



What is professional work experience?

To stand out in today's competitive jobs market, you'll need more than your degree alone. Most graduate employers look for evidence of professional work experience.

Professional work experience is experience of employment, paid or unpaid but typically short term and related to a student's career aspirations.

Why should you do professional work experience?

To stand out from other students and graduates.

To earn money.

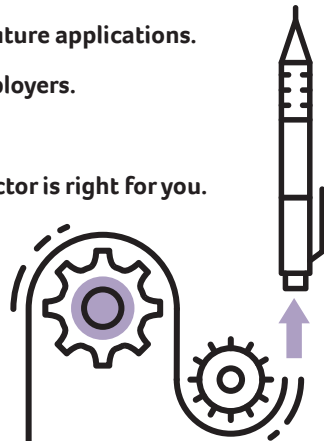
To prove or improve your employability skills.

To get experience in a specific sector for future applications.

To network and raise your profile with employers.

To develop commercial awareness.

To decide whether a career in a specific sector is right for you.



What counts as professional work experience?

There are so many different definitions of professional work experience but this handy guide will help you understand the different language used.

A sandwich placement: Assessed work, usually paid and done as part of your course, normally a year in length.

A work placement: A period of structured professional work experience, paid or unpaid, which is part of your study.

A work-based project: An assessed piece of work within your course, undertaken at an employer's premises or working to an employer's brief.

Internships: A short-term role undertaken after graduation or during vacations, usually separate to your course.

Vacation work: Full or part-time work taken to enhance your CV or improve your job prospects, usually done through the summer.

Voluntary work: Any type of work you undertake for no payment, usually for a not-for-profit organisation.

Part-time work: Work undertaken during term time or vacations, typically to earn money to support study.

Work shadowing: Observe an employee over one or several days to understand the nature of their role and responsibilities. Usually unpaid.

Professional work experience abroad: Whether your course includes a formal year abroad or you are considering a shorter period of professional work experience in another country, working overseas can provide an exciting and challenging opportunity to develop your language skills and experience a different culture. There are a number of websites and organisations that can help you find professional work experience abroad. You should also be aware that there is no regulation of international professional work experience opportunities and some companies will charge high fees to help you arrange a visa and find positions in countries such as the USA, China and Australia. Try to find independent reviews from people who have used the company before, shop around and ask lots of questions before you commit yourself. Students are not necessarily paid a salary, so you will need to weigh up the benefits of the experience and consider how you will support yourself.



What students say about professional work experience?



I completed a work placement at Govia Thameslink Railway in London. On my placement, I was able to develop existing skills gained from my course and learn new ones.



Zubin Motashaw



Doing a placement at Arla Foods allowed me to experience various roles and work across different teams. Undertaking a placement helped boost my confidence and the knowledge and skills I acquired during my placement year gave me a solid foundation for success in my final year at university and early career. I have since achieved a role on a graduate scheme with a world-leading logistics provider.



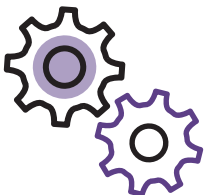
Abi Hutson



During my degree, I undertook a one-year placement at the largest transportation solutions provider in the world, Enterprise Rent-A-Car. I was responsible for a wide range of tasks and projects during my employment. I particularly enjoyed honing my skills and teamwork abilities by interacting and working with various teams to achieve common goals.



Amandeep Flora



How employers view professional work experience

We strongly recommend you take every opportunity to get professional work experience. As well as giving you a context for your academic studies, professional work experience gives you an opportunity to learn and develop the key skills employers regard as important. It will build your knowledge about an industry, job or organisation, and help you decide if you are suited to a particular kind of work. Use the opportunity to network and ask questions or seek advice from employees. We often find students that have taken professional work experience have been offered roles with the employer.

Professional work experience and employability

Today's employers are looking for more than a degree. To be employable, you need hands-on experience and work-ready skills. The responsibility is on you to build your employability skills, right from your first year at our

University. When you complete an application form for employment or write a CV, you need to consider your employability skills. You will need to demonstrate you have the skills required for the job by giving examples of where you have developed and practised those skills, be that through professional work experience, your hobbies and interests, voluntary work, in your personal life or during your academic studies. Your degree studies will show potential employers you are self-motivated and you can work independently, research and use resources effectively, network and reflect upon your personal development. However, you can't beat 'real-life' practical experience. Exposure to a working environment helps you to develop employability skills, gain commercial awareness and network with potential employers. Some vocational courses such as teaching and nursing have an element of professional work experience built in, but if this is not the case, you should think about how you will gain experience of the world of work.



What are the employability skills you will need?

Employers often tell us the skills they are looking for in graduates are as follows:

Self-motivated - you have the ability to do what needs to be done without being prompted by others

Commercially aware - you have an understanding of the wider environment in which an organisation operates

Enterprising - you are able to adapt your thinking and behaviour to suit changing circumstances

Resilient - you are driven, resolute, determined and able to deal positively with challenges

Effective collaborator - you work well with others and have effective interpersonal skills

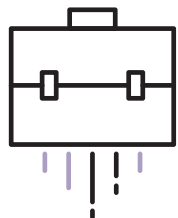
Confident leader - you are able to enthuse a group and motivate them to work towards an identified goal

Globally and socially aware - you welcome new ways of thinking and can anticipate the impact of external situations

You will start to build these during your studies and the Global Professional Award is designed to enhance and help you evidence these. By completing professional work experience you can further develop these skills.

A word about literacy and numeracy

All employers will want some or all of the above skills, but it is very difficult to acquire any of these without good standards in literacy and numeracy. The recruitment process for any professional work experience position or graduate role will test your literacy skills. How you structure your CV and express your experience and knowledge will provide employers with an indication of your ability in this area. Basic numeracy is essential for most graduate positions and your confidence with numbers may also be assessed in the recruitment process.



How to find professional work experience?

If looking for graduate roles, internships, part-time jobs or voluntary roles, then the first place to look is on the Jobshop.

- Don't forget to reach out to your placement unit or careers team who can help you identify opportunities that could be suitable.
- Learn about opportunities with employers you are interested in by following them or liking them on social media.
- Read newspapers for articles on local companies you could approach.
- Use your own networks and contacts to find professional work experience yourself.
- Contact employers to see if they would be prepared to offer professional work experience.

Advice on unpaid professional work experience

Unpaid work is often the traditional way of securing professional work experience

in very popular areas such as law, teaching, community work, galleries and museums, public relations and the media. This will often be for a shorter length of time in comparison with a work placement, but the quality of the work experience gained can matter just as much as the quantity. Key points to note about unpaid professional work experience and internships:

- They may not be subject to a contract of employment (implied or otherwise) setting out your legal obligations (or those of the employer).
- Where a contract of employment exists, the national minimum wage should be paid as a minimum (not-for-profit organisations are exempt).
- Check out health and safety implications and any insurance requirements.
- Reasonable expenses may be paid to individuals carrying out professional work experience – ask your employer about this.
- Volunteering and unpaid work may be subject to visa permissions.



Using social media

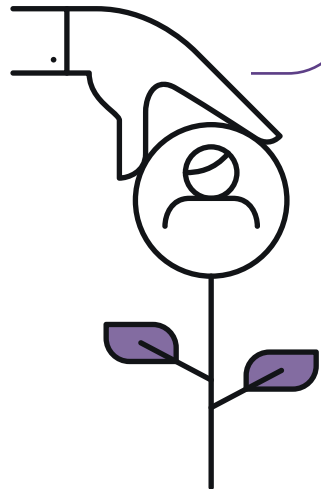
The use of social media by recruiters is increasing, so you need to know how to use it to your advantage in your search for professional work experience.

LinkedIn is a social networking website for professionals. It is used to build contacts, showcase your skills and experience and helps you find and “be found” for jobs online. You can also use it to present your online image and build your knowledge of businesses. It is easy to create your LinkedIn profile. Craft your summary carefully – choosing the right keywords can make sure your profile shows up in employer searches. Our Careers team offer LinkedIn workshops to get you started.

Facebook can be a powerful tool for finding professional work experience. Use it to connect with employers you would like to work

for and access limitless resources and connections. Remember to adjust your privacy settings and check the appropriateness of your Facebook presence, as there may be images you would not like a prospective employer to see.

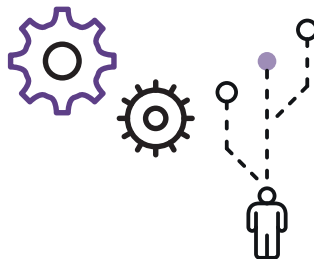
Twitter can be used to follow key professionals and employers you would like to work with. Following employers will help you develop commercial awareness and keep you updated with industry trends. You may also hear about potential professional work experience this way. Again, make sure your Twitter digital footprint does not contain images or content that you would not like a prospective employer to see.



Making applications for professional work experience

Many organisations advertise professional work experience opportunities months in advance of the start date. September to December are key recruitment periods following summer, so the earlier you start looking the better chance you have of securing what you want. Positions are often filled before the official closing date, so apply as soon as you can. Local or smaller companies may also have positions available and these tend to be advertised after Christmas. Casual summer jobs are advertised later in the academic year, often from Easter time. Keep looking as companies contact us all year round with opportunities. These opportunities are advertised on Jobshop.

You can also contact employers using the speculative approach. Cover letter examples can be found on the Prospects website: prospects.ac.uk. Whichever way you apply, be prepared to market yourself to employers by outlining the contribution you can make. Employers will expect a completed application or a professional CV with covering letter, and many large organisations require online applications. Some may also use psychometric tests as part of the selection process. See our resources on hud.ac/careers for advice on the application process.



Advice for international students

If you are an international student on a Student visa, who requires permission to work in the UK, please be aware that the University of Huddersfield complies fully with UKVI (UK Visas and Immigration). As a student you agree to meet the responsibilities, terms and conditions of your visa in full. Failure to do so will affect your stay in the UK and jeopardise your immigration status. The main purpose of the Student visa route is for you to come to the UK to study. Where you are permitted to work, the intention is that this should be to supplement your income whilst studying or as part of a work placement provided it is an integral and assessed part of your course. You must not work other than your conditions of stay allow. Further information regarding duration or working hours permitted may be found on the Immigration and Compliance Team website as well as the UKCISA website. There are limits on your working hours that depend on when you applied for permission to come to or stay in the UK, the type of course you study and your continued

academic progress. If you stop studying before completing your course, defer/leave study, you will no longer be entitled to work and will be in breach of your conditions of leave if found working. The University will report any change of study to UKVI as part of its Sponsorship duties. The period at the end of the course is considered vacation time.

National Insurance

Everybody who works in the UK has to pay National Insurance (NI) and must provide their employer with an NI number. UK nationals obtain an NI number automatically when they are 16 years old. Students from countries outside the UK will need to get an NI number too. To get your number, phone the NI application line on 0845 6000 643.

Advice for disabled students

If you require reasonable adjustments while undertaking your placement or professional work experience, please contact our Disability Services team and they will be able to discuss the options that might be available to you.

Advice for first and second year students

It's never too early to undertake professional work experience, as the sooner you start the more employable you will be. The routes to getting experience can depend on your year of study. Some forms of professional work experience can be undertaken during any year of study, for example casual summer work or part-time paid or voluntary work, worked around your studies. The University usually recommends that full-time students work no more than 15 hours per week during term-time.

Options to consider

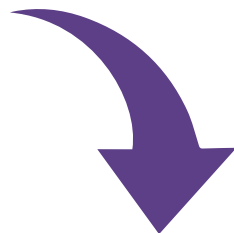
Some companies offer schemes specifically for first year students, often calling them 'spring internships' or 'insight days'. These tend to involve larger companies, so if you're interested in management, finance, banking, law or IT careers these are worth a look. Be aware that closing dates are typically in the autumn, so remember to look and apply early.

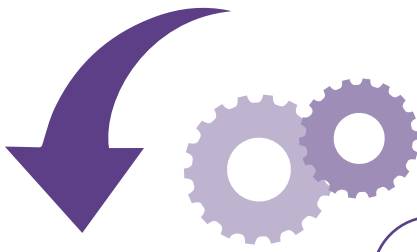
Look for work shadowing opportunities or just a few days of experience

Some employers may consider an informal approach for a short period of professional work experience. These opportunities are rarely advertised, so you will need to be proactive in finding them. See our advice later in the guide.

Apply to small and medium sized companies

Rather than using formal schemes as a part of their graduate recruitment programme, smaller businesses usually have a more immediate need for your help. These opportunities won't necessarily be labelled as internships but rather as paid professional work experience. You might be the only student there, helping them with a new website, social media strategy or completing a project they just don't have time to deliver. This means that having the right skills and attitude is more important than what year of study you are in. Smaller companies usually advertise between January and summer, and you can find vacancies on Jobshop.





Look for sponsorship, scholarship or bursary programmes

A small number of companies offer financial help such as scholarships, sponsorships or bursaries to students who are interested in a career with them. While you will have to commit to working for that organisation after graduation, they provide you with extra cash and guaranteed work each summer (possibly a sandwich placement too, if it's an option on your degree). The best way to stay informed about these opportunities is to Google 'undergraduate sponsorships' or 'undergraduate bursaries' and follow companies on Facebook and Twitter.

Take a summer job

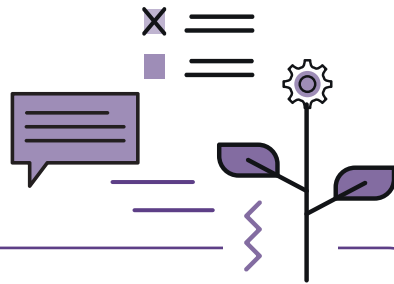
This is a great way to build your transferrable skills. If you can't find anything career related, don't be afraid to do something else that can earn you money and put skills on your CV, which can then be used in future roles that you apply for.

Find other ways to get experience

Work can sometimes be career related, and even where it isn't, it's great for showcasing skills and evidence of working in teams. For some careers (e.g. teaching and social work), volunteering experience is valuable or even essential. Even if it's not essential for your career plans, it's great for developing your skills and confidence and shows your commitment to supporting a good cause, so it's well worth doing. Active involvement in student societies is a great way to gain experience, evidence responsibility and develop your skills as a treasurer, social secretary or president. Enterprise events here at our University are aimed at students who wish to become self-employed or have a business idea. They are an excellent way to boost your employability skills and network with like-minded individuals. You can also focus on your business idea during an Enterprise placement year as part of the Enterprise Placement Scheme. Contact our Enterprise Team for more details.

Advice for final year students

Many student professional work experience schemes will not be open to you at this point, although you can apply for a graduate internship. These are aimed at those about to finish their programme of study, and are usually 4-12 months long. You can find details of a range of graduate internships schemes on Jobshop. Going onto a full-time master's degree? Some employers will allow you to do a summer internship after your undergraduate degree if you are going straight on to a short, taught master's degree. This is because it will be only a year until you graduate and you could then join their graduate programme. The same would not apply if you were planning to complete a PhD, which takes a minimum of three years' study. Professional work experience is a key addition to any graduate CV, so it is important to use your time wisely as this experience will make you more employable in the future.



Making professional work experience count

Before your professional work experience, ask yourself these questions:

Why am I doing this professional work experience?

What skills and experience do I expect to gain?

How could this help me in my career?

How can I make a positive first impression?

During professional work experience

Be proactive – seize opportunities to make contacts and network. Look for opportunities, utilise your stronger skills and improve your weaker skills.

Try to impress – aim to make a good impression with your manager and colleagues as a positive reference will be vital for future job applications.

Record your activities, responsibilities and achievements – when you update your CV, you will have a set of relevant and up-to-date examples of how you have progressed since starting your course.

Keep a skills log – this will help you record significant events and what you have learned from them. Include situations that went well and those which didn't go so well.

Ask for a reference – a good reference can assure a future employer that you will do a good job for them too. Ask about further opportunities – if you enjoyed your professional work experience, it is worth keeping the door open by reaffirming you

enjoyed working there and asking about future work opportunities.

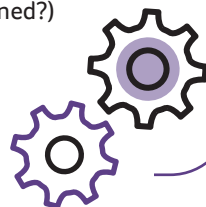
Consider how your skills have developed – do you feel you have achieved your aims and learned what you expected?

After your professional work experience

Communicate your achievements to employers. Employers frequently tell us that although students often have good experience on their CV, what really makes a difference is how they sell this experience and explain its relevance. Reflect back on your experience and refer to your skills log to provide evidence in future applications and job interviews. Remember to relate your experience to the position you are applying for.

Use the STAR formula to explain situations and provide information an employer will want to hear:

Situation (the background)
Task (what were you working on?)
Action (what did you do?)
Result (what happened?)



All experiences count and are valuable wherever they were gained. What is important is learning from them, recognising the importance of what you've done and then knowing how to promote yourself.

Top tips

Set clear objectives – what do you want to get out of professional work experience?

Show what you are capable of doing.

Keep a log of what you have been doing.

Build a network.

Stay in touch with your contacts.

Other ways to connect with employers are through mentoring schemes and networking events.

Need more help?

For placement advice contact:

School of Applied Sciences: sasplacements@hud.ac.uk

School of Arts and Humanities: SAH.Placements@hud.ac.uk

School of Computing and Engineering: scom-placements@hud.ac.uk

School of Education and Professional Development: sepdplacements@hud.ac.uk

School of Human and Health Sciences: hhspep@hud.ac.uk

The Huddersfield Business School: businessplacements@hud.ac.uk

For volunteering, part time, full time, internships and graduate roles, please refer to the JobShop, the University's jobs advertising platform.

If you wish to speak to a member of the Careers Guidance team about your CV or how you can make the most of professional work experience opportunities for your future career, please book an appointment. Visit: hud.ac/careers

This publication is also available online – should you like to have it in an alternative format please contact us.

Careers and Employability Service

Website: hud.ac/careers

