

International student guide: how to present yourself in the UK job market



In this guide you will find:

- An introduction to the world of work in the UK
- Information about how to prepare yourself to compete in the UK job marketplace
- Help on how to start planning your career and personal development to boost career success and satisfaction
- An example of a UK style CV
- An example of a UK style covering letter
- Recommended resources and activities
- A list of useful words, abbreviations and their meanings

➤ Working in the UK: an introduction

The UK has one of the lower unemployment rates in the European Union (EU) at present. The UK economy is built on the free trade system, buying and selling products for maximum profit in the global marketplace.

The government monitors and, to some extent, controls the migration of workers, thereby managing the UK labour market. Estimates of non-UK nationals working in the UK have been increasing over time, particularly with the expansion of the European Union. The Office for National Statistics estimate for January - March 2014 was 9.1% of all people working in the UK. You can look at government statistics and find out about the labour market on their website at www.statistics.gov.uk/default.asp.

Many international students who study in the UK want to get work experience during their studies and/or a UK graduate job on completion of their studies. Some will require paid employment during their studies, while others gain valuable unpaid experience. Employers value a degree; they also value evidence of work experience and skills gained from a wide range of life experiences and will expect to see this in your job applications. (Read the guide: 'What do employers really want?').

'I thought it would be easy to find work in the UK after the completion of my studies. However, this is not the case.' - an international postgraduate student

➤ Employment regulations

You are very welcome to use information and links to resources (both online and in paper format) but the Careers Service is not authorised to give advice regarding immigration issues or eligibility for work permits in the UK.

➤ Permission to work

- students from the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland

Most will not need permission to work in the UK. However, students from Croatia will need a CR1 registration certificate to work while studying (unless they already have student immigration permission which is valid beyond 1 July 2013) and for graduate work will usually need sponsorship from an employer and work authorisation. Full details are available from the GOV UK site at <https://www.gov.uk/croatian-national>.

(You are an EEA national if you are a citizen or national of one of the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway are EEA member states but they are not members of the European Union (EU).)



- students from outside the EEA

Most students who enter the UK for longer than six months receive restricted permission to work during their studies. Check your passport stamp carefully: this will indicate what permission you have been given. Details are available on www.ukcisa.org.uk/International-Students/Study-work--more/Working-during-your-studies/Can-I-work/ and you can also contact the International Office - www.aber.ac.uk/en/international/visas-support-advice/.

➤ Employment rights

All people who work in the UK have a number of employment rights and obligations. Comprehensive information on these is available from <https://www.gov.uk/browse/working>.

➤ National Insurance and Income Tax

You have to pay income tax and national insurance contributions when your income reaches a certain level. This is usually arranged through your employer and taken from your pay. You can start work before you have your National Insurance Number (NINO) but you must apply for one once you are working so that your employer can record national insurance (NI) contributions correctly.

To get a National Insurance number, you must make an appointment for an "evidence of identity" interview. You will need to travel to a Jobcentre Plus office where they carry out National Insurance Number interviews. Telephone 0845 600 0643 between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday to book an appointment for an interview. You will need to take proof of identity (such as a passport) as well as evidence that you are working. Read the handout 'How to obtain a National Insurance Number' and look at <https://www.gov.uk/apply-national-insurance-number>.

➤ Working during your studies: the local labour market

Wales is integral to the UK yet has its own distinctive culture and heritage with superb industrial architecture, a long history of trading, shipping and an important agricultural industry. With a population of around 3 million, most businesses are small or medium sized enterprises (SMEs) with fewer than 250 employees. Aberystwyth (with a core population of 16,000) is in the county of Ceredigion which has a population of about 76,000 people. The town's population grows to around 24,000 if student numbers are included. There are job opportunities for students in Aberystwyth but this is quite a small town and you may find that the types of job available do not always match your expectations. Call into our office in the Students' Union for help. Keep searching the Careers Service online vacancy database for part-time opportunities. Finding a job requires determination, persistence and a methodical approach. Employers say they find it more difficult to recruit people into elementary level occupations such as catering, hotel and factory work because there are not enough people who are interested! Skilled trades, however, such as automotive engineers, electricians and bricklayers, and associate professionals such as nurses or creative staff are the hardest jobs to fill.

Most students will not find work directly related to their course of study. Many will get cleaning jobs, manual work, factory work and work in restaurants, bars and hotels. All part-time jobs, however, give you the opportunity to earn money and develop valuable transferable skills such as teamwork, communication skills and perhaps language skills.

➤ The importance of work experience

You will see and hear the expression 'work experience' frequently in career-related resources and activities. It refers to full-time and part-time paid work, placements and internships, voluntary (unpaid) activities and could be for just a few days or much longer. You can use the Careers Service to find advertised opportunities and to help you identify potential employers for speculative applications. Have a look at the work experience section of our website for more information. (Year in Employment Scheme (YES): please note that visa-nationals cannot take part in YES as their student visa prevents them from taking a year out from their studies to go into paid employment.)

Work experience gives you the opportunity to learn a great deal about yourself, your capabilities and interests. It enables you to see for yourself how companies operate and what particular jobs involve. You can show how the experience has developed your skills and knowledge when writing your CV and job applications.

Internships are planned periods of work, usually for 6–12 weeks during the summer vacation, offered by larger employers as a method of testing out the suitability of students for future employment. They are very attractive and often highly competitive and it is likely that you will have to go through a rigorous application process, just like a graduate job or training scheme vacancy. Have a look at the Careers Service online vacancy database which includes a selection of work experience opportunities.



➤ Working after you graduate

If you are interested in the possibility of working in the UK after you graduate, as an international applicant, you will almost certainly need permission to work. Some of the main options are outlined below.

The Tier 1 category of the points-based system is for high-value migrants and has various sub-categories such as Tier 1 (Exceptional talent), Tier 1 (Entrepreneur) and Tier 1 (Investor). Details can be found on the GOV UK website and also see 'Working after your studies' on the UKCISA website.

One sub-category, **Tier 1 (Graduate entrepreneur)** allows students who have completed a degree in the UK, and who have been identified by participating institutions as having developed world class innovative ideas or entrepreneurial skills, to stay in the UK for a year after graduation to set up a business. (It is possible to apply to extend your stay for another year after this.) For more information, see the GOV UK and UKCISA websites.

In addition to the Tier 1 categories, there is also a **Tier 2 category** for sponsored skilled workers. **Tier 2 (General)** is for those who have the offer of a skilled job that cannot be filled by a settled worker. This category includes applicants coming to the UK to fill shortage occupations. (For students in the UK who meet the normal criteria for Tier 2 and who are switching to Tier 2 before their student visa expires, the Resident Labour Market Test requirement is waived.) The salary for the job should normally be at least £20,500 p.a. Applications under Tier 2 are for a specific individual to work in a specific job and you will need a valid certificate of sponsorship from the employer before you can make an application in this category.



Another, short-term, option is the **Tier 5 (Temporary worker - government authorised exchange)** category which allows migrants to work in the UK on an approved scheme for up to 12 or 24 months (depending on the scheme).

Obtaining permission to work is time-consuming and expensive. If you do not need permission to work, this should be made clear on your written application.

Further details on all categories and changes to arrangements to date are available from the GOV UK and UKCISA websites: <https://www.gov.uk/browse/visas-immigration/work-visas> and www.ukcisa.org.uk.

It is important to check the current rules of these categories, which can change at any time. If you want to stay in the UK, you must make your application **before** your current permission to be here as a student runs out and usually **after** you have graduated.

In a global, rapidly changing job market in which a migrating workforce increasingly seeks new opportunities, your job seeking activities will benefit from a business-like, organised strategy (see www.prospects.ac.uk/job_hunting.htm).

➤ UK employers and international students

Although it is unwise to generalise about UK employers and their attitude to international graduates, the barriers they perceive include:

- immigration and employment legislation being too complex to understand
- the process of obtaining a work permit being complicated and difficult
- English language skills not being of a high enough standard
- cultural differences making communication and integration difficult

Be realistic about your chances of success. Organisations that have a presence in the UK and your home country might be more willing to consider you and could value appropriate language skills too. Employers place great importance on relevant skills, work experience and awareness of the working environment; applicants who have taken the time and effort to gain these will be a more attractive prospect. Of course, it is not enough just to have the skills required; you must also be able to present these well in your application documents.

➤ Graduate jobs: the range

Jobs for graduates in the UK are of two types:

- Training schemes
- Direct entry jobs

Larger employers begin to advertise their training schemes in the autumn term to start the following summer and so it is important to get organised early and identify the employment sector and geographic location in which you are interested. You can get details of these from specialist websites including the Careers Service website (www.aber.ac.uk/careers). See also the handout 'What do employers really want?' and www.prospects.ac.uk/graduate_employers.htm. Competition for these jobs is strong.

Smaller employers - the Small to Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) - are more likely to recruit directly and offer on-the-job training. Graduates are increasingly employed in this way. The majority of UK companies come under the SME category, having 250 employees or fewer. Many of these are unlikely to have structured graduate training programmes and therefore seek to fill their vacancies in a variety of ways - local advertising perhaps or using a network of contacts to find suitable candidates.

Professional qualifications must be taken prior to starting some occupations such as teaching, law and social work whereas others require further study (often part-time or distance learning) whilst working eg accountancy. Assist your job seeking by reading relevant career resources, national newspapers, journals and websites, with particular reference to the official, national graduate careers website www.prospects.ac.uk.

➤ Why is networking important?

You may notice that the word 'networking' is mentioned frequently in careers literature and websites; it refers to the skills of developing and using contacts to market yourself to potential employers and is an integral part of the job market in the UK where many jobs are obtained in this way (not formally advertised as vacancies). Those who do not have a well developed network will find these hidden jobs difficult to discover (see the handouts: 'Networking' and 'Speculative applications' for more details).

"I met my boss in a local Chinese restaurant. I didn't expect to get a job by this way. But making contact with your home nation's local population can be a way to find a job."

an international postgraduate student

➤ Presenting yourself on paper: the UK CV

In the UK a CV (*curriculum vitae*) is an important career document that you will need. Spend time and effort to make your CV effective (see the handouts 'CVs and Covering Letters' and 'CV Checklist' plus www.prospects.ac.uk/cvs_and_cover_letters.htm). In some countries, a CV is called a *résumé* and may vary in its purpose, format and content.

CVs should be job specific; this means that each individual vacancy or opportunity requires a tailored CV - the information carefully selected to match the requirements of the job. It is important to 'sell yourself'; this may be a new and unfamiliar concept to you. You can seek advice from a careers adviser if you are unsure about how to do this.

The key purpose of a CV is to get you an interview. Your CV is likely to be the first impression you make on a prospective employer; it will be competing against many other CVs. Employers use the CV at the first stage of recruitment when they are looking for evidence of relevant skills and experience - if your CV does not pass this initial selection process, you will not have an opportunity to promote yourself at an interview.



Typically, a graduate CV is two pages long with information listed in reverse chronological order, starting with your most recent experience. Use a clear, brief style and avoid unnecessary words that do not add value.

If English is not your first language, you may want to indicate your achievement and standard of spoken and written English. Your CV will itself be an example of your writing skills and attention to detail is vital; check spelling, grammar and punctuation very carefully. Your overseas qualifications should be clearly but briefly explained (you can check UK equivalence by contacting UK NARIC - see www.ecctis.co.uk/naric/individuals/; alternatively, seek help from a careers adviser) so that UK employers understand your subjects and level of achievement.

Your CV is an individual document, unique to you, prepared and written by you; do look at examples of CVs for ideas on style and content but do not be tempted to copy text from these as it is unlikely to be suitable for you. A CV is included in this guide; it is an example to get you started and your own CV may look different.

➤ Presenting yourself on paper: the UK covering letter

When sending off a CV or an application form, it is usual to include a letter. A good letter is essential with a CV and should encourage the prospective employer to proceed to your CV feeling very positive about you. Get your draft letter checked by a careers adviser to make sure that you are marketing yourself well. Do not use a standard letter for every job application. An employer will expect you to have researched the company carefully, matched your skills and experience to the job and customised the letter (and CV) appropriately. He/she will also expect you to show an interest in what the company does.

Your priority is to produce a readable, focused letter that uses modern business language with no grammatical or spelling errors. Take great care when using computer spellcheckers (is yours set to UK English?). Clearly show why you are applying for the job and why you believe that your skills, abilities and experiences match those in the job description. Address your letter to a named person (eg Dear Ms Butler) and include their job title. If it is impossible to find this out, use the standard (but less effective) 'Dear Sir/Madam' (see the guide 'CVs and Covering Letters' for more details). Use a style of language that suggests you are a positive, keen and informed applicant. Look at examples (try the Careers Service resources and internet links to help you develop your own style).

A speculative letter is one that targets a company that is not actively advertising a job vacancy (see the handout 'Getting a Job - Speculative Applications'). You should explain why you have chosen to approach them; you may have read an article in the newspaper, analysed their annual report or worked on a relevant topic for your project. The employer should feel they, in particular, are being targeted for a good reason. If you can't find out much about them, then mention what attracts you to that employment sector or job type. If you declare your need for a UK work permit, your letter and CV must impress the employer enough to want to consider your application.

➡ Presenting yourself on paper: the UK application form

All applications are part of the matching process used by employers. It enables them to collect standard information for the first stages of assessment. In the UK, selection procedures are usually outlined in job advertisements, on websites or in employer literature. Many employers use application forms (rather than CVs), often online and those who require a work permit may be prevented automatically from accessing the system. Some companies require you to complete online psychometric tests successfully before you are permitted to fill in the application form (see the handout 'Getting a Job - Psychometric Tests'). Allow yourself plenty of time when using an online application process; some forms can be saved and continued later whereas others can only be completed in one sitting. Read the instructions carefully and check for keyboard and spelling errors. Skills training is offered through careers education workshops delivered through academic departments. Look at www.aber.ac.uk/careers/events, www.aber.ac.uk/careers/careersed and www.prospects.ac.uk/applying_for_jobs.htm.

➡ Presenting yourself at interviews and assessment centres

Good and confident command of the English language is essential. You will not succeed at interviews without it. If you are an international student whose first language is not English, practise speaking with native English speakers at every opportunity and attend English classes if possible (contact the International English Centre www.aber.ac.uk/en/international-english).

Thorough preparation is vitally important; this means that you need to allow enough time to plan how you will respond to the commonly asked questions (see the guide 'All about Interviews' and look at www.prospects.ac.uk/interview_tips.htm). In addition, your behaviour and attitude will be observed - enthusiasm and a keen interest in the job

will help, together with a respectful, courteous manner, a firm handshake and an awareness of British conduct (did you know, for example, that the personal space limit at which we are comfortable is 750mm?). Finally, remember the importance of being punctual, polite but not overconfident, and wearing smart business clothing. Do not sit down at interview until invited to do so or behave like a leader when you are not.

➡ Ideas to increase your chances of success

- Make use of the full range of career services available
- Identify your unique selling points (USPs) (language and cultural knowledge as well as skills) to target suitable companies
- Use Aberystwyth University career resources to improve skills such as letter writing, CV writing, interviews, English language skills
- Practise to improve your skills in researching, identifying, presenting yourself on paper before you actually need them
- Get feedback from careers advisers
- Try to develop and use interactions with others to get to know UK culture, habits and attitudes
- Aim to take part in work experience and volunteering activities during your studies
- Manage your own career development! Use Personal Development Planning (PDP) to get started at www.aber.ac.uk/careers/pdp
- Understand what employers seek from graduate applicants

Example of UK Style CV - Student 1

(This is packed onto one page for the sake of this handout but you are more likely to use two pages)

ZHI CHEN

Room 23, Building B, Rosser Halls, Penglais, Aberystwyth University, Penglais
Aberystwyth SY23 3DG

Tel 01970 222333 Mob 07960 123456 Email zzc0@aber.ac.uk

Nationality: Chinese

EDUCATION

2013 - 2014

MSc International Finance (distinction predicted)

Aberystwyth University

Modules include:

- Competitive and corporate strategy
- International markets and marketing
- Dissertation: A comparative analysis of international financial services - Banking, Insurance, Investments, Trusts and Real Estates in China and the UK

2010-2013

BSc Business and Finance Management (1st class)

Beijing Normal University, China

Modules include:

- International Marketing
- Accounting and Finance
- Group project: analysed existing structure and developed financial strategy for local manufacturing company

2005-2010

Advanced Diploma (85% score)

Beijing High School, China

- 8 subjects studied including English, Computing and Business

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

2012

Assistant to Finance Officer (3 months)

Beijing Bank plc, China

- Reviewed monthly audit procedure and made two recommendations resulting in introduction of revised documentation and improved data retrieval
- Took part in team training project to develop departmental communications; contributed innovative ideas and helped to run an e-survey to gauge opinions of 50 staff
- Delivered monthly presentation of target figures to regional managers

OTHER EXPERIENCE

2008-2013

Retail Assistant

Chen Store, Beijing, China

- Devised and created a computerised stock management system for 250 product lines
- Planned and delivered an effective advertising strategy for 2012 promotional event which resulted in 10% increase in regular customers

ADDITIONAL SKILLS

- Competent and experienced user of Microsoft packages including Word, Excel, PowerPoint plus email and internet
- Fluent in Mandarin, confident written and spoken English
- UK driving licence
- Completed a short course in international commercial awareness

ACHIEVEMENTS AND INTERESTS

Team captain for university basketball squad - play competitive matches regularly

Treasurer of the International Students' Social Club

Recently joined the Aberystwyth town half marathon club: take part in weekly training

Enjoy cooking for friends and have tried some traditional Welsh recipes

REFEREES

Dr Christine Evans, Personal Tutor, The School of Management and Business, Cledwyn Building, Aberystwyth University, Penglais Campus, Aberystwyth, SY23 3DD

Telephone 01970 619876 ext 312 Email cgx@aber.ac.uk

Mr David Lee, Finance Manager, Beijing Bank plc, Tower 2B Chang Avenue, Beijing, China

Telephone 00 86 10 0001 0002 Email leedavid23@beijingsbank.com

Example of UK Style Covering Letter - Student 2

17 Northgate Road
Warrington
CH6 8XZ

Tel 01925 003004
Email meiyeeli@emailaddress.com

12th March 2014

Ms Katherine Burnes-Jones
Human Resources Manager
UK Engineering Ltd
Eastgate Business Centre
Chester
CH1 2AP

Dear Ms Burnes-Jones

10 Week Management Placement

Having seen your advertisement at Aberystwyth University, on the Careers Service website, I would like to be considered for the above placement. My time as a student at Aberystwyth will come to an end in June 2015, when I will complete a BSc Econ degree in Management and Finance (expected outcome 2.1).

The course has given me a very good grounding in management principles, and I have developed a keen interest and balanced appreciation of both the theoretical concepts and practical application of finance as well as an understanding of how finance interfaces with other aspects of business and management.

My elective modules (International Finance and Quantitative Methods) reflect my particular enthusiasm for the development of financial systems in a multi-currency world, taking account of the relationship between risk and return. My second year project entitled 'Evaluation of implementation of a production control system' has enabled me to put my analytical skills into practice and also further developed my commercial awareness. I achieved a first for this piece of work.

Having had first hand experience in a manufacturing engineering company in my home country of China during a year out, I am confident that this would be of benefit to UK Engineering Ltd. I learned how to adapt to changing situations, including the introduction of new financial software systems, to communicate well with managers, technicians and administrators alike and to make effective contributions to team projects including a three-month financial product analysis with five colleagues. Working with professionals and observing good practice, I was able to apply many of the skills that I believe are needed to work successfully in this specialised environment.

A placement with UK Engineering Ltd would offer a challenging and rewarding opportunity with a highly respected industry leader. Your recently announced expansion into the Asia-Pacific rim is of great interest and I am particularly keen to learn more about the financial and management challenges presented by these developments. As well as giving me an excellent basis for a career in this sector, a placement would also give me the opportunity to use my cultural understanding of and relevant work experience in China to contribute effectively within the company.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the post and my own background in more detail. A copy of my CV is enclosed for consideration and I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely

Mei-Yee Li

Enc. CV

➤ Abbreviations and words used in careers literature in UK

Abbreviation	Explanation
AGCAS	Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
AU	Aberystwyth University
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
competency	A skill, ability or knowledge that enables an individual to be effective in a job
cultural awareness	Ability to understand and appreciate cultural difference
CV	Curriculum vitae (also called a résumé): your work and educational experience
DfE	Department for Education
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EEA	European Economic Area
eg	For example
employability	Skills, knowledge and personal qualities that increase your chances of gaining work and developing long-term prospects
EU	European Union
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FE	Further Education
FT and PT	Full-time and part-time
GO Wales	Graduate Opportunities Wales
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
IELTS	International English Language Testing
internship	A period of structured work experience
labour market	Interaction between workers seeking jobs (supply) and employers looking for workers (demand)
LMI	labour market information: constantly changing information about work/industries/jobs
mock interview	A practice interview
networking	Using social and business contacts to get information and create opportunities
NI and NINO	National Insurance and National Insurance number
NMW	National minimum wage (lowest legal rate of pay)
occupation	A type of job, job title or role
organisation	A company, business or institution
PDP	Personal Development Planning
per annum	For every year
person specification	Selection criteria: the skills, qualities and experiences to do a job effectively
pro rata	In proportion (often used to show that a full-time salary will be reduced for a part-time job in proportion to the hours worked)
psychometric test	Standardised tests to evaluate aptitude and personality
public sector	Central and local government, education, health, security
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
re or RE	Regarding
recruitment agency	Company that advertises job vacancies and selects candidates for employers
ref	Reference (for example Ref No = reference number)
SMEs	Small and medium sized enterprises: companies with up to 250 employees
speculative	Approach to an organisation to seek out a job when no vacancy is advertised
transferable skill	Knowledge, ability or skill that can be used in a range of occupations
UK NARIC	National Recognition of International Qualifications
UKCISA	UK Council for International Student Affairs
workshop	Small group (up to 20) actively participating in class tasks

➤ Resources

- **Websites**

Aberystwyth University Careers Service
www.aber.ac.uk/careers/

Prospects—UK graduate careers
www.prospects.ac.uk/

UK Council for International Student Affairs
www.ukcisa.org.uk/

GOV UK - Work Visas
<https://www.gov.uk/browse/visas-immigration/work-visas>

UK NARIC—for comparability of overseas qualifications
www.ecctis.co.uk/naric/individuals/

Going Global—country specific career information
<https://online.goinglobal.com/>

- **Information to take away from the Careers Service**

How to obtain a national insurance number (Careers Service)

Introduction to the Careers Service for international Students (Careers Service)

CVs and Covering Letters (Careers Service)

Application Forms (Careers Service)

All about Interviews (Careers Service)

- **Getting visa and immigration advice**

Contact the UKCISA National Student Advice helpline
020 7788 9214

Monday to Friday 1pm - 4pm

Location and Contact Details

➤ Careers Service

Students' Union (next to the Union Shop)

Open Monday—Thursday 9am—5pm and
Friday 9am—4pm

Closed until 10am and between 1pm—2 pm
during vacations

Tel: 01970 622378

E-mail: careers@aber.ac.uk