

Where next? Unlocking the

This guide has been compiled from the 2004 Subject Centre publication, •A Brief Guide to

# Aim of this guide

Using this employability guide is a way to help you, as a philosophy student, reflect on the skills you are gaining as you study, and gather evidence of these skills being put into practice. Sometimes with a non-vocational course, it can be hard to see how what you learn in the course of your studies will prepare you for your post-university career. Being comfortable with this yourself, and getting it across to future employers, is vital, particularly in a subject such as philosophy where there are plenty of popular misconceptions about what the subject actually entails.

Evidence of the skills you possess can also come from work experience and extra-curricular activities. Reflecting on these skills can help with writing up progress files or personal development planning, CV writing and job applications. There are lots of general resources available about how to write a good CV or job application, and how to do well in interviews, and you will find information about some of these in the •Resources• section at the end. This guide doesn't attempt to replace those resources, but rather to get you thinking about the specific skills that doing philosophy develops in you, and how you can use examples to demonstrate your skills when you apply for a job or go for an interview. The most important thing that we hope this guide will do is help you to articulate why you will be a good employee (because of all the skills you've developed by doing philosophy!) so that you can get the job you want.

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## General philosophical skills

1. Articulacy in accurately identifying underlying issues in all kinds of debate.
2. Logical thinking and presentation in the analysis and formulation of complex and controversial problems.
3. Sensitivity in interpretation of thoughts and ideas drawn from both history and current trends.
4. Clarity and rigour in the critical assessment of arguments presented in such thoughts and ideas.
5. Ability to use and criticise specialised philosophical terminology.
6. Ability to abstract, analyse and construct sound arguments and to identify logical inconsistency.
7. Ability to recognise methodological errors, rhetorical devices, unexamined conventional wisdom, unnoticed assumptions, vagueness and superficiality.
8. Ability to move between general and appropriately detailed discussion, providing examples to support or challenge a position, and distinguishing relevant and irrelevant considerations.
9. Ability to consider unfamiliar ideas and ways of thinking, and to examine pre-suppositions and methods critically within the discipline itself.

## Engaging in philosophical debate

10. Ability to conduct arguments about matters of the highest moment without recourse to insult or susceptibility to take offence.
11. Willingness to evaluate opposing arguments, to formulate and consider the best arguments for different views and to identify the weakest elements of the most persuasive view.
12. Honesty in recognising the force of the conclusions warranted by a careful assessment of pertinent arguments.
13. The ability to work with and in relation to others through the presentation of ideas and information and the collective negotiation of solutions.
14. Ability to cross traditional subject boundaries, examining the limitations and virtues of other disciplines and





## 2. What do employers want from you?

### Desired employee attributes and skills

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Analysis	Relates and compares data from different sources, identifying issues, securing relevant information and identifying relationships.
Judgement	Determines the most appropriate course of action and draws conclusions that are based on logical assumptions that reflect factual information.
Attention to detail	Accomplishes tasks through a concern for all areas involved, no matter how small.
Planning and organising	Establishes a course of action for self and/or others to accomplish a specific goal. Plans proper assignments of personnel and appropriate allocation of resources.



and information and the collective negotiation of solutions• could be used here. In studying for your philosophy degree you will be familiar with discussing difficult topics with others and developing your ideas through this discussion. Also, remember that there are ways that your course can demonstrate

Influencing	Influences others by expressing self effectively in a group and in one to one situations.
Interpersonal sensitivity	Recognises and respects different perspectives and appreciates the benefits of being open to the ideas and views of others.
Listening	Shows by a range of verbal and non-verbal signals that the information being received is understood.
Questioning	Uses an appropriate approach to questioning in order to gain information from which to draw conclusions and / or assist in the making of decisions.
Written communication	Expresses ideas effectively and conveys information appropriately and accurately.

Life long learning and development	Develops the skills and competencies of self, peers and colleagues through learning and development activities related to current and future roles.
Organisational sensitivity	Is sensitive to the effect of his or her actions on other parts of the organisation and adopts a mature, direct and up front style in dealing with conflict.
Personal development	Maintains an up to date personal development plan and takes action to ensure personal development takes place.
Teamwork / working with others	Builds and develops appropriate relationships with academic staff, peers, colleagues, customers and suppliers at all levels within an organisation.
Tolerance for stress	Maintains performance under pressure and / or opposition.

## Technical ability

For example, having the knowledge and experience of working with relevant modern laboratory equipment.

While you may not think that philosophy imparts any particular technical knowledge, your use of IT to research and write, and the other skills you may learn such as using email to network, or project management software to help you plan larger projects, are invaluable here. Don't underestimate the value of such technical knowledge ... use your time at university to develop these skills and always make them explicit when applying for jobs.

Technical application	Has experience of using modern technology.
Technical knowledge	Develops and maintains a body of knowledge of key trends in technology.

## Business and / or organisation awareness

An appreciation of how businesses operate through having had (preferably relevant) work experience.

Although this set of skills seems to be purely related to work experience, as a philosophy student you are very well equipped to build up this type of knowledge. When you apply for a job, spend time using your research skills to build up an understanding of the organisation you want to work with, and how your role will interact with the business processes. And of course, if you know what particular line of work you want to go into after your degree, setting up some work experience or summer or part time work in the relevant area will be invaluable.

Commercial awareness	Understands the economics of the business. Understands the business benefits and commercial realities from both the organisation's and the customer's perspectives.
Financial awareness	Understands basic financial terminology used in organisations and is able to construct and maintain simple financial records.

Organisation understanding	Understands the organisation's work environment, internal politics, business objectives and strategy.
Process operation	Begins, controls and concludes a complete process or procedure.

## Practical elements ... vocational courses

Critical evaluation of the outcomes of professional practice; reflect and review own practice; participate and review quality control processes and risk management.

Again, while it might be difficult to see how you can demonstrate this within the context of your philosophy studies, the robust nature of philosophical debate should give you the confidence to interact at all levels. Go to conferences or philosophy society meetings and gain experience of talking to people at a higher level in the same business (learning about and contributing to philosophy) as you. And if you decide that you want to do a particular vocational course, your ability to assimilate knowledge and understand processes will stand you in good stead.

Presents a strong, professional, positive image to others at all times. This image is consistent with all people (colleagues, management and peers, customers etc.).

Now, let's have a look at some real job adverts and selection criteria used by employers. We have looked at the extent to which they match up with the skills highlighted in Section 1, and this should help you to get a better idea of how to link up what you can do with what employers are asking for.

The specified criteria taken from the job specification or description are shown in the box in the centre. In the boxes round the outside, we have annotated the criteria with examples of the way in which a philosophy student might demonstrate how their skills satisfy the criteria, and which skills from section 1 are relevant for each point (shown in numbers in brackets after the text). Try doing this yourself with job adverts and selection criteria you're interested in; pick out the key words to do with the skills employers require, and look at which of the skills from the Benchmark Statement in Section 1 could be used to demonstrate how you satisfy those criteria.

## Example 1: the law firm

These criteria are given by a leading law firm as the qualities and skills they want in a graduate trainee. As you can see, this employer is looking for very similar skills to those listed in section 2. For example, cognitive skills such as analysis and judgement, personal capabilities such as creativity and teamwork, and technical abilities in the use of IT.

Bright ... Generally we look for a 2:1 at degree level. You need sharp mind, the ability to tackle complex legal and business issues and take a commercial view.

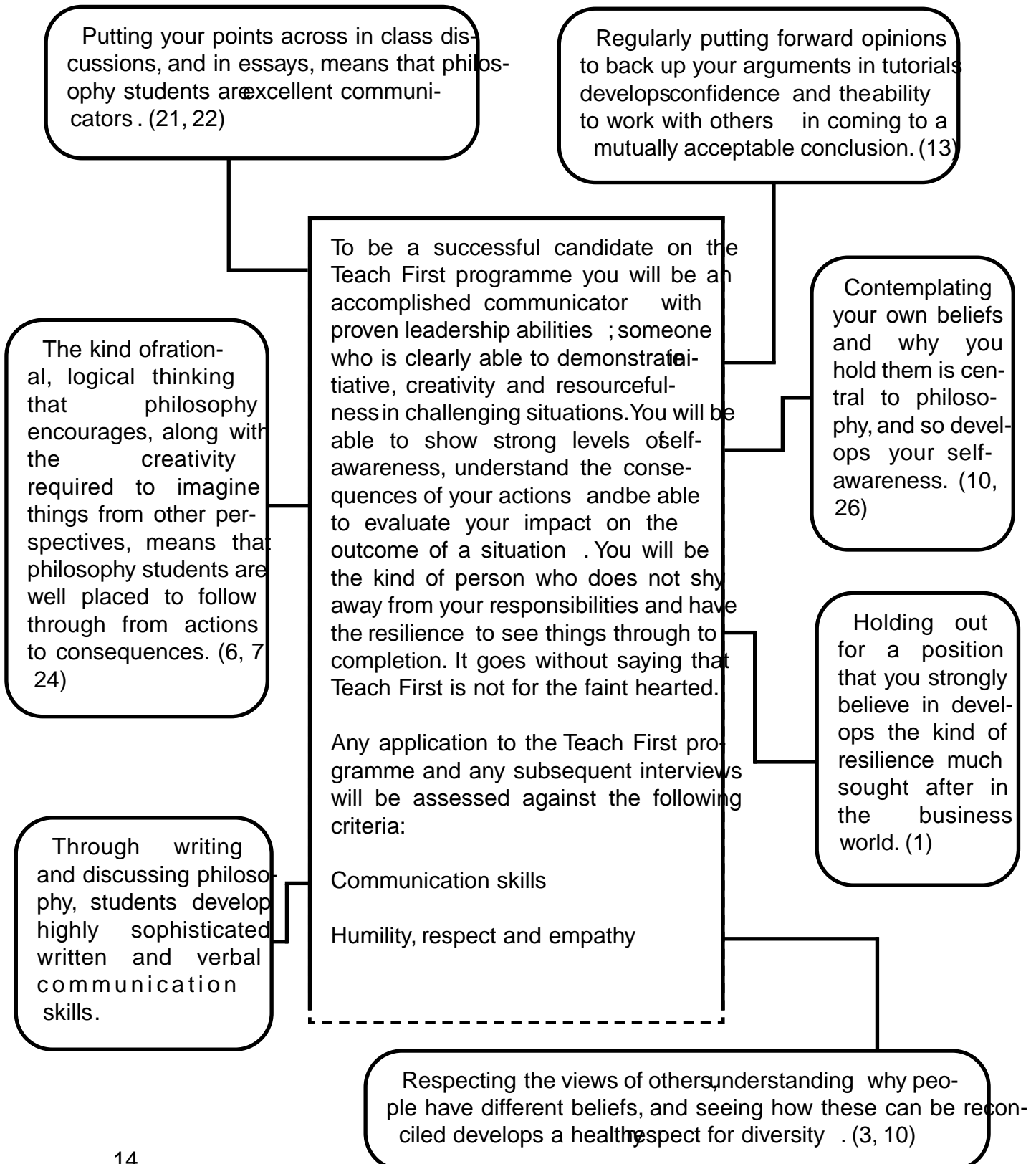
Creative and practical ... Interpreting complex law and developing solutions to demanding commercial briefs takes a great deal of processing power, coupled with a creative, analytical and pragmatic approach .

Common sense ... Invaluable when it comes to developing workable legal solutions which deliver practical business benefit for clients.

Sense of humour ... The law is a demanding occupation, so the ability to take a

## Example 2: the Teach First programme

These criteria are given on the Teach First website as skills they are particularly interested in. Again, you can see that this programme requires very similar skills to the ones given in section 2; generic competencies such as communication and interpersonal sensitivity (in the form of humility, respect and empathy), and personal capabilities such as creativity, initiative, leadership and teamwork.



As shown above, philosophers are independent-

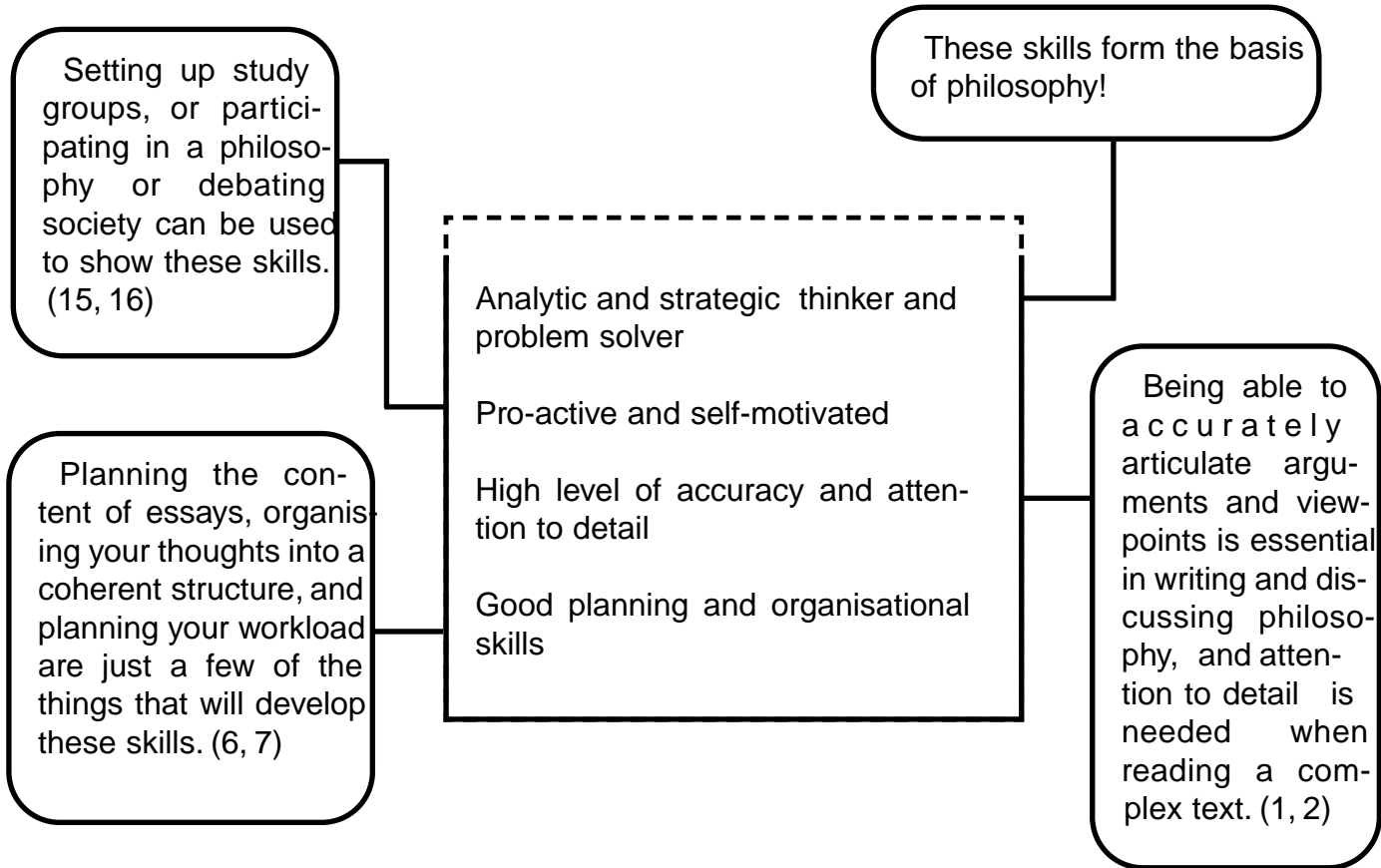
Leading discussion, and, as above, starting study groups and societies, shows how philosophy can develop leadership skills.

## Example 3: best of the rest

In addition to the full sets of criteria above, we have compiled a collection of frequently used criteria that appear in a lot of job adverts and graduate training schemes. Each individual point is one that appears in an actual person specification, although we have drawn them from several different sources.

- Excellent interpersonal and influencing skills
- Self reliant with ability to work under pressure with minimal supervision
- Ability to identify need; prioritise workloads; set achievable targets; evaluate progress; and to meet deadlines
- Commitment to own training (CPD) and development
- Experience in building partner-





## 4. Case Studies

### Real life examples of philosophy graduates• experience

These case studies are designed to get you thinking about where your degree might take you, not just for your first job but on into your future career.

They give you a snapshot of two philosophy graduates• experiences during and after university, and show how careers can develop after leaving university, and how the skills and attitudes you develop whilst studying can continue to stand you in good stead long after graduation.

### Elisabeth ... BA (Hons) Philosophy, Hull University, 1985-1988

•Studying philosophy has allowed me to consider the bigger picture on all issues and to understand there are always opposite opinions and there are no absolute truths in life. The notion that there is always a deeper level to issues that may seem simple has given me strong investigative and problem solving skills in the workplace.

To me as a person the subject has been really useful as it•s helped me understand myself and others. I would describe myself as •philosophical• and am constantly using my ability to constructively challenge others• thinking and beliefs. As a philosopher I am aware that people have their own belief systems and I am happy to debate others• belief systems in the workplace to challenge processes and develop new ways of doing things.Ž

Graduate programme at  
Commercial Union

•This allowed me to develop my employability and recognise my strengths, particularly in regard to managing others and planning.

Regional Office Manager  
for the Criminal  
Intelligence Service

In this job I managed a team of over thirty staff. Here the problem solving skills I developed studying philosophy helped me support my team th others iPgh tims of phalge pnd pn rtr1 (elssul aityation.

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Founder and Director of a  
Complementary Health  
Centre

Research Associate for the  
University of Birmingham

Current job roles

€ Project Development  
Officer for Walsall  
Hospice Appeal

I work for Walsall Primary Care Trust fundraising for a hospice development.

€ Private Practice  
Hypnotherapist

This involves seeing clients one to one and supporting them as they make changes in their lives related for example to health or personal relationships.

Reflections on my career  
path

I have enjoyed the flexibility that my career path has offered. I left my philosophy course with a strong sense of the need to be flexible and take risks. All my work experience has been useful and helped me develop a good understanding of people in different working environments and organisational cultures. I plan to continue progressing and changing within my career. I see the career choices I have made as part of a continual process of learning and growing in self awareness, and my own personal development is firmly at the top of my agenda.Ž

## James ... BA (Hons) Philosophy, University of Wales, Lampeter, 1990-1994

•The ability to reason, question and learn is probably the most important skill required in a job market that is always growing and changing. For every career that can be defined and a vocational course built around it there are many that simply rely on individual aptitude and the ability to create. It is here that I think philosophy though maligned in the past really shines.Ž

Diagnostics Technician in  
NTL Telecommunications

•I suppose the old chestnut •Learning how to think not what to think• really sums it up. The ability to think laterally and find alternative solutions to problems, the ability to empathise with the positions of others and find the best overall course of action, and the ability to plan in a structured way and separate the relevant from the irrelevant, have all come in useful in my career.

Capacity Planner and  
Controller in NTL  
Telecommunications

When I graduated I was looking for a job that would use my creative ideas and logic skills. The ability to logically evaluate a problem helped me diagnose the cause of new problems. I was also able to build structured and intuitive resources for others to learn from.

In demand planning I had to identify processes and then model their behaviour to perform forecasts. This meant being able to interview people and get all aspects of their part of the puzzle, understand the system processes and ultimately model the entire thing to generate plans of action. I can only attribute my ability to do this to the skills of structured thought, logic and discussion I gained from my degree. There were several instances where

simply by challenging existing working practices, huge improvements were made.

In my work as a Senior Analyst the real benefit of having studied philosophy was that I had the skills to evaluate business practices, identify the moments of truth within those practices and then define and implement the measurements that reflected true evaluation of performance whilst giving a sense of ownership to individual areas of that business practice. Central to this is the understanding and application of positive and normative analysis, phrases stolen by economics but with a good healthy philosophical ancestry.

This role covers the scoping, design, implementation and review of business analysis strategy. A large part of my current job is to provide IT solutions for large complex businesses. This is a problem solving role on a big scale and often involves helping businesses to make huge cost savings.

I don't see my role now as particularly technical ... more a case of understanding models, structures and concepts and coming up with creative solutions. Combining business thinking with technical sense involves interviewing clients to understand both their business needs and technical problems. Then it's up to me to put my creative thinking to the test and come up with solutions that aim to improve business performance and profitability.

# 5. Resources

## Extra resources on the PRS website

We hope that you have found the information in this guide a helpful way to start thinking about employability. However, there are additional resources available on our website that expand on some of the areas covered.

In section 2 you will have read about the qualities employers look for in the graduates they recruit. On this page of our website <http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/employability> you can find a large selection of reflective questions that should help you to think more deeply about ways to demonstrate that your skills match the qualities employers are looking for.

You can also find a table demonstrating how the skills in section 2 that employers want match up with the Benchmark skills in section 1, on this page <http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/employability>

## Other resources

In addition to the extra resources we provide on our website, here are some other sources of careers information that will be relevant as you make the transition from university to work, further study or other developmental opportunities. This information represents a starting point and we would strongly advise you to visit your own university Careers Service, which will have many additional sources of information and advice.

Prospects	This is described as the official graduate website and has a lot of useful information linked to job vacancies, postgraduate study and information on what graduates go on to do. There are also lots of useful resources on how to write your CV, tips for filling in job applications, and advice about interview techniques in the •Jobs and Work• section of the site. <a href="http://www.prospects.ac.uk">http://www.prospects.ac.uk</a>
Milkround	This is a graduate careers portal for students and graduates, listing jobs on the site, and sending relevant opportunities directly to those who sign up. It also has a useful •Advice• section, containing profiles of different types of jobs, advice about job applications, covering letters, CV writing, psychometric testing, interviews etc., and interesting profiles of recent graduates now working for different companies. <a href="http://www.milkround.com/s4/jobseekers/">http://www.milkround.com/s4/jobseekers/</a>
Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS)	The professional association of careers staff working in the sector. The site gives an insight into the work of AGCAS and its careers information products including books, videos and useful web links. There are several useful resources in the •Products and Publications• section of the site <a href="http://www.agcas.org.uk">http://www.agcas.org.uk</a>

The AGR is an independent, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting employers in all aspects of graduate recruitment. They produce research surveys on graduate salaries, skills and other labour market information.

<http://www.agr.org.uk>

In the •Info• and •Careers• sections of the NUS site there are lots



