

Why it pays to think outside the box when looking for a job

Mainly for students: Stephanie Latham provides tips and advice on how students can enhance their employability skills

Most universities took part in the [Teaching Excellence Framework](#) (TEF) in 2017 – the government’s assessment of teaching quality.

The TEF was based on six key metrics:

- Teaching
- Assessment and feedback
- Academic support
- Non-continuation of study
- Employment or further study, and;
- Highly skilled employment or further study

The first three are based on the National Student Survey of final year students, the fourth drawn from the Higher Education Statistics Agency and the last two from Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education surveys.

To gain employment, it is self-evident that students have to be employable. It is therefore important that universities – but especially students – endeavour to make undergraduates employable not just in the technical discipline studied, but also in the softer skills, experience and attributes that employers look for.

Use social media

Register for a free account on LinkedIn. Set up your profile to show the main headings from your CV such as work experience, education, skills and interests. You will soon make “connections” and gain valuable contacts. In 2014, 89% of recruiters hired through LinkedIn. Set up an account on Twitter and keep up to date with current affairs and review property articles. On social media, follow property companies and organisations, join professional networking groups and research the property career paths of alumni.

What’s going on at your university

Most universities have various systems in place and opportunities available to enhance employability among students. Online resources might include dedicated placement, graduate and work experience portals, as well as a range of career-planning tools. Initiatives might include graduate support, networking events, construction fairs, work experience and internship programmes, employability skills development programmes and alumni mentoring. Opportunities to enhance employability can also be gained by volunteering, being a member of the Institute of Directors Student Membership Programme or getting involved in your university’s alumni group.

Most universities have careers consultants who can provide valuable, up-to-date advice. They may be able to help students navigate the various stages of the recruitment and selection process, such as targeting applications and preparing for assessment days and interviews. They may help students

to compile a CV and direct them towards sources of online help such as the CV Builders, Prospects and Target Jobs websites, along with practice psychometric tests. Here are some links to try:

<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/interview-tips/psychometric-tests>

<https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice>

A really helpful RICS careers page and links is available at:

<https://www.ricsrecruit.com/careers/>

It's all about work experience

Get creative with work experience. If you have the opportunity, consider doing a sandwich degree, where you complete a work placement during your third year at university. You could go abroad or work in a different part of the UK. Enjoy a year's experience and then return to university and apply your practical knowledge to your final year of studies, as well as achieve a diploma in professional practice.

Another possibility is to consider a part-time degree linked to an apprenticeship programme where you can do, for example, four days a week in your property job and one day a week part time at university over the course of, say, five years, and receive on-the-job training while saving on fees.

Also consider shorter-term apprenticeships or internships. You may be at college and thinking about a property degree but are unsure which one to complete.

Consider doing work experiences/work shadowing at a range of employers. If you are already studying at university, try and get a holiday job with a property-based organisation, even if it is for a couple of weeks. It all helps.

'At RICS you'll shape your world'

Understand the benefits of being a member of the RICS and the requirements for membership. Review the RICS Rules of Conduct and the RICS Global Professional and Ethical Standards. Become familiar with the RICS Assessment of Professional Competence (APC). Review the APC pathway guide for your specific area of interest, i.e. planning and development or valuation. Get up to speed with the latest RICS International Property Measurement Standards publication and RICS Red Book 2017 changes. Become a member of your local RICS Matrics networking group.

Be a mastermind at interview

Many employers ask interview questions using the competency-based approach, similar to that of the final interview for the APC. Construct and rehearse some model answers to typical questions. For example, the answer to a question on "the importance of team work" could be supported by a scenario from your workplace, or consider hypothetical scenarios where your experience is more limited. Employers are not trying to trip you up with complicated questions. Be confident and tell yourself that they want to hire you and demonstrate/showcase why. Joining their workforce will bring an employer a number of benefits such as additional resources to do the work and fresh ideas.

It's about quality not quantity

Consider the type of qualities attractive to employers: commercial awareness, professionalism, enthusiasm, willingness, networking ability, ethics, ambition, creativity, problem solving, assertiveness, teamwork, communication and computer skills. Think carefully about the extracurricular activities that would add value to your CV and emphasise these characteristics. For example, mentoring, sports, field trips and travel, voluntary work, computer courses, CPD events and guest speaking/presenting.

Get proptech savvy

We live in a digital age where research and information is at our fingertips, so get up to date with the latest cutting-edge technology. The RICS magazine Modus and Property Journal, along with EG and The Planner all contain articles on these topics. Impress employers with your knowledge about BIM, fintech, smart cities, drones, big data, blockchain, bitcoin and cryptocurrencies!

Impressions count

Attend recruitment fairs and consider the first impression you make. Consider your professional image and the way that you present yourself. Take along a copy of your CV and covering letter and hold an interesting conversation – ask insightful questions and maintain eye contact. If you are completing work experience, bear in mind that your employer is potentially trialling you as a new employee, so think about your future and where you want to work and build strong working relationships as much as possible. Remember, it can take years to build working relationships and trust, and just a few seconds to destroy them. So always be mindful of professionalism, ethics and values.

Resources

[Teaching excellence framework](#)

[Employability skills](#)

[Getting to grips with proptech](#)

Stephanie Latham MRICS BSc (Hons) Planning and Development is a senior lecturer at Nottingham Trent University. She previously worked for Savills (UK) and JLL as a development surveyor and valuer.

Mainly for students is edited by Paul Collins of Nottingham Trent University. Comments and suggestions for future topics can be sent to him at: paul.collins@ntu.ac.uk