



The Open
University

OU study and your career

OU Careers Advisory Service



The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

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We may record our phone calls with you to make sure we have carried out your instructions correctly and to help us improve our services through staff training.

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Introduction

Are you reading this booklet because you are considering making a change in your life? The change could be a personal challenge to discover your potential. Or you may want to improve your prospects in a current job? Perhaps you are thinking of a new career direction?

Whatever your reason, it's likely that you have picked up this booklet because you want to know how studying with The Open University (OU) can help you achieve your career goals.

This booklet can help you find information on:

- ▶ how OU study can be part of your career plans (page 5);
- ▶ the ways in which we can support your professional development through lifelong learning (page 6);
- ▶ how well OU qualifications are recognised (page 9);
- ▶ how to improve your chances of getting the career you want by identifying the skills employers are looking for (page 11);
- ▶ how your choice of course may affect your career plans (page 15);
- ▶ how and where to start exploring your career ideas (page 21); and
- ▶ our Careers Advisory Service and how we can help you (page 33).

Please contact our Student Registration & Enquiry Service or your national or regional centre (see appendix 1 for details) if:

- ▶ you need advice on how OU courses and qualifications can affect your career; or
- ▶ you do not have access to the internet at home or through your library.

You can also read this document on our website at:

www.open.ac.uk/careers

“The main high point for me was an ever-increasing sense of self-worth and accomplishment as the years went by. I noticed that, almost in spite of myself, I was becoming more of an intellectual, able to engage more meaningfully in debate, able to express myself with more clarity and ease than I ever had before. The OU is a highly-respected institution, and generally, prospective employers see the independence, tenacity, commitment and determination that it takes to qualify through distance learning as highly positive assets. What you are doing is amazing compared to your average student. Be proud of your achievement!”

Law graduate



Why study with the OU?

Taking time to reflect on your reasons for studying may help your motivation and keep you studying if it becomes challenging. This section looks at why people study and what they gain in terms of personal and professional development.

Who we are

- ▶ When you are presenting yourself to an employer as an OU student or graduate, you may find the following information useful.
- ▶ We are the UK's largest university, with an enviable network of around 9000 tutors across the UK, many of whom are practising professionals with strong academic backgrounds, sector-specific skills and practical experience.
- ▶ With study materials written by OU academics who are experts in their specialist fields and in distance learning, we provide leading-edge teaching, born out of extensive research and close links with partners such as the BBC.
- ▶ Our flexible learning methods blend study materials and tutorial groups with online and mobile media to bring learning to life.
- ▶ About 80% of OU students are in work throughout their studies.
- ▶ OU qualifications are respected by employers and are universally recognised, at home and abroad. Over 75% of FTSE 100 have sponsored staff on OU study.

Did you know?

The OU consistently ranks among the top three UK universities for student satisfaction in the National Student Survey.

“What I did find (and many OU graduates find this too) was that the fact that I had done my degree with the OU counted for a lot. Potential employers could see that I'd had life experiences alongside my degree studies.”

OU graduate

What we can offer you

We are open to everyone and there are many different reasons why people choose to study with us. Here are just some of the reasons why you may be choosing to study with us.

- ▶ You may want to gain a nationally recognised qualification from a high-quality university but want to work at the same time (see 'The value of OU qualifications' on page 9).
- ▶ You may have caring responsibilities and want a flexible type of study that allows you to look after the person you care for.
- ▶ You may be looking for a new challenge.
- ▶ You may want to try higher-education study without committing yourself to a full-time degree.
- ▶ You may be studying as part of your continuing professional development. Perhaps your employer says you must study or you are already working in a profession and want to bring your knowledge and skills up to date (see 'Course choice and your career' on page 15).
- ▶ You may be thinking of a change in your career. OU study can provide the opportunity to enter a graduate career you may not otherwise have considered. You may need some further study to enter a specific career (see 'Course choice and your career' on page 15 and 'Exploring your career ideas' on page 21).
- ▶ You may be unemployed and hope that OU study will help you make changes in your life. Many students have suggested that OU study has helped them to manage their lives better and make positive changes (see 'Returning to work' on page 7 and 'Exploring your career ideas' on page 21).
- ▶ You may have retired recently and found that you have more free time.

- ▶ You may want to study a subject that has always fascinated you (see 'Learning – what's in it for you?' below).
- ▶ You may have discovered new interests and want to find out more about them.

"Because of my OU study I was used to the discipline of working on my own with remote support. Part of my job now is to advise people how to advance themselves. I often recommend having a look at what the OU offers."

Science student

About 60% of students tell us that career development or wanting to change career are their major reasons for studying, and we know that about 80% of students are in work while they are studying.

We also know that many students who begin studying for personal challenge or interest find unexpected work-related skills, knowledge and opportunities. They then decide that they want to use their new skills to change or develop their career.

Free online resources

<http://openlearn.open.ac.uk> offers free access to some of the OU's study materials for you to try for yourself. Units can take between three and fifteen hours of study, and you can:

- ▶ follow a structure or dip in and out of materials
- ▶ get support as part of an online learning community
- ▶ use innovative elearning tools.

Although it is free to use the site, it will still be necessary to apply separately to the OU if you wish to study the full course with a tutor and formal assessment, and to gain credits.

Audio-visual materials from many OU courses are free to download from iTunes U and can give you a flavour of our first class learning materials.

<http://open.edu/itunes>

Did you know?

The Open University was the first university to hit 20 million downloads on iTunes U.

Do I need a goal when I start studying?

Not necessarily, although for some people it can make a difference. It can help keep you focused and committed to achieving your goal.

How important is it to have decided on a career when I start studying?

Some people are motivated only if they know where their studies are leading. Others need to start studying to find out what their interests are.

If you are studying for career reasons rather than interest, you could be thinking about which of your skills you would like to use and in what type of work environment. For some careers such as teaching, you will need to choose modules carefully.

Learning – what's in it for you?

With changing employment and lifestyle patterns, lifelong learning has become more relevant. More and more people are employed on short-term or temporary contracts, or choosing to work from home or to job share. There is also more emphasis on achieving a balance between work and personal life and on developing and maintaining personal interests and skills.

If you are an OU student, you have already made the decision to learn and develop your skills in a more structured way.

"There is no doubt that a university degree still has a very high currency with employers and a profound effect on a person's earning potential over a lifetime. Our membership of over 800 organisations involved in graduate recruitment still attaches great value to a university education and has remained committed to recruiting graduate talent through the recession. A degree remains an extremely worthwhile investment."

Chairman of Association of Graduate Recruiters

(Taken from What do Graduates Do? HECSU/AGCAS 2010)

Continuing professional development

You may want to join the huge number of students who are in employment and studying with the OU for professional development reasons – either updating their knowledge or preparing for a career change.

Individual OU courses can be part of a continuing professional development programme. In fact, many organisations sponsor students on courses to meet their internal training needs. If there is no history of sponsorship within your organisation, you can begin studying and see what support you can negotiate later. Or, talk to your training manager about future possibilities. It may be that they recognise your skill and motivation in combining work and study, which will help with a promotion.

The OU has a number of short, focused courses designed to meet the immediate needs of busy professionals. For example, we offer short 30-hour online courses for people who may need to extend or update their work skills but can't commit to more long-term study. We can also design individual courses tailored to the needs of employer organisations. For more information on our Continuing Professional Development courses, visit www3.open.ac.uk/study/professional-skills.

If you are looking for courses related to your work, you can read the OU Recognition leaflets on our website www.open.ac.uk/recognition to check if any OU courses are recognised by your professional organisation.

For information on foundation degrees, read 'Course choice and your career' on page 15 and visit our website at www.open.ac.uk/study.

Returning to work

If you are returning to work following a career break, redundancy, changing domestic circumstances or ill health, you may find that this presents its own challenges. You may feel out of touch with the world of work and less confident in your abilities.

If you're worried about your ability to study at higher education level, or about committing to the time required, you might find one of our Openings courses a good place to start. These are short starter courses specifically designed to give you a gentle introduction to a subject and to the world of studying.

Visit www.open.ac.uk/openings for more information, or ask our Student Registration & Enquiry Service (see page 37).

Some local colleges also run 'return to work' courses, which can be helpful in building up confidence and providing information on new opportunities.

Community, voluntary or part-time work can also help you move back into the workplace and provide useful contacts.

Summary and next steps

- ▶ Take time to think about your reasons for studying. It may help your motivation and keep you studying!
- ▶ You may want to use some of the activities in 'About you' within the 'Features' section of the Careers Advisory Service website at www.open.ac.uk/careers to record your thoughts about study.
- ▶ If you are starting out, why not consider an Openings course? For more information, visit www.open.ac.uk/openings or contact our Student Registration & Enquiry Service. See appendix 1 on page 37.
- ▶ If you are employed, you could ask your training manager about the possibility of sponsorship for study, particularly if your courses are directly related to your work.
- ▶ If you are looking for courses related to your work, use the OU Recognition series at www.open.ac.uk/recognition to find out if any OU courses are recognised by your professional organisation.



The value of OU qualifications

If you are considering studying with the OU, you will want to know whether it will improve your career prospects and how the qualification is valued by employers. This section explains some of the main points about us, how our qualifications are recognised, and how OU study develops your skills.

There is no doubt that having an OU degree will broaden your employment opportunities and improve your chances of getting the job you want but it is not enough on its own. Skills, commercial awareness and overall potential as well as the ability to market yourself and your experience also play their part. You cannot rely on having (or working towards) a qualification on its own. You need to be able to explain what difference it has made to you and what skills you have developed and how they will benefit any employer.

You may need to do this if you are:

- ▶ applying for a job or voluntary work;
- ▶ considering a change of career;
- ▶ applying for further study at a higher or equivalent level;
- ▶ applying for promotion;
- ▶ having an appraisal at work; or
- ▶ hoping to persuade your employer to sponsor you.

An OU degree – what's in it for you?

Our students report a wide range of experiences in the job market.

- ▶ A large percentage say they have received better pay or have been promoted to a higher grade.
- ▶ Others report changing careers completely or taking on a more specialist role in the same occupation.
- ▶ Others have changed organisation and become a manager, and a small percentage have become self-employed.

You can read how OU study has helped some OU students develop or change their career at www.open.ac.uk/careers/student-stories.php.

Did you know?

The 2008/2009 'Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education' survey showed that the top three industries our graduates were employed in were education, public administration and defence, and health and social work.

What employers and professional organisations say about OU qualifications

"OU graduates already demonstrate self-motivation and commitment. If I were to receive a CV from an OU graduate, it would most likely take precedence over one from another graduate until after the interview and assessment."

Manager, FDM

Our qualifications are recognised by a number of professional organisations. Many count OU qualifications towards membership or part membership. You'll find a list of these organisations on our website at www.open.ac.uk/recognition. They include all the professional organisations (for example, the British Psychological Society and the Royal Society of Chemistry) whose policies we know about. Institutions not listed in the leaflets may also be willing to consider recognising OU study, and we are happy to support individual students in negotiations with professional organisations.

If you are considering studying to become qualified as, for example, a lawyer, a psychologist or an engineer, the courses are set by the professional organisations so look at the relevant leaflet to make sure you study the appropriate courses and within the necessary timeframe.

Although OU qualifications are highly respected, qualifications from any university are no longer a guarantee of a job. Success in gaining any qualification shows a range of skills and knowledge that is likely to make it easier to get the job you want, but you will need to market yourself and these skills and show how you will be useful to an employer, rather than expecting your qualification to speak for itself. This is covered in more detail in 'Exploring your career ideas' on page 21 and 'Equality and diversity' on page 27.

Our links with employers

The OU Careers Advisory Service has worked hard to develop relationships with employers to help our students improve their employment opportunities. This has resulted in an increasing number of employers asking us to advertise some of their job vacancies.

Employers as diverse as Santander, British Airways, The Red Cross, The Metropolitan Police, Cable & Wireless Worldwide, and Hallmark Cards, as well as various small to medium enterprises, have all advertised employment opportunities with us in the past year.

OU students can access our online vacancy service under 'Services' on the home page of www.open.ac.uk/careers.

Other national graduate recruiters, such as Tesco, Enterprise Rent-a-car, Heinz, The Financial Services Authority, and Unilever, are all marketing themselves to OU students through our 'Employer Showcase', which you can access under 'Services' from the home page of our careers website. (Please note that you can only access this part of our website if you are currently registered as an OU student.)

These employers recognise the unique skills, qualities and valuable experience that OU students and graduates can bring to an organisation.

OU students can also view video clips and listen to audio downloads of employers on our website. Find out what they think about OU study and access their advice on how you can improve your applications, via 'What employers say' under 'Features' on our homepage.

Periodically we host online forums where students can put questions to employers. The forums are 'live' for one month and remain 'read only' for one year. For more information go to www.open.ac.uk/careers/secure/forums.php. (You will need your OU username and password.)

Developing your skills through OU study

"I was told that my ability to be succinct, assess and evaluate information, my time management and self motivation were all key drives in my promotion. These were all skills that OU study helped develop."

Psychology graduate

The OU's Employability Statement at www.open.ac.uk/employability describes how OU study can enhance your career prospects.

Although your qualification is evidence of your intellectual ability, you will also be developing a set of skills which are likely to be as important as your qualification when you apply for a job. One student, David Hicks, said that he began his studies with the OU because he 'was feeling frustrated with the monotony of routine work and needed a challenge'. He identified the following skills that he developed through studying which have been particularly valuable in changing his career:

- ▶ self-belief and self-confidence
- ▶ improved written and spoken communication
- ▶ development of different points of view.

"OU students have developed a number of competencies that we see as very valuable, for example, OU students often have to balance a full-time or part-time job alongside their study, or may have to balance a hectic family lifestyle and still manage to deliver their essays and projects on time. Competencies such as time management, flexibility, resilience and resourcefulness are developed as a result of OU study, all of which we hold in high regard."

Graduate Recruitment Manager, Unilever

Remember, studying needs motivation and self-discipline, a significant time commitment and maintained dedication. In return, it can increase your confidence in your own abilities and improve your skills for the workplace.

These skills include:

- ▶ the ability to organise and prioritise – this is essential in the job market;
- ▶ learning how to be an independent learner and effective self-manager;
- ▶ working with different people at different levels;
- ▶ written communication skills that are developed through presenting information in assignments, projects and examinations;
- ▶ presentation skills – from presenting information in tutorials, residential schools and computer conferencing; and
- ▶ the ability to critically analyse issues and situations.

“I found that my OU degree gave me the skills, the self-motivation and the drive that helped prospective employers to see my potential.”

Open degree graduate

If you need help identifying the skills you have developed or will develop through study, look at the descriptions of OU qualifications at www.open.ac.uk/study and, in particular, the information on ‘learning outcomes’. There is also information on skills developed from OU study for each subject area in ‘OU study and your career’ under ‘Features’ at www.open.ac.uk/careers.

Look at the ‘About you’ section under ‘Features’ on the Careers Advisory Service website at www.open.ac.uk/careers to find a number of activities and ways of recording your achievements. You can use this information to answer those difficult questions on application forms or at interviews.

“Be honest with yourself: what relevant experience do you have and where are your gaps; how can you start to bridge these gaps? Can you gain access to someone in the company to find out what they value and focus your own development on the specific areas that will make a difference in your ‘self promotion’?”

Head of Talent Management, Royal Mail

Making the most of your skills

When you have identified the skills you have gained, you will need to market yourself so that you can find the job you want. The way your skills and achievements are presented in applications, CVs and interviews is crucial.

“The OU is a highly respected institution and, generally, prospective employers see the independence, tenacity, commitment and determination that it takes to qualify through distance learning as highly positive assets. What you are doing is amazing compared to your average student. Be proud of your achievement!”

Law graduate

OU students can ask for a copy of the ‘Career planning and job seeking workbook’ to access more information on getting a job, or look at it on our website at www.open.ac.uk/careers/publications. (This publication is password protected and you can only access it if you are currently registered as an OU student.)

There is information and advice on all aspects of applying for jobs at www.open.ac.uk/careers.

In a world in which we are all expected to manage our own career development, it is important to be able to:

- ▶ state your strengths clearly;
- ▶ provide evidence of your skills; and
- ▶ identify the areas you need to develop.

Employers want to recruit staff with the ability to work at an appropriate level. To achieve this you need a combination of personal and work-related skills and the ability to show that you are someone who will make a positive contribution to the organisation. As most of our students are already employed, they have the experience and many of the skills that are in demand in the workplace. By looking at information on employers’ websites, you can match yourself more effectively to an appropriate job and market yourself more successfully.

Read 'Exploring your career ideas' on page 21 for more information and an outline of some of the occupational areas that many OU students ask about.

"I was never sure if I would be able to change career at my stage of life but thanks to the OU I did."

ICT and Computing graduate

Many skills can be transferred from one situation to another. For example, if you have been the captain of a sports or quiz team, you will have gained skills of leadership, teamwork, motivating people, solving problems, working under pressure and interpersonal skills, all of which would be highly relevant in a managerial post. If you have worked in social care, in retail as a sales assistant or in catering, you will most likely have gained interpersonal and numeracy skills, and an ability to solve problems and work under pressure, and you will have evidence to show this.

Remember that you will already have many skills that employers are likely to find useful, whether through paid, unpaid, skilled or unskilled experience.



Employer surveys indicate that the skills employers look for in graduates fall into four broad areas – see table below.

Self-reliance skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Self-awareness ▶ Proactivity ▶ Willingness to learn ▶ Self-promotion ▶ Networking ▶ Planning action
People skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Team working ▶ Interpersonal skills ▶ Written and oral communication ▶ Leadership ▶ Customer orientation ▶ Foreign language
General employment skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Problem-solving ▶ Flexibility ▶ Business acumen ▶ IT/computer literacy ▶ Numeracy ▶ Commitment
Specialist skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Specific occupational skills – specialist relevant knowledge, e.g. languages, IT ▶ Technical skills e.g. journalism, engineering, accounting, sales

(From 'What do graduates do?' HECSU/AGCAS 2010)

IT and language skills

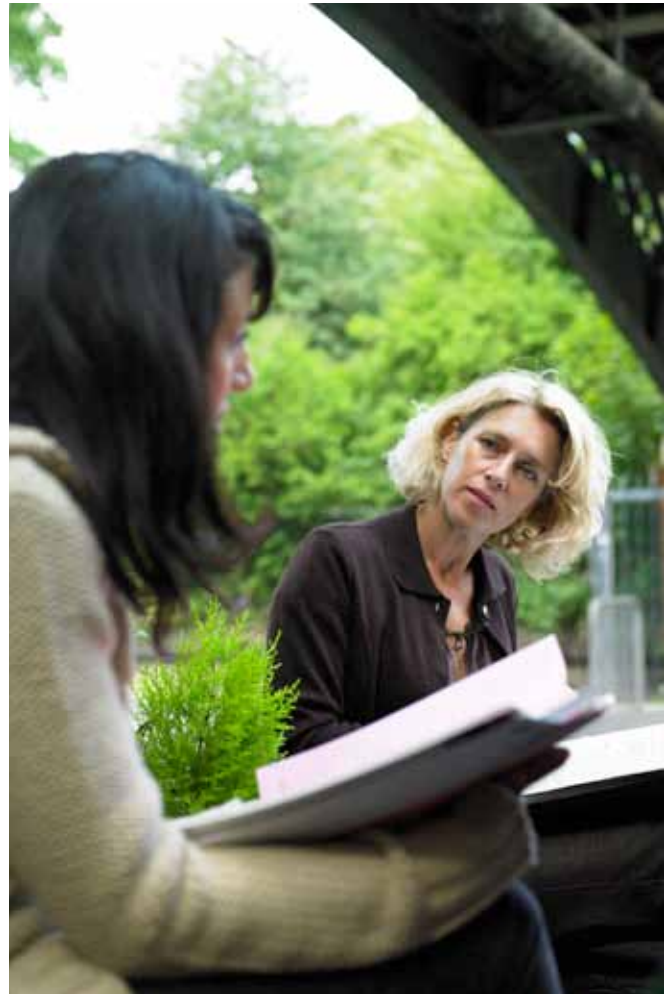
Information technology (IT) skills are generally essential for most jobs today. So, as well as making sure that you can competently use the internet and email, find out if there is a particular software package used in the career area that interests you and try to gain experience using it.

It is important to maintain and develop your IT skills, and you could consider gaining a qualification as evidence of your ability. For example, you could study an OU ICT course (see www.open.ac.uk/study) or you could study one through your local college.

In the global marketplace, language skills can be a real asset. Do you have any spoken or written language skills? Have you lived or worked abroad? What evidence do you have of your ability? If you enjoy languages, look at the OU courses in French, Spanish, Italian, German and Chinese or contact your local college.

Summary and next steps

- ▶ We are highly regarded. UK employers take OU qualifications very seriously – over 50,000 employers have sponsored their staff on OU courses.
- ▶ There is no doubt that having an OU qualification will broaden your employment opportunities and improve your chances of getting the job you want, but it is not enough on its own. Many students change careers during study.
- ▶ Transferable skills, commercial awareness and the ability to market yourself and your experience are also important.
- ▶ Our students have the skills and work experience employers want and an increasing number of employers are actively wanting to attract OU students.
- ▶ Read the Recognition leaflets at www.open.ac.uk/recognition to see what professional organisations and employers have said about what they need from OU study.
- ▶ If you want to find out about skills needed in particular jobs, visit www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations and read 'Exploring your career ideas' on page 21 of this publication.



“Mature student[s] ... often are balancing working and studying at the same time, perhaps with family commitments as well. And that takes some skill to be able to do that, and too often, I think, mature students don't recognise that. They just think 'that's life', but actually that really does demonstrate to us the ability to organise some very difficult priorities.”

Head of Recruitment, KPMG Europe



Course choice and your career

This section explains the issues you might want to consider when choosing your course or qualification, and also suggests further sources of help and information. You do not need definite career plans at this stage but you can use this publication (particularly ‘Exploring your career ideas’ on page 21) to give you some ideas of where to start.

Remember, you come to any course with a range of skills and knowledge from your own life experience. These are likely to affect the choices you make about OU courses as well as your choice of career. So, thinking about your life and the decisions you have already taken can be the first step in identifying the skills you would enjoy using in a job.

“I can’t emphasise enough how much the OU has done for me ... It has helped my self-esteem enormously.”

Geography and Environment student

Choosing the right level course

Unless you have studied at degree level before, we strongly advise you to begin your studies with a course at Level 1. This is equivalent to the first year at any other university, so it makes sense to start here and move on to Levels 2 and 3 (second and third years) when you have discovered which subject interests you and have developed your study skills.

If you are new to university study and are not sure about studying at a distance, consider studying one of our Openings courses first. Visit www.open.ac.uk/openings or contact our Student Registration & Enquiry Service.

The flexibility of the OU system means that you do not have to commit to a whole degree at the beginning as it allows you to make decisions about each course as your experience develops. However, you may like to start thinking about the implications of your choices for possible career options.

If it is appropriate, because of your previous study experience, for you to start at Level 2 or 3 in your first year, we recommend that you speak to an OU adviser before committing yourself. See appendix 1 on page 37 for details of how to contact our Student Registration & Enquiry Service.

Choosing the subject

When you are planning your studies it is important to begin with a course that interests you or relates to your previous study experience. It is not always necessary to commit yourself to a particular subject area in your first year of study unless you are sure what career you want. If teaching is one of your career options, you will need to choose your courses carefully. (See page 25 for more information.)

If you have specific career objectives, OU study may be the key to your career plans and the choice of courses may be crucial. In some fields (for example, law and psychology) there are specified courses that you must take to get professional recognition.

If you are interested in studying a single subject and want to know where it might lead, visit ‘OU study and your career’ under ‘Features’ at www.open.ac.uk/careers. For each subject area there is information on related career opportunities. Also visit www.prospects.ac.uk/links/options and the job sector information at www.prospects.ac.uk/sectors.htm. Some jobs demand a specific degree subject, particularly in the fields of science and engineering.

“The Open University is an ideal way of combining the experience in academia and also the experience at work and that can be a really good combination for us.”

UK Graduate Recruitment Manager, Logica

In higher education it is now common for degree programmes to be made up of a series of courses. This ‘modular’ approach offers more flexibility, and within the OU it allows you to create your own degree by choosing the modules that suit you. In the OU, this qualification is known as the Open Degree (BA or BSc Open).

Visit the Open Programme website at www.open.ac.uk/programmes/open-degree for more advice and information or contact our Student Registration & Enquiry Service.

New directions

The excitement of learning and the confidence that can arise through studying also produce new ideas. Many students start by taking one course, just to see what it's like. They then develop new interests and go on to further study, and are taken in directions they had not previously considered.

You could find that your career plans change and develop during your studies. For example, one student started studying to keep up to date in his job as a patent agent. He was made redundant and used the skills and knowledge he had learned from his OU studies to retrain as a teacher.

There could be many careers open to you, any of which would provide you with job satisfaction, so keep your options open.

“My current boss was very impressed when he found out that I was doing a science degree whilst working full time and I feel that he considered it very much in my favour.”

Science graduate

Vocational degrees

There is a difference between vocational and non-vocational subjects. A vocational degree is one directly related to an area of work such as engineering or nursing. This type of degree could allow you to move straight into a career, although there is often a need for specific work experience as well. For example, a law degree provides you with the first stage of legal training but further academic and practical training is needed after your degree.

A non-vocational degree is one that is not directly related to an area of work. This can be used for a wide range of jobs as it is the skills you learn that are more important than the specialist subject knowledge. So, you could decide to study a broad degree such as science and then specialise later with a masters degree in biology, or even combine a wider range of subjects (from technology to European studies) because they interest you.

Or, you may want to use a degree in something like science to enter a graduate-level job in industry or take a further course (for example, teacher training) to enter a particular career.

Foundation degrees

Foundation degrees are employment-related higher-education qualifications, designed to give students the higher-level skills that are valued by employers. They are designed and developed together with employers, and open up opportunities to gain professional recognition and other higher-level qualifications while working in that area. At least a quarter, and up to half, of the study for a foundation degree consists of work-based courses. Foundation degrees are recognised in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Most OU foundation degrees are also offered as Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE) in Scotland. We offer foundation degrees in a number of subjects including:

- ▶ Early Years
- ▶ Counselling
- ▶ Health and Social Care
- ▶ Health Sciences
- ▶ Information and Communication Technologies
- ▶ Working with Young People
- ▶ Business
- ▶ Business Information Technology
- ▶ Computing and its Practice
- ▶ Leadership and Management
- ▶ Paramedic Sciences
- ▶ Sport, Fitness and Health
- ▶ Youth Justice

For more information and advice on foundation degrees and choosing courses, visit www.open.ac.uk/study or contact our Student Registration & Enquiry Service.

Further qualifications or training

Some careers need specific qualifications that we do not offer – for example, physiotherapy. However, OU study can be helpful in establishing your academic ability for entry to a course at another institution. It is worth talking to the admissions tutor at that institution about your OU studies before you apply.

For career progression it is sometimes necessary to study for a postgraduate qualification or higher degree to gain the necessary specialist knowledge. These courses may be full- or part-time, taught or research-based. For information on the wide range of OU postgraduate courses and qualifications, logon to our online postgraduate prospectus at www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate or ask for a copy of one of our subject-specific prospectuses. To help you consider the wider issues of postgraduate study, see www.open.ac.uk/careers/further-study.php. You can also read the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) information, 'About postgrad study', which is available at www.prospects.ac.uk/about_postgrad_study.htm.

You usually need an honours degree before you can start studying for a higher degree. You may also need to pay for the course yourself as postgraduate courses are not funded in the same way as first-degree courses. However, there are grants available for the Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).

Did you know?

The 2008/2009 'Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education' survey showed that out of 7,592 OU students who completed their degrees and responded to the survey, 36% continued to further study. Almost half of these were able to access funding through their employer or through an award or sponsorship.

Below are some questions our students often ask us.

How important is it to work towards an honours degree?

This depends on your career ambitions – an honours degree is not always essential, but if there is strong competition for jobs, the classification of a degree (for example, first-class honours) can be important. This can apply, for example, to teaching, where your degree is likely to be one of the main conditions.

Or, for example, if you intend becoming a chartered psychologist, you will need an accredited honours degree. However, it is possible to take a conversion course to upgrade your degree (visit www.open.ac.uk/study or contact our Student Registration & Enquiry Service).

If in all other respects you are a strong candidate for a job that needs an honours degree and you have a BA or BSc rather than a BA or BSc (Hons), it is still worth applying. In a covering letter you should emphasise your suitability and explain that you have already achieved an ordinary degree and are continuing to study for honours.

You could also check with individual employers about their attitude towards qualifications.

If you intend to apply for a higher degree or postgraduate qualification, it is usually more important for you to have an honours degree and the classification of the degree may also be relevant.

For OU higher degrees, visit www.open.ac.uk/study or ask for the relevant prospectus.

For higher degrees outside the OU, visit www.prospects.ac.uk/about_postgrad_study.htm.

How important is it to have a degree in a named subject?

The courses you have taken and the skills and knowledge you have gained are likely to be more important to an employer than the title of your degree. However, you need to check with individual employers and training providers about their attitude towards your qualification. For some postgraduate or higher-degree study, you will need an honours degree in a named subject.

Did you know?

Over 60% of graduate job vacancies do not require a specific degree subject.

What happens if I change my mind?

Imagine, for example, that after a year of studying psychology you discover that it is not what you expected and you want to change direction. This can be a positive step – your increased knowledge about what you enjoy and dislike can allow you to extend your options. With the flexible OU system, you can choose courses from another area of the curriculum and gain an Open Degree (BA or BSc Open) or link your existing courses to a diploma or other qualification.

If you do change your mind or have any doubts about your choices, contact our Student Registration & Enquiry Service. If you want to link your courses to a particular award or qualification, we will advise you on how to do this.

What is the relevance of an OU diploma or certificate and how are they viewed by employers?

Some qualifications have been specially designed with the needs of the professional in mind, while others are suitable for career development. Remember that all qualifications show your ability to study at university level and highlight that you have studied some of the issues relevant to that sector. Equally, they provide evidence of a range of skills that will be useful to employers.

You may also need to gain some relevant experience (you will find ideas on how to do this in 'Exploring your career ideas' on page 21). It is important to market your skills to employers. You will need to show how your qualification will be useful to them rather than make assumptions about what they will know. Look at the learning outcomes specified for each qualification at www.open.ac.uk/study for help identifying the skills you will gain.



Feedback from students shows that where employers have some experience of the OU, either personally or professionally, they value OU students highly.

"My application was definitely seen in a better light for having an OU qualification ... I expected the three-person panel who interviewed me to not view my OU degree as favourably as an Oxbridge one, but this was definitely not the case."

Psychology graduate

What if you don't have a course in the career area that interests me?

We do not offer specific courses that are directly appropriate to all careers. There may be OU courses that will help with the knowledge you need for certain careers, for example, biology for physiotherapy and speech therapy, or the science Level 1 course for pharmacy. OU study may also help you gain entry to a specialised course at another institution.

For a full guide to all UK courses at undergraduate level, visit the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) website at www.ucas.ac.uk.

For postgraduate or higher degrees, visit www.prospects.ac.uk/search_courses.htm or read the useful contacts and resources in appendix 1 on page 37.

If you are applying to other institutions, your OU studies will provide evidence of your motivation and ability to study at university level and will show that you already have a range of skills and knowledge.

Should I choose a BA or a BSc?

The titles BA and BSc reflect the content of the courses that make up your degree. Where the balance is even, you will be asked to choose the title you prefer. If you are studying for career reasons, you should research the career area you have in mind. In most cases, employers do not have a preference. However, if there are specific knowledge or technical requirements for the role you are aiming for, you could find that a BSc is expected.

In any job application you will need to provide evidence of your suitability for the role from your studies and other life experiences.



Summary and next steps

- ▶ Choose your subject and level of study carefully. Remember, if you haven't studied at university level before, we recommend that you start with a course at Level 1.
- ▶ If you are new to university study and are not sure about studying at a distance, consider one of our Openings courses first. Visit www.open.ac.uk/openings or contact our Student Registration & Enquiry Service.
- ▶ We have a number of resources to help you with your choice of courses. Contact our Student Registration & Enquiry Service for more information.
- ▶ Visit 'OU study and your career' under 'Features' at www.open.ac.uk/careers for information on career opportunities related to OU subject areas and the Open Programme.
- ▶ Visit www.open.ac.uk/study for information about OU courses and qualifications.
- ▶ Visit www.open.ac.uk/coursereviews to find out what other students think about the OU courses they've studied and what they've gained from them.
- ▶ Read the following Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) information: Options Series – 'Your degree in ...' at www.prospects.ac.uk/links/options.
- ▶ The Graduate Prospects website at www.prospects.ac.uk includes a lot of information on different career areas. If you are considering postgraduate study, there is useful information in the 'Postgraduate study' section of the website at www.prospects.ac.uk/about_postgrad_study.htm.
- ▶ Visit www.open.ac.uk/careers/further-study.php for information on further study options, applications and sources of funding.
- ▶ Read 'Exploring your career ideas' on page 21 to help you make a start in planning your career.



Exploring your career ideas

Nobody will hand you a new career on a plate! Choosing your career is a process that involves understanding your values and motivations, recognising your skills and knowing how to find information on opportunities. It generally needs time and commitment and serious research to be successful.

In this section, we explain some ways you can explore your career ideas. We highlight sources of advice and information and provide brief information on some careers that our students ask about.

For an online summary of the process of planning your career, visit the Careers Advisory Service website at www.open.ac.uk/careers and go to 'Career planning' in the 'Features' section.

Voluntary work and work experience

Voluntary work or work experience is really important in helping you build the skills employers are looking for. It gives you an opportunity to improve your understanding of a career and puts you in a better position to judge whether it is something that would suit you and your skills.

You need work experience for some careers (such as social work or teaching), which you can gain through voluntary work. Gaining work with a group such as the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) would be a real asset if you are interested in environmental or conservation work.

You can find out more about the benefits of volunteering and find links to sources of volunteering opportunities at www.open.ac.uk/careers/voluntary-work.php.

Working as a volunteer can expose you to different work environments and sometimes provides the first step back into employment. Small charities are often run entirely by volunteers. Organisations like the Citizens Advice Bureau provide training for their volunteers in return for a commitment for a minimum period of work. For prospective lawyers, there is the potential of reducing the length of a training contract as a result of work with the Citizens Advice Bureau.

There is a free study unit on 'Using voluntary work to get ahead in the job market' on Open Learn at <http://openlearn.open.ac.uk> (listed under social sciences).

If you are registered unemployed, check before beginning voluntary work that you will still be eligible for benefit. If you are working and want to change career, a few hours a week of voluntary work could help you to gain extra skills and knowledge.

See appendix 2 on page 40 for a list of organisations that can provide more information on volunteering.

In early 2011 the Careers Advisory Service ran an online forum for OU students on volunteering and work experience. This will be available as a read-only resource until Spring 2012. Go to www.open.ac.uk/careers/secure/forums.php to access the link to this forum (OU username and password needed).

Networking

Networking is about mutual support and exchanging information and is another way to gain more knowledge and understanding of a career. It is also an important life skill that is useful while applying for work.

Did you know?

The 2008/2009 'Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education' survey showed that out of over 7,500 OU students who completed their degrees and responded to the survey, 15% said that they found their job through personal contacts.

You may be someone who networks naturally in your social and work environment, or someone who has to work hard at establishing and maintaining contacts. Think about who is in your current circle or network. Are there ways in which you could expand your network?

Speaking to someone who works in a particular occupation is a good way of finding out what it's like, but gaining access to these people can need some dedication.

Explore all possibilities. Think about people you know or have had contact with through studying, work, and social and sporting activities.

Joining a professional network such as LinkedIn can be a great way to make connections with potential employers. Go to www.linkedin.com.

See the section on 'Building a Network of Contacts' in the 'Career planning and job seeking workbook' (for registered students only), via our website www.open.ac.uk/careers/publications or go to www.open.ac.uk/careers/networking.php.

Did you know?

Job opportunities are often found through informal networks (the hidden job market), not necessarily through adverts.

Considering other careers

Remember that there are now a number of alternative styles of working that students and graduates follow, and they are not all centred around 'nine to five' jobs with large companies. Many OU students are interested in these routes as they can fit well with other commitments.

Did you know?

The 2008/2009 'Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education' survey showed that out of over 7,500 OU students who completed their degree and responded to the survey, 5% were self-employed/freelance.

Portfolio careers

An alternative to the traditional permanent full-time job is the portfolio career. In this style of working, you earn your income from several sources. It may involve various working arrangements at different times, perhaps combining self-employment with short-term contracts and part-time, temporary or project work. Each job adds skills and experience to your portfolio, which you can use to attract more work. You can find more information under 'Flexible working', at www.prospects.ac.uk/flexible_working.htm.

Self-employment

Surveys have shown that the number of self-employed people has increased in recent years. In the current economic climate it is likely to stabilise or reduce, even with the increasing recognition of the value of small and medium-sized businesses to the economy

and an environment that is encouraging new business. However, all types of people with a range of qualifications have started their own business and it is now seen as a valid career choice. To consider the advantages and disadvantages, the personal and commercial skills you may need, and to find sources of help, read the 'Self employment' information at www.open.ac.uk/careers/self-employment.php.

It is likely that there are many more types of jobs available to you than you can imagine. As well as researching your career ideas through your own experience and contacts, there are many websites and publications where you can investigate the wide range of occupations that exist.

Tips for exploring your career interests

- ▶ Use our Careers Advisory Service website, for example, 'Exploring your career options' under 'Features' where you'll also find links to other valuable sources of information (also see page 33 for details).
- ▶ Use online interactive tools and computer-assisted careers guidance. These can be helpful in confirming your career ideas, exploring new ideas or just getting started. They can also help you to reflect on your skills, experience and values. See www.open.ac.uk/careers/which-career-might-suit-you.php for links to a range of resources.
- ▶ The Prospects website www.prospects.ac.uk gives in-depth careers information written by members of AGCAS. See page 35.
- ▶ The Gradireland website <http://gradireland.com> gives in-depth careers information produced by members of the Association of Higher Education Careers Services in Ireland and GTI Ireland.
- ▶ Browse vacancies in newspapers and specialist journals such as 'Computer Weekly' or the 'Health Service Journal' and specialist websites. For example, www.jobs.ac.uk has jobs at universities and colleges. Job titles vary, so by browsing regularly you pick up on the range of titles used for similar roles. Many jobs don't fit neatly into categories, so widening your search may be useful. You will find more about sources of vacancies through www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations and from the section on 'Job seeking' under 'Features' at www.open.ac.uk/careers.

- ▶ Employer websites such as www.bbc.co.uk are a valuable source of information and often use case studies to show the range of careers available in their organisations. You can gain impressions of individual organisations as well as building up a picture of an industry and current terminology.
- ▶ Visit libraries – most main libraries have a careers section and provide internet access.

Common questions

How do I find out about local job opportunities?

OU students will find links to regional and national sources of job opportunities on our website www.open.ac.uk/careers under 'Job seeking'. Anyone can also look at the Prospects website at www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations – choose the occupation you are interested in and explore links for vacancies.

Once you are an OU student you will have access to our online vacancy service on the Careers Advisory Service website under 'Services'.

Check the business sections of local newspapers for new developments and write to organisations with a CV offering your services and asking about future vacancies. Show that you have researched the area and say why you have chosen them and what you can contribute. You can always ask for work experience or offer to do a project on a topic that will benefit you and them.

There are a number of business directories you can access on the internet, which may also be available at your local library – for example, Yellow Pages www.yell.com, Thomson Local www.thomson-directories.com and Kompass www.kompass.com.

What can I do with a degree in ...?

If you want to find out what career opportunities your degree can lead to, go to 'OU study and your career' under 'Features' at www.open.ac.uk/careers and click on the subject(s) that interest you. Also see the 'Options' series on the Prospects website www.prospects.ac.uk/links/options.

For information about how OU courses and qualifications are recognised by professional bodies, read the Recognition leaflets at www.open.ac.uk/recognition.

For information about how relevant OU qualifications are to careers, look at descriptions of our qualifications on our website www.open.ac.uk/study.

"With over 50,000 people working for us we have plenty of OU students and graduates in the organisation. We are obviously keen on OU people joining as the fact that they are studying with the OU demonstrates a drive and energy that we welcome."

Inspector, Metropolitan Police

Where can I find more information about a career in ...?

The information below is based on questions about areas of work our students often ask about. It may give you a starting point when exploring your own career ideas. We suggest you also look at the 'OU study and your career' section of the Careers Advisory Service website www.open.ac.uk/careers located in the 'Features' section. OU students can also find useful information in our careers forums which you can find under 'Services'.

... working with children?

There are a wide range of careers involving children and you should think about your strengths and the type of role that appeals to you.

- ▶ Advocate – for example, social worker or careers adviser
- ▶ Carer – for example, children's nurse
- ▶ Educator – for example, play worker, teacher or classroom assistant
- ▶ Listener – for example, counsellor
- ▶ Specialist therapist – for example, educational psychologist or speech therapist

It is a good idea to get some experience in a voluntary role if you can. For example, you might volunteer as a helper in a nursery or a school, as a Cub, Scout or Brownie leader or as a summer playgroup helper.

Please remember that to work closely with children in a voluntary or paid role, you have to have a criminal record check.

“People that have genuinely thought about their career, and perhaps taken a decision to study, maybe later on in life, and look for a career change; that really shows good focus, good motivation and they’re the kind of people that we’re looking for.”

UK Graduate Recruitment Manager, Logica

... computing and IT?

If you want to find out what careers are available if you study for a degree in computing, you can read the Computing and ICT pages in the ‘OU study and your career’ section, under ‘Features’ at www.open.ac.uk/careers. You can also read the ‘Options series’ at www.prospects.ac.uk/links/options which suggests what you can do with individual degree subjects.

BCS – The Chartered Institute for IT (formerly known as British Computer Society) provides information on qualifications, training and careers at www.bcs.org.

Recognition leaflet 3.7 gives information about recognition of OU courses by BCS. This is available online at www.open.ac.uk/recognition.

... counselling?

If you want to follow a career in counselling, studying psychology could be useful, especially if you are considering a postgraduate degree in counselling psychology. If you have not studied at university level before, you could consider *Introducing the social sciences* (DD101) to begin your studies.

Alternatively, The Open University’s Foundation Degree in Counselling provides an understanding of the theory and skills required to practise as a professional counsellor. The foundation degree is provided in partnership with the Counselling and Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body. Details are on the website www.open.ac.uk/study or go to www.cpcab.co.uk.

For many courses, particularly those at postgraduate level, you will need to show that you have an interest and some experience in a counselling role. This is usually gained as a volunteer. Visit the volunteering databases at www.do-it.org and www.volunteerscotland.org.uk to search for opportunities in your area.

... management?

If you are interested in working in business, we have an extensive programme of business-related courses that will help you to develop your knowledge. If you already have some personal knowledge and experience of managing in an organisation, look at the Professional Certificate in Management and the MBA programme. Business or management courses can be included as part of a BA or a BSc degree. Details of all business-related OU courses are at www.open.ac.uk/study.

If you already have a degree, or are studying towards one, you will find that many large organisations run graduate training schemes for potential managers. Here are some questions you might consider.

- ▶ Are there opportunities within my current employment to develop my career?
- ▶ Which area of management interests me – human resources (HR), financial, IT or consultancy?
- ▶ If I am working, could I speak to my personnel or HR department and ask to work-shadow a manager?
- ▶ Would I prefer to work for a large or a small organisation?

Answering these questions will help to identify relevant information sources.

... psychology?

You can study courses that lead to an OU BSc (Hons) psychology degree. This is accredited by the British Psychological Society (BPS) to provide the Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC) that is the recognised foundation for further training to become a professional psychologist. Read Recognition leaflet 3.1 www.open.ac.uk/recognition about the modules you should do.

Once you have completed your degree, you can then go on to take recognised masters or doctorate courses leading to professional qualifications (registered-to-practise) and/or, through appropriate PhD completion, you can become a Chartered Psychologist. Visit www.bps.org.uk for details.

If you already have a degree and want to ‘convert’ this to a BPS-recognised qualification, you can find details of psychology conversion courses on the BPS website under ‘General information’ > ‘Accredited courses and training programmes’.

Remember that there are many ways in which you can use a psychology degree – visit www.prospects.ac.uk/links/options.

... social work?

An honours degree in social work is now the professional award for all social workers. As long as you meet conduct and competence conditions, once you have successfully completed the award you will be entitled to register with the relevant professional organisation as a social worker. For example, in Scotland this would be with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). We offer a work-based learning route to the honours degree in social work. Although some courses in the programme are available to all students, the full programme is currently restricted to students living in England, Wales and Scotland who are being supported in their practice by their employing agency. You have to enter the course through the employing agency – you cannot apply direct to us. The requirements for the degree in Scotland are different from those in England and Wales. In England and Wales, students must complete 360 credits to qualify for the degree, whereas in Scotland they need 480 credits.

For up-to-date information about this qualification and the courses that count towards it, visit www.open.ac.uk/study or contact our Student Registration & Enquiry Service.

For more information on careers in social work, visit www.caringcareers.org.uk which contains links on its homepage to information for Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales. For Ireland see 'Social and caring' information under 'Industry sectors' at www.careersportal.ie.

... teaching?

For details of how to become a teacher, read our publication 'Becoming a teacher'. You can view it on our website at www.open.ac.uk/becoming-a-teacher or you can ask our Student Registration & Enquiry Service to send you a copy. The publication has information about how to become a teacher in England, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland and Wales. You should thoroughly research the appropriate choice of courses for your degree and check the entry requirements with each Initial Teacher Education provider you are applying to.

Remember that there are differences in entry and training requirements for England, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Contact our Student Registration & Enquiry Service for details.

You can also visit www.open.ac.uk/careers/getting-into-teaching.php.

"Consultation was excellent in providing validation of my existing plans and in fine tuning them. I was very grateful for a professional assessment of how I was intending to obtain a career in teaching."

Student feedback

Summary and next steps

- ▶ Explore your career ideas. Talk to a Careers Adviser if you need help with this.
- ▶ Gain experience in a career you are interested in, even if it is just for a short time or as a volunteer.
- ▶ Look at your own networks and how these could work for you. Do you need to develop contacts elsewhere?
- ▶ Contact small companies or employers. Don't just think about 'nine to five' jobs with large employers – some people now follow 'portfolio' careers or self-employment.

There are many things that may affect your choice of course and career and your success in achieving your goals.

- ▶ Academic qualifications and experiences
- ▶ Personality, skills, experiences and values
- ▶ Where you live
- ▶ Family responsibilities
- ▶ Finance
- ▶ Employment history

"People do actually have to commit to an Open University degree ... [It's] different to other universities because you tend to do it later in life; because you tend to do it when you are balancing other things, such as family or working life. There is absolutely the drive and commitment there. What we would see are some additional skills in an individual who has come through The Open University and an absolute motivation to succeed, and that does come out in the Open University students that I have interviewed as well."

Head of Recruitment, KPMG Europe



Equality and diversity

In this section, we cover issues around equal opportunities such as disability, race and age. We also look at concerns about criminal records.

The Equality Act 2010 brings together previously separate laws protecting individuals against discrimination on grounds of age, disability, gender, race, religion/belief, sexual orientation etc. It applies to people in England, Wales and Scotland. Details are at www.equalities.gov.uk.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission provides detailed guidance on equality law and good practice in England, Scotland and Wales at www.equalityhumanrights.com. For Northern Ireland see 'Your rights' at www.equalityni.org.

The Open University has an equality scheme reflecting its commitment to promote equality and opportunity to all. See 'Equality schemes' at www.open.ac.uk/equality-diversity.

If you are an OU student you can find out more about equal opportunities issues relating to employment in the section on 'Equality and diversity issues' in our publication 'Career planning and job seeking workbook'. You can view this at www.open.ac.uk/careers/publications or ask your national or regional centre for a copy.

Disability

Did you know?

We are the UK's leading provider of higher education to disabled students. In 2011 there were over 11,000 students who had identified themselves as having a disability.

Disability is defined under the law as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Disability should not be a barrier to your chosen career, and the same principles of planning and researching your career apply. However, you might need to consider some other issues that might affect your choices and your success in getting a job.

Many disabled students and graduates do not need any specific adjustments or support to carry out their study or work. For some, further support can help them access study or work.

The Equality Act 2010 requires employers to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace and offer support, if necessary, to disabled people at work.

"I am most grateful for the opportunity and practical help offered me by the OU, which helped me to gain the opportunity to study, which in turn gave me confidence. Thank you to all the many individuals who helped me with that."

Student feedback

The range of disabilities is so wide and varied that it is impossible to make generalisations in terms of careers.

Disability organisations are working to change attitudes and prejudices so that a disability is not seen as a barrier to employment. These organisations can offer detailed information and advice on issues such as adaptations to the workplace and when you need to tell employers about disabilities or health problems.

When sending job applications to employers, you might want to consider how disability-friendly they are.

- ▶ Are there positive equality statements in their advertisements?
- ▶ Do they offer details of the job in other formats?
- ▶ Do they use the Government's 'two ticks' symbol in their literature, showing their commitment to disabled people which guarantees an interview if you meet their minimum requirements? (However, you should be aware that many employers may not choose to use the symbol but may demonstrate in other ways that they are positive about disability. So look out for practical evidence as well.)



- ▶ Are they a member of the Employers' Forum on Disability (major employers who aim to develop best practice on disability in the workplace)?

You also need to decide whether or not to tell an employer that you have a disability. If you do decide to tell them, you will need to consider how and when you do this. Remember that, by law, employers must make reasonable adjustments to remove barriers that might prevent disabled people from getting access to employment or services.

If you are an OU student, you might want to talk about this with a careers adviser in your national or regional centre (see appendix 1 for details). To start with, read the 'Equality and diversity issues' section in the 'Career planning and job seeking workbook', where you will find more details (see below).

Sources of information

Career planning and job seeking workbook – this includes a section on equality and diversity issues, including disability, and is available to OU students from national or regional centres or on the website at www.open.ac.uk/careers/publications.

SKILL – the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities is closing in 2011 but free information and leaflets will remain available on its website at www.skill.org.uk.

Employers' Forum on Disability – this is an employers' organisation committed to creating and developing opportunities for people with disabilities www.efd.org.uk.

Remploy offers a work experience programme for students and graduates with disabilities www.rempoy.co.uk.

Race

Despite legislation, surveys show that discrimination continues to exist for students from minority ethnic groups, in terms of barriers to getting work, or working at a level appropriate to their qualifications.

The Equality Act 2010 contains positive action provisions aimed at ensuring that people from ethnic minorities have access to the same opportunities as others – for example, employers will be able to offer shadowing, mentoring or training opportunities to people from ethnic minorities to enable them to reach their full potential and engage in fair and open competition for jobs.

So, what can and should you do to market yourself, to target employers, and to challenge unfair discrimination? Here are some suggestions.

- ▶ If you are an OU student, read the section in the 'Career planning and job seeking workbook' on race issues.
- ▶ If you are an OU student, discuss your plans with a careers adviser at your national or regional centre.
- ▶ Many employers have subgroups for ethnic-minority groups. Target employers with a reputation for good equal-opportunity policy and practice.
- ▶ Develop contacts and make the most of your networking skills.

Sources of information

KAL – this is an online resource for ethnic-minority students and graduates that covers student life and how to find a career www.kaleidoscopic.co.uk.

National Mentoring Consortium Unit – this unit works with employers, universities and schools to support ethnic-minority learners. You can look here for information on the annual careers day for black and Asian students and graduates www.uel.ac.uk/nmc.

Race for Opportunity – this is a Business in the Community programme, working with employers to recruit and hold on to black and ethnic-minority employees www.bitc.org.uk/workplace/diversity_and_inclusion/race.

TeacherWorld UK – this provides information and support for teachers, and those who plan to teach, from an ethnic-minority background www.teacherworld.org.uk.

Ethnic Jobsite is a recruitment site offering a searchable database of vacancies for ethnic minority students and graduates www.ethnicjobsite.co.uk.

Age

The employers who contact the OU are very positive about recruiting mature students. So, as a mature graduate you need to present your experience and skills positively and highlight your value and what you will bring to the particular organisation.

Remember that for lots of jobs, age and life experience can be a positive benefit and that there is legislation in place to protect people from age discrimination in the UK. Whatever your situation, research your chosen career carefully and market yourself effectively!



Some areas of work look for maturity and view life experience as an advantage, e.g. counselling, social work or teaching. Many OU graduates have changed careers in mid-life. Some have started new careers in their 50s. You need to be clear about what you want and what you can offer. Don't be put off by negative reactions if at first you don't succeed. Tell employers about your skills and what you have had to do to gain an OU qualification. Most employers will be impressed by your motivation and commitment.

“Mature applicants tend to have experienced the ambiguity and complex nature of work and are much more adept at coping with this. Mature applicants often bring greater planning and prioritisation skills, having managed multiple demands on their time. I have also found that mature applicants tend to be much more considered about who they apply to work for, by virtue of greater self awareness, and as a result are more committed to the organisation over the long term.”

Talent Manager, Heinz



Sources of information

Career planning and job seeking workbook – this workbook has a section on equality and diversity issues, including age, and is available to OU students from your national or regional centre or on our website at www.open.ac.uk/careers/publications.

Tips for mature graduates on making your experience count are at www.open.ac.uk/careers/tips-for-mature-graduates.php.

Employers' Forum on Age – this is an employers' network aiming to promote good practice among employers and promotes the business case for employing people of all ages www.efa.org.uk.

The Age and Employment Network (TAEN) – works for better opportunities for mature people www.taen.org.uk.

Criminal record and offenders

If you are a student with a criminal record, you may be concerned that you will be disadvantaged when applying for jobs. It is important to act positively to overcome the challenges that having a criminal record can pose. It is easy to see every rejection as due to your criminal record when there may be other reasons for unsuccessful applications – poor presentation, lack of evidence of skills or experience, or just better candidates.

A careers adviser at your national or regional centre can help you market yourself positively and highlight your relevant experience, skills and suitability for the position.

Here are some important tips.

- ▶ Find out whether your criminal record might affect the type of work you are applying for.
- ▶ Ask for advice from Nacro, the crime reduction charity, on disclosure, CRB checks and finding a job. Phone their helpline on 0800 0181 259 or visit www.nacro.org.uk. For Scotland visit www.sacro.org.uk.
- ▶ If possible, positively promote your qualifications, skills and experience to an employer before telling them about your record.
- ▶ Explain the circumstances and what you have learned and achieved since the offence.
- ▶ Try not to allow the offence to dominate your applications.

Sources of information

For information, support and advice for people with a criminal record who are seeking employment, contact the Apex Trust www.apextrust.com. For Scotland visit www.apexscotland.org.uk.

Religion

The Equality Act 2010 protects against discrimination in employment and vocational training in England, Scotland and Wales on the grounds of religion. If this is an issue or concern for you, for further information go to the Equality and Human Rights Commission website www.equalityhumanrights.com – follow the link at the foot of the homepage to ‘Religion and belief equality’; or the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland www.equalityni.org – see ‘Your rights’ > ‘Fair employment and treatment’.

Sexuality and sexual orientation

The Equality Act 2010 bans discrimination in employment on the grounds of sexual orientation. This relates to England, Scotland and Wales.

Stonewall works to achieve legal equality and social justice for lesbians, gay men and bisexual people. They launched ‘Diversity Champions’, which is a forum in which employers encourage

diversity in the workplace. For more information go to www.stonewall.org.uk or visit the Gay Business Association website www.gba.org.uk.

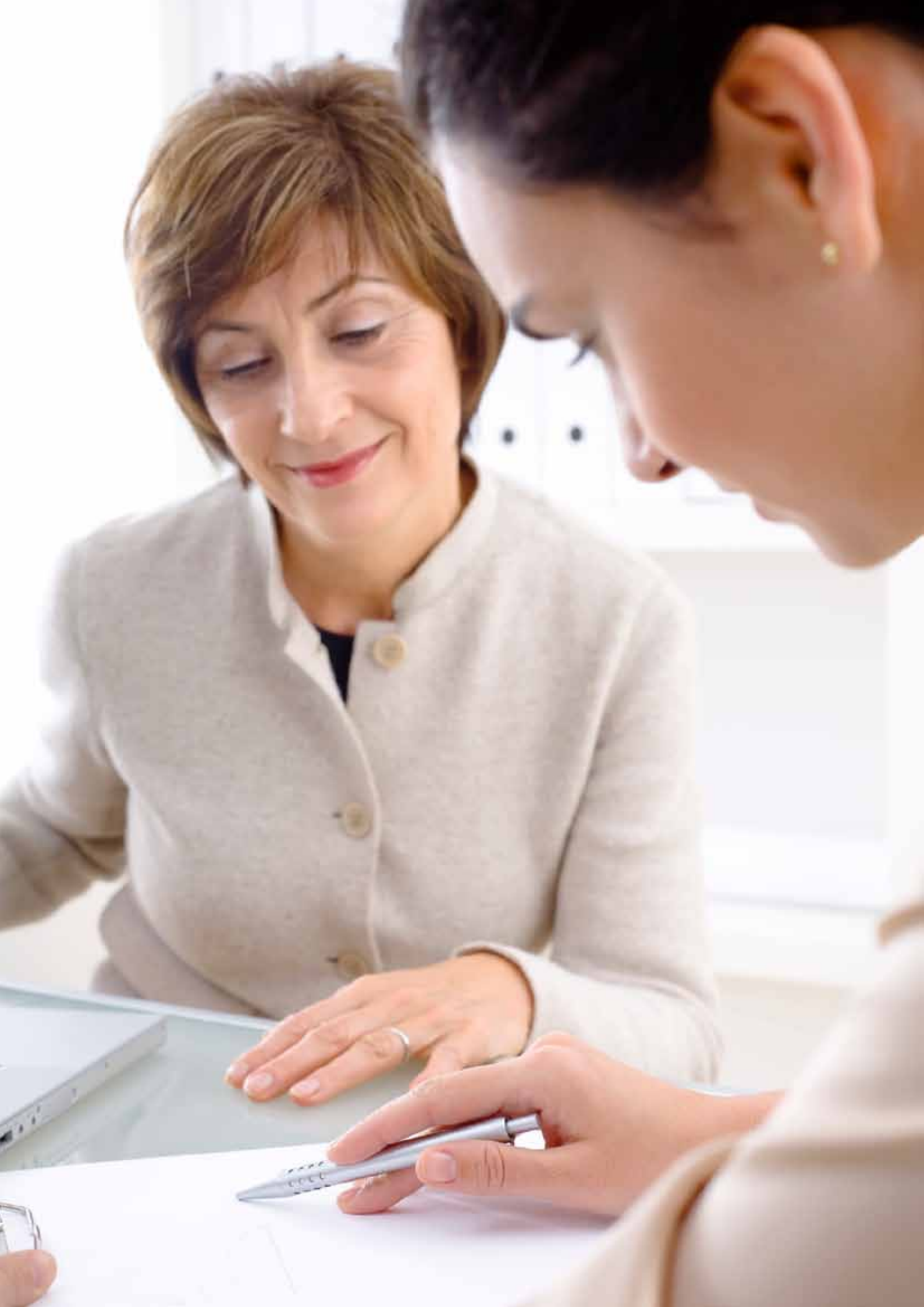
Summary and next steps

- ▶ Think positively and carry out research carefully.
- ▶ Use the specific sources of help outlined in these pages.
- ▶ Learn to market your skills effectively (see page 11).
- ▶ If you are an OU student, look at the section on ‘Equality and diversity issues’ in the ‘Career planning and job seeking workbook’ available from your national or regional centre or at www.open.ac.uk/careers/publications.
- ▶ Visit the Equality and Human Rights Commission website at www.equalityhumanrights.com. Select from the ‘Themes’ at the foot of the homepage for advice on your area of interest.

“I was thinking about how to achieve a more diverse workforce when an obvious thought struck me – where better to find a group of diverse students than the OU?”

HR Director, Beachcroft LLP





Our Careers Advisory Service

How we can help you before you become an OU student

As a prospective student we can refer you to careers information to help you decide what to study at the OU. You may be signposted to an external career guidance agency if you need more in-depth guidance. When you have registered as an OU student, you will have access to the full range of support offered by the OU Careers Advisory Service.

If you have not yet registered as a student with us, but would like to explore your career ideas further, you are entitled to use our Careers Advisory Service website to get more help and information. (Some sections are open only to registered students.)

From www.open.ac.uk/careers you will find the following.

The 'Features' section of the website includes 'Career planning' which:

- ▶ explains the four stages of the process for planning your career – an ideal starting point if you're not sure what you want to do; and
- ▶ provides links to other useful resources that can help you to explore your planning further.

The 'OU study and your career' section of the website allows you to:

- ▶ find out how OU study can be relevant to your career plans;
- ▶ understand the value of OU study;
- ▶ read information about career areas related to OU study.

Don't forget that you can get advice about choosing courses from our Student Registration & Enquiry Service. Call our enquiry line on 0845 300 60 90 if you would like some help.

How we can help you once you become an OU student

As a registered OU student you can contact your national or regional centre to get information, advice and guidance from a careers adviser about planning your career – either by phone, email or face to face. This will give you the opportunity to:

- ▶ discuss possible options even if you have no idea what you want to do;
- ▶ talk through your career plans if you already have some ideas;
- ▶ receive feedback on your CV and application forms;
- ▶ explore ways of finding and applying for jobs or further study (including accessing vacancies notified to the OU Careers Advisory Service); and
- ▶ discuss how to prepare for interviews.

It is possible to make an appointment for outside the usual office hours of 09:00 to 17:00 if that is more convenient for you. The appointment would usually be over the phone, and is confidential within the OU Careers Advisory Service. You will be provided with an action plan outlining what to do next.

Careers advisers may also be available at national or regional events such as course-choice meetings, residential schools and some day schools. You can contact your national or regional centre to find out about these events or about the availability of careers staff in your area. Or, check the events on our website at www.open.ac.uk/events.

Did you know?

Feedback in 2010 from face-to-face careers interviews showed 92% of respondents felt that their interview had helped them develop a clear idea of the next steps to take in their career planning.

What do our students say about the Careers Advisory Service?

“It was well worth talking with a careers adviser, as afterwards I felt clear and confident of the next steps I should take.”

“The combination of the information on the OU careers website and a discussion with the (careers) adviser was just what I needed – much appreciated.”

“I was extremely impressed by the encouragement and support provided by the careers adviser who listened and took a real interest in my plans. I highly recommend this service to anyone who feels they need a little guidance to help them form a study/career plan.”

Quotes from students following career consultations in 2011.

Can I use the Careers Advisory Service if I don't have any idea what I want to do?

Yes. If you are an OU student, you will have access to a careers adviser who will be able to help you at different stages of your career development.

Feedback from students who have had a careers interview has told us that almost a quarter of them asked for an interview because they were not sure what career to go into.

We can also point OU students to online resources on our website that can generate ideas for careers that match your skills and interests.

“Found the meeting incredibly useful and helpful ... I found [the careers adviser] very supportive and knowledgeable, and the service itself is fantastic!”

Student Case Study

Online resources

Careers Advisory Service website

Whether or not you are an OU student, you can use our website www.open.ac.uk/careers. The website includes pages on all aspects of planning your career from deciding on the right job for you through to CV and interview techniques. The site also contains:

- ▶ a section on how OU courses and qualifications can be used for careers;
- ▶ interactive exercises to help you plan your career;
- ▶ advice on exploring your career options;
- ▶ students talking about their careers, their study and their lives; and
- ▶ up-to-date news items.

As soon as you become an OU student, you can also access the online vacancy service and information about employers interested in recruiting from the OU.

Email Careers Guidance

OU students can email a careers adviser from the ‘Contact’ page of the careers website www.open.ac.uk/careers for help and advice on all aspects of their career planning. If you are not yet an OU student, the ‘Contact’ page gives alternative sources of careers guidance.

Online forums

All OU students can access our interactive topic- or subject-based forums where you can ask questions and receive replies from a careers adviser as well as support from other students. Details of available forums are at www.open.ac.uk/careers/secure/forums.php (You will need your OU username and password.) Forums are live for one month then read-only for one year.

Did you know?

In 2009–2010 the OU Careers Advisory Service ran seven online forums, which between them received 2,492 postings, which is an average of 356 postings per forum.

Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) information

AGCAS information is very useful for exploring your career options. It is researched and written by members of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, who are careers guidance staff from UK universities. It includes the following:

Options series: your degree in...

This series gives information about career opportunities related to particular subject areas. It is available at www.prospects.ac.uk/links/options.

Special interest series

This series covers a range of topics such as 'CVs and covering letters', 'Job application advice', 'Interview tips', 'Flexible working', 'Self employment', 'Using your language skills' and 'Working abroad'. You can find this information on the Prospects website at www.prospects.ac.uk under the 'Careers advice', 'Jobs and work' or 'Postgrad study' sections or use the search facility to enter your topic of interest.

Job sectors

You can get information on jobs in a wide range of employment sectors such as teaching and education, IT and information services, law, and health and social care at www.prospects.ac.uk/sectors.htm.

Occupational profiles

You can explore information on a wide range of occupations at www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations.

Gradireland information

Careers information researched and written by members of the Association of Higher Education Careers Services specifically for graduates wanting to work in Ireland (both north and south) includes:

Career sectors

In-depth advice on key graduate career sectors, including applications and interview tips, training and development information, personal insights from graduate recruits, plus employers and jobs information. Visit <http://gradireland.com/career-sectors>.

Useful publications

Career planning and job seeking workbook

This publication can be requested by OU students from their national or regional centre or viewed at www.open.ac.uk/careers/publications.

The workbook provides information and activities that are designed to:

- ▶ help you review your life experience;
- ▶ help you assess your skills and values to find out how these can help your future career;
- ▶ show you how to research the job market;
- ▶ help you produce a curriculum vitae (CV);
- ▶ show you how to present yourself at an interview; and
- ▶ offer advice on getting a job.

Recognition leaflets

OU Recognition leaflets explain how professional organisations value OU qualifications. You will find these very useful if you want to find out if you are able to use your OU qualifications to join professional organisations. They are available on our website at www.open.ac.uk/recognition and include:

- ▶ scientific institutions
- ▶ British Psychological Society
- ▶ The Law Society and the General Council of the Bar
- ▶ computing organisations
- ▶ professional engineering institutions.

If you have a disability or additional requirements

If you have a disability or additional requirements that may make it difficult for you to access any of our services, we will be happy to take reasonable steps to meet your needs. (By 'additional requirements' we mean particular services you may need us to provide for you because of your disability, specific learning difficulty or medical condition.) For example, if you need any information in another format, you can ask us to arrange this. The 'Career planning and job seeking workbook' includes a section on 'Equality and diversity issues', which you may find useful if you want to consider how your disability could affect your career choices. This publication is available to OU students.

The Open University Equality Scheme sets out our policy and commitment, and is available on our website at www.open.ac.uk/our-student-policies under 'Our policies'.

Information on the OU's services for disabled students is on our website at www.open.ac.uk/disability.

Read pages **27** to **31** for more information about equal opportunities.

How to contact the Careers Advisory Service

If you are not yet an OU student you can contact us through our Student Registration & Enquiry Service or, if you are already an OU student, through your national or regional centre or the 'Contact' page at www.open.ac.uk/careers (See appendix 1 on page **37** for details.)

If you are studying in the Republic of Ireland, you should contact our Enquiry & Advice Centre in Dublin (see appendix 1 on page **37** for more information).

If you are studying in any other European Union country or in Switzerland, and are looking for more specific advice or information related to your country, contact The Open University in Europe or your OU country coordinator (see page **38** for more information).

If you are studying in prison, contact your prison education department, who can contact your national or regional centre for you.

If you are an OU student based overseas and studying full time through one of our partner organisations, careers advice and guidance may be provided in your home country. Please contact your partner organisation for more information.



Appendix 1: Sources of information, advice and guidance

Open University contact points

Before you become an OU student

Staff in our Student Registration & Enquiry Service and representatives in countries where we register students will help with any questions you may have. We can offer advice about things such as choosing courses, how study can affect your career, preparation, study arrangements or difficulties, tutorial support and financial help.

In England, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, British Forces Post Office (BFPO) addresses outside the UK and all other countries, except the EU, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland

Phone our **Student Registration & Enquiry Service** on +44 (0)845 300 60 90.

Our lines are open (UK time):

Monday to Friday: 08:00 to 20:00

Saturdays: 09:00 to 17:00

Calls are charged at the UK local rate when calling from a UK landline.

Email: general-enquiries@open.ac.uk

In Northern Ireland

Call our office in Belfast

(110 Victoria Street, Belfast BT1 3GN)
on 028 9032 3722

Email: Ireland@open.ac.uk

In the Republic of Ireland

Call our Enquiry and Advice Centre in Dublin
on (01)6785399

or our office in Belfast
on +44 28 9032 3722

Email: Ireland@open.ac.uk

In other EU countries, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland

(see note below about services available)

Call The Open University in Europe
on +44 191 477 6100

Email: Europe@open.ac.uk

For Welsh speakers

If you would prefer to discuss your study needs in Welsh, please contact The Open University in Wales in Cardiff, where we will be pleased to offer you personal guidance as well as information about the services available. You may contact us by letter, phone or email, or you are welcome to visit us. We recommend that you make an appointment first to make sure an appropriate adviser will be available.

Although we are able to offer a range of services for Welsh speakers, our course materials and teaching are normally in English.

Phone: +44 (0)29 2047 1019

Email: Wales@open.ac.uk

I siaradwyr Cymraeg

Os yw hi'n well gennych drafod eich anghenion astudio yn Gymraeg mae croeso i chi gysylltu â'r Brifysgol Agored yng Nghymru yng Nghaerdydd lle byddwn yn falch o roi cyfarwyddyd personol i chi yn ogystal â gwybodaeth am y gwasanaethau sydd ar gael. Gallwch gysylltu â ni drwy lythyr, galwad ffôn neu neges ebost, neu, os yw hi'n well gennych, mae croeso i chi ymweld â ni. Byddem yn argymhell i chi wneud apwyntiad gyntaf i sicrhau y bydd arbenigwr priodol ar gael.

Nodwch, os gwelwch yn dda, er ein bod yn gallu cynnig ystod o wasanaethau i siaradwyr Cymraeg, bod ein deunyddiau cwrs ac addysgu fel arfer yn Saesneg.

Rhif ffôn: +44 (0)29 2047 1019

Ebost: Wales@open.ac.uk

If you are an OU student

If you are an OU student, you are entitled to use all the services our Careers Advisory Service offers. See the careers website www.open.ac.uk/careers or contact your national or regional centre to access these. Contact details can be found on our website at www.open.ac.uk/local.

For advice about choosing courses, visit our website at www.open.ac.uk/study or call our Student Registration & Enquiry Service (see the details above).

The Open University Student Services is accredited against the national **matrix** quality standard for the provision of information, advice and guidance services. You'll find more information about this at www.matrixstandard.com.



**The Open University
Student Services**

Other European Union countries, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland

Our careers information and advice is mainly based in the UK and Ireland. As a result, the help we can offer to students living outside the UK and Ireland is limited to:

- ▶ sources of careers information and guidance, and help for gaining recognition of OU qualifications in European countries; and
- ▶ general information on planning careers, and skills and strategies for looking for work.

If you are an OU student, you can receive advice by phone, letter, fax or email from The Open University in Europe (see contact details above) or from your OU country coordinator. We have representatives in many countries where we register students. They're there to give you information and advice and to coordinate arrangements for tutorials and exams.

Contact details can be found on our website at www.open.ac.uk/local.

Other sources of careers advice

UK-wide

University and College Careers Services provide careers guidance and information for their own students, but will sometimes allow other students to use their careers library and information facilities. Contact your local college or university for more information and look for their website at www.prospects.ac.uk/links/careersservices.

England

Next Step provides learning and careers advice for adults in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Phone 0800 100 900 or visit <https://nextstep.direct.gov.uk>.

An all-age careers service for England has been announced. Young people aged 13–19 and adults will be able to access the new arrangements from September 2011. At the time of going to press (April 2011), no further details are available but information will be added to the 'Contact' page at www.open.ac.uk/careers when available.

Ireland

Careers4graduates: this is a website for Irish graduates planning their career www.careers4graduates.org.

FAS: Ireland's National Training and Employment Authority www.fas.ie/en.

Gradireland: developed by Irish universities (north and south), it provides information on courses, careers, employers, vacancies, and strategies for looking for work <http://gradireland.com>.

National University of Ireland, Maynooth: this is the website of the Career Development Centre. It includes a virtual careers library, links to employers and occupational information <http://careers.nuim.ie>.

Northern Ireland

Department for Employment and Learning: this provides information for people who want to work in Northern Ireland www.careersserviceni.com. Follow the 'Explore careers' link to useful information. You may need to register to access some services.

EGSA: an educational guidance service for adults in Northern Ireland www.egsa.org.uk.

Gradireland: developed by Irish universities (north and south), it provides information on courses, careers, employers, vacancies and strategies for looking for work <http://gradireland.com>.

Scotland

Careers Scotland: this provides careers information, advice and guidance to individuals, employers and the learning and guidance community www.careers-scotland.org.uk.

Skills Development Scotland: advice and guidance on training, skills and career development www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk.

AGCAS Scotland: this is Scotland's graduate careers website www.graduatecareers-scotland.org.uk.

Scottish Online Route to Employability and Career Development (SORTED): this is a series of interactive career development seminars for students and recent graduates, provided by Scottish University Careers Services (AGCAS Scotland) www.agcasscotland.org.uk/sorted.

PlanIT Plus: a repository of careers and learning information for Scotland www.planitplus.net.

Business Gateway: this provides online information and advice about starting a small business, with a link to Scottish Enterprise that concentrates on self-employment www.bgateway.com.

Scottish Institute for Enterprise: this provides a service for students in Scotland who want to start their own ventures or social enterprises and develop their entrepreneurial talent www.sie.ac.uk.

Wales

Careers Wales: this provides careers information, advice and guidance to employers, adults, teachers and young people www.careerswales.com.

Welsh Assembly Government: this is a site which provides information on education and training in Wales www.learning.wales.gov.uk.

GO Wales: this offers a wide range of services for undergraduates, graduates and businesses in Wales www.gowales.co.uk.

Europe

Eurograduate: this provides details of vacancies and advice on applying for jobs in Europe www.eurograduate.com.

EURES: this provides information on jobs and learning opportunities throughout Europe <http://ec.europa.eu/eures>. Select 'en' for information in English.

Appendix 2: Voluntary organisations

Here are some voluntary organisations where you may be able to gain some appropriate experience.

Citizens Advice: this has advice on becoming a volunteer and finding your nearest bureau
www.citizensadvice.org.uk.

Community Service Volunteers: this is a UK charity dedicated to giving everyone the chance to play an active part in their community through volunteering, training and education
www.csv.org.uk.

Do-it: search this database for a wide range of volunteering opportunities in the UK to suit your time, your interests and your skills. From here you will also be able to link to the various volunteer bureaux for your area of the UK.
www.do-it.org.

Employer Supported Volunteering: many programmes are being set up by businesses and the public sector to assist employees to volunteer, either during work hours or in their own time. See 'Employer Supported Volunteering' on the 'Volunteering England' website at
www.volunteering.org.uk/WhatWeDo.

Timebank is a national charity aimed at helping people make a start with volunteering. It has a directory of other volunteering organisations and contacts
www.timebank.org.uk.

Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO): this is an international development charity that works through volunteers. It helps people aged 18 to 75 to share their skills and experience with local communities in the developing world
www.vso.org.uk.

Volunteer Centre Network Scotland is Scotland's gateway to volunteering
www.volunteerscotland.org.uk.

Volunteering Wales has a searchable database of volunteering opportunities throughout Wales
www.volunteering-wales.net.

Volunteer Centres Northern Ireland has a searchable database of opportunities and links to volunteer centres
www.volunteernow.co.uk.

Volunteer Centres Ireland is the national organisation responsible for developing volunteering in Ireland
www.volunteer.ie.

"I cannot tell you about my life as an OU student without mentioning the fantastic OU Careers Advisory Service, which encouraged me to go further on my personal journey and embrace the world of volunteering. My outlook has changed so much. I now have more awareness of the skills that I have gained during the years and which have been honed further by studying with the OU."

Literature graduate

To find out more, visit our website at
www.open.ac.uk/careers

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