CAREER PLANNING GUIDE FOR POSTGRADUATES AND CONTRACT RESEARCHERS

Academic careers – and beyond
This booklet has been written for all postgraduate students, recently-completed postgraduates and contract researchers at the University of Kent. Its aim is to help postgraduates to achieve their career aims by providing information on opportunities for postgraduates, advice on job-seeking and details of the help and resources available to postgraduates – at the University of Kent and beyond. It looks at career opportunities for postgraduates and at the skills and knowledge which they can bring to a large number of jobs – not just those directly related to their study or research. The booklet can only offer a general introduction and you should follow it up by using the various information resources to which it will point you or by discussing your own personal queries and issues with a careers adviser.

There is a very wide variety of postgraduate students, following both taught Master’s courses and research programmes in the full range of academic subjects. Some have gone on to postgraduate study immediately after their undergraduate degree, while others have returned to study after some years of employment. Some are studying for interest, others for vocational reasons: some are planning a career as a lecturer or researcher in their subject while others may hope to use their studies outside academia.

This booklet inevitably has to generalise about the opportunities open to postgraduates and the skills gained through postgraduate study. Please use it as a starting point and continue your career planning by using the Careers and Employability Service and the other sources of advice and information on careers and employment noted.

Whatever you are studying at graduate level, and whatever your future career plans, you should begin your career planning early and not wait until you have completed your dissertation, thesis or contract before taking action. This will give you plenty of time to decide on your preferred career option, to make contingency plans and to gather information about opportunities through research and networking. Many major recruiters will advertise vacancies several months in advance of the starting date.

With best wishes for the future

Tim Reed
Head of the Careers and Employability Service
WHAT DO POSTGRADUATES DO?

Almost 200,000 people complete a postgraduate-level qualification every year in the UK. Three-quarters of these graduate from taught Master’s degrees and the majority of the remainder from other taught qualifications such as PGCEs. Less than 10% have undertaken research degrees.

Although the number of postgraduates has grown significantly over the past ten years, their job prospects have not decreased as a result. Both doctoral and Master’s degree graduates have a lower level of unemployment than Bachelor’s degree graduates and are more likely to be employed in a professional role. A smaller number continue studying, for further academic or professional qualifications.

As the chart below shows, the majority of postgraduates enter employment after their degree. Over 90% of these postgraduates were working in professional or managerial roles such as education, scientific research, finance, human resources and marketing.

Detailed information about the destinations of Kent postgraduates is available at www.kent.ac.uk/careers/fdrbases/destinations.htm
CHOOSING A CAREER

The first thing to do when planning your career is to think about issues such as:

- Your interests
- Your values
- Your skills
- Your opportunities – the job market for your subject or area of interest
- Your personal circumstances – such as geographical restrictions

This will help you to decide what you want from a career, what you can offer employers and what other factors might affect your choices. The following sources will provide information and advice to help you make these decisions:

- “Choosing a Career” – CES booklet and web pages www.kent.ac.uk/careers/ChoosingCareer.htm
- Prospects Career Planner: www.prospects.ac.uk/links/Pp1anner An online self-assessment and career choice program that helps you to:
  - generate new job ideas and check out your existing ideas;
  - identify your skills and find out what motivates you in a job;
  - see how these match the jobs you are considering;
  - research your chosen jobs in more detail and decide on the right choices for you.
- Your PhD – What Next? www.prospects.ac.uk/links/YourPhD
  - Find out about the skills you have gained as a result of your postgraduate study and how you can present these skills most effectively to an employer.
- Options with your subject www.prospects.ac.uk/links/options_with_your_subject.htm
  A series covering over 40 academic subject areas giving ideas for how graduates can use their degree subject or the employability skills acquired in studying it. Although targeted at undergraduates, much of the content is also relevant to postgraduates.
CHOOSING A CAREER (CONT)

• “What can I do with my degree in ..?” www.kent.ac.uk/careers/degreein.htm
  Information on the destinations of Kent graduates and postgraduates plus links to
  employers and career areas likely to be of interest to graduates in
  that subject.

The University of Kent
Careers Employability
Award

This is open to all students at Kent at any stage of your studies. You gain
the award by completing quizzes and assignments on Moodle, the
University’s Virtual Learning Environment. A few hours spent
getting this will not only help you to improve your career planning and
job-hunting skills and make the right career choices: it can transform
your chances of getting a graduate job. On completion of the award,
you will receive a certificate and 40 Employability Points. To find
out more, see www.kent.ac.uk/careers/moodle.htm

“The award has made me feel
a lot more confident when it
comes to applications and
interviews in the future and
has also made me think about
skills I have that I didn’t think
I had before”

Important things to keep in
mind when making career
decisions

• Get to know yourself – your
  employability skills, abilities and
  personal qualities. Without
  knowing what is important to you,
  what you want from a job and
  what you can offer, it will be more
difficult to make career choices.

• Other people can often help you
to see yourself more clearly. Try
asking your friends, relations or
tutors about your strengths and
weaknesses, or talk over your
ideas with a careers adviser. They
could help you to see yourself
more objectively.

• Don’t have fixed ideas about
  jobs, such as who does them and
  what the work is like. Stereotyped
  pictures of jobs are rarely
  accurate. Find out what is really
  involved and look for the truth
  behind the popular image.

• The best careers advice comes
  from people with first-hand
  knowledge. Try and make contact
  with people doing the type of
  jobs that interest you and talk to
  them about their work. See p23
  for further advice on networking.

• Keep an open mind. Be flexible.
  Be receptive to new job ideas.
  Don’t reject career possibilities
  without some consideration first.
  Remember that your first career
  post does not have to set the
direction for the rest of your
working life if you don’t want it to.

• Make full use of the Careers and
  Employability Service. Use our
  print and online resources and
  consult careers advisers with any
  queries and problems.
SKILLS DEVELOPED THROUGH POSTGRADUATE STUDY

Employers want postgraduates to be able to offer more than their academic subject knowledge. They also look for a range of skills: transferable skills such as teamworking, business awareness and communication skills plus, depending on the employer, more practical skills such as languages, numeracy, laboratory techniques and quantitative methods. These skills are just as important for academic posts as for jobs in business and other areas and you will need to show them on your job applications.

The transferable skills most often sought by employers of postgraduates are:

- **Written communication skills**
  The ability to use the English language effectively in order to express your ideas clearly and at a level appropriate for your audience.

- **Verbal communication skills**
  Again, using language effectively but with the additional ability to speak confidently and clearly and to pitch what you say in such a way to have the desired impact on your listeners.

- **Analytical ability**
  Considering differing ideas, information and theories; picking out key points and details in order to construct or support your arguments; following complex reasoning; applying logic.

- **Critical thinking**
  Ability to question and not to take things at face value. Interpreting information and arguments; considering their validity in the light of issues such as their source, the evidence provided to support them and other material on the topic. Constructing a reasoned argument for your own point of view.

- **Planning and organising**
  Approaching tasks and projects systematically; managing time; setting targets; monitoring progress; delegating; ability to handle a number of different tasks simultaneously.

- **Research/Investigative skills**
  Use of a variety of sources; constructing research proposals; testing different theories; using specialist techniques such as statistical packages or laboratory equipment.

- **Innovation**
  Ability to take a fresh approach, think laterally, be original and creative, willing to try new things and adapt to new environments.
SKILLS DEVELOPED THROUGH POSTGRADUATE STUDY (CONT)

• **Problem solving**
  Taking a systematic approach to problems; being flexible in finding solutions; looking at different angles and approaches; identifying the most appropriate solution for the situation.

• **Maturity and confidence**
  Wide experience of life generally and specifically of working with other people; strong career focus; credibility with employers and clients.

• **Self-motivation**
  Ability to work independently without the need for constant direction or feedback. Anticipating what needs to be done; setting your own goals and working towards them. Being positive and professional. Taking responsibility for your own work and personal development.

• **Commercial awareness**
  An awareness of the environment in which an organisation operates (public sector and charitable organisations face commercial and financial pressures too!). A focus on the purpose of the organisation and its clients and/or stakeholders.

• **Co-operation**
  The ability to work with other people, inside and outside your own department or organisation. Working together to achieve a common goal. Allocating and sharing responsibilities and tasks.

Many of these skills are developed to a high level through postgraduate study and research. Others can be demonstrated through other aspects of your experience, such as part-time or vacation work and extra-curricular interests, so make sure to get involved in activities outside of your studies and to use these activities in your applications.

**Analysing your skills**

The sites listed below offer various resources to help you identify the skills you have developed through your studies and those you wish to develop further:

- **Our Employability Skills pages**
  [www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/skillsmenu.htm](http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/skillsmenu.htm) include a skills inventory and a progress file.

- **Prospects Planner**
  [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/Pplanner](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/Pplanner) – an online self-assessment and career choice program that also helps you to relate your skills to jobs.

Once you have worked through one or two of these resources you may wish to talk over the results with a careers adviser – see the back cover of this booklet for contact details.
USING SKILLS IN JOBS

Below are a few examples of jobs that may be entered after postgraduate study, and the key skills that are needed to succeed in them:

**Academics** obviously need good research, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as written communication to produce books and journal articles. Verbal communication is not only needed for lectures and conference presentations – academics may be interviewed for TV or radio programmes and also need to advise students individually. Planning and organising skills are needed to help manage administrative tasks such as scheduling classes, producing reading lists and meeting deadlines as well as combining these tasks with teaching and research. Commercial awareness is needed in helping to attract students to the department, write bids for research funding, etc. Finally, academics have a considerable amount of flexibility in managing their own work which demands self-motivation.

**Research scientists** must be able to plan and organise projects and experiments, solve problems that occur during their research activities and analyse the results. They must be competent in writing to produce reports about their work and also to bid for research funds, where innovation may be a requirement. They usually work in teams and therefore need to co-operate with other people. They have to give presentations to managers and other non-scientists, which demands good verbal communication skills.

**University librarians** need good verbal communication skills to advise clients (students and staff) and give presentations. They need commercial awareness to manage budgets and to appreciate the needs of their clients, which also demands good problem solving skills. Planning and organising are needed to meet the changing demands on staff and services during the academic year and to maintain and improve standards of service. They work in co-operation with other staff in their own library, in other libraries or information centres and with academic departments. Critical thinking skills are required to make decisions on the purchase or disposal of books, journals and other information resources.

**Clinical psychologists** need strong critical thinking, analytical, and verbal communication skills to assess and help clients. They may need to devise innovative approaches to solve problems when working with clients. They have to co-operate with colleagues from other disciplines and agencies, such as medical practitioners and social workers, using written communication skills to produce reports. Clinical psychologists are often involved in research and, as their career develops, may work on a self-employed basis, requiring self-motivation and commercial awareness.

The examples below give a few suggestions for where you could make use of the skills developed through postgraduate study and research outside the academic field:

**Jobs using people and communication skills**
- International aid/development worker
- Housing manager
- Events organiser
- Human resources manager
- Insurance broker
- Environmental health officer
- Prison governor
- Journalist
- School teacher
- Teacher of English as a foreign language

**Jobs using research and analytical skills**:
- Librarian
- Archivist
- Heritage manager
- Museum curator
- Historical researcher
- Patent agent
- Trade mark attorney
- Social researcher
- Political researcher
- Translator
- Operational researcher
- Statistician

Most of the job roles above will use a mixture of all these skills – to work with colleagues and clients, to gather information and to pass on the material that you have researched and make it accessible to non-specialists.

For information about these and many other job roles see www.prospects.ac.uk/types_of_jobs.htm
ACADEMIC CAREERS

An academic position is the main career goal for many postgraduate students, and higher education will often offer the best opportunities to use your studies directly, especially in the humanities. A PhD is almost always a formal requirement so taught Master’s graduates will need to continue into a research degree before being able to apply for these positions.

Even after a PhD, this is not an easy option. The job market for lecturers and contract researchers is highly competitive and it is increasingly rare for postgraduates to obtain a position as a lecturer immediately after completing their PhD. More typically they will start out in a role such as Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant or Postdoctoral Fellow. These will generally be temporary contracts lasting one, two or three years and may lead on to a permanent academic post, although there is no guarantee of this. Teaching posts in particular are likely to be part-time and remunerated only on the number of hours taught.

Universities will look at more than just the quality of your research: candidates for academic posts should be able to offer all of the following:

- **Publications.** You should be able to demonstrate that you have begun to disseminate your work to the wider academic community through published journal articles or books and/or presenting papers at conferences.
- **Teaching experience.** Teaching at undergraduate level is obviously also an essential part of an academic career and you should therefore take advantage of any opportunities to gain teaching experience during your postgraduate studies. Departments frequently require, or strongly encourage, their research students to do this but, if your own department does not offer any teaching opportunities, you may be able to obtain part-time teaching in further and adult education.
- **Administrative skills.** Academic staff also have a number of administrative responsibilities (such as convening courses, managing exams, sitting on committees, quality assessment, etc) so any experience of people or project management would be helpful here.

The academic job market is highly international with lecturers and postdoctoral researchers moving between countries to find employment and develop their career.

Academic posts, both in the UK and abroad, are normally advertised in the Guardian, Times Higher Education and on www.jobs.ac.uk – see p14 for a full list of links.
MAKING APPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIC POSTS

When applying for research posts or lectureships, make sure you have a good understanding of the department, the position and the broad area of teaching and/or research.

All this may seem self-evident, but candidates for academic posts are often too focused on their own specific research and don’t think about what the job actually involves or what they can contribute to the department through their skills or experience. So, before you start to apply, put your research skills into practice to find out all that you can about the department, its staff and students (any contacts that you have built up through networking will be invaluable here). This will help you to focus your application and to demonstrate clearly what you can offer them that distinguishes you from the other candidates.

Academic CVs follow a different format from a “normal” CV, most notably in the content and the length. They are generally longer than the “standard” two-side CV, often running to five or six pages, as they need to include information such as:

- A detailed synopsis of your PhD and any other research;
- Publications – books, articles, reviews, conference proceedings;
- Conferences attended (especially if you have presented papers);
- Membership of relevant professional bodies;
- Teaching experience – running seminars, helping with practicals;
- Awards – such as funded studentships, academic prizes or travel grants;
- Details of relevant scientific or specialist packages/techniques you are familiar with such as SPSS, LexisNexis, NMR or chromatography;
- Evidence of skills such as IT, time management, project management and report writing;
- Work experience – only list experience relevant to your application, such as teaching, “university ambassador” roles, exam invigilation, industrial placements and internships;
- References. Usually three academic references (one or more from your postgraduate degree plus one from your first degree) and possibly one from an employer or another individual who can comment about your personal qualities as opposed to your academic performance.

In your covering letter or personal statement, you should outline your skills and strengths, show real enthusiasm for your subject, evidence of a wider knowledge of the area beyond your specialised field of research and awareness of recent developments.
Interviews for academic, contract research or postdoctoral posts are no longer relaxed, informal chats: there is fierce competition for these posts and you need to prepare well, show enthusiasm and ask appropriate questions.

Before the interview:
- Research the university and the department carefully;
- Check out the research interests of the current academic staff;
- Try to speak to current students in the department and look at notice boards, social networking sites, etc;
- Read over your application again. Try and put yourself in the interviewers’ shoes and think of questions they may want to ask you;
- In addition, think of questions you want to ask.

At the interview:
An academic interview is likely to be carried out by a panel made up of a number of members of staff, from both the academic department and the human resources department. Remember that, unlike HR staff, academics may not be trained interviewers, so be aware that you may occasionally have to take the initiative.

Interviews for academic posts frequently require candidates to give a short presentation – usually on an aspect of your research. This allows the panel to assess not only your teaching skills but also your ability to plan, research, analyse and present information. You can also expect to be asked questions, and how you respond to these will also form part of the assessment. Presentations need to be pitched at the right level – at a well-informed and knowledgeable audience who may nonetheless not be familiar with the detailed nuances of your specialised area of research. Alternatively, you may be asked to prepare a presentation of the sort that would be delivered in an undergraduate lecture.

There may also be a social side to the interview, such as a lunch to which all members of the department will be invited. While this will not be assessed, remember that people who are not on the actual interview panel may also be asked for their opinions of the candidates, so don’t get involved in any heated debates or inappropriate topics of conversation.

The Questions
You can expect to be asked about:
- Your research: research already carried out, work in progress, your future direction;
- Studentships, research grants and other funding achieved;
- Teaching experience – what you have taught; to whom; teaching and assessment techniques;
- Any relevant specialist technical expertise;
- Any other ways in which you have contributed to University life, such as administration experience, involvement in open days and student recruitment.

The interviewers will also want to find out about you as an individual – will you fit in to the department? Are you a good team member?

Questions that might be asked to elicit this information include:
- How did you choose your research topic?
- Why do you feel that this research is important?
- What theoretical framework are you using?
- What methods did you use to collect your data?
- How do you see your research within the wider area…?
- What have you got out of your postgraduate study?
- How would your research interests fit in with the work of this department?
- What teaching experience do you have?
• How would you approach teaching first-years on our … module?
• What other relevant skills or experience can you offer?
• Have you considered any further potential areas of research?
• How would you go about persuading a funding body to support your research?
• What makes you the right candidate for this post?
• Where do you see yourself in five years time?

They will also be looking for evidence of strong interest in your subject, as well as enthusiasm for the subject. Do you keep up to date with developments? Do you genuinely seem to enjoy talking about the subject?

Make sure that you ask questions of the panel, as this demonstrates your enthusiasm and interest.

**Some questions you could ask at an academic interview**

• What do you feel are the key strengths of this department?
• What are your most successful courses in terms of student numbers?
• Do you have any plans to introduce new courses or modules?
• What training is available to new members of staff? Would I have the opportunity to take a PGCHE?
• What staff development opportunities are available?
• How and when will I be appraised?

**Dress code**

Smart casual dress may be acceptable for academic interviews, particularly those for research posts rather than lectureships, but many departments now expect more formal business dress. If in doubt, go for the smarter option – you will never prejudice your chances by being too smart, but dressing in too casual a way risks being interpreted as unprofessional or not sufficiently motivated.

**Further information**

For advice on academic interviews, including presentations and commonly-asked questions, see:
• www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers/pursuing-an-academic-career/applying-for-academic-jobs/academic-job-interviews
• Jobs.ac.uk
• www.jobs.ac.uk/careers-advice/interview-tips
OTHER CAREERS IN UNIVERSITIES

As well as academic roles, universities employ staff in a variety of academic-related management and support roles.

These include:

• Administration, including student registration and admissions, central services administration, departmental co-ordination;
• Library and information services;
• Scientific support, e.g. laboratory technicians;
• Careers, employability and enterprise;
• Human resource management, including staff development/training;
• IT and systems support;
• Public relations and marketing posts, promoting universities to prospective students (in the UK and overseas), alumni, businesses and the community;
• Student welfare and support: counselling and advice services, disability support, international student support;
• Accommodation, catering and conference services;
• Arts, music and events;
• Financial management;
• Health and safety.

Vacancies in these areas may be advertised at national level on the same sites as academic posts but, at entry-level grades, may only be advertised on the individual university’s website.

Finding a job in the higher education sector

• www.jobs.ac.uk
• FindAUniversityJob www.findauniversityjob.com
• FindAPostDoc www.FindAPostDoc.com
• www.PhDjobs.com
• The Guardian http://jobs.guardian.co.uk/jobs/education/higher
• Times Higher Education www.timeshighereducation.co.uk
• Eduserve www.vacancies.ac.uk
• Academic Jobs EU www.academicjobseu.com

Most of these sites list jobs covering a range of academic, research, managerial and support roles in higher education plus vacancies in other public and private sector bodies that are appropriate for postgraduates and researchers.

There may also be specialist listings for particular subjects or job roles, such as Inomics (www.inomics.com) for Economics or LIS JobNet (www.lisjobnet.com/jobs/jobs) for library work – check with academics or careers advisers to find out the best sources for your subject area.
OTHER CAREERS IN TEACHING AND RESEARCH

Other careers in teaching

A number of postgraduates will go on to an initial teacher education or training programme leading to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). These are available either through a PGCE course or while working in a school. Although it is possible to teach in independent schools, academies and free schools in England without QTS, it is a definite advantage to have it. Funding to cover fees and maintenance may be available for PGCEs, depending on the subject. A postgraduate degree may be looked on favourably in independent schools and further education colleges.

If you intend to teach in schools, you should have some work experience with the relevant age-range. Most providers expect you to have at least two weeks’ classroom experience before you begin teacher training.

For further information on teaching careers, teaching qualifications and entry requirements see www.kent.ac.uk/careers/siteach.htm

Other careers in research

Humanities

Outside education, jobs which make direct use of a research degree in the humanities are unlikely to be more numerous at postgraduate level than they were after your BA. Areas such as the media, publishing and the heritage industry are highly competitive and, although your degree should be able to help you demonstrate an advanced level of skills and knowledge, employers will usually be seeking practical and transferable skills rather than purely academic expertise.

Social Sciences

You may be particularly interested in the field of social research – working for central or local government bodies, think-tanks and consultancies. Commercial organisations, such as market research and advertising agencies, also make use of social research techniques and skills. Subjects such as law, business and economics can also be applied with commercial employers specialising in these fields.

Science and technology

Research and development scientists are employed in many organisations including manufacturing companies (cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, defence, etc), energy and utility companies, Government laboratories, charities and Research Councils.
OTHER CAREERS

You may not wish, or may not be able, to use your postgraduate study in your career either directly or indirectly. A change in career direction is certainly possible at this stage, whether through entering employment immediately or after further study or training.

In particular, graduates who have taken a taught Master’s degree immediately following an undergraduate degree, and do not have a great deal of work experience beyond part-time and casual jobs, may be seen by employers as an “undergraduate plus”. While your Masters can help you to demonstrate a number of additional skills, the jobs and graduate schemes you can go for are likely to be equally open to undergraduates – only a very small number of the major graduate recruiters have separate intakes of Bachelor’s and Master’s graduates.

As a Master’s graduate, though, you do have more to offer these employers than you did at the end of your first degree. At the most basic level, you have an extra year’s experience, which makes you more mature and focused. Since most Master’s students are self-funded, taking a degree at this level demonstrates commitment and motivation. If, during your postgraduate year, you have gained further experience and skills (through internships or extra-curricular activities) in addition to academic qualifications this can help you to stand out when competing with Bachelor’s degree graduates. See pages 7/8 for an outline of the employability skills developed through postgraduate study.

Outside these big graduate recruiters, there are plenty of opportunities where a postgraduate degree will be a requirement or an advantage and employers will value the specialist knowledge or practical skills gained through your studies. This is particularly true in scientific and social research, economics and international organisations, as well as education.

Some of these employers may have an annual graduate intake, but many more will only recruit on an ad hoc basis, as and when they need somebody with a particular knowledge base or skill set.

In general, though, postgraduates are highly attractive to a wide variety of employers, whatever their background. A 2010 report from the Council for Industry and Higher Education, “Talent Fishing”, found that 70% of employers surveyed sought out postgraduate students, and 90% of those who did valued the analytical thinking and problem-solving skills a Masters or PhD brings.

www.ncub.co.uk/reports/talent-fishing-what-businesses-want-from-postgraduates.html
FINDING A JOB – VACANCY SOURCES

If you are looking for employers who run large-scale graduate recruitment schemes, you can find details on sites such as:

- **Prospects**
  www.prospects.ac.uk/links/jobs.htm
- **TARGET Jobs**
  http://targetjobs.co.uk
- **The Times Top 100 Graduate Employers**
  www.top100graduateemployers.com
- **Milkround Online**
  www.milkround.co.uk

These are national resources which chiefly focus on large corporate and public sector recruiters. Many of these employers will begin recruiting in September for graduates to start work the following autumn, so apply in good time.

If you are interested in working in Kent, or other areas outside major cities, working in media or the arts, or working for a smaller employer, the following may help you:

- **“I Want to Work In …”**
  www.kent.ac.uk/careers/workin.htm – brief introductions to almost 100 popular career areas, with useful links

- **Working in Kent**
  www.kent.ac.uk/careers/kentopps.htm
- **Working in Small Businesses**
  www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sme.htm
- **The Creative Career Search**
  www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/CJ.htm
- **The Careers and Employability Service’s vacancy database**
  http://kent.prospects.ac.uk includes jobs with all kinds of employers (in Kent, nationally and internationally) plus postgraduate studentships and research posts.
While your postgraduate study or research will have equipped you with a large number of the skills that employers want for graduates, if you are applying for posts outside the academic or research field you will need to convince employers of two things:

- that the skills you have gained can be useful in a non-academic setting;
- that you are motivated and enthusiastic about the position that you are applying for.

In other words, you not only need to convince prospective employers that you can do the job, but also that you want to do the job. This is particularly important for research postgraduates who may otherwise run the risk of being viewed by employers as “over-qualified” or as “frustrated academics”.

Your CV should therefore be more similar to an “undergraduate” CV, using your postgraduate study alongside work experience and other activities as evidence of the skills and personal qualities required in that particular position. In general, these CVs will be shorter than academic CVs – not more than two sides of A4 when printed out – and should include:

- A brief outline of your research or course;
- Work experience – here, any type of experience may be relevant: part-time and vacation work, voluntary work, work shadowing, etc;
- Extra-curricular activities and interests – these do not just help to demonstrate your skills but also show that you have a life outside your studies!
- Evidence of skills such as IT, time management, project management and report writing;
- References. Usually just two references, one academic and one employer or character reference.

This information may be set out in a traditional, chronological CV format or, as in the following example, in a format which puts the emphasis on your skills rather than your career history. Which you choose is up to you and depends on which format you feel is best suited to you and the job for which you are applying.
Eleanor Estraven
121 Darkness Way, Canterbury, Kent CT2 8NE
Tel 01227 764521 Email eje999@kent.ac.uk

Career aim
A Humanities postgraduate with museum and service sector experience that demonstrates my adaptability, dependability and determination to get a job done as effectively as possible. I am looking for a graduate management programme which offers me the opportunity to use my organisational and analytical skills.

Education and qualifications
2013-2014 University of Kent
MA English and American Literature
2008-2011 University of Warwick
BA English and Drama Upper Second Class Honours
2001-2008 Shriftgrethor Technology School, Swansea
A-levels English (A), History (A), French (B)
9 GCSEs at grades A-C including English and Mathematics

Skills
• Planning and Organising: as Chair of the Cultural Society I devised and arranged events and activities for up to 100 people, including film shows, debates and dance workshops.
• Analytical Skills: for my MA degree, I completed a 10,000-word dissertation which required close analysis of the literature of Gertrude Stein, a famously complex writer.
• Communication Skills: worked as Campus Tour Guide, promoting the University to student visitors and their families and answering questions; presented several seminar papers; liaised with film distributors as Secretary of the Film Society.
• Teamworking: Played for the University of Kent Women’s Rugby team; worked as one of a team of conference catering staff as a Silver Service waitress.
• Attention to detail: as a Museum Assistant I worked independently to catalogue artefacts and display exhibits and enter their details on databases. Accurate and speedy work was essential.
• Computing: good knowledge of MS Word, Email and Web. 25 wpm typing.
• Languages: fluent English and Welsh, intermediate French and German.
• Full, clean driving licence

Work experience
2010-2012 British Museum, London. Museum Assistant
2007-2009 University of Warwick Students’ Union, Coventry
Part-time assistant available at short notice for a range of Hospitality and Student Union activities.

References
Available on request
The format of these, and the questions asked, will naturally vary according to the employer and the type of job but in most cases will be different from academic interviews. You will usually be interviewed by one or two people rather than a panel and the questions are likely to focus as much on your skills and competencies as on your studies and research.

As with academic interviews, thorough preparation is the key to success. This will help you to appear confident at interview (however nervous you feel inside!) and provide evidence of your motivation and enthusiasm by showing that you have taken the trouble to research the career area and the employer to which you are applying.

As part of this preparation, you should:
- Think about why you want the job – what motivates you?
- What you have to offer that will help you to do the job – relevant experience, skills and/or competencies;
- Prepare examples that demonstrate these skills;
- Anticipate questions that you might be asked during the interview.

Demonstrating your motivation and competencies will be doubly important if you are applying for a position that has little or no direct relevance to your studies. While employers may find your academic qualifications impressive some, particularly in smaller organisations, may equally find them intimidating. They may also have concerns about the relevance of these qualifications, your practical and people skills and your commitment to a career outside academia.

A survey of employer attitudes to postgraduate researchers found that the following concerns and negative perceptions were most often raised by employers outside academia:
- Lack of commercial awareness
- Difficulty in adapting to the working culture outside university
- Over-specialisation and lack of adaptability
- Unrealistic expectations – of, for example, salary and levels of responsibility

While many employers in this survey were enthusiastic about recruiting PhDs, you should be aware of these issues (which may even be extended to candidates with taught Master’s degrees) and think about how you can counter them. Using all aspects of your experience, including part-time work and extra-curricular activities, rather than just focusing on your studies, is a helpful tactic. Questions about the relevance of your postgraduate degree, and your reasons for changing career direction and applying for a particular position, can easily be seen by the candidate as hostile but are a legitimate way for the interviewer to test your motivation and enthusiasm, so don’t let yourself get flustered.

The questions
You can expect to be asked questions such as:
- Why did you choose to take a postgraduate degree?
- What did your course/research actually involve?
- How might your degree be useful to us?
- What do you know about this organisation?
- Why are you applying for this job?
- What do you expect to be doing in this job?
- Apart from your degree, what can you bring to the job?
- What other jobs have you applied for?
- Where do you see yourself in five years’ time?
- You have a Master’s degree – have you thought about carrying on into a PhD?
- You have a PhD – don’t you want to be a university lecturer?

These questions are designed to assess your motivation – do you want the job? Other questions will aim to assess your competencies – can you do the job?

Competency-based questions will follow the format “Give me an example of a time when you have...”.
INTERVIEWS (CONT)

• had to convince a person or group to do something that they were initially reluctant to do;
• had to analyse detailed information to extract the essential points;
• had to manage a heavy workload or a number of conflicting priorities;
• had to organise your time to achieve a specific aim;
• worked with a group of other people to achieve a common goal;
• taken a major decision;
• succeeded in a challenging task in difficult circumstances;
• solved a problem in a creative way;
• acted to improve a process or make a system work better;
• had to explain something in detail to a person or group who knew little about the subject;
• begun a task and then had to change your approach and do something in a different way.

For more advice on competency-based interviews, and further example questions, see www.kent.ac.uk/careers/compet/skillquest.htm

Useful sources of information and help
• Careers and Employability Service web pages on interviews: www.kent.ac.uk/careers/interview.htm. These include hints on the questions you might be asked, and how to handle them, questions you might ask the interviewer and advice on preparing for interview.
• The Careers and Employability Service booklet, “Interview Skills”, covers the same topics in a handy pocket-sized booklet. Pick up a copy from the Careers and Employability Service building.
• We have a DVD, “Why ask me That?”, which gives an insight into the interviewer’s mind and what s/he is looking for in candidates.
• The CES runs regular talks and workshops to give advice on interview preparation and the chance to practise your interview skills – see our events pages www.kent.ac.uk/careers/casevents.htm for details.
• The Vitae website gives advice on interviews generally as well as academic interviews www.vitae.ac.uk
• If you have an interview coming up you are welcome to talk to a careers adviser about it: we can go through your application with you and suggest questions that you may expect to come up.

Your studies will have given you material to use in answering many of these questions, but it is a good idea to provide a number of examples from outside academia as well – this will reassure the interviewer that you have experience beyond university and have gained skills from “real life” as well as from study and research.
THE CREATIVE CAREER SEARCH

The creative career search differs from conventional job hunting in that it involves a creative, active approach rather than being passive and reactive.

Most jobs are never advertised – one source put the figure of unadvertised jobs at 80%. Therefore instead of just waiting for a vacancy to appear, you need to make an active search. A key element of the creative career search is networking – building up a network of people who can help you in your job search. This help may be very relaxed and informal, such as just chatting to people about their work, their current research or even a spare-time interest that they share with you, or it may develop into something further such as mentoring or work-shadowing.

Conferences are a good place for networking and you should be sure to attend these or other meetings whenever possible to get to know other people working in your field. This networking may be both formal and informal but you may also be able to use the opportunity to try to find out what opportunities are available and to get to know people who may be able to put in a good word for you when appropriate.

You should also join any academic or professional societies that relate to your area of study, research or career interest. A directory of subject associations and learned societies in humanities and social sciences can be found on the British Academy website www.britac.ac.uk/links/uksahssSections.asp?Section=H12

Your tutor or supervisor is likely to be another useful source of professional contacts – academics will know who else is working in this field and may know them personally – but all kinds of people may potentially be able to help you. You can also use the University of Kent Alumni Careers Network – see below.

There are specialised academic networking sites – see www.kent.ac.uk/library/research/collaboration/index.html?tab=academic-networking for a list.

LinkedIn www.linkedin.com, a business-oriented social networking site (which includes a group for Kent alumni), may also be useful.

Pick up our booklet “The Creative Career Search” or see our Creative Job-Hunting page at www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/CJ.htm for more information.

The Alumni Careers Network

This is a network of University of Kent graduates working in a wide variety of careers who have offered to give advice and help to current University of Kent students who wish to enter their career area.

These graduates offer one or more of the following:
- Work shadowing: where you spend a day with the person observing a typical day’s work.
- Information Interviews: a chance for you to ask the person questions about what their job involves and gain advice and tips.
- Advice by letter, phone or email

This network can be especially helpful if you are trying to gather information about a career area outside academia, or one that is completely new to you.

For further information about the Alumni Careers Network, and how you can make use of it, see www.kent.ac.uk/ces/files/careers-network.html
FURTHER STUDY

Having taken your studies to Master’s level, and successfully completed a research project or dissertation, may have fired you with the desire to continue onto an MPhil or PhD. You should seek advice from your dissertation supervisor on this option and your suitability for it.

Studying for a degree based entirely on independent research is quite a different experience from following a taught Master’s course and self-motivation and determination are just as important as academic ability in achieving success.

Finance is another important issue to consider: although funding from the research councils and from individual universities is targeted on research, rather than taught, postgraduate students, this does not mean that such funding will be easy to obtain! In addition, the closing date for funding applications is usually at the end of April, meaning that these applications need to be made before you start work on your dissertation.

As well as further academic study, you may wish to consider study for professional or vocational qualifications. In some careers, such as teaching or law, these will be essential, even for Master’s graduates. In others, such as journalism or marketing, such qualifications are not essential but may be helpful in a competitive job market. Employers in some career sectors may pay for these qualifications, in which case you will usually study for them on a part-time basis while working for that employer.
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Since almost one-third of full-time postgraduate students are from overseas, this page gives a brief overview of issues of concern to this group.

Our leaflet for international students, available from the Careers and Employability Service, and our web pages www.kent.ac.uk/careers/InternationalStudents.htm will give more detailed advice and refer you to authoritative sources of help and information.

Staying in the UK to work
If you are completing a PhD, you may be able to apply to stay in the UK for a further 12 months beyond the end of your studies through the Doctorate Extension Scheme (DES). This is designed to help newly-qualified PhDs to find skilled work, set up as an entrepreneur or gain further experience in their chosen field, with the University acting as their sponsor. For further details, and how to apply, see www.kent.ac.uk/student-records/students/des.html

Alternatively, PhDs and other new postgraduates can apply for permission to work under the Tier 2 (General) scheme. Applicants for this scheme must meet points requirements, have a job offer from an employer that is a licensed sponsor and must be paid a minimum salary (£20,300 in 2013).

Employers are also required to meet a number of conditions before they can sponsor international graduates: for this reason, many employers state that they are only able to accept applicants who are entitled to work in the UK without any restrictions.

For full details of schemes and eligibility, see the UK Border Agency website www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/working/tier2/general

The issue of eligibility to work in the UK is complex and you are advised to seek advice from an authoritative source such as one of those listed at www.kent.ac.uk/careers/InternationalStudents.htm

Work and study abroad
You may wish to return to your home country, work in another country or to continue with postgraduate study at another overseas university. If you wish to work or study in another country, especially one that you do not already know well, you will need to investigate the application procedures and any visa requirements – start to do this early! The USA, for example, is always a popular destination for further postgraduate study, but you should start to plan at least eighteen months before you graduate and make applications at the beginning of your final year of postgraduate study here.

Our web site www.kent.ac.uk/careers/postgradmenu.htm#PGAbroad links to general sites for study overseas, and to postgraduate study sites covering Europe, Commonwealth countries, the USA and other countries.
WHAT DOES THE CES OFFER POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS?

Postgraduate students and researchers can access all of the general facilities and services offered by the CES, such as:

Careers advice
- A drop-in advice service available every day for preliminary careers advice, help with CVs and application forms and to answer quick queries
- Individual guidance interviews to provide in-depth advice and help with your career choice and planning
- A programme of talks and workshops on a variety of topics, open to all interested students

Careers information
- An extensive website www.kent.ac.uk/ces
- Booklets to help with career planning and preparation
- Information for special-interest groups such as international students
- Links with Kent alumni through the Alumni Careers Network (see p23)

Employer information
- Employer directories, such as PROSPECTS and TARGET Jobs, outlining major employers recruiting graduates
- Vacancy database of jobs, internships and research opportunities
- DVDs, books and CD-ROMs to help with applications, interviews and psychometric tests
- Employer presentations
- Annual Careers Fair

Services specifically for postgraduates
We also offer:
- Dedicated web pages for postgraduates and contract researchers www.kent.ac.uk/careers/PDWPgrad.htm
- Information on the destinations of previous students in your subject area www.kent.ac.uk/careers/degreein.htm
- Advice on applications for academic or research posts

Services specifically for you
Since all postgraduates are individuals, and the structure and nature of their postgraduate study also varies widely, web-based and print resources can only be of partial help in making career decisions and putting them into practice. We hope that this booklet will be a useful starting point for all postgraduates in their career planning, but do follow it up by making use of the one-to-one information, advice and guidance that the Careers and Employability Service can offer you from an early stage of your degree. It is not a good idea to put off any thoughts about careers until the day that you hand in your thesis or dissertation!
LINKS AND RESOURCES

- **Vitae** www.vitae.ac.uk – a national organisation supporting the personal, professional and career development of doctoral researchers and research staff in higher education institutions and research institutes. The site includes a great deal of useful information for postgraduates.

- **Beyond the PhD** www.beyondthephd.co.uk Arts and humanities PhDs describe their experience, their current work in a range of academic and non-academic careers and how their PhD has equipped them for their role.

- **Social Science Space** www.socialsciencespace.com/category/early-career. A resource for social scientists with pages of advice for those at the start of their career.

- **Science and Technology Facilities Council** – survey of the career paths of PhD graduates in physics and related subjects. www.stfc.ac.uk/Funding%20and%20Grants/18313.aspx

- **Postgraduate Careers Blog** from the University of Manchester http://manchesterpgcareers.wordpress.com – careers news, comments, vacancies and deadline alerts for postgraduates.

- **Career Resources** for Researchers from the University of East Anglia www.uea.ac.uk/careers/researchers Includes links to professional and funding bodies in a wide range of fields; vacancy sources and recruitment agencies relevant to research students.

- **Research is Cool** www.researchiscool.com Recruitment and social networking site for researchers at all stages of their career including vacancies for research assistant jobs, postdoctoral positions, postgraduate studentships and careers advice.

- **Shinton Consulting** http://shintonconsulting.com Provides careers advice, information and professional development training to scientists, academic researchers, research students and academic staff. Their website carries advice, profiles, case studies, information about careers in academia and beyond, plus links.

- **LinkedIn group** for PhDs seeking career opportunities outside of academia http://bit.ly/bqTOlj

- **PhD Comics** www.phdcomics.com – comic strip charting the “ongoing chronicle of life (or the lack thereof) in graduate school”. Many a true word is spoken in jest!
The Careers and Employability Service
University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7ND
T: +44 (0)1227 823299 E: careerhelp@kent.ac.uk www.kent.ac.uk/ces