Working abroad

Why work abroad?
For some people working abroad is a logical step in their career. For others it’s a necessity in a tough job market or a desire for a better standard of living. And there are those who do it to experience a different way of life. The reasons to work abroad are numerous, and the experience can be both life enriching and career enhancing.

- **Experiencing different cultures** - employment overseas can provide an opportunity for total immersion in a foreign culture in a way that tourist travel can not. It also provides the possibility to forge friendships with people who may have a very different cultural background to your own.

- **Enhancing employability** - working in a different country can be particularly beneficial in developing certain strengths and skills. Finding and securing the job to make your experience a success will test your initiative and determination. Communication skills will be strengthened through working with people from different cultural backgrounds and overcoming language barriers. You’ll also develop your flexibility when adapting to new and unfamiliar living environments and work cultures. Working abroad is an attractive feature to have on your CV to interest future employers.

- **Gaining experience** - working abroad may also provide experience which is relevant to your chosen career. For example, if you want to get involved in conservation work you could volunteer on an environmental project, or work in a hotel if you want to go on to a job in the hospitality industry. If you want to work in a specific career area, spending time abroad may enable you to experience different practices, attitudes and ideas in the workplace which give you an edge. Future career development opportunities may be significantly enhanced by a period spent working abroad.

- **Taking time out** - for many a student or recent graduate it’s the ideal time to take time out and work abroad before you have commitments like relationships, family, property, which would make leaving the UK difficult. It can be a complete break from studying for students while picking up valuable skills and experience at the same time. For graduates, working overseas might represent a much needed respite before embarking on a career and could provide some useful reflection time, experience and networking opportunities before making any long-term decisions.

- **Limited job opportunities in the UK** - during difficult economic times, better and more plentiful job opportunities may exist in other countries.

- **Better living conditions or higher pay** - some jobs abroad may offer high salaries and/or a better standard of living than in the UK. Some countries may also enable you to live more economically if they have lower taxes, lower accommodation costs and cheaper consumer goods.
• **Altruistic reasons** - particularly for those wanting to work or volunteer in a developing country. Some feel that ‘giving something back’ has a greater effect in a developing country rather than in a Western country like the UK.

• **Family reasons** - such as relocating for a partner’s job, moving to be closer to family or emigrating for a better lifestyle for your own family.

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**Before you make a decision**

Once you have decided to work abroad there are some important considerations for you to think about carefully.

**What are your objectives?**

- Why do you want to work abroad?
- What do you hope to achieve from the experience?
- Where do you want to go?
- What do you want to do?
- How long would you like to spend abroad?
- How will you benefit personally? And in terms of your career?

**Timescales and exit strategies**

- Be realistic about the time it will take to find and plan a job overseas. The process can take a long time and requires careful consideration and good organisation as well as determination.
- Getting meaningful work experience for only a year may be difficult. Your year abroad may easily turn into two or three.
- What will you do when you come back to the UK? Is this your intention? If you plan on using your experience abroad to help get a job once you return, think about how you will market it. Your initiative in getting a job overseas, as well as your motivation in following it through and making it a success, will impress employers. The ability to communicate and work as part of a team with people from a broad range of cultural backgrounds is also an invaluable skill.
- Working abroad may ultimately not suit you. This could be the job itself, the country you’re living in or being away from family and friends. It’s useful to have a back-up plan should this happen.

**Language and cultural issues**

- Being a foreigner with English as a mother tongue can have its advantages, but be aware that many international firms may prefer to hire locals who speak the language. You should check how it will affect your employment chances if you’re not competent in the country’s language.
• The type of work you are doing, your employer and the country you are in will all determine the level of language skills required. An IT job in a multinational organisation, for example, may be possible with more limited language skills.

• Even if a high standard of the language is not required, you may want to demonstrate your cultural adaptability by learning it anyway. You will need to be prepared to devote time and effort to doing so. You may be able to take a course at your university, local college or in your destination country. Research your options as costs can vary widely.

• If one of your aims is to improve you language skills, then consider the opportunities to practice the language if working as an au pair and living with a local family compared to teaching English and sharing a flat with other expats.

• However much you may think you know about your destination country, be prepared to adjust to cultural norms and behaviour both socially and in the workplace. Expect to experience ‘culture shock’ for the first few weeks or months in a new country. Prepare yourself mentally by researching the aspects of the culture you might find unusual or difficult. Read as much as you can and speak to other people who have moved to that country to live and work.

• Your living and working environments may be predetermined by the type of job you are doing. If not, it is something you need to consider. For example, would you prefer to be surrounded by expats, so that you feel more at home? Or would you rather be surrounded by the local community, so you get a real feel for the culture? Before you go, check that you will be happy with the living arrangements as well as the work setting.

Family impact

If you are moving with family or a partner, consider how they will fit into the new environment and the implications working abroad may have for them, such as with their work or education. Even if friends and family are being left behind, your move will still have an impact on them as well.

Which countries can I work in?

In theory, you can work anywhere in the world. In reality, you may find yourself restricted. It depends on the state of the local employment market, work permit requirements and immigration procedures. Enquiries about all of these issues are best made to the appropriate embassy or high commission in the UK and Expertise in Labour Mobility offers useful information on the job market and recruitment practices in various countries.

• European Union (EU) nationals have the right to work in any other EU member state (as well as Iceland, Lichtenstein and Norway) without the need for a work permit. However, unemployment tends to be higher in some of the newer member states, so it may be more difficult to find a job there.

• Immigration into Commonwealth countries is becoming more difficult, as they produce large numbers of their own graduates.
- **Overseas organisations** are often only interested in recruiting British graduates if they are unable to satisfy recruitment needs from their own nationals. This applies in reverse conditions too, with it being difficult for non-EU nationals to get employment in the UK if there are British people who can do the job.

- **Immigrant visas** will usually only be issued to individuals applying from their home country. Graduates who get offered permanent employment whilst in their destination country will usually have to return home to obtain the proper visa. This can be a lengthy process, sometimes lasting up to 12 months, so you should not rely on finding a permanent job when you get to your new country.

- **Some countries, such as the US**, will only issue work visas to individuals with definite jobs to go to, and the visa application process has to be instigated by the employer. It may be possible to be transferred on a temporary basis if you already work for a company that has offices in the UK, as well as your destination country. However, such employment will not allow you to stay permanently, so you need to look into what visa you would require if you wish to stay longer.

- **Other countries, such as Australia, New Zealand and Japan**, offer working holiday visas that allow you to combine work and travel for up to a year. These schemes are particularly aimed at people who want to take on casual work while they travel to top up their funds.

- **Apply for your visa in plenty of time** as obtaining a visa can be a long and complicated process. Make allowances for this and ensure you are getting the correct visa.

- **Get up-to-date information** on your destination country to make sure it is safe to travel. Always remember to check the website of the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)](https://www.gov.uk/government) before you leave.

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### Types of work

There’s a huge range of opportunities for students and graduates wishing to work abroad. Here are some ideas of the type of work open to you.

#### Casual work

The majority of casual employment is in the hospitality and tourism sectors, like hotel and bar work, or working as a holiday rep. Other typical jobs range from fruit picking to au pairing. Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand and North America offer the best opportunities.

#### Internships and exchange programmes

- Opportunities in Europe are available through the [Erasmus](https://www.erasmus.eu) European Exchange Programme.
• **AIESEC (Association Internationale des Etudiants en Sciences Economiques et Commerciales)** offers international internships from 6 weeks to 18 months for students and recent graduates.

• **IAESTE (International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience)** provides science, engineering and applied arts undergraduates with paid relevant work experience abroad.

• **Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE)** helps students find work in the USA for up to 4 months.

• The **Leonardo da Vinci Programme** offers funded work placements in Europe, available through the European Union’s vocational training programme. You can also apply for placements and other schemes via **European Training Services**.

• You may be able to do your sandwich placement year abroad, so discuss this option with your tutors.

**Voluntary work**

Overseas projects are often based in the developing world, working with local communities tackling issues around health, social care, education and conservation.

For all volunteering opportunities, you should have a realistic idea of the contribution you can make and what is expected of you. Ensure that you have everything in writing before you go. Organisations should be able put you in touch with a returned volunteer who can give you first-hand information. Speak to your careers service if you are unsure about the organisation.

To find international opportunities, your local volunteering centre can be a good starting point. They may be able to recommend some matching agencies as well as specific organisations.

**Teaching**

Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) is a very popular way for new graduates without specialist experience and skills to obtain work overseas. Teachers are employed in commercial language schools, state schools, education and development organisations, and large companies. There are more structured teaching programmes specific to individual countries as well.

There are also international schools operating all over the world in need of qualified teachers. Experienced teachers are recruited to teach the normal range of subjects at primary and secondary level.

**Academic research and lecturing**

Getting posts overseas can be competitive and you must have a good academic record. The **Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU)** publishes a regular bulletin of jobs in
Commonwealth universities. European Researchers Mobility Portal (Euraxess) is a one-stop shop for researchers moving between EU countries. And Jobs.ac.uk advertises academic posts in the UK and abroad.

Consultancy

There has been a steady growth in the volume of consulting business undertaken by British companies overseas, and many UK companies plan to branch into new and emerging markets. Consultancy work, especially for experienced professionals, can be found with both large international companies and smaller niche businesses.

Creative industry

The creative arts industry offers good opportunities for work abroad, from touring musicians to artists promoting and selling their work. The European Commission Culture Programme aims to promote cross-border mobility of those working in the sector.

Finance

The financial sector is a global industry with major financial centres throughout the world. However, with the decreasing numbers of visas available and banks demanding that their graduates have knowledge of the region they will be working in, it is very hard to land your first graduate job overseas. Working abroad is more likely once you’re established in your career.

Oil and gas

The oil and gas sector offers many opportunities to work overseas, predominantly in Africa and the Middle East. Working for an international energy company does not guarantee that you will work abroad though, as many companies choose to employ local people.

Self-employment

Setting up a business overseas is a much bigger undertaking than becoming self-employed in the UK. As planning and setting up in business in a foreign country can be very complex, many people use the services of a specialist consultancy to advise them.

Finding overseas employers

Finding potential employers will depend on the sort of work you would like to do and the sector, if any, you would like to work in. Use the suggestions here to find an employer who is right for you.
• **UK employer with overseas offices** - check company websites to see if a specific company has offices overseas. However, you will need to be realistic. There are no guarantees that you will be able to work in an overseas office. There are likely to be more overseas opportunities once you have gained experience. Some companies only offer opportunities in particular destinations, while others may be happy to send you anywhere in the world.

• **Companies that recruit worldwide** - examples include investment banks/retail banks; solicitors with international divisions; accountancy firms - particularly those with a consultancy arm; oil companies; fast-moving consumer goods companies; civil and structural engineering companies; the armed forces; and the civil service. Many government departments offer both short-term and long-term postings overseas as well. These include the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office), the [Department for International Development (DFID)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-international-development) and the [Ministry of Defence (MoD)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-defence). The main route for graduates is via the [Civil Service Fast Stream](https://civilservicejobs.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/), but other vacancies are advertised by the individual departments via [Civil Service Jobs Online](https://www.civilservicejobs.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/).

• **Overseas job postings** - explore international job posting websites like [4 International Careers & Jobs](https://www.4internationalcareers.com), to learn about potential employers. Services such as [Going Global](https://www.goingglobal.co.uk), which are often available through university careers services, have lists of international vacancies.

• **Business directories** - such as [Kompass](https://www.kompass.com) and [Europages](https://www.europages.com) are searchable databases of companies. Professional associations frequently publish their members on their websites, effectively providing you with lists of potential employers. If you need help finding the appropriate body, check with their UK equivalent.

• **Online journals, magazines and newspapers** - these usually have a jobs section and may show which employers are active in your chosen country or area. Newspapers are usually more general and advertise a range of jobs in various sectors, and from casual to professional level. [Kidon Media-Link](https://www.kidonmedia-link.com) provides access to foreign newspapers.

• **Networking** - contact people in your chosen career field who are working in overseas posts to learn more about how they got their job and to get advice. You could also try speaking to people from the country you want to work in to get local information about the best places to look for jobs.

• **International students** - international students graduating from British universities should note that UK-based international companies regularly recruit those interested in returning to work in their home countries. Similarly, companies from overseas regularly target international students (and home students) studying at UK universities.

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**Vacancies abroad**

Where to look for vacancies will vary from country to country, but here are some good starting points wherever you want to work.

**Where to find vacancies**
• **EURES - European Job Mobility Portal** - has a huge database of jobs from over 30 European countries.

• **Eurograduate - The European Graduate Career Guide** - lists vacancies in Europe and worldwide.

• **Europages and Kompass** - online directories with links to companies in Europe and worldwide.

• **Jobs Abroad** - provides a database of job vacancies around the world.

• **International Job Online** - vacancies and careers information particularly aimed at international students and those seeking work overseas after graduation.

• 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.

• Use the websites of professional bodies for the sector you want to work in. If you can’t find the appropriate organisation contact the UK equivalent for suggestions.

**International organisations**

• Vacancies with major international organisations are advertised either in the national press, in professional journals or on their own websites. While some do have schemes for recent graduates, the majority of vacancies are for specialists or those who are well-established in their career.

• **The British Council** - advertises jobs in TEFL and education generally, as well as a range of consultancy posts in finance, health and the environment. They also work on arts events in over 100 countries and have contacts for those in the creative sector wishing to work abroad. There are also a few opportunities to staff British Council offices overseas, although these tend to be for people with extensive work experience.

• **European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN)** - the world’s largest particle physics laboratory (based in Switzerland) offers a range of career opportunities of varying time periods for undergraduates, graduates and experienced researchers in particle physics, computer science, engineering and mathematics.

• **European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO)** - organises open competitions to select highly qualified staff for recruitment to all institutions of the European Union (EU).

• **European Commission Traineeships Office (Bureau de Stages)** - operates an in-service training and work attachment programme enabling recent university graduates to gain first-hand experience of the workings of EU institutions. Traineeships last for about five months and start either in March or October.

• **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** - offers a variety of programmes, including their Research Assistants Programme (for new graduates with a ‘superior academic record’) and their Fund Internship programme (for PhD students specialising in macroeconomics or a related field). There’s also the IMF’s Economist Programme (EP), where participants typically either have a PhD or are studying for one.

• **United Nations (UN)** - offer a range of opportunities, including programmes for young professionals, associate experts, internships and volunteers. They also offer temporary jobs. Roles in specific divisions, such as **The UN Refugee Agency UNCHR**, are advertised on the divisions’ own websites.
• **The World Bank** - operates the Young Professionals Program for the recruitment of people under the age of 32 for two-year postings. Applicants must specialise in a field relevant to the World Bank’s operations and have significant, relevant professional experience or continued academic study at doctoral level.

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**Checklist**

In addition to finding a job, there are some issues you need to consider in advance. Working through this checklist is a good idea.

**Visas and work permits**

• UK or EU citizens do not need a work permit or visa to work legally in any other country in the **European Union (EU)**.

• For many other countries - most notably the USA - it is much more difficult to obtain a work permit. In most cases, you will need a job offer before getting the relevant visa. This needs to be applied for, on your behalf, by your prospective employer.

• Some countries have skilled migration programmes designed to attract suitably qualified foreign workers to plug skills shortages in the local economy. The immigration section of government websites will inform you of any specialist programmes.

• Some countries - like Australia, Canada and New Zealand - operate a points system to determine visa eligibility. This is for those wishing to emigrate rather than work short-term.

• Check the relevant foreign embassy in the UK for specific information about visas and other legal requirements. Contact details for all foreign embassies in the UK are available at **Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)**.

• Certain countries require a passport to remain valid for a minimum period after the date you enter the country, so ensure your passport is ok.

**Health and insurance**

• The UK has reciprocal healthcare arrangements with most European countries, which means that UK citizens are entitled to free or reduced-cost medical treatment. If you’re working in a European Economic Area (EEA) country, you will need to obtain a **European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)** to qualify.

• Outside the EEA, you will generally have to pay for medical treatment. It is advisable to investigate healthcare costs and options for getting health insurance. A country-by-country guide to entitlements is available from **NHS Country Guidance**.

• If you require vaccinations, check with your GP when you need to receive them.

• Getting adequate travel insurance before you go is very important. It can help you get practical, as well as financial, assistance abroad should something go wrong. Prices and levels of cover vary widely, so it is worth shopping around.
The FCO has helpful advice on staying safe and healthy abroad, finding the right insurance and what to do if things go wrong.

Financial matters

- **Tax** - if you’re moving overseas inform HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC). Even if you are not living in the UK there may be a requirement for you to pay tax, depending on your situation. Also, find out about the tax system in your destination country and how it will affect you.
- **National insurance** - you may be required to pay UK National Insurance contributions while you are working abroad, contact HMRC.
- **Pensions** - if you’re already in a UK-based pension scheme, you should seek advice on the implications of working overseas for your pension status, contact HMRC. You may also wish to seek professional pension advice.
- In all these matters you need to consider the implications when you are abroad and what needs to be done if/when you return.

Transferability of qualifications

- Your qualifications might not be clearly understood by potential employers, unfamiliar with the UK education system. In a bid to help with this, Europass, a European-wide initiative, provides a portfolio of five documents which serve to increase the transparency of people’s competencies, skills and qualifications through a standardised format.
- Overseas employers may place value on different factors compared with UK employers, so you’ll need to tailor applications appropriately.

Accommodation

- Unless your employer is organising accommodation overseas on your behalf, you should look into housing opportunities and any property regulations which may affect you.
- Be extremely careful of handing over money in advance. If in doubt, take someone with you who speaks the language when viewing properties, so they can help with questions and contract terms. Don’t sign anything you don’t understand and get it translated if necessary.
- The Association of International Property Professionals (AIPP) has a searchable database of members which will help you identify estate agents to contact.
- Directgov - Preparing to move or retire abroad has a useful checklist to work through before you go.

Family matters

- Family members travelling with you may not necessarily have the same residency status as you.
- Partners may not be entitled to work in your chosen country just because you can.
• If you’re travelling overseas with children, you should consider what educational facilities are available for them.

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