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

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

In addition we have a dedicated website for Undergraduate 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 career themes by year of study.

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 university – students do not need to know what they want to do, to use the Service
- Advice on applying for further study and jobs at any level
- Guidance for those thinking of changing or leaving their course
- We also advertise graduate level jobs, work experience opportunities and part-time jobs and can offer advice to students on looking for work and applying in all three areas

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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Career themes by year

First year
During first year most students are acclimatising to university life and tend not to be thinking about what they plan to do at the end of it all. There is plenty they can do at this early stage to boost their chances in the job market and lots of support the Careers Service can offer.

Getting involved in University life
Joining clubs and societies, for example, is a great way to meet people and can enhance the university experience. Employers often look for candidates with co- and extra-curricular experience. The Edinburgh Edge database is a great starting point to refer students who want to get involved, it signposts to the multitude of opportunities on campus.

Students may even be eligible for an Edinburgh Award for getting involved with a variety of activities at University, including volunteering or part-time work.

Thinking about a part-time or summer job
Increasing financial pressures mean that many students need to earn while they learn. As a guide we would recommend that students try and stick to no more than 15 hours per week of work during semester time.

The Careers Service advertises part-time job and work experience opportunities via MyCareerHub, which is a great place to start looking for jobs. Often students find a part-time job through a friend or family member so we would also strongly encourage students to think about using their existing networks to find work. Students may even be eligible for an Edinburgh Award for getting involved with a variety of activities at University, including volunteering or part-time work.

Changing or leaving course
Many students find the transition to university to be a difficult one. It can be a very different learning environment to what they are used to and can be difficult to be away from home for the first time.

The Careers Service offers a variety of support for students who are thinking of changing or leaving their course. We have developed a work book for students to use which aims to help clarify their thoughts. We can provide 1-1 impartial guidance as an opportunity to discuss the problems they are having and look at their options. In particular we can discuss any potential impact on the student’s future career plans.

Possible Prompts for Discussion:

- What are they doing outside of academic study? Have they considered joining any societies or setting a new one up if none take their fancy?
- Are they thinking about getting a part-time job?
- What are they planning to do over summer?
Second year
Second year is an ideal time to start trying out some of the career ideas that students may have (or to start generating some) by getting work experience. It is also a good time to start discussions with students around whether they have started to think about what they plan to do after university.

Work experience
Most commonly this takes place over summer. An increasing number of bigger organisations are offering internships to students in the summer at the end of 2nd year, in addition to the traditional time of the end of the penultimate year. These are still relatively small in number so 2nd year students may have to be more flexible and creative in the experience they get. For example, they could try to arrange some work shadowing for a few days or could get some voluntary experience during term time, for example in a school classroom. The Careers Service runs the Employ.ed on Campus internships which are open to students in second year. These internships last for 8-12 weeks over summer and are based at the University.

Honours choices
Another topic on many 2nd year students’ minds is their options for Honours courses. At the Careers Service we see students who are not sure what Honours options to take. Often it can be useful for the student to look at the ‘What can you do with your degree?’ section of our website. We also provide guidance to 2nd year students who have been told that they will not be progressing to Honours but will graduate with an Ordinary degree. We provide 1-1 advice and guidance exploring a student’s options in both these instances.

Taking a year away from the University of Edinburgh
Penultimate year of study is often a time when students decide to gain experience away from the University of Edinburgh; in some courses, such as languages, this is compulsory. This can take various forms, including a year in industry and a year abroad on exchange. If a student is interested in doing this then the preparation takes place in 2nd year. While employers hugely value work experience of any length a full year can give students a significant advantage when applying for jobs. Increasingly employers are offering yearlong work experience opportunities. This is especially common in areas such as engineering and science and is increasing in many other sectors such as consulting and finance. A year studying abroad can be viewed very positively by a future recruiter. The Careers Service and International Office both offer advice on Exchanges.

Students can continue to use the Careers Service at the University of Edinburgh throughout their year away.

Possible Prompts for Discussion:
- Have they thought about taking some time away from the University of Edinburgh?
- Are they confident that they will get into Honours? If not, have they started to think about alternative options?
- What did they do last summer? Do they have plans for this coming summer? Could they use the time to get some work experience?
**Penultimate Year**

Penultimate year is when many students start to think seriously about their options after university and in particular about getting work experience.

**Planning for after final year**

Although students start thinking about options after university at different times, many do start thinking seriously about what they are going to do next in their penultimate year. As a Personal Tutor it may be worth prompting students to see if they have started this process, for some students in can be a daunting prospect which they would prefer to ignore!

To make the process less daunting we often reassure students of the following:

1. It is not uncommon to be unsure of what you are going to do next.
2. You are not necessarily choosing a career for the rest of your life. Many students assume that the decision they make about what direction to take after university is final, however it is common for graduates to try out several career directions throughout their working lives.

3. Reflecting on existing experiences is a valuable starting point in the career planning process. Often thinking about positive or negative experiences from university, part time work, work experience or extracurricular activities can inform decisions about their future.

4. As a starting point for exploring the jobs that are available it may be worth recommending students attend one of the career fairs organised by the Careers Service. This can be a great way of meeting lots of employers in the one place.

An appointment to speak to a Careers Consultant can really help students to start thinking about their options after university.

**Summer work experience**

The summer at the end of a student’s penultimate year is the most common time to get work experience. Often this is in an area the student is considering as a career, although any work experience is useful in adding to a student’s CV and giving them a taste of working life. The Careers Service runs the Employ.ed on Campus internships which are open to penultimate year students. These internships last for 8-12 weeks over summer and are based at the University.

**Deadlines**

Applications for some further study and graduate jobs open very early in final year so it may be worth encouraging penultimate year students to investigate the application processes for the options they are considering.

**Possible Prompts for Discussion:**

- Have they used the Careers Service or visited our website yet?
- Have they given any thought to what they might do at the end of their final year?
- What have they enjoyed about their time at university and any work experience they have had so far?
- What do they plan to do during the upcoming summer vacation?
Final year
Final year is a busy one and flies by for most students. For this reason encourage tutees to think about what they are going to do after graduation as soon as they come back from summer. Hopefully before the work really starts to mount up!

Thinking about deadlines
Graduate training schemes with bigger companies tend to open for applications in August/September of the calendar year prior to graduation. Often application deadlines will pass before Christmas.

Graduate training schemes are just one option open to graduates. There are many instances where graduate schemes are not common, in small businesses or industries like the media. In addition to this they do not suit all graduates, for some an alternative route into a career is more appropriate. The Careers Service can support those considering all types of employment area. Postgraduate courses can also be competitive, applications should be submitted as early as possible, this is especially the case if the student hopes to obtain funding.

Recent changes to visa regulations have shortened the time that non-EEA students can remain in the UK after graduating to 90 days. This means that for final year international students it is even more crucial to make a head start with applications.

Career motivation
To increase their chance of success it is important that students articulate their reasons for applying to a particular vacancy or course. If a student is struggling to articulate their motivation or cannot muster any motivation for anything they have considered so far, it may be worth encouraging them to make an appointment with a Careers Consultant to talk through these issues.

Dealing with rejection
For many University of Edinburgh students the application process for a job after university will be the first time in their career they have faced rejection. It can be a difficult to obstacle to overcome. Our advice is to not get disheartened but to try to identify why they have been rejected. At the Careers Service we can offer practical help to identify and address any weaker areas in a student’s application.

After graduation
The Careers Service continues to provide resources and support to those who have graduated from the University of Edinburgh over the last two years.

Possible prompts for discussion
- Are they planning on attending the careers fairs or employer talks on campus?
- What are their plans for after graduation?
- Have they sought advice on making applications and interview skills?
- Have they thought about who will provide a reference if it is required?
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.