



Careers for Geography Graduates

PAULINE KNEALE, *University of Leeds, UK*

All geography graduates have countless skills that employers seek, but many employers are unaware of the bounteous skills of geographers, and most do not know you. Geography graduates are employed in most careers, including many that are not geography related (Table I). OK, some careers require further training (legal work, nursing, software engineering, forklift-truck driving) but that is part of the fun and in many cases you will be paid while you train. When you look around your Careers Centre or search the web remember that there is little to rule out. The challenge is to identify the career for you, impress employers with a well-written CV (*curriculum vitae*) and at interview, and land a job in your chosen occupational sector.

Getting Started

First, take stock of your skills. Geography is a wide-ranging subject using science and social science skills, which puts you ahead of those who specialised in one area or another. Your skills include the ability to think logically, analyse information, handle difficult problems, communicate effectively and work on projects independently and in teams. You have great computing-based experience and you survived at university. Employers hope that graduate employees have thinking, leadership, team, motivation, self-development, commitment, management, business, personal, achievement and technical skills. Notice that academic geography knowledge is not listed here. Employers expect people to use these transferable skills at work, and geography graduates have them ready. Highlight them on your CV and prepare to talk about them.

For each skill make some notes about the circumstances where your own experiences exemplify your skills. For example:

- From your geography degree you have IT skills, organisational skills, presentation skills of all sorts, and specialist subject knowledge. What else ... (group work, leading discussions, debating, commitment, laboratory, fieldwork)?

TABLE I. Some career options for geography graduates.

Accountancy	Geology	Planning
Advertising	GIS	Police
Air Traffic Control		Pollution Control
Aircrew	Health Service Management	Post Office
Architecture	Hotel Management	Public Relations
Archaeology	Human Resources	Publishing
Archivist	Hydrology	
Army, Navy, Airforce		Recruitment
	Information Science	Recycling
Banking	Information Technology	Research, MRes, MA, MSc, PhD
	Insurance	Retailing
Cartography	Journalism	
Catering		Sales
Charity Management	Laboratory Analyst	Social Services
Civil Service	Law	Social Work
Complementary Medicine	Logistics	Software Development
Computing		Solicitor
Conservation Services	Market Research	Sports Management
Countryside Officer	Marketing	Statistics Office
Courier Services	Meteorology	Stock-broking
Customer Services	Mining	Systems Analysis
	Museum Work	
Diplomatic Service		Teaching
	Navy	TEFL
Environmental Consultancy	Nursing	Theatre
Environmental Monitoring		Tour Management
	Ordnance Survey	Transport
Farming	Outdoor Recreation—Skiing,	Travel Agent
Films	Climbing...etc.	TV
Finance	Photography	
Fire Service	Physiotherapy	Voluntary Work
Forestry	Pilot	Web Design

- From part-time and vacation employment you acquire communication, team working, time management, self-management, motivation and people skills. What else ... (negotiation, driving, language, financial)?
- Just by being at university you acquire skills and competence in financial (debt) management, decision making, stress management, self-management and motivation skills. And ...?

If you keep a personal development portfolio or diary, this should have helpful notes.

Second, think about the sort of work you want to do. What are your aims and ambitions? Do you want to be in a big organisation with structured training, options to change direction and plenty of colleagues? Do you want to work for yourself? Does being part of a small or medium size enterprise (SME) appeal? Have you already seen your ideal job? What sort of lifestyle would you like? Do you want the security of a well-known organisation or do you want to consider something that leads to regular change (or what)? These are difficult questions to answer; make time.

Try to think around your 5-year, 10-year and 15-year plan. What do you need to do now to make something else possible in the future? For example, someone wanting to work in the charity sector on water supply problems might do an engineering hydrology

MSc and work with a firm of consulting engineers before moving to work with Oxfam. Someone wanting to start his/her own business might plan to work in one or more large companies to get management skills and experience of different aspects of business, and to complete a part-time MBA first. This type of planning lets you acquire both practical experience and networks of contacts to support you in the future.

Hawkins (2000) cites eight key points when deciding on career options:

- (1) Increase your self-awareness.
- (2) Make an informed decision about what, how and where to study.
- (3) Gain relevant work experience.
- (4) Develop skills for the workplace.
- (5) Set aside opportunities to reflect on your learning.
- (6) Explore alternative career opportunities.
- (7) Do something different to stand out from the crowd.
- (8) Don't panic! You don't have to be perfect!

Bear in mind that few people go to one organisation and stay for life. 'Portfolio career' describes the situation where people mix and match a series of remunerated and unremunerated appointments and fit them around other work and life responsibilities. Twenty-first century working practices may lead you to change jobs and organisations every 3 to 5 years. You are searching for a career after university but also looking to future moves (Hawkins & Winter, 1995; Harvey *et al.*, 1997). Understanding the changing world of work will help you operate within it.

Ask your friends and family about the careers they think you will enjoy, and to describe the skills that they know you have. Think about activities and experiences that really motivated you. Make some notes and add the skills involved. Keep these notes safe and read them before an interview.

Research Career Options

Why wait until you graduate before thinking about your career? Careers Centres have information about summer placements and internship schemes where you can be paid to discover whether accountancy, sales, banking or other businesses suit you. You can also surf to a career; start with your home university site and check the AGCAS (2001) site.

To research potential careers try the following scheme:

- (1) Pick a career or occupation you think you might enjoy.
- (2) Make a quick list of the things you imagine that the job will involve.
- (3) Find literature and/or web sites for three potential companies or organisations—what skills do they say the job will need?
- (4) Make quick list of the skills and the evidence you can quote to show you have these skills.
- (5) How did your original ideas about this occupation match your first ideas? Are there surprises?
- (6) Is this the right type of company for you? How do you skills and aspirations fit the package? Do you want to do the same job but in a larger/smaller company?
- (7) Now research another career. Back to No. 1.

It is also wise to research some careers that seem unlikely. Pick two at random from Table I, or two you feel are not for you. Many people are surprised when they see what

TABLE II. The main sections of a CV.

Personal Details	Full name, address, telephone number. (In the UK Equal Opportunities legislation means date of birth, nationality and marital status are optional)
Education	Degree results: provide key details such as relevant projects/modules undertaken. School name and results from final exams: A levels and grades. For earlier years be brief and summarise: 10 GCSEs, 6 As, 4 Bs; or 10 GCSEs, including English and Maths.
Work Experience	Include work placements, summer jobs, voluntary work, any permanent or part-time work. Place these in reverse order, the most recent first. For the most recent and relevant jobs use two or three sentences to state the content or skills you used and developed (see Table III). Be concise.
Computer Skills	Most geographers have enough experience to highlight this area. Remember the packages used in practicals and projects, statistics, mapping, GIS, programming, EXCEL, ACCESS; and Word-processing, Power Point, Internet Searching, Electronic Library skills and... You may not feel very expert, but many applicants have fewer skills.
Other Skills	Include driving licence, first aid, and language skills. Be up front about your transferable skills. Use examples rather than lists: <i>... showed that I can be persuasive and present my case well.</i> <i>Working in customer services at Homebase gave me considerable experience of dealing with customers' problems. I enjoyed solving problems, negotiating and aiming to ensure the outcome was satisfactory for everyone.</i> <i>Working with disabled teenagers helped me to be organised and patient. I realise that I need to be aware of safety issues and mindful of colleague's activities.</i>
Interests and Activities	No boring lists allowed (please don't make it up). <i>I play rugby for the university Second XV, hall team and have enjoyed coaching juniors.</i> <i>I play chess for a local club, I coordinate transport to matches.</i> <i>At present I prefer to concentrate on aerobic training for skiing but intend to play more tennis in future.</i>
Referees	Generally cite two, one academic and one from work, or two academic. Always ask permission. Giving referees a copy of your application helps them to write a more focused letter.

different organisations and careers involve and realise that these are potential options. Equally you may not like what you find and confirm that this is not a career for you.

Making Applications

You need a clear CV to act as your persuasive marketing statement; always accompany it with a covering letter. The CV informs an employer about your past and current qualifications and experience. The covering letter links to your CV; use it to say more about the skills and experience that make you the ideal person for the job. As your CV should be concise and is stored on a computer, there is no excuse for not tailoring it for each application to match all the requirements.

Some guidance on CV construction is given in Table II and more example statements in Table III. Postgraduate and research applications will focus on geographical skills but for most generic jobs focus on the transferable skills and experience that are particularly relevant. Practical skills can seem so obvious that they are often left out; check that you are presenting yourself fully. Remember that you are familiar with different word processing packages, spreadsheet and statistical packages, and perhaps GIS and other software. A business may not use the packages you mention, but by listing the software

TABLE III. Example CV statements.

Summer 2001: Briggs and Ashcroft plc, Lincoln
 Administrative Assistant: A vacation job working in the Human Resources Section of a large textile company
 Responsibilities and achievements:
 Worked with the HR manager, arranging interviews, checking references, meeting clients
 Handled telephone enquires to HR from within the company and the public
 Created an online version of the application form and organised an electronic filing system for electronic applications and references
 Revised an updated the firms' external website and developed a new section for internal staff use
 Typed reports using WordPerfect and kept track of applications using Excel

Easter and Summer 2001: Hucclecote ChildCare Centre
 Assistant: A vacation job in a team of seven
 Responsibilities and achievements:
 Responsible for the care of children aged 2 months to 6 years
 Organised three summer outings for older children and attended as a helper
 Used graphic skills to design new posters for the centre
 I showed visitors around my department and university on admissions days, described my university experience, demonstrated some computing facilities and answered questions [preferable to 'Helped with Open Days']

Where an employer states that leadership skills are a main requirement:
 Leadership experience:
 Attended team and leadership course run by ... plc
 Worked as a team member in University Young Enterprise Company, raised £1600
 Elected social secretary of Walking and Climbing Club
 Taught IT skills to groups of 14- to 17-year-olds at summer school
 School Games Captain and Hockey 1st IX captain
 School Prefect
 I raised £3000 to fund my place on Operation Raleigh/Tall Ships race/... I really enjoyed the teamwork involved in all aspects of the expedition and in having to rely on one's own resources in awkward situations
 As the elected social secretary for the Surfing Club I organised 12 weekend visits to various venues. This involved liaising with hotels, restaurants and equipment specialists, making travel arrangements and coordinating the finances with the Treasurer

If problem solving is a requirement use statements like:
 In my academic and work I am logical and consistent. I plan my time and set myself targets. While at ... plc I used my creativity and initiative skills to organise a new cataloguing system. Working with people at ... plc, answering the phones and meeting customers taught me to think on my feet, give clear answers and to find solutions to awkward problems using my own initiative

an employer realises you have more computer skills and experience than other graduates.

If a job advertisement sets out a list of skill requirements make sure that your CV and letter addresses each area. These 'competence-based job descriptions' are a real help because the organisation is stating clearly what it wants and you can respond directly to each of the criteria. A description of the key roles required of the new employee and the transferable and technical skills that are essential or desirable is normally included.

Make sure your CV is two sides of A4 only, professionally printed, punchy and precise; no waffle is allowed. Be consistent in explaining what you have done, leave no time gaps and order it within sections putting your most recent experiences first. Write in formal English, not a casual style. Some applications are made electronically via websites but do not drop into a text message or email writing style—it does not impress human resources managers. Check out examples of CVs in your Careers Centre Guidance or on the web to get a good idea of what people include.

When you have drafted your CV pretend to be the human resource manager reading it. Does it convey the impression of an enthusiastic, energetic and creative person with oodles of skills? Redraft if not.

The Interview

Flunking an interview because of lack of research into the organisation is a total waste of your application and travel time. Review the company literature on the web, in the Careers Centre and read everything the company sends. Re-read the advertisement and check out the skills sought. Be ready to expand on your application with more details and examples. Before an interview think through some of these questions:

- (1) Why are you choosing to be a ... *customer analyst, environmental safety officer, junior web developer, market research officer* ... ?
- (2) What prompted you to apply to this organisation/sector/company?
- (3) What do you know about the business?
- (4) What interests you most about the job you have applied for?
- (5) What particular skills have you that will help you make a success of this job?
- (6) Why does working in this area/organisation/country attract you?
- (7) Why do you want to work in a large/middling/small organisation?
- (8) Why should we offer you a job with us?
- (9) What were the three most significant/tough/traumatic things that happened in your year abroad/life and how did you manage them?
- (10) Variations on: What are your strengths and weaknesses? What can you offer the company?

Remember that an interviewer does not want to know that you learned about rivers and wrote essays on urbanisation. Use real examples all the time:

During a team project in Spain I organised ... , negotiated for ... , shared the decision making ...

Helping tutor secondary school students to use the web and make PowerPoint slides gave me a real buzz. It gave me confidence to realise I enjoy working with people and helping them develop their skills.

As an elected member of the Department Teaching Committee I regularly debated teaching and learning issues with staff and fellow students, and enjoyed the negotiation elements.

Check out Careers Centre sites for advice on interviews or see Topgrads (2001) which has example answers to those difficult questions people ask at interview and other advice.

Chasing a job may involve you in any or all of: telephone interviews, selection centres; employer interviews on campus; campus careers fairs, recruitment fairs, career workshops, employer presentations, psychometric tests; standard application forms, employer's application form and... Use the experts in your Careers Centre to make sure you make the most of opportunities. Are there practice interview sessions? Will Careers Centre staff check your application form and CV before you post it? Bookmark the local careers information websites and check them regularly.

Gap Years with Pay?

To be given financial freedom wandering the globe for a year or two is a great escape.

For some a holiday is just right. Others take rather longer away and work *en route*. The TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) qualification can open many doors in Eastern Europe, the Near and Far East and Latin America. The real advantage comes in getting to know local people and being involved in local communities. Ecovolunteer (2001), Oneworld (2001), VSO (2001) and Whetter and Pybus (2000) are starting points in the voluntary sector. A number of international companies offer overseas internships too. Check out the options.

Geographical Careers

If you wish to continue to use your geographical knowledge and skills there are many possibilities. The most obvious is teaching in the infant, junior or senior school sector. In the UK there are incentives to train and no shortage of jobs in private or public schools (RGS, 2001). Then you can run fieldtrips to the locations of your choice. An MA or MSc will hone your skills in a specific geographical or related area; there are many options, so do a web check. An MRes (Master's by Research) aims to give you further research skills and an insight into whether research is for you. Almost all master's degrees can be taken as one-year or part-time degrees. Look at degree options in related subjects that interest you: civil engineering, information science, computing, management, sociology, politics, international studies ...; or in applied areas of interest: conservation, water management, applied meteorology and climatology, urbanism, tourism, regional science, environmental planning, society and space. If you fancy 3 years in-depth study of one topic, research PhD opportunities. Ask the postgraduate officer in your department for information and advice.

In many careers you can use your geographical knowledge indirectly. Interest in regional geography may encourage you towards the leisure sector, travel, international aid, the Foreign Office, politics or the international side of many companies. Environmental interests link with environmental management, waste planning and management, environment agency work, wilderness, coastal and river management, and planning and safety in chemical, engineering and waste management industries. GIS and mapping skills are used by governments, companies, and urban and regional planners among others to store, display and map information. Insurance companies, financial institutions, police, fire service and any telephone-based operation from pizza delivery onwards uses GIS; these organisations need geographers to understand them fully. If urban geography really is about understanding and enhancing the quality of urban life there are careers for geographers in town planning, transport system design and implementation, local and regional government, health service provision, and social and cultural organisations. Economic-minded geographers may find a niche in market and business location and research, transport management, logistics, many aspects of financial businesses and stockbroking. These are starter suggestions; what other geography connections are there?

Finally

Exploring career options is time-consuming but pays off later. Ignoring career research at university may lead to your returning home to carry on with vacation work (at vacation pay) rather than kick-starting the rest of your life with new opportunities. Researching careers in your first and second years may reveal exciting summer-vacation and gap-year work opportunities. If you wait until your final year you will miss these. All geography graduates are very employable. They possess many of the skills that

employers are seeking—it is a matter of articulating them clearly. Use your reflection and enterprise skills to decide what next. Get yourself well prepared and enjoy the job-seeking process. Good luck.

Correspondence: Pauline Kneale, School of Geography, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK. Fax: 0113 2333308. Email: p.e.kneale@geog.leeds.ac.uk

REFERENCES AND WEBSITES

- AGCAS (2001) Careers Services, online: <http://www.prospects.csu.man.ac.uk/student/cidd/carserv/index.htm>
- ECOVOLUNTEER (2001) online: <http://www.ecovolunteer.org/>
- HARVEY L., MOON S., GEALL V. & BOWER R. (1997) *Graduates Work: organisational change and students' attributes* (Birmingham, Centre for Research into Quality and Association of Graduate Recruiters).
- HAWKINS, P. & WINTER J. (1995) *Skills for Graduates in the 21st Century* (Birmingham, Association of Graduate Recruiters).
- HAWKINS, P. (2000) The Future of Work, online: <http://www.prospects.csu.ac.uk/student/cidd/wdgd/articles99/Future.htm>
- ONWORLD (2001) online: <http://www.oneworld.org/index.html>
- RGS (2001) Royal Geographical Society with IBG Education, online: <http://www.rgs.org/Category.asp?Page = maineducation>
- VSO (2001) Voluntary Service Overseas, online: <http://www.vso.org.uk/>
- TOPGRADS (2001) Does your future start here? online: <http://www.topgrads.co.uk/>
- WHETTER, L. & PYBUS, V. (2000) *International Voluntary Work*, 7th edn (Oxford, Vacation Work Publishers).

Websites with good advice for geographers seeking jobs include:

- <http://www.aag.org/> (Association of American Geographers—use the Careers in Geography link)
- <http://depts.washington.edu/geogjobs/> (University of Washington Department of Geography, Career Resources)
- <http://www.geog.canterbury.ac.nz/geog/dept/careers.html> (Geography Career Prospects, University of Canterbury, NZ)
- <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/infocentral/fact/cargeo.html> (Geography careers, National Geographic)
- <http://w2.vu.edu.au/careers/DevelopingCareerSkills.html> (Developing career skills, an action plan for students)
- <http://www.ssn.flinders.edu.au/geog/geojobs.htm> (GeoJobs, University of Flinders)
- <http://www.gis.com/resources/careers/> (Careers in GIS)
- <http://feature.geography.wisc.edu/resources/careers.html> (Geography Career Information University of Wisconsin)

Useful words for web searches include: careers, portfolio careers, telephone interviews, selection centres, careers fairs, recruitment fairs, career workshops, employer presentations, psychometric tests, GAP, internships, summer placements.

Copyright of Journal of Geography in Higher Education is the property of Carfax Publishing Company and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.