

What can I do to improve my employability?

By Matthew Aldrich



The graduate labour market is competitive, particularly in the current economic climate, so it's important to do as much as you can to improve your attractiveness to employers – your employability – whilst studying. This article will give an overview of the careers support structure both at university level and school level, and give hints and tips on what you can do to improve your chances of obtaining graduate employment.

Despite the tough conditions in the labour market, there is some good news for economics students; because of the nature of an economics degree, students are in demand by employers in a wide range of jobs. The analytical background coupled with an ability to apply theoretical concepts to real world issues means that economics graduates are highly valued in the labour market. The latest available data shows that over 85% of ECO students were employed or in postgraduate education 6 months after graduation, and less than 5%

were unemployed (2010-11 cohort). Of those in employment, almost 7 out of 10 were in graduate-level jobs.

However, having a degree (or even a good degree) is not enough to walk into a good job; you must prove that you hold other skills required by the employer to support your academic abilities. Being able to demonstrate that you have these skills is what sets you apart from other job candidates. This is a developmental process that occurs throughout your studies – the earlier you consider employability, the better. Importantly, stating on your CV that you have a particular skill is not enough – you must prove that you have it through the extra-curricular activities that you do. Below is a list of examples of things you can do to improve employability:

- Taking a part-time job, joining a club or society – and becoming involved at an organisational level – or volunteering for local organisations is a great way to start. University life gives you the opportunity to get involved in a wide variety of activities, so search out some that interest you and get involved.
- Apply for internships or work experience in sectors you are interested in. This is becoming increasingly competitive but the Careers Centre can support you on this (and in developing your own internship placements where they aren't advertised by firms), and remember that the university runs its own internships programme – see <http://www.uea.ac.uk/internships>. The school is developing some placements specifically for ECO students.

- Attend careers workshops, talks and employer events, including the CEI lecture series. This gives you an insight into the job application process and what employers are looking for in applicants.
- Attend alumni talks. Each year, the School invites alumni to come back and talk to students about their current roles, how they secured their job, and what it is like working in these sectors. It's also a useful way to generate contacts in sectors you might want to work in. the university also runs a mentoring scheme, which will match you with mentor to demystify the job application process, and help you with career planning <http://www.uea.ac.uk/careers/mentors>
- Use the Careers Centre and the resources and support that it offers. Get feedback on your CV; find out how and where to search for jobs; understand, prepare for and practice each part of the assessment process; use the coaching sessions to build your confidence and understand what you offer employers and how to express it in the way they want, and much more www.uea.ac.uk/careers
- Focus on quality rather than quantity of job/internship applications – a good application takes time, so be organised and understand how to tailor your application to the job criteria.

Importantly, you must be proactive in developing your employability through any of the channels above. For further guidance and support, the Careers Centre runs quick query sessions and guidance appointments (<http://www.uea.ac.uk/careers/students/advice>).

There is also an employability brochure 'Professional Life Begins Now' which includes further advice and guidance as well as careers profiles of recent graduates, available in the ECO corridor. Further ECO-specific information is available at <http://www.uea.ac.uk/economics/careers-and-employability>.

If you have any specific questions, you can contact us at the addresses below:

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