The Careers Service: a guide for postgraduate personal tutors

About us

The Careers Service has two locations:

3rd Floor, Main Library Building, George Square 0131 650 4670
Weir Building, King’s Building Campus 0131 650 5773

Careers@ed.ac.uk

Our student facing website is: www.ed.ac.uk/careers.

In addition we have a dedicated website for Postgraduate Personal Tutors at www.ed.ac.uk/careers/personal-tutors which has lots of information to help tutors support their tutees, including sections on common queries tutors receive and a guide to what careers topics are relevant during the Masters’ year.

Students should refer themselves to the Service; please give them the contact details above. Our offices have a wealth of hard copy resources for students to use without appointment and we have an excellent website packed full of information.

We provide students (and graduates from the last two years) with advice and guidance on a wide variety of areas, including (but not limited to):

- Guidance about what to do after their course - students do not need to know what they want to do to use the Service
- Advice on applying for PhDs and jobs at any level
- We have strong links with employers and provide a variety of opportunities for students to meet with recruiters.
- We advertise vacancies for jobs suited to postgraduate students.

For details of our opening hours and how to make an appointment please visit our website: www.ed.ac.uk/careers/about

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Guide to writing references
Career themes over the year

Semester 1

Settling In
The Careers Service runs several talks specifically to introduce Postgraduate taught students to our services. In addition we provide bespoke talks for your Masters students throughout the academic year. One of the most popular is to arrange for an adviser to speak to students at the beginning of the year to explain the support available and what they need to do to plan ahead.

Getting Involved
Semester 1 is a good time for students to think about making the most of their time at the University of Edinburgh and getting involved in different areas of the University. We encourage Masters students to think carefully about how much they commit to due to the demanding workload of postgraduate courses. Getting involved in other activities can really help students’ employability.

There are a wide variety of opportunities for students to get involved in at the University. The Edinburgh Edge database pulls together details of a variety of opportunities from across the University; including clubs, societies and information on various scholarships. Volunteering is popular among Masters students as it can be very flexible. It is also useful for helping international students to develop their cultural awareness of the UK and to decipher the Edinburgh dialect!

The Edinburgh Award gives students recognition for their involvement in these additional experiences and to help them make the most of them.

Recruitment to Graduate Schemes
For Masters students recruitment to graduate training schemes within larger companies, for example accountancy firms; banks; supermarkets; blue chip companies; will be taking place by the start of Semester 1.

This takes many Masters students by surprise as they have to apply for jobs when they start their postgraduate study. Graduate schemes in larger companies can be especially appealing to international students as they often offer a slightly higher salary. This can be helpful in fulfilling the minimum salary criteria for obtaining a visa after graduating.

The Careers Fair which runs in October is a great place for students to meet these types of company to speak to them about what they can offer graduates.

MyCareerHub is an excellent place for students to start looking for graduate scheme vacancies. It is rare that job advertisements will specifically request a postgraduate qualification but that does not mean employers would not consider a Masters graduate for the role.

Life after the Masters
It is worth encouraging all students to start thinking about what they are going to do after their Masters. Many students undertake postgraduate study with a career in mind; many others don’t really know what they want to do next. The Careers Service has an excellent online career planning resource and students are welcome to make an appointment with a Careers Consultant to talk about their plans – or lack of them.
Semester 2
Considering PhD Study
Many students undertake a Masters as a stepping stone to a PhD; some may not have considered it an option but enjoy their Masters so much that they decide to stay in academic study.

If students are thinking about applying for PhDs then it is worth ensuring that they have thought about this process by early semester 2. Preparation is key to securing a PhD that is right for them and with funding. As a Personal Tutor you may want to question students on their motivations to undertake the PhD and to try to measure how realistic their understanding of what is involved in undertaking a PhD.

Researching Options
Different sectors and employers recruit in different ways and at different times of the year. This makes it essential for students to research the sector(s) they are interested in.

The Careers Service website has plenty of this type of information, especially in the ‘Occupations’ section on our site. We also have details of alumni who are currently working in various sectors. Students can use 'Connect.ed' to search our database for Edinburgh alumni who are happy to give advice and top tips on how to get into a variety of careers.

If students are unsure of what they want to do next then it may be useful for them to come into the Service to speak to a Consultant.

Beyond Advertised Vacancies
It is often beneficial to look beyond immediately advertised vacancies. This is especially true for Masters students whose additional expertise may make them more desirable to smaller companies.

Masters students can try to build up a network within their chosen area, for example by attending professional events or through researching their dissertation. This network can provide information and further contacts, laying a foundation for when the student comes to apply for a job.

When applying for jobs it can be a good idea to get in touch with employers speculatively in addition to applying for advertised vacancies. This involves sending a CV and covering letter to employers of interest who are not currently advertising a post. This works best when followed by a phone call which is an opportunity to get further information and hopefully another contact to send a CV to. The Careers Service offers support with this kind of job hunting along with feedback on speculative CVs and covering letters.

Application Process
The Careers Service can support students through all stages of the application process for both employment and further study.

Often Masters students assume that employers will understand the value added through their Masters simply by reading the title of the course. This is generally not the case and it is up to the student to communicate the potential value of what they have learned to a particular employer. This is an area where Personal Tutors can help students by helping them to see the value of what they have been studying.
Our website has excellent resources on all aspects of the application process. We also run workshops throughout the year which any student is welcome to attend; these are on a variety of topics from CVs to interview technique and looking for a job. In addition students are welcome to come into the Service for feedback on their applications or for a Practice Interview with a Careers Consultant.

**Summer and the Dissertation**

**Dissertation as a Career Development Tool**

Many Masters students use their dissertation very effectively to assist them with their career aspirations. For both PhD and employment applications a well-chosen dissertation topic can demonstrate enthusiasm for and expertise in a particular area.

Researching a dissertation can be a great way to build up a network within the student’s sector of interest. It is a way to meet contacts, without the pressure of asking for a job, while demonstrating the student’s ability to work well. Some Masters students choose to undertake an industry based dissertation which can help gain valuable experience within an area of interest.

Making the Most of Masters is partnership project between various universities, including Edinburgh, which works to provide opportunities to Masters students to undertake work based projects.

**Using the Service after Graduation**

All graduates of the University of Edinburgh can continue to use the Careers Service for up to two years after graduating. We also offer support to students who are unable to make it into the Service because of work commitments or geographical location.
Guide to writing references

The majority of students applying for work or further study will need to put at least one academic reference, providing this is the responsibility of their Personal Tutor. References are usually sought once the candidate has made it to the interview stage of an application process. Many tutors are concerned about what to mention (and not mention) in a reference.

- Remember that the student can request to see a reference at any time. It is a legal document and therefore must be truthful.
- Focus on positive points where possible, negative points should be backed up with evidence.
- If the reference is being written on behalf of the University then it should be on University headed paper, signed by you and dated. If it is sent by email it should be from a University email account.
- Try to avoid giving telephone references as it is best to keep a copy of what you have said.
- Information regarding a student’s health or attendance levels should not be disclosed in a reference.
- Try to keep the information you give fact based with evidence to back up your statements where possible. If you are unsure about certain areas you can contextualise by using statements such as ‘To the best of my knowledge…’.
- Most references do not exceed one A4 page in length.
- Go back to the reference requester to get more guidance if you feel you need it.
- Try to maintain a consistent format to all the references you write, to ensure no allegations of favouritism can be made.
- Try to respond to any reference requests as quickly as you possibly can. If you are unable to give a reference try to get in touch with the requester to give a reason why

Many employers will have a reference pro-forma, where this is the case then it is best to follow the guidelines provided. If this is not provided or if the student has asked you to provide them with a generic open reference (which the student sees before any employer) in preparation for applying for jobs then you may want to consider the following points.

Possible points to cover in a reference

- The capacity in which you know the student
- Dates they have been in attendance at the University, subject of study, relevant grades, related modules and any other notable academic achievements such as awards or bursaries
- How they meet the criteria of the role, the ‘Person Specification’ part of the job advertisement should help you here. If this is not available it may be worth thinking about commonly valued skills and experiences, for example communication, team working and problem solving skills and giving any specific examples of when they have demonstrated the skill in question
- Students should gain your permission to be used as a referee and should make contact with you to discuss the types of roles they are applying for.