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# working abroad

Special Interest Series 2006

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# Contents

## Working Abroad

- |   |   |   |    |  |    |
|---|---|---|----|--|----|
| 1 | Introduction  | 3 | 7  | Opportunities overseas with UK-based organisations | 9  |
| 2 | Where can I go?                                       | 4 | 8  | Finding overseas employers                         | 10 |
| 3 | Planning ahead  | 5 | 9  | International organisations                        | 10 |
| 4 | What can I do if ... I am still at university?        | 6 | 10 | Case studies                                       | 12 |
| 5 | What can I do if ... I have recently graduated?       | 7 | 11 | Information sources                                | 15 |
| 6 | What can I do if ... I am a graduate with experience? | 8 |    |  |    |

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Published autumn 2006  
To be revised autumn 2008

The writers of the *Special Interest Series* are members of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS). These *Special Interest Series* are edited by the Information and Content Development Department (ICDD) of Graduate Prospects and distributed by Graduate Prospects. Full editorial control is exercised by AGCAS.

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# 1 Introduction

If you are interested in the possibility of working in another country, there are many issues to consider. This information is intended to be a starting point and hopefully an encouragement in your exploration of opportunities abroad. It is written from the standpoint of UK and Irish nationals but will be useful for anyone wishing to work in a different country. Overseas students will also find the AGCAS Special Interest booklet *Careers and Further Study for International Students* helpful.

## What are the advantages of working abroad?

- Employers will be impressed by your initiative in gaining a job abroad, your motivation to follow this through and make it a success, and the self-reliance inevitably developed by working abroad.
- The ability to communicate and work as a team with people from a broad range of cultural backgrounds is an invaluable skill that will look great on your CV.
- Working within a different social, political and economic system will give you new insights and a different perspective.

## Things to consider before making a decision

- The clearer your objectives, the more likely you are to succeed. Why do you want to work abroad? What are your motivations? What do you hope to achieve? How will you make the most of it?
- Be realistic about time scales. The process is time consuming and requires perseverance, determination, good organisation and planning, and careful thought. Also, bear in mind that getting meaningful work experience for a period of only a year can be difficult – your year abroad can easily become two or three.
- If you go with a partner, remember that they may face challenges and difficulties too – you will need to take this into account.

## Language skills

- The level of language skills required will depend on the country, the occupation – a job in IT, for example, may be possible with more limited language skills – and the employer. However, you can demonstrate your cultural adaptability and sensitivity by learning the relevant language.

- Being a foreigner with English as a mother tongue can have its advantages but be aware that many international firms prefer to hire local labour. If you are not competent in the necessary language, then check how much this will affect your chances. You may be able to take a course at your university or a local institution or possibly in your destination country in order to get up to speed, although costs can vary widely.
- New language skills can take a long time to acquire. Even if English is widespread in the workplace, you will be limited socially if you do not have a reasonable command of the necessary language.

## A reality check

- Degrees from the UK or Ireland do not necessarily carry the same value abroad.
- In many countries, degrees are considered to be vocational. Some employers are not used to employing arts and social science graduates for commercial functions, although this is beginning to change and is less true of multinational companies.
- Students abroad usually spend longer getting their degrees. Employers may be wary of taking on younger graduates and sceptical of a degree that has been gained in 'only' three years.
- British graduates are often dismayed to find that their degree is regarded as 'only a Bachelors'. In the US, for example, Masters degrees are much more common than in Britain.
- Extracurricular activities may play a smaller part on CVs and application forms in other countries than in the UK. Any work experience, however, is highly regarded.
- Not all professional qualifications are recognised abroad.

It is worth noting that work being undertaken by the European Commission under the Bologna Process aims to establish, by 2010, a European Higher Education Area to improve international transparency in relation to the mobility of students and the portability, comparability and understanding of their qualifications.

# 2 Where can I go?

So, is the world your oyster? In theory, yes; in reality, the picture is a little less clear, depending on the state of the local employment market, work permit requirements and immigration procedures. Enquiries about immigration are best made to the appropriate embassy or high commission in the UK.

- European Union (EU) nationals have the right to work in any other EU member state. However, unemployment is high in some of the newer member states, so the flow of workers is more likely to be out than in.
- Immigration into Commonwealth countries is becoming more difficult, as they produce large numbers of their own graduates.
- Foreign governments or other employers are often only interested in recruiting British graduates if they are unable to satisfy recruitment needs from their own nationals. (The same applies in reverse - it is very difficult for nationals of non-European Union countries to get employment in the UK if there are British people who can do the job.)
- Immigrant visas are normally granted only on application from your country of origin. Many graduates visit Australia and the USA hoping to be offered permanent jobs whilst they are there. However, in the event of a job offer being received, you must return to your country of origin to obtain the proper visa, which can be a lengthy procedure lasting up to 12 months, sometimes longer.
- Most countries that require work permits will issue them only to individuals with definite jobs to go to. To seek employment after arrival in a country in which a work permit is needed is not a good idea; this can raise many practical and legal difficulties, including possible deportation.
- Always remember to check the website of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk), before you travel to make sure it is safe to go.

## COUNTRIES AND REGIONS OF INTEREST

To find detailed information about visa requirements, the job market, application procedures, language requirements and postgraduate study in over 50 countries worldwide, see the AGCAS Country Profiles available at [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/Countries](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/Countries). Each country profile also contains a comprehensive list of links to help you in your job search. The countries and regions covered by these profiles are:

### The Americas

Brazil; Canada; Mexico; USA.

### Asia

China; Hong Kong; India; Indonesia; Japan; Malaysia; Pakistan; Russia; Singapore; South Korea; Sri Lanka; Taiwan; Thailand; United Arab Emirates.

### Australasia

Australia; New Zealand.

### Europe

Austria; Belgium; Croatia; Cyprus; Czech Republic; Denmark; Estonia; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Iceland; Ireland; Italy; Latvia; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Malta; Netherlands; Norway; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Russia; Slovakia; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; Ukraine.

### Middle East and Africa

Ghana; Israel; Saudi Arabia; South Africa.

# 3 Planning ahead

Just interested in short-term opportunities? Looking for a gap year or time out? Or are you looking for a more permanent move? Whatever your reason for going abroad, preparation and planning can help you get the most out of your time. This means planning for your time there, and for when you come back too!

## Before you go

- The first, most crucial thing to consider is to decide which country or countries you would most like to live and work in. If your answer is 'I don't mind', you are going to find it very difficult to do the amount of research required to be successful. Be realistic about the sorts of climates and places with which you can cope.
- Next, decide which type and level of job you ideally want, and in which employment sector. If you wish to work at a graduate or professional level, you will have a much greater chance of success if you have a clear idea about this.
- Finally, do extensive research into the country and the jobs in which you are interested. You will need to be aware of cultural differences in work practices and application methods.

## While you are there

- Whatever type of job you get, it is worth keeping an eye on your future career. Be aware of the job market in the country you are working in and back home. Check relevant websites regularly for opportunities. (Online application procedures are a boon for the traveller!)
- Keep up to date with developments in your profession back home - this will be an advantage on your return.

- If the job you are doing has little relevance to your future plans, you may still be able to undertake some relevant unpaid work to keep your CV moving.
- Keep a record of your skills, experiences and accomplishments. If you used a Personal Development Plan (PDP) at university, keep this up to date.
- Start thinking about how you will present your experiences abroad to any future employer, on application forms and at interview.
- Keep in touch with your university careers service. Most will continue to offer advice up to two years after graduation.

## Coming back

- Prepare for your feelings on your return. You may experience reverse culture shock. You will have changed while you were away and so will your friends, family and home country.
- Consider setting up some interviews with recruitment agencies when you return. This will give you a feel for the employment market.
- Your time abroad may have caused you to reconsider your career options. You may wish to undertake some sort of postgraduate study. See the AGCAS Special Interest booklet *Postgraduate Study and Research* for more details on further study.
- If you have taken a gap year, your friends may have made progress in their chosen careers while you were away. Don't be resentful – remember it was your choice to go abroad and that the benefits may take a while to kick in. Be proud of what you have achieved.

# 4 What can I do if... I am still at university?

## STUDYING

- Many students have the opportunity to spend time abroad as part of their course, often with a partner university in Europe, the USA, Canada or Australia. Opportunities in Europe may come under the Erasmus European Exchange Programme, [www.erasmus.ac.uk](http://www.erasmus.ac.uk).
- AIESEC (Association Internationale des Etudiants en Sciences Economiques et Commerciales), [www.aiesec.co.uk](http://www.aiesec.co.uk), the world's largest international student organisation, offers an International Trainee Exchange Programme open to university students (and recent graduates) from a range of subject backgrounds.
- The British Council runs a number of international exchange programmes, for example, Connect Youth, [www.connectyouthinternational.com](http://www.connectyouthinternational.com). They also offer jobs as language assistants.
- The Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), [www.ciee.org](http://www.ciee.org), can help you find internships in the USA, Canada and New Zealand.
- IAESTE (The International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience), [www.iaeste.org.uk](http://www.iaeste.org.uk), provides science and engineering undergraduates with paid training experience abroad relevant to their studies.
- The Leonardo da Vinci programme, [www.leonardo.org.uk](http://www.leonardo.org.uk), offers funded work placements, which are available through the European Union's vocational training programme. Look out for organisations offering this type of placement. All applications must be made by an organisation, so you cannot apply as an individual. (Some universities are members of this scheme.)

If your course does not include a year abroad, you may be able to negotiate an individual placement year - give your tutors a list of what you consider to be the advantages of a year abroad and how it would deepen your understanding of your subject. You will probably need to find the placement yourself but ask if your tutors have contacts in other countries that you can use. Above all, be prepared to be proactive and persistent.

## IN YOUR VACATION

### Casual work

Working holidays are a popular way for students and graduates to finance a year off or a trip around the world. Most people find work in the hospitality industry, working in hotels and bars, in the retail sector and as seasonal labourers in agriculture. The developed economies of Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand and North America offer the best opportunities.

There are a number of useful guides to casual work abroad (see chapter 11 'Information sources'). A selection of these may be available in your university careers service.

Depending on your availability, it may also be possible to take part in voluntary short-term development or conservation projects - see the sections 'Aid/development work' and 'Environmental and conservation work' in chapter five for further details.

### Work experience

In a number of countries, graduates commonly start their careers by gaining experience from periods of short-term practical work experience. This can be either during vacations or immediately after graduation. There is no one way of securing this type of work. Vacancies for work experience are usually keenly sought and you will be in competition with local students. It is important to start planning and researching possible opportunities as early as you can and make the most of the contacts you have.

### Internships

A variety of short-term opportunities are available in a number of European and international organisations, and they can often provide useful experience for permanent or longer-term employment overseas. For examples of these organisations, see chapter 9, 'International organisations'.

# 5 What can I do if... I have recently graduated?

The number of long-term/permanent graduate-level overseas vacancies available to people directly after completing a degree is relatively small. However, there are other options.

## *TEACHING*

Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) accounts for more short-term opportunities than any other category of work – this is often the first post that students take up. Look at private language schools and send in your CV. Some schemes will employ you as a teaching assistant in state schools, for example, the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) Teach in China and Teach in Thailand programmes.

A TEFL qualification is an advantage, although not always essential, and you don't need to have a degree in English or modern languages. Detailed information about entry and training routes is available in the AGCAS Occupational Profile *English as a foreign language teacher*. Projects often ask for a commitment of two years and, in some cases, there is a minimum age limit, although this may be revisited in light of the October 2006 age legislation which makes it illegal to discriminate against candidates on the basis of age.

## *AID/DEVELOPMENT WORK*

Volunteers are needed in many parts of the developing world in many different settings: education; health; technical trades; crafts; engineering; natural resources (including agriculture); social and community work; and business development. Agencies recruit for specific vacancies in response to requests from the governments concerned.

As a volunteer, you will live and work as a member of the community, working at grass-roots level, sharing your skills and earning local rates of pay.

You are likely to be heavily involved in training local people to take over your work. In most cases, you will need to gain a relevant professional qualification and work experience before you go – enthusiasm alone is not enough. Personal qualities are equally important. You will need to be adaptable, self-sufficient and resilient. You will also need a sense of humour.

## *ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSERVATION WORK*

There is a range of voluntary opportunities available to work abroad on conservation projects. Experience is not always necessary but enthusiasm and an interest in environmental issues are expected. Projects (which may be short term) range from saving turtles to mapping coral islands. The work is usually unpaid and you may have to pay for travel and accommodation yourself, although you could try to raise the money to finance your trip through sponsorship and fund-raising.

For all volunteering opportunities, you should check the requirements, aims and philosophies of any agency to which you apply. Have a realistic idea of the contribution you can make and what is expected of you. Most agencies can put you in touch with a returned volunteer who can give you first-hand information.

## *STAY IN THE UK FOR A PERIOD*

The other option is to secure a position with a UK-based employer or organisation that offers opportunities to work abroad once you have gained experience with them. See chapter 7 'Opportunities overseas with UK-based organisations' for more details.

# 6 What can I do if... I am a graduate with experience?

Almost all long-term or permanent employment abroad is available only to graduates with specialist qualifications or experience.

## *ACADEMIC RESEARCH*

Each year, large numbers of British citizens take up places at American (and, to a lesser extent, Canadian and Australian) universities to undertake postdoctoral research. The academic market is itself international in scope and some British academics are successful in obtaining permanent appointments in the USA. The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) publishes a regular bulletin of jobs in Commonwealth universities. See the ACU website, [www.acu.ac.uk](http://www.acu.ac.uk), for more information.

In many European countries, it is considered unfair to offer short-term contracts to young researchers so there is less of a coherent postdoctoral system than in the UK. Many UK postdoctoral researchers wishing to work in academia in mainland Europe have to apply for British (eg, Wellcome Trust) or European Commission funding for their financial support. The main route to securing academic research positions worldwide is through personal contact from collaboration and shared academic interests. Many positions are also advertised on the internet and in relevant journals.

To be successful in this competitive field, you must have a good academic record at undergraduate, postgraduate and postdoctoral level.

## *TEACHING POSTS*

There is no doubt that teaching provides some of the best opportunities for working abroad. Remember that, as well as short-term opportunities to teach English as a foreign language (TEFL), there are international schools

operating all over the world in need of qualified educators. Experienced teachers are recruited to teach the normal range of subjects at primary and secondary level. English is invariably the language of instruction, with the curriculum based on either an American or British model. Defence cutbacks in Britain have reduced the teaching posts available in HM Forces schools abroad but they are still worth considering.

## *OTHER OPTIONS*

Writing directly to overseas employers of interest to you on a speculative basis can work but your application will have to be extremely well targeted. Always bear in mind the different approaches to recruitment that may apply in other countries; job offers can occasionally be made without face-to-face contact, relying instead on a telephone interview.

Recruitment consultants and employment agents may be able to help you in locating opportunities but remember that they act in the interests of the employers and operate on a commission basis – agents are not impartial advisers. Bear in mind too that while some recruitment consultants are well established and knowledgeable about the countries they are recruiting for, others are far from thorough.

Personal contacts can be invaluable. The commercial attachés in London-based embassies and the appropriate desks at the British Foreign Office may also be useful but they will not necessarily see careers advice as part of their job.

See chapter 8 'Finding overseas employers' and chapter 9 'International organisations' for further details of how to research prospective employers and who to target.

# 7 Opportunities overseas with UK-based organisations

There is no doubt that Britain invests huge amounts of money abroad; there are commercial and cultural ties with all parts of the world. The types of roles available have changed a great deal in recent years. Improved travel and IT communications mean that few staff need to be based abroad permanently. Large organisations have tended to centralise their operations with one location acting as the headquarters for the whole of Europe.

You will need to be realistic about when you will get that overseas posting: the majority of organisations will not contemplate sending a member of staff to represent them abroad unless they are satisfied with levels of competence and can see evidence of the other qualities needed to succeed in the new posting.

It is normal to spend two or three years working in an organisation in this country before being posted overseas. There are likely to be many more opportunities available once you have gained experience – it is common for staff at middle and senior level to travel abroad on a regular basis. There are, however, some exceptions.

Organisations/employers with international operations in such areas as civil engineering and accountancy may have a policy of sending newly recruited staff overseas to gain experience, often for two or three-year postings.

## Overseas graduates

For overseas graduates of British universities, it is worth noting that UK-based international companies regularly recruit those who are interested in making their careers in their home countries.

## GRADUATE-LEVEL OPPORTUNITIES

If you are interested in longer-term opportunities overseas with a UK-based organisation/employer, look at the following options:

### Consultancies

There has been a growth in the volume of consulting business undertaken by British companies, particularly in such areas as water

management and transport systems. The public sector has also been part of this growth.

### The Armed Forces and police

The Armed Forces are huge training organisations in their own right and are involved in training large numbers of military and civilian staff overseas. Similarly, police officers have recently been involved in the training of forces overseas.

### The Civil Service

Many government departments offer both short-term and long-term postings overseas. In addition to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) are the most likely to provide opportunities. All applicants must apply via the Fast Stream route, [www.faststream.gov.uk](http://www.faststream.gov.uk), although economists can apply via the Government Economic Service.

### International companies

The following UK-based companies recruit worldwide:

- Investment banks/merchant banks/retail banks, eg Morgan Stanley and HSBC.
- Solicitors with international divisions, eg Baker & Mackenzie.
- Accountancy firms, particularly those with a consultancy arm, eg KPMG.
- Oil companies, eg Shell, Esso and BP.
- Companies specialising in fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), eg Unilever.

### Education

British educational specialists, such as teacher trainers, experts on syllabus design, administrators, and examiners, are involved in initiatives abroad, often, though not exclusively, with Commonwealth countries. Additionally, universities and other research organisations have important contacts with overseas clients, covering educational and technical areas.

## SHORT-TERM OPPORTUNITIES

There are also a number of UK-based employers that offer the opportunity to work (or volunteer) abroad on short-term or seasonal contracts.

Such opportunities to travel and experience a period of living abroad are available with:

- organisations such as Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) or Working Abroad;
- charities, eg Global Vision International;
- organisations offering work and travel packages, eg BUNAC.

Be aware that you may have to raise money to participate in some of these schemes and/or pay a registration fee.

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## 8 Finding overseas employers

If you do decide to try your luck and want to make a direct application to a company overseas, you may discover that finding out which employers operate in an individual country can be difficult – it is very unlikely that you will be able to find a definitive list of firms. The following contacts and resources, however, should be of use:

- The entries for countries on Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org>, often have links to lists of companies based in that country. These can be good starting points but are far from being complete.
- UK Trade & Investment helps British firms secure overseas sales and investments and has a useful information centre that provides statistics and market information. It is possible to visit their London office by making an appointment.
- Jobcentre Plus offices are linked to the EURES (European Employment Services) jobs database.
- Agencies such as Expertise in Labour Mobility offer useful information on job availability and recruitment practices in various countries.
- Europages, [www.europages.com](http://www.europages.com), and Eurograduate, [www.eurograduate.com](http://www.eurograduate.com), have links to companies worldwide, as well as in Europe.
- Kompass, [www.kompass.com](http://www.kompass.com), is a very useful online business directory, which can be searched by country.
- Professional online journals, magazines and newspapers usually have a jobs section. Look at these to see which employers are active in your chosen country or area.
- The careers service at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) produces a very useful Directory of International Employers covering 19 countries outside Europe and the USA, which may be available at your university careers service.
- There are a number of recruitment agencies involved in cross-border recruitment that organise recruitment fairs and events aimed at African, Asian and European students and graduates.

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## 9 International organisations

Posts occur from time to time with major international organisations. It is not possible to generalise about the type and frequency of these, except to say that they are invariably for people who are well established or specialists in their chosen career, although there may also be opportunities on schemes or programmes for recent graduates.

Vacancies are usually advertised in the national press and in appropriate professional journals. Be aware that posts may be restricted to nationals of member or signatory states, or limited by geographical quota representation. Nationalities sought will usually be indicated.

### **British Council**

The British Council recruits on an agency basis for a wide variety of education posts, as well as for a range of long and short-term consultancy posts in the fields of finance, health and the environment. There are also a few opportunities to staff British Council offices overseas.

### **CERN (European Organisation for Nuclear Research)**

The world's largest particle physics laboratory, based in Switzerland, recruits computer scientists, engineers, mathematicians and physics graduates into its Fellowship Programme, and pre- and postdoctoral researchers, and experienced researchers for Marie Curie Fellowship placements.

### **Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC)**

This is the operational arm of the Commonwealth Secretariat. It recruits only those with at least three years' experience (or more) across a range of fields, including health, finance, education, administration and planning, trade and industry, and agriculture. Some positions are voluntary.

### **Crown Agents**

This agency regularly recruits a wide variety of trained and experienced staff to work on commercial contracts for over 100 overseas governments, public bodies and international aid agencies. They also run a graduate recruitment scheme for those who want to gain experience and skills in the field of international development.

### **European Union (EU) institutions**

The institutions of the EU are situated mainly in Brussels and Luxembourg. The European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) organises open competitions to select highly qualified staff for recruitment to all institutions of the EU. Their website, <http://europa.eu.int/epso>, is a one-stop shop for all open competitions. The EU Traineeships Office (also known as the Bureau des Stages) operates the Stagiaire Scheme, an in-service training and work attachment programme ('stage') that enables recent university graduates to gain first-hand experience of the workings of EU institutions.

### **The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)**

NATO, by its very nature, is staffed chiefly by experienced military officers and diplomats, and there is no separate NATO career ladder. Civilians (usually nationals of member states), however, are employed both at NATO headquarters and, of course, on military bases.

### **Overseas Development Institute (ODI)**

The ODI recruits able postgraduates in economics or closely related fields (including development studies, forestry, agricultural economics and transport) onto its Fellowship Scheme.

### **The World Bank Group**

This comprises four institutions: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD); the International Development Association (IDA); the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA); and the International Finance Corporation (IFC). It operates a Young Professionals Program for the recruitment of people under the age of 32 for two-year postings, usually covering two assignments. Applicants must specialise in a field relevant to the World Bank's operations, such as economics, finance, education, public health, social sciences, engineering, urban planning, and natural resource management, and have significant, relevant professional experience or continued academic study at doctoral level.

### **The International Monetary Fund (IMF)**

The IMF recruits onto their Economist Program (EP). Although a PhD is not a requirement, most candidates are pursuing (or have recently completed) their doctoral studies. The Experienced Economist Program seeks those with upwards of five years' post-qualification experience. Research assistant posts are also available for two-year (maximum) appointments at a first degree level.

### **The International Civil Service Commission (ICSC)**

The ICSC is an independent expert body established by the United Nations General Assembly. Its mandate is to regulate and co-ordinate the conditions of service of staff in the United Nations (UN) common system. All jobs in the UN system are advertised on its website, <http://icsc.un.org>. Most require a number of years' experience and fluency in a language other than English.

# 10 Case studies

## *JAMES, UNILEVER GRADUATE LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME, ARGENTINA*

I have been working for 18 months on the Unilever Graduate Leadership Programme (UGLP) in supply chain. I took the job directly after graduating from university but Unilever does offer the option of deferred entry into the scheme. The aim of the scheme is to groom the future managers of the business and fast-track them to positions of responsibility. The scheme gives you a series of four to six months' secondments in key areas of the business, which leads to good overall knowledge and then allows you to specialise in your area of interest.

I spent my first six months working as a supply manager responsible for a portfolio of raw materials in the European laundry business. I then moved on to a factory improvement leader role, managing four production lines and 30 engineers and operators. Following this, I had the opportunity of a secondment in Argentina; I moved into the deodorant category and relocated to Buenos Aires.

My role is to define the future global technology requirements of the deodorants' production line, which will cumulate in a report, trials and installation of new and innovative technologies. My secondment in Argentina will last for approximately six months, dependent upon business needs.

A secondment abroad is encouraged on the UGLP scheme in supply chain functions: I have colleagues and friends at the same stage as me who have completed or are undertaking secondments in Dubai, the Philippines, Germany, Switzerland, France, Australia, South Africa and Brazil. Unilever also provides this opportunity to graduates in other functions, such as customer development, R&D, and marketing, where people have moved to America, France, Italy and Holland, amongst other countries. That's one of the benefits of the scheme – being able to drive your own career in terms of job choices and locations.

When I found out about the opportunity to move to Argentina I had no knowledge of Spanish, but Unilever provided me with language lessons and I am improving fast. It is, however, a clear advantage to have some knowledge of the language before you move to a country.

In terms of living arrangements, the local team here in Argentina found accommodation for me (this is paid for by the company throughout my placement). I am also provided with a living allowance to cover any additional expenses.

For me, the high point of being in Argentina is the people: they are friendly, warm and always willing to try and understand my broken Spanish. I play football with the guys from the factory every Friday night and am taking up tango lessons. I believe the opportunity to work abroad is enhanced massively if you immerse yourself in the culture of the country. At the same time, there will be those moments when you need to hear a friendly accent and, in Buenos Aires, there are plenty of ex-pat bars and events if you feel the need.

There are only three low points: the first is that I have not yet found a hockey team to play for (!); the second is that I could not bring my friends and family with me; and the third is that I know I have to return to the UK in three months' time.

I would strongly recommend to anyone to take the opportunity to work abroad. The experience can be as rich and fulfilling as you make it; it will test your strength of character at points, but you will discover a new wealth of experience.

## *LIZZIE, YEAR IN EMPLOYMENT SCHEME, US*

Between my first and second year at university, I made a promise to myself that when lectures started again in September I would investigate how I could take a break from my degree and do something productive during a period of time away. I had a friend who had returned from a year away in the US and he pointed me in the direction of the YES (Year in Employment Scheme) office.

There was one small problem holding me back: the fact that I was an English literature student (a year in employment isn't really the done thing for a scholar of English). However, not one to say no to a challenge, I nervously booked an appointment with the YES office and discovered that, regardless of my degree, there were several placements I could do, all of which were overseas.

After months of hard preparation and many phone interviews, I was offered a job as an environmental education instructor at Rock Eagle 4H Centre in Eatonton, Georgia, and began working there in August 2004.

Nothing could have prepared me for the experiences that lay ahead over the next ten months. When I got to Georgia it was hot and humid, I had jet lag and my first week of training required me to take the classes as if I was a pupil: I capsized a canoe in the Rock Eagle lake, met several snakes and alligators (that I discovered later would be my teaching aids in class) and waded in the muddy detritus of the lake trying to catch creatures in a net that I had no idea existed. At this point, I wondered how I was going to endure the next twelve months.

Well, the answer is I did! I took on a year of employment that stretched me mentally, physically and emotionally; I have proved to myself that if I put my mind to something then I really can do it. It turned out to be a fantastic job and it has opened up many more possibilities that I wouldn't have known about if I hadn't taken a break from studying.

A year in employment gives you a refreshed outlook and renewed excitement for your degree. All it takes is a little bit of hard work and the urge for the next adventure. Whatever you end up doing, you will have the satisfaction of being part of something totally outside your experience, finding skills you never knew you had and developing those new-found strengths – all with a small wage to help you on your way. I was given a wonderful opportunity to experience a year like no other.

### *RICHARD, YOUTH FOR DEVELOPMENT SCHEME, PHILIPPINES*

During my placement year, I volunteered with Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) under their Youth for Development (YfD) scheme. I worked for a national but small, rural development non-governmental organisation (NGO) called IRDF (Integrated Rural Development Foundation of the Philippines). I was based in the capital, Manila, but had frequent field visits to the rural programme areas. Through project implementation and support, and advocacy campaigns, IRDF aims to improve the livelihoods of peasant farmers and artisan fisherfolk.

My job title was project development officer and advocacy researcher. My responsibilities included: researching (both field and office-based) and writing project development plans and funding proposals for various rural livelihood programmes; conducting research for, and writing advocacy papers on agricultural issues; creating two websites for promotional and information dissemination purposes; and undertaking secretarial work at an international NGO/civil society conference convened by IRDF in Bangkok.

I was responsible for finding my own placement. This was not an easy process; it involved lots of networking, hours of internet searching and the disappointment of many promising avenues closing up. My placement was eventually found through sending an email to the NGO I worked with, having found the address buried deep in the website of one of their occasional Dutch donors.

I don't remember a lot about the application form but think it was fairly straightforward. The VSO assessment day was challenging and tiring but good fun. A number of group activities were followed by an individual interview. After being selected, everyone is put on probation for a period, including a weekend at VSO's training centre in Birmingham. This is a great opportunity to air your concerns, find out more about VSO's expectations and to get to know everyone else in the same boat.

In terms of fundraising to allow me to go on the placement, I received a significant grant from my university, which covered about half of the required amount. The rest was raised through sponsorship to complete the Three Peaks Challenge. The money came together surprisingly easily and writing an article in a local newspaper definitely helped with this. I think it's important to have voluntary/community experience under your belt, especially in the UK - YfD seem to be placing new emphasis on this as part of their selection process. I had spent the previous summer working (unpaid) in rural Kenya helping to build a community centre, teaching geography and taking part in a reforestation project – I think this went a long way to assisting my application.

What kind of person do you need to be to succeed with VSO? Well, bearing in mind that you will be living abroad in unfamiliar and potentially challenging circumstances for up to a year, you need to be strong-willed, confident and

independent. You will also need to be patient, as the pace of life and the work ethic can be very different to that in the UK. However, provided that your expectations are realistic and that you are prepared to be good-humoured and flexible, anyone has the potential to succeed and have a great time.

I would definitely recommend the experience to others – it will stay with me for the rest of my life. As for the future, I have already gained a place on an MSc course in international development as a direct result of my year abroad.

### *MARK, TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE, INDONESIA*

After my degree, I wasn't ready to join the rat race. I saw an English First (EF) advertisement for teaching English abroad and speculatively sent my CV, not really expecting anything, but they invited me for an interview at one of their training centres in Manchester. They offered me a place on a teacher training course on the spot. This was a four-week intensive programme teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). It was offered at a heavily subsidised price (£200 instead of £1,000) providing you agreed to work for EF for a year. They guaranteed you a job, if you successfully completed the training.

As I'd been speaking English for 22 years, I expected the course to be easy. I was wrong. The course began every day at 8am and ran until 6pm, by which time we were exhausted but were expected to go home and work on lesson plans and essays. Six of us began the course but only four of us completed it.

After earning my TEFL certificate, I was given the choice of going to China or Indonesia. I opted for the latter. I decided to go to Jakarta instead of somewhere more remote because I can't bear to be too far away from fast food! Six weeks after finishing university, I was on a plane to South East Asia.

Jakarta was extremely noisy, dirty and polluted but had a great atmosphere and everyone was incredibly friendly. I liked it right away.

Accommodation was provided by the school. I shared a house with the other teachers and we quickly became friends. I taught all kinds of classes, from children to business and exam preparation courses. I found the students were polite, eager to learn and fun to teach. I enjoyed the working hours (afternoon starts, evening finishes) and especially loved going to beautiful secluded beaches at the weekend. My year working there flew by.

Following a brief stint teaching in Casablanca, Morocco, I got a job through an expat teachers' website in Jubail City, Saudi Arabia. They offered a very good tax-free salary, a large house and a short working day. I had to be incredibly culturally sensitive - even little things could cause great offence. On the whole, though, I enjoyed the experience of working there.

As I was approaching the end of my time in the Middle East, I was contacted by the owner of the school I had worked at in Jakarta. He offered me the position of principal of its sister school. I have been here for a year and plan to stay for at least one more. It is quite a responsible (and stressful) position as I'm in charge of teacher training, recruitment, corporate clients and generally making sure things run smoothly.

I believe that many of the skills I have learnt as a teacher will transfer well to any working environment. In an increasingly competitive employment market, anything that sets you apart from the crowd is a good thing. Right now, though, I'm looking forward to my weekend trip to Bali and the class of hyperactive six-year-olds waiting upstairs for me to teach them the alphabet!

# 11 Information sources

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**AGCAS and Graduate Prospects products are available from higher education careers services and on [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk).**

### AGCAS

AGCAS Special Interest booklets:

*Careers and Further Study for International Students; Going for Interviews; Job Seeking Strategies; Making Applications; Postgraduate Study and Research; Using Languages; Your Degree...What Next?; Your Masters...What Next?; Your PhD...What Next?*

AGCAS Sector Briefings:  
*Voluntary Sector*

AGCAS Country Profiles  
AGCAS Occupational Profiles

### Graduate Prospects

*Prospects Directory*  
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[www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)

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BUNAC, [www.bunac.org](http://www.bunac.org)  
Career.edu, <http://career.edu>

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## ADDRESSES

AIESEC, National Office, 2nd Floor,  
29-31 Cowper Street, London EC2A 4AT  
Tel: 020 7549 1800 [www.aiesec.co.uk](http://www.aiesec.co.uk)

Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU),  
36 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PF  
Tel: 020 7380 6700 [www.acu.ac.uk](http://www.acu.ac.uk)

The British Council, Bridgewater House,  
58 Whitworth Street, Manchester M1 6BB  
Tel: 0161 957 7000 [www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)

CERN, European Organisation for Nuclear  
Research, CH-1211, Geneva 23 Switzerland  
Tel: 00 22 76 766 49  
<http://public.web.cern.ch/public>

Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC),  
6 Duke Street, St James's, London SW1Y 6BN  
Tel: 020 7484 7700 [www.cdcgroup.com](http://www.cdcgroup.com)

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St Nicholas Road, Sutton, Surrey SM1 1EL  
Tel: 020 8643 3311 [www.crownagents.com](http://www.crownagents.com)

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1 Palace Street, London SW1E 5HE  
Tel: 0845 300 4100 [www.dfid.gov.uk](http://www.dfid.gov.uk)

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Belgium <http://europa.eu.int/comm>

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Education and Culture, B-1049 Brussels, Belgium  
Tel: 00 32 2 2992339  
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/stages>

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King Charles Street, London SW1A 2AH  
Tel: 020 7008 1500 [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)

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HM Treasury, 1 Horse Guards Road, London  
SW1A 2HQ Tel: 020 7270 4835 [www.ges.gov.uk](http://www.ges.gov.uk)

IAESTE, British Council, 10 Spring Gardens,  
London SW1A 2BN Tel: 020 7389 4771  
[www.iaeste.org.uk](http://www.iaeste.org.uk)

Ministry of Defence (MOD), Main Building,  
Whitehall, London SW1A 2HB  
Tel: 020 7218 9000 [www.mod.uk](http://www.mod.uk)

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UK Socrates Erasmus Council, Rothford,  
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Tel: 01227 762712 [www.erasmus.ac.uk](http://www.erasmus.ac.uk)

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66-74 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6SW  
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Washington DC 20433 USA Tel: 202 473 1000  
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Avenue Appia 20, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland  
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## Checklist

### What should you do next?

Check the websites, contacts and publications listed at the back of this booklet.

Look at the other AGCAS publications listed at the front of this booklet.

Speak to a careers adviser in your HE careers service for more help and information.

Browse the [prospects.ac.uk](http://prospects.ac.uk) website for graduate careers information.

# Guide to AGCAS information on [prospects.ac.uk](http://prospects.ac.uk)

## Options

Ideas of what you can do with your subject of study, with details of skills gained, jobs related to your degree, further study and other options.

**[www.prospects.ac.uk/links/Options](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/Options)**

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**[www.prospects.ac.uk/links/SectorBs](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/SectorBs)**

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