



**A HECSU Survey:  
How are Higher Education Career Services  
Experiencing the Recession?**

**Appendix  
'Top tips' for students who are graduating in 2009**

Authors: Kathrine Jensen and Holly Higgins (HECSU)

**©Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU)**

If you are going to reproduce any of the publication, please cite the author(s), title of publication, organisation and year of publication.

We asked participants to give us their 'top tips' for students who are graduating in 2009 and their suggestions were extremely useful.

## **Top Tips for Students Graduating in 2009**

### **Sourcing vacancies**

Don't take a scattergun approach – target the jobs you really want - one well written application is worth 100 rushed ones.

Make finding paid employment your full-time job – plan, be organised, be systematic, be focused and be professional – focus on the quality of your applications rather than the quantity.

Be clear about your objectives – you cannot be equally qualified for all jobs in all organisations.

Network – think about your own network (friends, family members, tutors, careers advisers, ex-work colleagues, professional bodies, local/community organisations) and use every contact you have to find vacancies.

Consider going to conferences or professional events to meet people, make contacts, and find out more about the area you are interesting in work in.

If there is a professional body attached to your discipline, join it and become active at a local/regional level so you can mix with professionals working in your area.

Be flexible and mobile – if you are willing to work anywhere in the country you will have a larger pool of jobs to apply to.

Take advantage of recruitment events which will enable you to meet employers and get to know the graduate employees who are currently working for them.

Apply for jobs that interest you even if the specification does not require you to be educated to degree level – entry level jobs allow you to gain experience, prove your ability and secure promotions – don't dismiss the idea of starting in a more basic role because they think you will be languishing there forever – you won't be.

Keep looking for jobs – sourcing vacancies takes time and it is easy to lose your motivation – use your Careers Service, family and friends for support, and remember you only need one application to succeed.

Think about setting up a support group with any friends who are in the same position as you to broaden your network – coordinate your searches so you can recommend suitable vacancies to one another.

Use speculative approaches to identify job opportunities at small and medium-sized employers – don't just rely on advertised vacancies or restrict your applications to multi-national employers or companies who are already household names – approaching the company yourself shows initiative.

Keep your eyes and ears open for opportunities before they are advertised e.g. new firms moving into your local area.

Do your research into the industry or profession you are interested in to ensure that you are aware of the full range of employers you can approach.

If you are interested in graduate training schemes make sure you know when companies begin the recruitment process to ensure you are prepared for the next round – identify which opportunities will become available in autumn 2009 and remember that opportunities which may arise in spring 2010 are only 6 months away.

### **Applications and Interviews**

Make sure your CV and cover letters are professional – check you are using language which is appropriate for a business letter, check your spelling and your grammar, and ask someone at your Careers Service to proof read them.

Always tailor your application to the job role – a general CV and cover letter won't get you anywhere – carefully consider every element of the job specification and give evidence of your ability to fulfil the criteria.

Make sure your enthusiasm for the job comes across in your application and at your interview – you'll need to demonstrate your motivation and commitment to the role and the company – this is easier if you have a genuine interest in the role or the sector.

If you are invited for an interview redouble your efforts to research the organisation and the job role – think about what the employer might ask you and ask your careers service for a practice interview to try out your technique.

Follow up unsuccessful applications to get some feedback if you can.

Identify your unique selling points and make sure you are marketing yourself effectively to potential employers.

## **Building your CV**

Take action to fill gaps in your experience - any work experience (paid or unpaid) looks better on your CV than unemployment – the experience will also give you something to draw on in subsequent job interviews.

If you can't secure a work experience placement, ask if you can 'shadow' someone for a day instead.

Do something with your time – volunteering is impressive on any CV.

Remember that voluntary/temporary work might even lead to a permanent paid position.

Use any free time to develop your knowledge and skills so you are ready to take advantage of the upturn when the economy starts to improve.

Use your careers adviser to help you identify which activities or courses the employers you are interested in are most likely to value.

Travelling can be a great experience – but remember that if you are away for too long you will end up competing with the students who will be graduating in 2010 when you begin to apply for jobs on your return.

Don't stay in education unless you have a real purpose for doing so and can articulate what you plan to get out of it.

## **Planning your career**

See your career as a journey - identify what you want to achieve and work out how you can do this – you need an action plan so in 6 months time you have achieved something and made some progress.

You are responsible for your career and you need to start managing your career now – have a structured career development plan – think about where you want to be in 5 years and how you plan to get there.

Have short-term, medium-term, and long-term career goals and plan steps for your progression – even if you don't land your dream job straight away you will know you are working towards it by gaining the relevant skills and experience.

Remember that the process of deciding what you want to do is not fundamentally changed by the recession – it just might take you a little longer to get there.