

The current graduate job market is the toughest in recent memory. The traditional recruiters are taking on fewer graduates, and the class of 2010 are, in many cases, competing with the class of 2009 for those posts available. But the difficulties for students do not end there: for those either starting or returning to a course this autumn, the market for part-time work is just as tough.

For the majority of full-time undergraduates, part-time employment is a vital source of supplementary income. Most studies show that at least 50 per cent of students work during term time, and around 90 per cent in vacations. About 70 per cent of those in work say that they do so to cover basic living expenses, so this is not just to fund socialising either.

It seems likely, however, that the current cohort of students may find it more difficult than their predecessors to find such employment. There are fewer jobs to find, and much greater competition from the non-student population for those that still exist – recent estimates put the number of people in part-time employment at record levels, as fewer full-time posts are available in the general economy.

But if you are a student looking for additional income, there are steps that you can take to maximise your chances of getting a job. Most universities will have a job shop, operated by the institution or the students' union. As these cater specifically for students, they will at least make the search easier. In addition, most if not all will, to some extent, filter the jobs to ensure that the employers are not completely evil, and will offer help with key job application skills such as writing CVs, personal statements and interview techniques. You can find a list at www.nases.org.uk.

Students' unions themselves often employ large numbers of student staff, usually with relatively good pay and conditions. The trick here is to apply well before term starts, as any jobs are usually gone by freshers' week (not least because the staff need to be in place by then).

If you do not like the idea of a boss, you could also consider self-employment. For example, if you have particular skills, such as design or computer programming, you can advertise these on sites such as Student Gems (www.studentgems.com).

For those of you who do find work, there are also various points to keep in mind. The National Union of Students is often asked to put a figure on the maximum hours that a student should work. There are a range of opinions on this: often the figure of 16 hours a week is mentioned, whereas Cambridge University forbids its students from taking up employment during term time. Of course, what is suitable for you will depend on your circumstances – a history student with ten hours of formal classes a week might be able to work more than a medicine student with 35.

Research has shown that there is a correlation between a high number of hours worked and the likelihood you will end up with a lower degree classification, so you should be careful about balancing any work with your studies. You might also want to consider when you work: night shifts might pay better but they can have a harmful effect on your coursework.

Then there is the issue of what sort of work. In an ideal world, students would be able to find employment in areas that are relevant to their future careers, or at least which pay well. Alas, this was never easy, and may well be all the more difficult now. In any case, most students are still to be found in low-paid and low-skilled jobs in catering and retail.

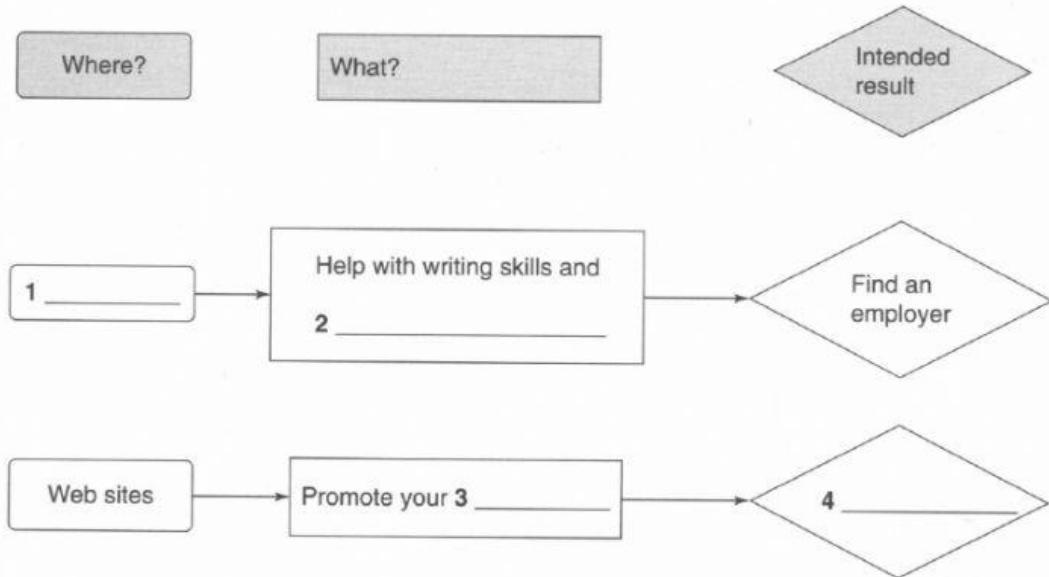
But whether you are bar staff or an agency nurse, you need to know your rights. Employers have to obey the law, no matter how challenging the job market is. For example, you should be paid at least the minimum wage – from October it is £4.92 an hour if you are 18–21 or £5.93 an hour if you are older. All employees are entitled to a written contract, and a rest period if your shift is six hours or longer. Part-time employees cannot be treated less favourably than full-time workers, although if you work through an agency, you can be treated less favourably at present than permanent employees in certain circumstances, so be careful. A full list of rights is available at www.direct.gov.uk/employees.

One way to ensure that your rights are upheld is to join a trade union. They can help you discuss employment matters with your bosses and bargain for better rights in your workplace. Student workers often get a rough deal – but there is safety in numbers.

Talking of numbers, one last thing to watch out for is tax. Students are actually liable for income tax, contrary to popular belief. Fear not, though, as at present 80 per cent of students don't earn above their 'personal allowance' (the amount everyone can earn before tax is applied, which is £6,475 in 2010/11, rising to £7,475 in 2011/12). However, because of their erratic work patterns, and the way tax is calculated, students can sometimes end up paying tax erroneously – so if you think you have, contact HM Revenue and Customs about a refund – www.hmrc.gov.uk/incometax.

8 Find the section of the text in Exercise 6 that is relevant to the flow chart below. Then complete the flow chart using NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS from the text for each gap.

HOW TO LOOK FOR WORK WHILE YOU STUDY



Part 3: Exam practice

Complete the summary below with words from the text underneath. Use NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS for each answer.

Summary:

Up until recently, students expected to earn good money after graduation. However, there has been a dramatic (1) _____ in attitude, and a minority now think that they will work in a field that they are (2) _____ for. It is still worth doing higher studies in the UK because the gap in earning between university graduates and the people who do not have university degrees is greater than anywhere else (3) _____. Because of the current economic situation, there may be fewer employment opportunities available, so for (4) _____, qualifications are very important.

The recession has brought about an abrupt change of mood on university campuses up and down the country. A five-year boom in the graduate job market has been stopped in its tracks and salary expectations, which hit record levels last year, are heading southwards. No wonder only one in five of 16,000 final year students questioned for a recent survey by High Flyers Research said that they expected to get a job for which they are qualified by the time they graduate this summer.

Despite the gloom, the financial case for going to university remains compelling. International surveys continue to show the salary premium enjoyed by UK graduates over those who choose not to go to university as among the highest in the world. In the post-recession world, a university degree is likely to be even more of an advantage to job-seekers than before.

But choosing the right degree course and the right university will also be more important than ever. This does not necessarily mean that students should go only for job-related degrees, but it will put a premium on marketable skills. And it may mean that more universities can be expected to follow the lead of Liverpool John Moores University, which puts all of its undergraduates through a World of Work (WoW) course designed to give them the problem-solving and communications skills they will need at work.

The Times Good University Guide 2010, published by HarperCollins, offers a wealth of essential information to help candidates to navigate the maze of university choice, as well as advice on student life. It is the most authoritative guide to universities in the UK and is an essential and comprehensive tool for students and parents.

The online version of the Guide allows students and parents to create their own individual university rankings and to compare the strengths and weaknesses of different institutions by sorting universities according to one of eight criteria – from student satisfaction to research quality and degree results. The table sees Oxford maintain its leadership, despite coming below Cambridge in most of the subject tables. Cambridge has the better record on student satisfaction, research, entry standards, completion and graduate destinations, but Oxford's lead in staffing levels, degree classifications and particularly in spending on libraries and other student facilities makes the difference.

The biggest climbers at the top of the table include Liverpool (up from 43 to 28), Leeds (up from 31 to 27), Sheffield (up from 22 to 18), Edinburgh (up from 18 to 14) and Exeter (up from 13 to nine). St Andrews remains the top university in Scotland, while Cardiff is well clear in Wales.

The key information is contained in the 62 subject tables, which now cover every area of higher education. The number of institutions in this year's tables has increased by only one because a fourth university – the West of Scotland – has instructed the Higher Education Statistics Agency not to release its data. It joins Swansea Metropolitan, London Metropolitan and Liverpool Hope universities in blocking the release of data to avoid appearing in league tables.

