THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO START YOUR CAREER

Successfully gaining a place in a Graduate Program is just one way of beginning your career; this article looks at ten other options. Many graduates succeed in their careers by thinking laterally and choosing from a variety of alternatives to enter their chosen industry/sector. For some sectors, such as arts administration, advertising, publishing etc., starting off in the industry tends to be via entry-level positions where you work your way from the ground up.

Employers and Recruiters seek candidates who can demonstrate the ability to add value to an organisation. Tertiary qualifications may be seen as a requirement, or as an advantage for some positions, whilst for others, they may be not essential. In applying for these positions you must market yourself effectively, drawing on your combined experiences across study, work experience, community and/or sporting involvements. Your ability to understand ‘what you want’ and ‘what you can offer’ will enable you to consider a wide range of career starting points.

The decision you take needs to be balanced between the time available for you to research possible options, the need to earn money and your available resources. There is no definitive answer; just a range of strategies that may allow you to present yourself to the marketplace with ‘added value’.

This handout focuses on alternatives to Graduate Programs to enter the workforce. If you are interested in Graduate Program Opportunities, visit: www.graduateopportunities.com/ and Unigrad www.unigrad.com.au/.

DEVELOP YOUR CAREER EXPERIENCE AND THEN APPLY FOR A GRADUATE PROGRAM

Whilst some Graduate Programs are targeted at recent graduates, some graduate employers recruit people who have work experience and are not necessarily recent graduates into their Graduate programs.

For example, a Flinders Bachelor of Psychology (Honours) graduate worked in a Call Centre, customer service environment, became a Team Leader there, then successfully applied for the SA Public Sector Graduate Recruitment Register and progressed into a Graduate Human Resources role.

AusAID: What if I graduated some years ago?
“Having completed your studies some years ago is not an impediment to joining the AusAID Graduate Program, so long as you have attained at least a three-year bachelor degree. If however you have been in the workforce for a period of time, you may wish to consider joining AusAID at a more senior level via the regular Careers process.” http://www.ausaid.gov.au/recruit/grad_faq.cfm

‘ONE OFF’ GRADUATE VACANCIES

Rather than offering a formalised Graduate Program for a large graduate intake, some organisations may advertise ‘one off’ vacancies suitable for a graduate from time to time. These vacancies may offer scope for career development. The advertisement may state something along the lines of ‘this position would suit a graduate seeking to enter the … sector’ or the title would indicate that this is a graduate position e.g. ‘Graduate Officer’. The advertisement would specify that a tertiary qualification is a requirement.

ALTERNATIVE ENTRY POINTS TO YOUR “EMPLOYER OF CHOICE”

A Graduate Program with a particular major employer may have been one of your options but the reality is that there are high levels of competition for a limited number of places (and often, interstate relocation is required). However, organisations that provide specific Graduate Programs are usually very large and they may have a variety of opportunities. For example, whilst organisations such as the Australian Taxation Office and Centrelink advertise Graduate Programs, they can also engage in major recruitment for positions such as Customer Service Representatives/Advisors, where successful candidates receive paid intensive training and ongoing career development support.
So someone keen to work for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade might apply for a position as a Passports Officer.

By gaining a role within these organisations, you have the chance to develop within the organisation, to take advantage of the training and development opportunities there, and ultimately to draw on your skills and experience to apply for promotion over time. These positions could potentially lead to similar ‘destinations’ as a Graduate Program. In some organisations there is also the benefit of being able to apply for ‘internal’ vacancies that will not be advertised externally.

Consider the widest perspective when aiming at an employer of choice. This could entail working in the target organisation, or perhaps working with an associated stakeholder (such as a client of the organisation, or a related funding body) in that sector to broaden your ‘offer’ to the employer of choice in the future.

**DIVERSE WORKPLACE ENTRY POINTS**

The options to start your career are wide ranging: customer service representative, administration officer, information service officer, client contact officer, residential care worker, call centre roles, member service officer, document processing, sales and banking roles etc. The job title could indicate that it is a ‘support’, ‘assistant’ or ‘junior’ role, for example: Human Resources Assistant, Sales and Marketing Assistant, Events Assistant, Claims Assistant, Paralegal Support Officer, Junior Production Assistant.

**TRAINEE ROLES**

Some trainee roles don’t require a degree, but could be a great career starting point for certain sectors. There could be one or multiple vacancies available. For example:

- The Australian Customs and Border Protection Service has a Customs Trainee program as well as a Graduate Trainee program.
- To enter the Justice/Community sector, one pathway could be the role of Trainee Correctional Officer with the SA Department for Correctional Services or Youth Support Worker/Night Officer roles with The Department for Families & Communities.
- Someone wishing to enter the insurance industry may apply for roles such as Trainee Claims Technician.

Some trainee opportunities are targeted at graduates, for example Trainee Recruitment Consultant, Trainee Rehabilitation Consultant etc.

Whether a degree is specified or not, a great benefit of a trainee role is that it usually involves comprehensive training and development programs, in some cases to certificate level - while you are working and earning!

**TEMPORARY/CONTRACT WORK**

Consider temporary or contract work or even part-time work as a way to enter an organisation or even as a stepping-stone to more permanent employment. Check if the organisation has a temporary employment register (and/or which recruitment agency they use). These vacancies may also be advertised on the organisation’s website. Networking can be another way to find out about these opportunities.

**RELOCATION TO A DIFFERENT LABOUR MARKET**

Adelaide is a smaller marketplace than some other states. Interstate (or overseas) experience may be highly regarded, and relocation could broaden your job search opportunities. This option demands both a high degree of research, the resources to suit, and does depend on your own circumstances. You need to ensure that the location of choice actually provides more favourable conditions than locally. You might also consider opportunities in rural or remote regions.

Information on vacancies in other states can be accessed at www.jobsearch.gov.au or via Internet based job boards such as:

- www.seek.com.au
- www.careerone.com.au

**TIME OUT OVERSEAS**

If your situation and resources allow, you could also take time-out when you have finished your studies to pursue options overseas. You might teach English in Japan, build houses in Africa, study comparative religions in Bali or join the Peace Corps. Whether you work, study, or volunteer, such experiences can not only be fun and interesting, but may also be looked upon highly by future employers. For information on options for working overseas, visit: www.graduateopportunities.com/career_advice/volunteering_working_overseas.
For example a Flinders Archaeology student had worked casually in administrative positions (Department of Immigration and Citizenship and Theatre Front of House) while studying. Traveling overseas, she then got a job working on one of the Edinburgh Festivals as Finance Assistant. “I have friends who run a theatre production company and they gave me contacts at the Festival, but if it hadn’t been for all my office/admin experience I wouldn’t have got the job.” Subsequently she has worked in arts administration for Womadelaide, the Adelaide International Film Festival and again at an Edinburgh Festival working as a Travel Coordinator.

In another example, a Flinders Science and Environmental Management graduate drew on a diversity of accumulated experience, including a year in Ireland to gain a position in the Graduate Program offered by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. “… I found living, working and travelling overseas to be invaluable. So much so that after returning home and saving money again, I headed to North and South America, and back to Europe, before undertaking my BEM degree. Throughout this period I worked full time as a manager at a cinema. … I now feel that the combination of my studies, work and travel holds me in good stead to move forward and achieve in the Department.”

(www.environment.gov.au/archive/about/jobs/graduate/2008/benp.html)

**UNIVERSITY CAREERS**

Having just finished studying at a tertiary institution, you may not necessarily have considered working in one! Yet graduates have forged successful careers in tertiary administration and research, sometimes through starting off in an administrative support role (or even having worked casually in such an institution whilst studying), then applying for positions of greater responsibility.

UniJobs, a University Jobs Website, advertises a range of higher education jobs from all 39 Australian universities: www.unijobs.com.au/careers

**FURTHER STUDY**

You may have been studying for a while, but is the particular sector or profession that you are aiming for demanding an additional qualification? If so, further study may complement your degree. Further study, along with part-time work in your chosen field, can provide valuable experience in your ongoing job search strategies.

For example, a Flinders Aquaculture graduate studied the Graduate Diploma of Public Policy & Management and gained a position in the Graduate Program with the Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations.

**CONCLUSION**

The pathways listed above all require some level of self-assessment, and research into the opportunities available to you. Whichever option you choose, make sure you don’t take your decision to pursue it lightly, and that your choice is based on what you truly want - not what you (or others) think you should do.

Whatever your career starting point, aim to demonstrate excellence to your employer, focus on developing your career experience, and making a positive contribution to the organisation. In your future job applications you will draw on this valuable experience to demonstrate your track record of performance in the workplace.

More information on job search strategies including networking, using a Recruitment Agency and so on is available from the Careers & Employer Liaison Centre. Collect a copy of our booklet on Creative Job Search.