

Eight ways to combine a degree with work experience

Employers place a high value on work experience and graduates who have made the effort to spend some time in a workplace are generally more attractive to employers.

Employers ideally want graduates who have some understanding of the reality and challenges of the world of work, how organisations operate and have business awareness. They look for potential employees who have skills useful in industry, such as communication, analytical and team working abilities and can hit the ground running.

There is an increasingly wider range of ways to combine a degree with work experience. This article aims to enable you to help your son or daughter consider and compare these options.

Four year degree including a year in industry.

Traditionally known as a sandwich degree and most commonly found in subjects such as engineering, science and construction, four year courses with one year spent on work experience can now be found in a much wider range of subject areas, including finance and accounting, law, business and economics and geography . You can apply directly for these courses through UCAS. The entry requirements are usually higher than for a three year degree.

In some cases adding on an extra industry year to your degree may be possible when you get to university. However, you may need to get a certain percentage attainment in your first year, to be eligible.

- UCAS course search for sandwich degree options <http://search.ucas.com/>

Sponsored Degree

Employers support chosen students through a degree by offering financial assistance, work experience, mentoring and networking events, in the hope that the student will choose to work for them when they graduate. In most cases there is, however, no obligation to work for that employer. Scholarships schemes often work in a similar way, where employers offer bursaries to help pay course fees and provide valuable work experience during summer vacations. Sponsored degrees are most common in Engineering, Finance and Accounting, Construction, Business, IT and Science.

- See Which University for The Complete Guide to Sponsored Degrees for details and how to apply. <http://university.which.co.uk/teachers/introduce-higher-education-options/the-complete-guide-to-sponsored-degrees>

Professional degree where work experience is mandatory

Degrees in areas such as medicine, health, teaching, social work. Work experience in the form of placements is an essential part of the course. At the end of the degree you are eligible to register as a professional in the area of work in which you have trained.

Degree Apprenticeship

You are employed, so receive a salary but also follow a training scheme that includes studying for a part-time degree. Degree study is usually one day a week or in blocks of a few weeks. The university you study at will be chosen, in most cases, by your employer

- See Which University Guide to Higher and Degree Apprenticeships
<http://university.which.co.uk/advice/introduce-higher-education-options/higher-and-degree-apprenticeships-guide-download>
- See individual employer websites for Apprenticeship scheme details and how to apply.

Foundation Degree

This is a two year course equivalent to the first two years of a degree. Foundation degrees combine academic study with work based learning. There are two main types:

- Part-time courses for those already in work to help with career progression
- Full-time courses for those who want to enter a specific area of work.

Subjects include early years teaching, paramedic science, sport and exercise science, media, business.

They are often designed by employers to address skill shortages, so you gain skills needed in your local area. Options range from being employed with some part-time study to being at university full-time on a degree that includes some work based modules.

- See Which University The Complete Guide to Foundation Degrees.
<http://university.which.co.uk/teachers/introduce-higher-education-options/the-complete-guide-to-foundation-degrees>
- UCAS course search for Foundation degrees <http://search.ucas.com/>

Internship

Internships most usually take the form of summer work placements offered by employers principally to penultimate year undergraduates to be taken in the summer after their second year. There are also opportunities for first year students. The application process is tough and similar to applying for a company graduate scheme but if you do well on your internship you may be fast-tracked to a graduate job.

- See Internships – The route to a graduate job? (Hilary - please link)

Professional placement/work experience modules

Many degrees include one or more compulsory or optional modules to gain work experience. These are assessed and part of the final degree

Work experience/volunteering at university

All universities offer opportunities to gain work experience or volunteer, either on campus or in the local area.

- See individual university websites

Whether you spend a whole year in industry or merely spend some time volunteering during your degree, the skills you gain will boost any job applications you make and give you a step towards the type of graduate employers increasingly are looking for.

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