

20

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS AFTER GRADUATION

CHAPTER STRUCTURE

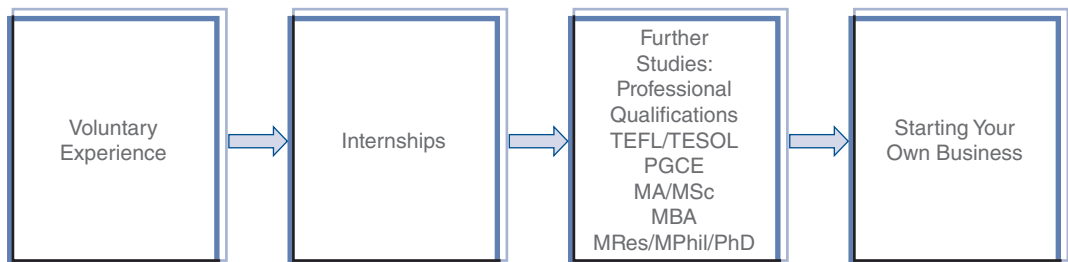



Figure 20.1



When you see the  this means go to the companion website <https://study.sagepub.com/morgan2e> to do a quiz, complete a task, read further or download a template.

AIMS OF THE CHAPTER

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Recognise that graduate employment is not the only option after undergraduate studies.
- Understand your own capacity to take up additional options.
- Evaluate which option(s) are applicable to your own situation.
- Develop practical strategies for taking up alternative options.

INTRODUCTION

It is generally thought that a university education is intended to prepare you for a career, usually a career with a blue-chip multinational organisation. The idea is that, after you graduate, you will find a management or graduate trainee position where you can earn a good salary and start to develop your career towards the top of whatever organisation you start working for – maybe for government or for a large corporation. There used to be the view that graduating meant you were almost guaranteed a career.

Neither is necessarily the case. Graduates from university have a range of options, and even if those options include employment, organisations can be very different. Public sector employers – including universities and local authorities – are often the biggest employers in many U.K. towns, while voluntary organisations can offer very rewarding opportunities for those with a strong social view. But there are other alternatives as well – including volunteering and internships – which can be low-risk options for those unsure about what they want to do.

We do need to be clear about what we mean by ‘job’ and ‘career’. A career is usually seen as long term, maybe 20 years or more. We talk about people having ‘a career in ...’ and follow with something relating to a particular business role (e.g. HRM), or ‘a career with ...’ a particular company. Both uses of the word refer to something different from a ‘job’, which is usually seen as short term, something which can be changed relatively easily and something which is primarily used to pay for living expenses on a day-to-day basis. Many people aspire to develop their career, and most will have a series of jobs before ‘settling’ on one career and moving forward in that role or company.

This chapter outlines some basic thoughts regarding these options, giving some benefits and risks to each option. The one outcome that nobody wants (and that this text has been intending to prevent) is to be unemployed with no daytime activities; this has been shown to harm mental health. Assuming that you do not wish to be unemployed and that you do not have a graduate trainee contract, this chapter may give you some ideas moving forward. It will look at voluntary work, setting up your own business, postgraduate study (Master’s, PGCE and PhD) and teaching English as a foreign language. The structure of this chapter is somewhat different to those of other chapters; the aim is to give you information rather than to facilitate your learning and development. We begin by looking at voluntary work experience and examine the kinds of opportunities available, the personal qualities needed and additional issues to consider before starting a career.

It is worth noting that you may already have done – or be doing – some of these activities. If you are, then of course you can choose to either continue those activities, or to do something different, but this chapter is designed to examine some additional ideas for life after graduation.

VOLUNTARY EXPERIENCE

Voluntary experience is by its very nature ‘voluntary’ (i.e. it is typically unpaid) and is undertaken by individuals who want or need to gain some kind of experience before entering the workforce.

Such experience can take a variety of diverse forms:

- Working on a farm or in a factory.
- Undertaking charity work, either in your own country or overseas (e.g. nature conservation, building a school, providing healthcare).
- Work shadowing a company manager.
- Teaching English. (Note that you should be trained and qualified if you are doing this for a professional organisation.)
- Leading or taking part in an expedition (e.g. Operation Raleigh or Duke of Edinburgh’s Award scheme).



'VOLUNTARY EXPERIENCE'

Voluntary experience is work undertaken without contract or obligation on either party, which is unpaid and undertaken to gain experience.

There are no formal obligations or accountabilities when it comes to voluntary work experience, so it is entirely up to you as to how you structure, plan and thus benefit (or otherwise) from any such experience.

The aims of such a form of experience are usually to obtain some practical work experience that you did not get during your degree, and to add to that experience in a real-world setting. You probably will not get a decent level of experience (you will not usually be asked to handle any large budgets, for example) that

requires a more formal arrangement and additional accountability, but you might have the chance to develop some skills relevant to the roles you wish to fulfil. Companies familiar with providing voluntary experience may need you to sign some type of statement that, whatever you do in front of others as a representative of the company providing the experience, limits their liability (e.g. if you break something while visiting a customer). Box 20.1 discusses how to obtain voluntary work experience.

BOX 20.1

How to Obtain Voluntary Work Experience

Because there is less formality to voluntary arrangements, you will not see companies going through a formalised recruitment process. It is possible that some organisations might advertise that they provide voluntary experience in some instances, but by far the easiest way to obtain such experience is simply to write and ask.

Find some organisations which are either in the kind of business you wish to work in during the years ahead or local and large enough to provide you with something interesting to do, find out the name of the local manager, and then politely write and ask.

Explain what kinds of activities/experiences you are looking for and/or the kinds of skills you want to develop, and why. Also, ask whether there might be anything you can do to help them out.

It takes some initiative and a little bit of courage if you have never done it before, but if you approach the right person and explain what you are looking for, then there will often be something interesting you can help with.

There are also volunteering programmes available in many universities. These may involve helping a professor with their research or assisting in an administrative office. You won't be given access to grades or confidential information, but you will be given the chance to work with others and develop skills.

Personal Attributes Required/Developed

The nature of the skills you develop and the personal qualities you need to make the experience work for you will vary from person to person, and from experience to experience. To begin with, you might need a little tenacity to try to get the experience you are seeking and some creativity to find the right kinds of opportunities, but it is really important to think through what skills you wish to develop.

Having had some voluntary experience, you will probably be able to persuade an interviewer that you are proactive (if you went out and asked for the experience, rather than waited for someone else to suggest it), you are determined (if you asked a number of individuals for the experience) and you are able to work independently (if your experience required you to do so) and/or as part of a team (if your experience required you to do so). If the work experience was very structured with definite start and stop

times each day, then that might mean you had to be disciplined, and if you had to communicate with others, then that is something to be noted.

If you have chosen to work with a particular organisation or with people working in a particular role, then exposure to that organisation and that role and the decisions individuals have to take will help you understand what it is like to work in such an organisation, which will prepare you for interview.

Issues to Consider

Why are you seeking this experience?

If you are seeking voluntary experience with a work organisation, you should think about why you are undertaking this experience with this individual organisation. Wanting to develop your skills is fine, but there is nothing worse than turning up to an office one day with nothing to do, so be clear about your reasons for taking up the experience and the kind of work you want to do.

Is there any kind of reimbursement?

Seeking money from an employer for voluntary experience you have sought from it would likely be seen as inappropriate: if you have agreed to undertake voluntary experience, then voluntary it should be. However, some employers might wish to *offer* some small benefits, as a thank you. Regardless, the correct thing to do is to wait until anything is offered, rather than seek it before you begin the work.

How long will this experience last?

It is always useful to set a definite length to the time you will be 'working with' an organisation, though the importance of this will depend slightly on the nature of the experience you seek. If you are working with a voluntary organisation, a charity or an employer on a voluntary basis, then they will almost certainly expect you to tell them how long the experience will last, so they can make some formal plans. If you are working on a voluntary basis with a very small business or in a rural setting then it might be less important, but the main issue here is to ask them: (1) whether they need to know, and (2) how much notice they would like to have of your intention to leave.

How structured will this experience be?

By its nature, the structure of any voluntary experience that you are seeking may well be up to you to negotiate with those who are making such experience available to you. You are the one seeking the experience, you know what you want to get out of it, and you should have an idea of how structured the experience should be, so this should be up to you. The less clear it is, the less it will impress someone who might be able to offer you that experience (and the less likely they might be to offer you that experience, of course).

Think about doing a project on ..., or attending meetings about ..., or being involved with a team which is working on ... Have some ideas as to what you want to do – ideas based on what you wish to get from the experience.

How Can I Use this Experience to Begin My Career?

There are two main ways in which you can use voluntary experience. Taking the initiative to obtain voluntary experience (particularly in a work setting) can impress a manager, so if you have been professional

in how you set it up and used the experience well, then the manager might be inclined to offer you a post when a suitable vacancy arises. If the manager is very impressed, then they may be able to create a post for you, and although this is fantastic, it is not common and should not be expected.

More commonly, individuals use such experience carefully to develop their skills and give themselves something to talk about when it comes to a subsequent interview. Working overseas on a charity project to build a school or do some teaching can provide a large number of opportunities to develop teamwork and practical skills, to show some commitment to others at your own expense (which usually impresses others, if the cause is humanitarian!) and to broaden your experience to include working in a culture usually very different from your own. All of these qualities and motivations are usually seen *very positively* when vacancies arise.



REFLECTION POINT

Take some time to think about the following questions and write down some answers, first on your own, and then with others that you might be working with.

What sort of voluntary experience would work for you?

What would a 'poor' period of voluntary experience be like for you?

Is this an option that you would enjoy?

INTERSHIPS

An internship is very similar to voluntary work experience but has a number of important differences. It is halfway between a job and voluntary work experience. For example, an internship is usually an opportunity offered by a company. A vacancy is created by the organisation, an individual – often a student or



'INTERNSHIP'

An internship is a structured piece of work experience, usually organised by the employer, but carries no formal salary and has a defined length.

a recent graduate – will apply and they will then work with the organisation for a defined length of time. The individual will not always get paid, but there will be some recompense in the form of a bursary or a minimum payment to cover some expenses.

An internship can often be better than an unstructured period of voluntary work experience, since structured work defined by an employer may lead to definite tasks to be done and the development of specific skills. Employers do use them as a way to

determine whether individuals should be offered jobs in the future, but internships are usually very popular with those seeking jobs, or with those about to graduate.

Other than the above, the same considerations that apply to voluntary experience (goals, length, structure and using the opportunity to find a job) also apply to internships.



BUT I HAVE A QUESTION...

I was expecting to get paid for my internship, but I am told that I will just get an allowance. Should I quit?

Some internships offer salary, while others offer an allowance. It is quite possible that you might have done or be doing an internship as part of your course (or during your studies as an extra-curricular activity). The

key question for you to ask before taking on an internship is 'Why am I taking on this internship?'

There are usually two reasons: (1) To enhance the CV for a graduate job application (and so the company offering the internship becomes important), and (2) To make contacts for future job applications and networking. Making money is rarely the aim, so it is good to get some perspective on this.

If you are intending to make some money, then the better option is to get a part-time or full-time job of some sort. Even if an internship does offer some allowance, it may or may not cover expenses such as accommodation or travel. That might sound as if it is a bad deal, but the benefit is long term, rather than short term. When you get work experience through an internship, you get the chance to work in a real office, to understand how business really works and perhaps to work on a project and set/achieve some goals. If you are able to talk about a project that you have done and some results that you have achieved, then the internship will add significantly to your CV, and boost your chances of getting that interview.

If the internship does not offer any money, you should not necessarily quit - though this will of course depend on your own circumstances. Any internship should develop or give you a chance to practice and develop your skills - and it is this issue that gives internships their potency. Developing unquantifiable skills is something that cannot be costed, but it is likely that during an individual's lifetime, any costs incurred will be more than repaid.

FURTHER STUDIES

Obtaining postgraduate qualifications after you have graduated from an undergraduate degree is not as common in the United Kingdom as it is overseas. In India, anyone graduating from a reasonable university and hoping for a career in management will almost certainly expect or want to do an MBA. If you are from China, then doing a postgraduate qualification is simply another 'automatic' step on the road to a good career - it is expected that students will obtain a postgraduate qualification, but it is not so common for students from the United Kingdom.

There are broadly four kinds of further study that can be undertaken in the United Kingdom and, in different ways, most will give you an additional advantage over those who graduate, leave university behind and start looking for a career. They are as follows:

- Professional business qualifications (ACCA, CIPD, etc.).
- Qualification in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (CertTEFL).
- Teaching qualification for school teaching (PGCE).
- Academic postgraduate qualifications (MSc/MA, MBA, PhD).

Of course, there are other postgraduate professional qualifications in a variety of occupations and you will usually be able to find information about those from your university careers services or online, but the ones described below are those most frequently taken by graduates in social science subjects (including management).

If you are already a postgraduate student and have completed both an undergraduate and a postgraduate qualification in the United Kingdom, you might wish to be careful about choosing to take another - there are time limits on how many years you can spend studying in the United Kingdom.

Professional Business Qualifications

These cover qualifications particularly in Human Resource Management (through the UK Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, or CIPD), Marketing (through the Chartered Institute of Marketing), Accountancy (through Certified Public Accountancy qualifications, CPA; Association of

Chartered and Certified Accountants, ACCA; Institute for Chartered Accountants for England and Wales, ICAEW; Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, CIMA; and others), Psychology (British Psychological Society, BPsS) or other professional disciplines.

These qualifications are often a requirement for technical roles, and seeking to obtain such qualifications can assist you in getting closer to interview. The effort and time that you take to get them is usually recognised by managers as a sign of commitment to the career you wish to take, and of expertise in the relevant field.

It is also worth checking with your university whether you could obtain exemptions from professional certification on the basis of your previous studies. This would mean that you do not need to take exams for certain subjects again. However, obtaining the *full qualifications* does require, in some cases, that you are undertaking a professional role and there are some professional associations which cannot grant you the full qualification until you have completed two years in a professional setting and a relevant role.

Qualification in Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language

The TESOL/TEFL qualification is a very popular option for graduates who wish to get some international experience, who wish to travel and who wish to start a teaching career but who do not wish to teach in a school.

There are some places where it is quite possible to get a job as an English teacher without any qualifications. Being good at English is a very important skill in many places and can create international mobility for those good at English as much as those who are native English speakers and who wish to travel themselves. There are also a large number of 'temporary language schools' which are set up in the United Kingdom during the summer (when teenagers from across Europe take summer holidays and when their parents wish to send them to the United Kingdom to learn English) or summer language camps overseas, where teaching qualifications are seen as less important. Some take the view that qualifications are not that useful and the ability to speak and read in English is more important.

However, have a look at the following five questions and imagine that you are being asked these in a language class:

1. There are two sounds for 'th' (one 'hard' and one 'soft'), so how can I write these on a board in a way that non-native English speakers can understand?
2. What is the present simple tense and when do I use it?
3. When should I say 'I have done' instead of 'I did'?
4. I know that I should say 'I can't do' rather than 'I can't done', but why?
5. Why is 'taller' correct English grammar and 'more tall' incorrect?

All of the questions above are based on simple English grammar rules, but most English native speakers will not be aware of why they use the language that they do. Taking a recognised qualification will not only teach you how to teach – which is vitally important – but also teach you the English grammar that you will need to know.

Options for taking such qualifications are extremely varied, just like the length and costs of the course. You should take a course which:

- Is recognised and certified by the British Council and by accreditation organisations such as Pitman.
- Gives you actual teaching experience with students in a real classroom.
- Gives you accurate and useful feedback on your teaching.

- Requires you to write assignments about your teaching and the students you are teaching.
- Teaches you to be creative in your teaching techniques, yet sensitive to those you are teaching (especially if teaching from countries with a more conservative culture).

If taking one of these courses full time, then you will probably have a very good experience over four very full weeks. If you do well and graduate with a CertTEFL or equivalent recognised qualification, then you will probably have little trouble finding a job – either in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.

Finding a suitable employer

As mentioned above, language schools vary considerably in their nature and in what they offer. Some will emphasise one-to-one tuition, others will conduct programmes for corporate clients, and some will run during just the summer; however, some language schools will do all of these.

Once qualified, you will need to consider carefully what sort of work you wish to undertake, and where. Whatever you do, you need to ensure that the employer is one that meets your needs and offers a professional service to their students.

If you are hoping to work abroad, you will need to ensure that you can meet the visa regulations for the country you are visiting. China, for example, recently tightened up the requirements for a visa to take employment by teaching English by insisting on much more experience than had previously been the case.

Qualification in Teaching – Postgraduate Certificate in Education

The PGCE qualification is designed for a very specific purpose: to enable you to begin a career in teaching. By its very nature, the qualification is designed to teach you how to teach. You will need to spend a considerable time in the classroom during the programme, to be supervised during that experience and to attend taught classes.

If you are considering a career in teaching, the main issue for you is to think about the age group you wish to teach. The teaching techniques used for very young children (4–7 years old), where you will be expected to teach a broad selection of subjects at a basic level, are significantly different to those teenagers for a specific subject so they can pass their exams at 16 and/or 18. Programmes designed for teaching in a secondary (11–18 years old) school will typically include some content around the subjects, but it is usually expected that you will have graduated in that subject to begin with.

You will also need to consider the kind of school you wish to work in. Fee-paying schools tend to have a vastly different culture (class size, organisational resourcing) and student background (social background, international mix) from those in the state sector, but are of course more difficult to get jobs with. If you spend a number of years in one sector, it is often more difficult to change sector.

The nature of the PGCE programmes offered by universities in the United Kingdom is regulated by the Teaching Qualifications Authority (TQA) and does change from time to time. Funding and loans for such programmes are not usually difficult to obtain, but you are best advised to speak to your careers services to obtain the most up-to-date information about the nature of the courses available and funding.

Taught Master's (MSc and MA) Qualifications

These are typically one-year programmes (in the United Kingdom at least) and fall into two types – Type I and Type II:

Type I qualifications are postgraduate degrees which have a specialist focus (e.g. MSc Marketing) and which usually require a first degree or experience in a relevant discipline. For example, you

might do an undergraduate degree in management and then choose to specialise and advance your knowledge in a particular field (e.g. marketing).

Type II qualifications are designed as an introduction to a discipline when applicants have studied in a different area. For example, you might have studied for a BA (Hons) in English but then changed academic focus and taken a postgraduate qualification in Management (e.g. MSc Management Studies).

Both forms of postgraduate qualification are seen as potential routes to PhD studies, should you be seeking that. They will nearly always have a large dissertation towards the end of the programme (often taken in the summer and contributing to around a third of the programme), and will provide you with research training in order to undertake the dissertation. You will need to apply research techniques, both qualitative and quantitative, and statistical analysis in order to identify your conclusions (see Chapter 7).

Such qualifications will typically be taken by individuals shortly after graduation and applicants will usually be applying for such programmes in semester 1 of their final year to meet deadlines in early December, although many institutions do accept applications much later in the academic year. The admissions requirements to such programmes usually consist of qualifications related to English language (typically IELTS between 6.0/6.5 and 7.0, perhaps with some requirement that no component score should be less than 6.0) and an upper second-class honours (2:1) degree. You will usually need two references from academics who know you (U.S. institutions typically need three) and also need to submit a personal statement.

Where you cannot meet the language requirements, any offer may require you to take a pre-sessional language course. These usually vary in length but take place during the summer so that when the academic year begins in September, your level of English should be sufficient to enable you to cope with the English language demands of the programme.



'BUT I HAVE A QUESTION ...'

... What should I write in my personal statement? I have never seen one before.

This is understandable. Admissions tutors sometimes see personal statements which start by telling them how wonderful their institutions are - that is not what is required here. You may want to say that, but the personal statement - and the entire application, including the academic references - is intended to show the institution you are applying to that you are: (1) capable of passing the programme, (2) motivated to do so (usually according to some career goal), and (3) careful about how you select your course(s).

So, that means ensuring that the institution receiving your application understands your academic strengths and weaknesses - in terms of your critical thinking abilities as much as your grades - understands how the programme in question will benefit you in terms of your career goals, believes that you would work well with others on the programme (so, what kinds of activities have you undertaken in your degree: group projects, case studies, examinations, individual assignments?) and has some confidence that you will make a personal contribution (in terms of adding to the life of the university) to the institution are all important factors.

The personal statement is usually one of three kinds of documents the institution will need to see, but it will usually ask academic referees to comment on your personal and academic strengths and weaknesses in terms of critical thinking, oral and written English, insight, creativity and innovation, ability, willingness to work with others, and so on. There are times when it might ask the referees to rank your performance against others in the class.

Should Students Apply Through an Agent?

Many international students wish to use agents to manage their application - and many will cost around £1000. For some people, this is a lot of money, so the question is always whether they are worth it. The answer, sadly, is not definitive.

Students use agents for a variety of reasons, but one of the most common relates to their knowledge of technical governmental processes relating to immigration. An agent will work with the prospective student to ensure that all the documentation is exactly as it should be so that everything is ready when the visa application is submitted. Another reason - and one that agents use to sell their services - is that agents may previously have been successful in getting students into the top postgraduate courses around the world, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Agents also belong to two types, some of whom are employed directly by an institution (or a small number of institutions). Those institutions give an incentive to agents to recruit students and often provide them with information and training on their courses and admissions processes. The second type of agents are funded directly by the applicants, rather than by the institution, and provide wider advice and services (e.g. immigration/visa advice) than do those who promote certain institutions. However, this type of agent will likely not be so familiar with the institutions, the courses they offer, the living environment, the social opportunities and the general quality of the programmes as the first type. Neither type can give a guarantee of an offer and it can be risky to spend such a great deal with little guarantee. However, for a busy student completing their final year of undergraduate studies, using an agent to deal with the complex documentation for visas can be the best way forward.

Institutions and their recruitment and admissions offices can sometimes take very different views towards educational agents. Some agencies seem to appear and then disappear overnight, while others have been known to fake reference letters for poor-quality students so as to ensure they get admitted. (Universities do talk to each other and some faked letters are very easy to spot.)

For you as a potential applicant, the question should always be: 'To what extent do I believe that they will tell me the truth about the institution and work in my interests to help get me admitted?' That is the only way to determine whether the service they offer is value for money.

Master of Business Administration Programmes

MBA programmes are seen - in the eyes of some - as *the* career-enhancing qualification in management. The idea is that if you want to move into middle or senior management, you need an MBA - and the more you spend to go on a better ranked (according to the *Financial Times* or *Wall Street Journal*) MBA programme, the better. They are qualifications designed to help individuals enhance their practical understanding of management and their ability to manage individuals and organisations, where those individuals have previously graduated in a non-management subject.

Good MBA programmes will carry the AMBA (Association of MBA studies) accreditation and will not usually accept students with less than three years' professional experience, although there are a very large number of institutions offering 'MBA' programmes of less quality. Alongside U.K. governmental institutions, AMBA requires institutions to manage their admissions processes carefully and indicates to institutions what such programmes should cover.

They are offered in a wide variety of formats: online or distance learning, part-time (evenings and weekends), full-time, international (across different locations, e.g. New York, London and Shanghai), executive (often part-time, but taking students who are already in senior management) and specialist (e.g. MBA in Healthcare Management). UK-based full-time programmes are usually a

year in length, while part-time programmes tend to be more flexible and between three and four years.

Good MBA programmes are often seen by those wishing to join them in the same way that a branded bag might be seen by a consumer. An MBA from Harvard or from London Business Schools is often taken as a badge of having participated in a vastly superior educational experience, and the costs of taking an MBA at such institutions reflect this. Whichever programme you select, you need to ensure that it will give you an opportunity to:

- Build your international network of contacts in middle/senior management roles.
- Go beyond the theoretical aspects of management education and give you a chance to apply what you are learning to the real world.
- Stretch yourself – your skills, knowledge and experience.
- Progress into a worthwhile career.

MBA programmes are typically intense, very hard work and costly, but those who take them will usually see them as an investment which will yield rewards in the longer term. If or when you decide to take an MBA, you should probably discuss this with those closest to you. Your life will change considerably while you are doing it, particularly in terms of the time you have available for others, and perhaps the amount of stress you experience.



'BUT I HAVE A QUESTION ...'

... How do I find the money for an MBA, if courses are so expensive?

If you are serious about taking an MBA, it is important to see it as an investment, rather than as a piece of paper. Here are some ideas:

- **Scholarships:** Some business schools will offer scholarships for students from certain countries or regions, or to those who are suffering financial hardship, but these will be very specifically targeted when it comes to MBA programmes. (MBA programmes are often a significant source of income for business schools, so it does not make a lot of sense for money to be given out without a very good reason.)
- **Career loans:** Banks may sometimes be willing to give loans to individuals to enhance their careers (just as student loans are made to U.K. undergraduates). These are sometimes long term and sometimes the interest rates can be higher than for other purposes, but they are available for some candidates in some places.
- **Government loans:** The U.K. government has now made available loans for postgraduate study. It might be worth comparing the details with payment arrangements made for loans from banks. The requirements state that this is only available to those ordinarily living in England. (<https://www.gov.uk/funding-for-postgraduate-study>). For those living in Scotland and the EU, similar loans are available from the Student Awards Agency Scotland (http://www.saas.gov.uk/forms_and_guides/postgraduate.htm).
- **Employers:** It is not to be taken for granted, but some employers might be willing to consider part-funding a talented individual through an MBA under certain conditions. Other employers may have a leadership development programme which includes an MBA.
- **Others:** Family, friends and others who might be able to contribute to support you financially.

If you decide to do a full-time programme, you will need to find income to provide for daily living expenses in addition to the course fees. These may be more or less expensive, depending on the cost of living of where you decide to study.

KEY LEARNING POINT



Postgraduate studies can be a useful way of enhancing your knowledge and skills, either by specialising in a particular area or by obtaining management qualifications and abilities which build on the academic skills from a non-management area.

REFLECTION POINT



Take some time to think about the following questions and write down some answers, first on your own, and then with others that you might be working with.

What would a taught postgraduate course give you, above your current qualifications?

Would a taught postgraduate course be useful to you? Why?

Postgraduate Research Qualifications

Postgraduate research qualifications such as a Master's in Research, Master of Philosophy, Doctor of Philosophy (MRes, MPhil, PhD) are designed to enable you to start a career in a research role, either as an academic or as a professional consultant (or sometimes as an expert in a very specific business role). They are very different to any other form of postgraduate qualification, and if you are used to studying in a large class and discussing how to complete particular assignments, then you need to be aware that the experience of studying for them will be hugely different.

There is no requirement for you to have done a Master's qualification before taking such a qualification – you can start a PhD straight from your undergraduate studies – but the completion of a dissertation at postgraduate level can significantly help your chances of being successfully admitted and then completing your qualification. In order to apply for a PhD place, you will usually be required to submit a research proposal outlining what topic(s) you wish to study and identifying the relevant literature in that particular area. It is on the basis of your awareness of the existing literature, your ability to analyse and evaluate this literature and your identification of issues that have not yet been investigated that you will receive an offer of a place.

What is it like to undertake an MRes, MPhil, PhD?

The qualification, lasting between three and six years, requires you to undertake a piece of research, but is completed in stages (see Figure 20.2).

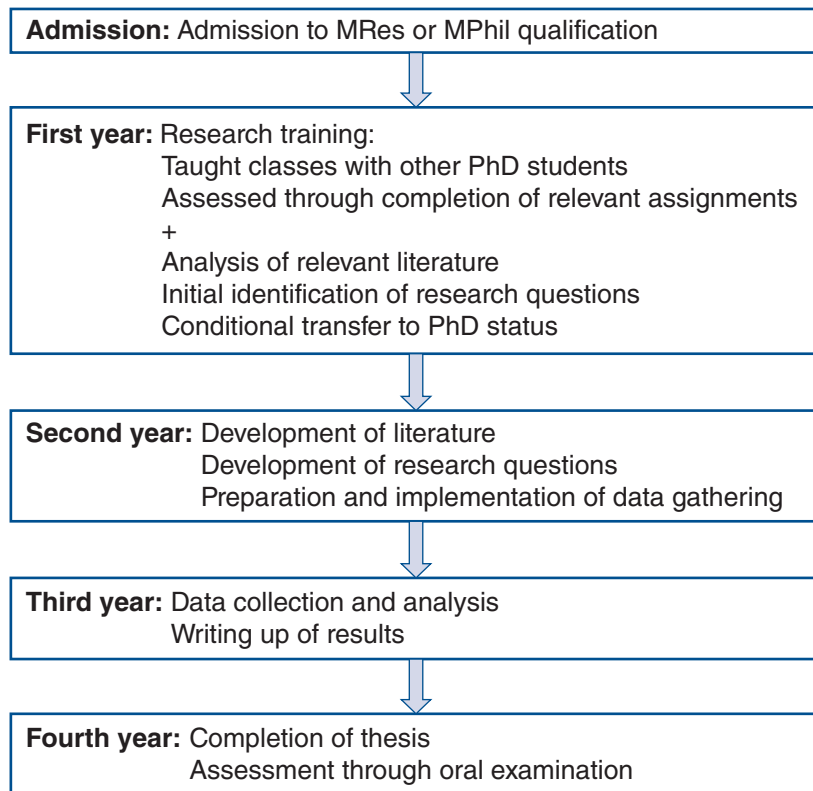
Students apply for and register as MPhil, or in some cases MRes. Transferring to PhD status is dependent upon their identifying and developing research questions that have not previously been asked. A doctorate qualification is only ever awarded on the basis that the thesis adds to the broader literature on a particular subject.

If successful in their application, the student will be allocated a supervisor before beginning the programme. The supervisor will be the student's mentor and guide through the research process, but from an analysis of the literature through to writing up the findings of the research, the work has to be that of the students themselves. The supervisor will also work with a PhD student to produce research in

their own area and will usually publish joint papers in journals and conferences over the duration of the student's programme. This may be formally expected of the student during the programme (particularly if they enter an academic career after completion of the PhD) but is a good idea anyway: publication of work in a reputable journal usually confirms that the work is of a very good standard when it comes to the oral examination at the end of the programme.

In order to complete their programme (and not all do), PhD students are required to produce a thesis which describes what they have researched and how, why they have done so (usually relating to the fact that it is important and no one else has yet answered these questions, and explaining why the research and statistical techniques they have used were appropriate), what they have found, what else could be investigated, and how their research relates to the current body of knowledge. In terms of structure, it is not dissimilar to the way that an undergraduate dissertation might be compiled, though the arguments would need to be much stronger.

Stages for the completion of PhD qualification



Structure of a typical PhD programme

Figure 20.2 Structure of a typical PhD programme

Completing a PhD can be a lonely process. You will be working on a research project that no one else is working on, but a good supervisor and a reasonable number of other students going through a similar experience can make the experience an interesting one. You will usually get a desk in an office, have

access to resources and individuals that you might have struggled to get access to as an undergraduate, and get resources to attend research conferences with others researching in broadly the same area. You might be given some teaching to do, and some relevant training to undertake that teaching. This would be a minor aspect of your work, but would help you when it comes to applying for academic jobs after you complete the PhD. You will also have a fairly large amount of independence and freedom. Most supervisors will expect you to be disciplined and get on with your work, but how and when you do so is largely going to be up to you.

Finally, obtaining funding to do a PhD is usually very easy, if you have the right qualifications and your application (and references) is a good one. Most institutions have funding available to support PhD studentships, either from research grants that academic faculty have received (in which case, you would become an employee, a Research Assistant, who is undertaking research more closely aligned with your supervisor's interests rather than your own, but producing a thesis alongside the research work you are doing), or from scholarships (called studentships) offered by the university itself as a way of increasing its own research output – and, in some cases, producing future employees.

STARTING YOUR OWN BUSINESS

For some people, this is one of the most challenging – some would say 'scary' – options. For others, it is the ultimate idea of freedom and reward. A small business can be a replication of what someone else does elsewhere, or it can be related to something that you are interested in or have links to, or it can lead to the establishment of a company which produces something that you or others have needed, but which does not currently exist. It might also be one of the following:

- Initiating a franchise operation, where you invest in setting up a branch of an established brand (e.g. a McDonald's Restaurant) and run the operation in an area where that brand does not currently exist.
- Offering your own personal resources (practical resources, skills, contacts, etc.) to others who might need those resources (e.g. Airbnb, Uber, wedding planners, photographers, lawyers).
- Developing a physical or digital innovative product (e.g. Facebook, smartphone apps) where you have noticed a need that you and others have and developed a way of meeting this need.
- Establishing a network which individuals pay to join in order to get certain benefits and enjoy those experiences together (e.g. World Ventures and DreamTrips).
- Starting an online distribution channel for customers to obtain products without needing to pay for warehousing and storage (e.g. companies on Facebook or eBay).

Some new ventures offer products and services to businesses and others offer such items directly to consumers. The kind of product or service you decide to offer will be based on the expertise and resources that you have access to and the viability of getting such resources to the marketplace so that others can access them easily.

FOR YOU TO DO



Look at the statements below and try to identify those which are closest to your own personality, desires and ambitions, and those which are furthest away. They are fairly obvious in their implications, but try to answer them honestly.

(Continued)

Give each item a score between 1 and 5, where 1 is 'strongly disagree' and 5 is 'strongly agree'.

1. I really enjoy seeing the outcomes of my actions.
 2. I tend to prefer to be in control of my own situation.
 3. I do not like someone else telling me what to do.
 4. I intend to have a mentor, someone who can help me when I am not sure what to do.
 5. I am comfortable when I know what I am doing.
 6. My friends would describe me as 'conservative', as someone who does not really enjoy taking risks.
 7. I really love working on something pioneering.
 8. When I start an activity, I put all my effort and everything I have into that project.
 9. It is more important for me to earn a lot of money as quickly as I can than to see my achievements in other ways.
 10. I respond well to a challenge.
 11. I am excited by being the first to do something.
 12. I am extremely persistent and determined in what I do.
 13. I do not care if others tell me that I will not succeed.
 14. Life is all about passion, rather than being rational.
 15. I have an idea for a business which I know others will really love.
 16. I love the idea of others coming to me for a service.
 17. I know that others will put as much effort into helping me with my innovation as I do.
 18. I think that setting up and running a small business is easy.
 19. When I have had ideas for activities in the past, I have been able to motivate others to follow me.
 20. I do not wait for permission to do what I want to do: I just think we should get on and do it.
 21. I have done an undergraduate business degree so I am pretty sure I know what running a business is about.
-

If you answered 4 or 5 to most of the questions above, then you might have some of the personal qualities needed to set up and run a small business, but there are a couple of questions above where the better answer is 1 or 2, and others where a little comment might be helpful. As you read below, think of the issues involved in setting up two kinds of business.

The first is a small online business selling clothes made by someone else and distributing them to the public. The second is a production business, making an innovative product, largely for distribution to other businesses. The challenges and issues will be vastly different for each one, so it is not easy to generalise about the issues that will be faced: the online interactive exercise may give some guidance.

The above analysis has given an indication of some of the issues that we might need to bear in mind if we want to run our own business. For those who make it successfully, the rewards can be great, but many folks who do make it 'successfully' have often spent time developing businesses which have previously failed.

There are some issues noted above which need expanding on a little and which may or may not help you to decide whether this kind of option is right for you. Watching others set up their businesses can be inspirational, and if you do have an idea for a product or a service that you think would work, then you might like to speak to those lecturers who you trust to give good advice and who know something about setting up a small business in order to evaluate your idea.

Issues to Consider

Finance

It is true that the larger the risk, the larger the return. Most – if not all – new businesses will require finance of some kind, either a large amount to make a new product or simply a small amount to allow

for some publicity about your product or service. Putting a video on YouTube or its equivalent will likely cost hardly anything, but can – if done well – get your product out to your potential customers very effectively.

Banks, private investors (otherwise known as ‘Business Angels’, who will invest significant sums in return for some level of ownership), individuals and, of course, yourself may all be useful sources of funding, but they will want to be reasonably sure that they will not lose their investment.

People

Depending on the nature of the business, you will likely have to recruit, select, manage (i.e. use appropriately according to their skills and expertise, give feedback, develop and train, and possibly promote or dismiss or reassign) and lead (inspire, motivate) your team in a way that helps your business grow. For many people, this means the development of additional skills and knowledge, and perhaps seeking some personal development via a mentor or another established entrepreneur.

Legal

There is little doubt that at some stage – potentially including the very early establishment of the business – you will likely need some legal advice. This could include everything from protecting your customers against any accidents arising from your work (termed ‘public liability insurance’ in the United Kingdom) to defects in products that you produce *and/or* source from elsewhere (for which you *do* have responsibility as far as the customer is concerned) and the arrangements for closing down the business if you are working with others in a legal partnership. Legal issues will also affect your advertising, the recruitment, health and safety and dismissal of your employees, and – of course – your liabilities for managing finances and taxation.

Market

If your idea does not have a market which can cover the costs of delivering or producing that idea, then it will not work as a business idea. It might be nice for you to do and might be interesting, but it will not be viable as a way of making money. This is why the issues above relating to the information you gather are so important.

One issue to be aware of is who the product or service is intended for. The individual paying for the product or service may not be the one who actually ends up using it. The classic example is the market for children’s toys, where the parents pay but the decision to buy is based on whether the child will enjoy the product. In such instances, any market research should not be about the purchaser alone, but the end user.

Of course, making money may not be the aim of your idea. You may have developed it to help solve a problem for others in situations less fortunate than many, where the resources for developing and implementing the idea or product might be borne by a non-governmental organisation or a charity. In this case, the market will be the NGO or charities who pay for the product based on the promise that it will alleviate some need very effectively.

The plan

While planning the growth of a new business in an unpredictable situation is a precarious idea, it will be difficult if not impossible to get external funding for the business and to evaluate the performance of your business without a comprehensive business plan – based on the comprehensive market research you have done. Creating a realistic plan is not easy, especially if you are excited and passionate about

an idea that you think you could make and sell tomorrow, if only you did not have to take time to produce a business plan! However, it is vital and important to develop this idea if you want to establish a growing business. You will need to think about *how the market and your products will grow and change* (is it likely to be affected by demographics; is there space to take the business online; is there scope for diversifying and adding to what you think the business could offer?), *when and how your financing will come* (how long will it take you to break even; how will you ensure that you have adequate cash flow; how will you cover any periods of time when you have no money coming in; what accounting ratios will be most important to you, and why; what funding will you need as a cushion against any unexpected expenses?) and *how your workforce might need to grow and change* (how will you cover against sickness; how big will your leadership team need to be; how will you access expertise if you need it on a temporary basis?). All of these decisions – and others – will need to form part of your organisational strategy and business plan.

Conclusion

In the digital age, setting up a small business on eBay and publicising it on Facebook (or Taobao and Weixin in China, or Line in Korea) is not difficult. If you act as a distributor, then all that is needed is for you to find a way to obtain the goods at a decent price and then get them to the final customer. If you get the publicity and the pricing right, and have a reliable system for distribution, then making a little money can be very straightforward. If you decide to operate a franchise, then you need the financial resources to make the investment and then nearly everything else is done for you. If you wish to offer your resources to others, then you simply need a way of giving your clients and customers access to those resources – and that is what makes a business work.

KEY LEARNING POINT



Running your own business can be very easy, but can be very difficult. A great deal will depend on the nature of the business you wish to run and the ease with which you can get our goods and/or services to those who might wish to use them - in a cost-effective way.

CONCLUSION

By now, you should be able to:

- Recognise that graduate employment is not the only option after undergraduate studies.
- Understand your own capacity to take up additional options.
- Evaluate which option(s) are applicable to your own situation.
- Develop practical strategies for taking up alternative options.

This chapter has outlined a number of options for you to consider outside of what some see as the usual process of getting a job with a graduate employer, so if you do not have an offer with a major organisation, do *not* worry. Instead, you might like to think about some of these ideas or others.

The important thing is to make sure that you *do* something. Organising formal events, holding social activities or getting involved in social groups or local charities are all seen positively by employers as activities which demonstrate your skills. Even activities such as organising a holiday for friends

or family will require you to use a range of skills. So, whatever you decide to do with your time, make sure that you do it well, that you enjoy it and that you give yourself the best chance for a great future.

That has been the entire intention of this book. Good luck!

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Based on the content of this chapter, what do you now know about additional options for you that you did not know before?

Which key learning point had the most impact? Why?

Do your answers to either of the above questions have the potential to change your ability to perform well at selection interviews? Why?

What will you now do? (Write this down and put it somewhere where you will scan it regularly.)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Want to learn more? Visit <https://study.sagepub.com/morgan2e> to gain access to a wide range of online resources, including interactive tests, tasks, further reading and downloads.



Website Resources

About Careers – Information about gap year programmes (US website): <http://jobsearch.about.com/od/college-job-search/a/gap-year-programs.htm>

Gapyear.com – website providing information on gap year jobs: www.gapyear.com/jobs

Kent University – alternative ideas after graduation: www.kent.ac.uk/careers/alternatives.htm

Newcastle University – advice on further study: www.ncl.ac.uk/careers/study/

Newcastle University – ‘Is a gap year before employment a good idea?’ www.ncl.ac.uk/careers/planning/timeout/

Prospects website – ideas around work experience and internships, both in the UK and abroad: www.prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/work-experience-and-internships

Prospects website – ‘What can you do with your degree in ...?’ www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/what-can-i-do-with-my-degree

SAP.com Gap Year Programme (others are available): www.sap.com/careers/students-and-graduates/gap-year-program.html#

Target Postgrad – information on further study: <https://targetpostgrad.com/advice/choosing-postgraduate/why-do-postgraduate-study>

University of Aberdeen – further study: www.abdn.ac.uk/careers/further-study-funding/index.php

