasons for leaving previous employment
- Low salaries, in the hope of securing a higher wage in a future job
- Personal circumstances
- Periods of unemployment

If you are recruited but you are later discovered to have lied on your application form, employment law supports the employer in that this can potentially lead to instant dismissal. Presenting information about yourself in a positive yet honest light requires skill; if you need help with this come and speak to a careers adviser.
Completing the form

- Take one or two copies of the form to practise on.
- Read through the whole form before you begin and follow all instructions.
- Make the form visually attractive and easy to read - use paragraphs; create sections to your answers with separate subheadings; use a bullet point format to make your answers concise and 'punchy' whenever possible.
- Don't leave spaces - use 'n/a' to indicate 'not applicable' or a dash in sections you do not need to complete.
- Don’t leave time gaps when providing dates for your education and employment.
- Don’t exceed the space allowed unless you are told you may do so.
- If you are given the opportunity to submit additional information on a separate sheet of paper then state clearly how many additional sheets of paper you are submitting. Add your name to each sheet.
- It is vital that you address the question being asked, and take time to understand what is being asked of you.
- Keep a copy of your completed application form and any additional information that you send with your application.

Your personal details

You need to be clear about what you have to offer an employer. Create a detailed list of your experience, skills, personal qualities and achievements. Consider your employment and work experience, academic skills, study, social and personal life.

Use the STAR format to help you to frame your answers succinctly (S=situation T=task A=action R=result) and create examples with clear evidence. Think about your transferable skills such as those that you can apply to any role no matter what the sector of employment.

Examples of transferable skills could include: communication; teamwork; analytical thinking and problem-solving skills; planning and organising.

- A CV usually requires your name, a phone number, postal address and email address; an application form will ask for detailed personal data such as information about your education and work history, your date of birth and nationality.
- Use a simple but professional e-mail address and a phone number with a formal voicemail message.
- You may have a chance to include other details such as your LinkedIn profile, your own professional blog, an online portfolio, a different social media profile (Twitter, Pinterest) or a website showcasing your skills and achievements.

Education

- Your most recent education generally comes first. You can include relevant areas of study and brief details about your dissertation.
- Summarise GCSEs, give more detail for more recent and relevant education.

Experience

- Steer clear of only listing tasks done in a role e.g. operating a till, serving customers, instead include skills developed whilst completing these tasks such as customer service and communication.
- Ensure that you give examples of what you did and what skills you used or developed – try to relate these to the role.
- Include placements, voluntary or short term experiences and provide detail if they are relevant.

Interests

- Your interests should ideally relate to the role you are applying to e.g. if you attend relevant conferences or subscribe to relevant journals.
- Include details of extra-curricular activities that are a little different and highlight your skills. Not just socialising with friends.
- Try and relate interests to the skills required in the role i.e. communication, problem solving, effective team working.

Skills

- If you have additional skills that you have not yet mentioned, include them under this heading e.g. competent user of Microsoft Office packages including Word and Excel.
- Add language skills, if they are relevant.
- Indicate, if required, whether you hold a driving licence.
Applications for jobs and postgraduate study often require you to complete a personal statement – this is an opportunity for you to show that you have the relevant knowledge, skills, abilities and personal qualities. If the job vacancy has a person specification then you must ensure that you have matched your statement against it – especially when skills and experience are marked as ‘essential’. Failure to acknowledge these can lead to rejection.

**Before you start your statement**

- Allow plenty of time to write and re-draft your statement.
- Read the person specification / job description: this will tell you what your statement should include.
- Research the role and organisation – you can use this to demonstrate your wider understanding of the job.
- Don’t forget to include the obvious: have you stated why you are applying?
- Always tailor your personal statement to each opportunity – ‘standard’ statements rarely work.
- Read any instructions as these might include restrictions on word count.
- Think about your structure: although it’s a good idea to mirror the format of the person specification, you might want to put skills or experiences that you think are key to the role within the first paragraph.

**Statement content:**

- Keep your statement direct and focused on the post.
- Address each specification point to show how you match the criteria.
- Use evidence to back up your suitability from a wide range of examples; try not to have all your examples from your course, or from one job role.
- Reflect on the language used in the job description – and if appropriate use the terminology of the role / industry to demonstrate your knowledge.
- Try to use positive examples from your experience that show you in a good light and focus on tangible achievements.

**When writing your statement ask yourself:**

- Have I addressed all of the essential criteria, and as much of the desirable criteria as possible?
- Have I included my Unique Selling Point, i.e. what makes me different from my competitors?
- Have I provided evidence for the skills that I claim to possess?
- Have I mentioned my motivation – why I’ve applied, to both the job and the company?

**Before you start your statement**

- Ask for a second opinion on your statement by using our regular careers drop-ins; you don’t need an appointment.
- Remember that grammar and spelling need to be perfect.
- Plan your statement before writing it: this will allow you to have a clear, concise structure.
- Always re-read and double check your personal statement.
- Always use a positive tone: focus on your achievements and don’t refer to negatives.
- Keep a copy - you may need it for an interview.

**When writing your statement ask yourself:**

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Your references

All application forms ask for references; usually two are needed, one academic and one work related, however it’s not uncommon for employers to ask for more. You will need to add the name and contact details of your referees to your form; be aware that some companies will contact referees prior to offering you an interview. Make sure that referees know that you intend to give their details to support your application.

Referees are important because they know you, whether as your employer at work or your tutor at university, and can vouch for the statements you’ve made on your form. Good references grow out of good working relationships – and you need to cultivate these throughout your professional life.

Selecting a referee

• University is a good place to find a reference. The teaching staff will be familiar with your work, they’ll understand how you’ve coped with course assessments and they will have seen you grow academically during the progression of your course.
• Employer contacts from part time jobs and placements will reflect your qualities in a different light as you’ll have had the chance to show work based skills such as reliability, good time keeping and trust.
• A good referee will be able to back up what you’ve claimed about yourself on the form, whether in terms of your character, academic track record or what you’ve done in the workplace.
• Aim for a recent contact – if possible, someone who can write about what you’re currently doing.
• Find someone who supports your current career or academic goals and who will happily back up their support in writing. This is especially true if you’re applying for a post graduate course such as Teaching and your tutor will be asked to comment on your application.
• Choose someone that you’ve got on well with professionally. This is key to a good referee as you might need their services for a long time to come and if you go through a period when you’re applying for lots of jobs they might face a barrage of enquiries about you from potential employers.
• Always ask their permission before giving their details. You’ll need their name, job title, address, email and phone number and you’ll also need to add ‘relationship’ to describe how you know them (unless ‘place of work’ implies a working relationship).
• Try and keep in touch with people who might act as your referee for example through LinkedIn.
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• Try and keep in touch with people who might act as your referee for example through LinkedIn.
• Bear in mind that employers will rarely write a letter about it; it’s more likely that they’ll complete a short form for your reference commenting on aspects of your character and work based behaviour that have a particular relevance to the job you’re applying for.

Things to avoid when selecting referees:

• Don’t add the name of someone without their permission.
• It is not usually acceptable to use friends and family for referees.
• It is wrong to assume that an ex employer must write your reference on demand.
• References are confidential but you can request information through the provisions of the data protection act.
• Courtesy works well and if you know someone has written you a reference do remember to thank them.
Further advice and resources

If you need to send an application form AND a CV:

There are companies who ask for more than just an application form. You may be asked for:

• A copy of your CV
• A separate personal statement
• A covering letter
• Copies of certificates / qualifications or evidence of your professional status.

You can use the additional material to reinforce your suitability for the post. Do ensure that if you are replicating facts that they remain the same no matter where they appear within your application.

Advice for online / email applications:

• Online applications are unlikely to have spell check so it would be a good idea to copy and paste your responses into a word document, spell check them and then paste them back into the application form.
• Online applications may be stored in a database and employers may scan electronically for key words as part of the selection process. This makes it even more important that your application form is tailored to the job that you are applying for.
• Keep a list of sites you have registered your details with – and make a note of password / username information.
• Check your files are virus-free before sending them. Sending a virus to an employer is not a good way of making a positive first impression, or highlighting your IT skills.
• Don’t forget to submit your online application and ensure you have not just saved it. Take a note of the time and date that you sent your application and if you receive any confirmation on screen that your application has been received by the employer then save a copy of the confirmation.
• Have a covering email if you are asked to send in your form as an email attachment.

Following up your application:

• Keep a record of when you applied and save a copy of the form that you sent. Follow up each submission with a personal contact ideally via telephone, within two weeks, sooner if you had a deadline date for submission.
• Check that your application has been received and landed on the right person’s desk.
• Remember – treat a follow up phone call as a part of the application process, before you make a call prepare some questions, also have a glance over your application and refresh yourself with what you have to offer the organisation. You may get the chance to speak to someone involved in recruitment and selection process.
• Try to obtain feedback even if you have not been successful. Whether it is good or bad news this information will help you to make improvements to your applications in the future. Remain professional when seeking feedback as the company may consider you for other positions.
This publication is also available online - should you like to have it in an alternative format please contact us.

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