

ABOUT TO GRADUATE? HERE ARE FIVE WAYS TO BOOST YOUR PROSPECTS

THERE ARE PLENTY OF OPTIONS FOR IMPROVING YOUR CHANCES OF GETTING A FIRST JOB IN PLANNING IN THESE TOUGH TIMES, EXPLAINS KATHERINE PARKES

Those of you in your final year of a Royal Town Planning Institute-accredited qualification may soon be looking to secure your first job in planning. Every year around 2,000 people graduate from universities with an RTPI-accredited planning degree, so what can you be doing now to give yourself an advantage when it comes to applying for jobs in this challenging and extremely competitive environment? Here are a few suggestions:

1 Join a network According to a recent report, only one in five job vacancies are advertised. By joining an RTPI network, you will be well placed to meet potential employers, gain contacts, keep up to date with developments and opportunities within your field of planning and, most importantly, get to know like-minded people who share your passion for the profession. One group in particular that understands the importance of networking is the young planners' network, which recently ran a speed networking event in Birmingham. Events such as this offer an excellent opportunity to speak to people who were recently in your position and who can provide you with advice and support.

2 Keep abreast of current affairs One major graduate employer recently commented that he was disappointed with interview candidates' knowledge of the latest developments in planning and government policies. It is vital to keep up to date each day with what



Young planners: keeping up with current affairs or gaining work experience can give you the edge when going for a job

is happening in planning both at a local and national level – and this magazine is a good place to start. Not only could this give you an advantage in the recruitment process, but if any new schemes or developments are proposed for your area, it could also give you a chance to get involved right from the start.

3 Offer to help out Employers increasingly expect students to have some work experience, which ironically can be difficult to obtain if you don't have any work history. If you have any spare time, offer to help out in your local planning department or consultancy. This will give you an opportunity to show how hard working, conscientious and reliable you are and may lead to bigger things. In one recent case, a graduate offered to work for a consultancy for free for two weeks. Despite the employer's initial reluctance to take up the offer, after a fortnight the graduate became so

indispensable that he was offered a full-time position, a vacancy that had not previously existed.

4 Learn from others If there's a specific company or organisation that you would love to work for, find out the name of the person who has your dream role, contact them and ask them for a few minutes of their time. Find out how they got where they are today, what influenced them when they were studying and what guidance they can offer you. They have been in your situation and so are in an ideal position to offer advice. If they invite you to have a look around, so much the better. When a vacancy finally does arise in their organisation, it may be you that they think of first.

5 Broaden your horizons and experience Even in the current tough and highly competitive job market, there are still opportunities. Show future employers that you

are passionate about planning by getting involved and engaging in the planning world while still studying. Volunteering is a great way to achieve this, and environmental charities and community organisations often need people with planning expertise to drive projects forward. Although not an option for everyone, some student planners have also gained experience overseas, which has enhanced their job prospects when returning to the UK. New Zealand and Australia in particular have a shortage of planners. The RTPI web pages have details of specialist websites and recruitment agencies as well as advice from people who have worked abroad. Both volunteering and gaining some experience overseas will give you an advantage over others. And wherever you are in the world, all planning experience counts towards your assessment of professional competence. **Katherine Parkes is RTPI education officer.**