**Careers with Languages**

**Introduction**

Your career options with a language degree are broad and varied. Graduate employers increasingly value language skills and the intercultural awareness provided by international experience:

*"More and more employers are wanting graduates to have a 'global mind-set', which means understanding different cultures and how industries work across borders," says Stephen Isherwood, chief executive of the* [*Association of Graduate Recruiters*](http://www.agr.org.uk/)*.*

*Isherwood recommends that students make the most of time at uni to meet people from around the world, consider study abroad schemes like Erasmus, and says that speaking another language shows that a grad has a "better cultural understanding".*

Source: The Guardian: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/feb/04/skills-graduates-need-students-employability>

A recent study of Erasmus participants also showed that international experience on your year abroad has a range of career benefits [europa.eu/rapid/press-release\_IP-14-1025\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-1025_en.htm)

*“Erasmus Impact Study confirms EU student exchange scheme boosts employability and job mobility …A new study on the impact of the European Union's Erasmus student exchange programme shows that graduates with international experience fare much better on the job market. They are half as likely to experience long-term unemployment compared with those who have not studied or trained abroad and, five years after graduation, their unemployment rate is 23% lower.”*

**Key issues to consider**

* **Approximately 50% of graduate jobs are not degree-specific**. This means an employer is looking for graduate-level skills and abilities, but does not mind whether you have studied German or Chemistry, English Literature or Arabic. This means that you have a really wide range of job opportunities available to you
* **It is therefore crucial to spend some time reflecting on what YOU want to do** – this could include reflecting on your strengths, your interests, tasks or responsibilities you have held in the past which you have enjoyed, or projects which you have enjoyed working on. It may also involve reflecting on your values and motivations – what is likely to motivate you to go to work on a Monday morning? If you want help reflecting on these and many other factors which may influence your career choice then why not look at the resources on the Careers Service website: [www.ed.ac.uk/career](http://www.ed.ac.uk/career) *> Explore your options> Figuring out your career*
* **How do you want to use your language skills in your future career?** Some people wish to continue speaking the language they have learned on a daily basis in the future and this will necessarily point to certain career paths
  + Others would like a career where international experience may be possible in the future but not necessarily immediately – so they may use their language skills occasionally but not as a key feature of the work they do
  + Others again feel they would like to use the broader skillset which their language study has developed, but do not need to use the language itself on a regular basis
  + What would be the right option for you?



Bilingualism Matters has put together a great leaflet that summarises the range of skills gained by learning another language.

**Common career options with a languages degree**

The ideas below are some examples of options which languages graduates are commonly interested in. However, this is not a prescriptive or exhaustive list and other languages graduates may take different routes for their career.

If you are interested in any of the careers listed here you can find out more by using the *Occupations* section of the Careers Service website:

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/careers/explore/occupations>

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| **Careers which require high levels of use of language skills** | Translation  Interpreting  Language Teacher  European Institution careers e.g. the European Commission  Linguist for the Security Services  Bilingual executive assistant or personal assistant |
| **Careers where languages may be an advantage** | Civil Service Fast Stream: Europe  Civil Service Fast Stream: Diplomatic Service  International Development  Buying, selling and retailing - including food and drink companies and supermarkets as well as fast moving consumer goods (FMCG)  Sales and marketing (international)  Travel and tourism  Export and import  Logistics, transport and distribution  Media and communications including marketing, sales and advertising  Event management  Teaching English as a Foreign Language |
| **Additional careers where skills from language degree may be valuable** | Civil Service Fast Stream and Civil Service roles  Management Consultancy  Finance and business  Marketing, advertising and PR  Human Resource Management  Accountancy  Policy work  Charities and 3rd sector  Law |

Some common options are also summarised on the Prospects website (covers modern languages but broadly applicable to other languages too): [www.prospects.ac.uk/options\_modern\_languages.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/options_modern_languages.htm)

The University of Kent has a useful site: [www.kent.ac.uk/careers/modernlanguages.htm](http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/modernlanguages.htm)

You might also find useful ideas by looking at **examples of what previous Edinburgh graduates have gone on to do**. Have a look at the destinations of previous graduates from your degree and similar programmes: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/careers/explore/what-with-degree/dlhe>

and use the Alumni Tool on LinkedIn <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/careers/looking-for-work/social-media/linkedin>

**Graduate Recruitment Schemes interested in language graduates**

Below is a list of some graduate recruitment programmes that either require language skills or which offer the chance to work in other countries. However, as noted above, many other employers will be able to make use of your languages, or offer international experience at some point during your career.

This list is not comprehensive but should act as a guide, giving you a flavour of the range of graduate recruitment schemes for languages. As well as the employers listed here, make sure that you check MyCareerHub for employers recruiting language graduates at different points of the year: (<https://mycareerhub.ed.ac.uk/students/login>)

This list is adapted from an original list by University of Kent Careers Service:

* **Civil Service – European Fast Stream**
* **Civil Service – Foreign Office Future Talent Scheme**
* **Cargill European Graduate Programme\*** (willingness to work overseas)
* **Diageo European Graduate Programme**
* The **Diplomatic Service**
* **EasyJet European Graduate Programme\*** (willingness to work overseas)
* **European Union Careers**
* **Goodyear Dunlop European Graduate Programme\*** (looking for people who have spent time abroad)
* **Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ)**
* **Heineken International Graduate Programme**
* **Inter-Continental Hotels\***  European Graduate Programme
* **Reckitt Benckiser** European Graduate Programme
* **Red Bull** **European Graduate Programme**
* **Reuters Journalism Programme**
* **Fidelity Investment Management Graduate Programme**
* **The Security Services (MI5 and MI6)**
* **Sony European Graduate Programme\*** (Also opportunities to work in Japan but Japanese isn’t essential initially; you learn while you are working)
* **Telefonica Pan-European Graduate Programme**

\*no specific mention of needing language graduates

Some examples of employers who have advertised graduate jobs through MyCareerHub recently and specified they require language skills:

* Amazon (Investigations Specialist)
* SpectrumInsight (Insight Analyst)
* TVF MediaGroup (International Media Trainee)
* TravelBookingNetwork (International Manager)
* The International Media Associates (Operations Coordinator)
* NRS Healthcare (Export Sales Executive)
* ScotGrad (Marketing Assistant)
* TPP (Graduate Business Analyst)
* Ai-Media (Real-time Subtitler)
* Skyscanner (Range of roles – global travel search site)
* Amnesty International (global internships)

**Working abroad**

Working abroad is an attractive option for a lot of students and having experience of spending time abroad is highly valued by employers. You could spend time improving your language skills, experiencing another culture or starting your career. One option to work in your preferred country is to start by working for a UK company who has an office there and then transfer at a later stage. To help you identify opportunities it is a good idea to start by honing in on the country you would like to work in and also the sort of work you would like to do.

The Careers Service is able to support you if you decide to work abroad. Use our resources (some listed here) and also talk to our staff, either by booking an appointment with your School’s Career Consultant or dropping in to talk to one of our Careers Information Advisers who staff our helpdesk and are available without appointment.

To get you started with your job hunt overseas try the following:

* The Careers Service advertises opportunities throughout the world on MyCareerHub
* Use the *International Experiences* section of our website <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/careers/international-experiences>**. There is region-specific information which includes lists of the best places to look for vacancies.**
* **Access the resources on the Careers channel on MyEd, particularly Going Global. This gives you access to detailed information on a wide range of countries and also acts as a vacancy database.**
* Meet employers who have international opportunities at Careers Service events such as careers fairs and presentations. Even though that employer might not be promoting their international vacancies, provided you have done your research, it gives you a great opportunity to find out what might be available and to demonstrate your interest and enthusiasm.
* Use the links to professional bodies on our website [www.ed.ac.uk/careers/occupations](http://www.ed.ac.uk/careers/occupations). If you know you want to work in a particular field the British organisation can help you find their equivalents in other countries. Professional bodies are a good source of vacancies and often have a list of their members on their websites, which provides you with a readymade list of potential employers.
* Using Chambers of Commerce in the country you want to work in is another way of generating a list of potential employers to contact.
* Speculative applications can be a really effective way of finding opportunities. You can find more detail on this in the *Finding unadvertised vacancies* section of our website: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/careers/looking-for-work/graduate-jobs/finding-unadvertised>

**Work experience**

Opportunities using your language skills aren’t restricted to after you graduate. There are various options where you can use your skills in jobs while you study and/or during vacations. These are some suggestions to help get you started. Remember, if you need further help either contact your School’s Career Consultant or speak to one of our Careers Information Advisers who staff our helpdesk.

* Check MyCareerHub. You will find a range of opportunities advertised there. Possibly even some part-time jobs which require someone with language skills e.g. telephoning, hospitality-related roles
* The Employ.ed Overseas Internship Programme enables you to undertake structured paid placements throughout the world. You can find out more [www.ed.ac.uk/careers/employed-on-campus](http://www.ed.ac.uk/careers/employed-on-campus)
* Speculative applications can be a great way of finding opportunities. You can find more information about this on our website in the section *Finding unadvertised internships*.
* **In the country specific pages at** <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/careers/international-experiences> **you will find links to resources that are particularly helpful for identifying internships in that country. The Going Global resource on MyEd (accessible by selecting Careers Service resources) also contains internship and work experience websites**
* **The British Council run work experience programmes to enable students to get experience in countries such as China**
* Country profiles on Targetjobs [www.targetjobs.co.uk](http://www.targetjobs.co.uk) cover internships and work experience in specific countries.
* Volunteering abroad can be a way of developing language skills. You can find resources to help you identify suitable opportunities in the *Volunteering* section of our website [www.ed.ac.uk/careers](http://www.ed.ac.uk/careers)
* Attend our fairs where there are a range of organisations some of whom will have opportunities overseas that are suitable for undergraduates.
* The employers listed above who recruit language graduates may also offer internships in addition to graduate jobs.

**Marketing the skills and experience from your languages degree**

It is really important to applications for internships, work experience and graduate jobs that you are able to market the skills you have gained from your degree. Of course, you are developing the language skills themselves – but be prepared to also spend some time thinking about the broader skillset involved. Here are some examples to get you started:

* Use language creatively and precisely for a range of purposes and audiences
* Reflect critically and make judgements in light of evidence and argument
* Extract and synthesise key information from written and spoken sources
* Organise and present ideas in a structured and reasoned argument
* Analytical and evaluative thinking
* Problem-solving skills
* Work creatively and flexibly with a team
* Self-reliance, initiative, adaptability and intercultural awareness

These examples were taken from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages & Related Studies (2007): <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Subject-benchmark-statement-Languages-and-related-studies.pdf>

**If you are in your 4th year and have returned from** **a year abroad, also remember that this is worth far more on your CV than one line listing the institution and the dates!** Living and studying or working in another country is a considerable achievement. Use examples from your time abroad to show personal attributes such as confidence, resilience and determination; or skills such as team-working, flexibility and demonstrating intercultural awareness.

**Careers with Languages - Case Studies**

*The following are sample case studies from previous University of Edinburgh languages graduates, to give you a sense of the broad range of career options with a languages degree*

**Case Study 1 - MA (Hons) German, 2011**

* **Short description of your current job**

I currently work as an Ethical Coordinator at Sainsbury’s. It is my responsibility to ensure the factories which produce our own-brand products (in the Non-Food category – so everything from t-shirts to toys to toasters!) meet our ethical standards in terms of health and safety, wages and working hours and fair treatment of workers. I work closely with our suppliers and teams based in the UK and overseas to ensure factories are compliant and to support in the remediation of any issues.

* **Brief career history**

During my final year of study at the University of Edinburgh, I applied for the Sainsbury’s Non-Food Buying graduate scheme. I got the role and started as a Graduate Buyer for Storage, Bathroom and Laundry products, before moving on to Home Fragrance. After 18 months, the scheme ended and I moved into a role in Strategy, working with different teams to define their category priorities and make recommendations for areas of growth. After 1 year, I joined the Ethical team.

* **How have you used the skills and/or knowledge developed during your degree in your career?**

I have not directly used my language skills in my role (other than booking a restaurant in Germany for a colleague!) but the skills I learnt during my studies have been invaluable in securing a graduate position and in each subsequent role. Being able to communicate with people from a variety of different backgrounds and working through large volumes of information to extract key findings are two elements honed during a language degree that can be directly applied to the workplace.

* **What experience do you feel helped you get you where you are now?**

I worked part-time in Retail throughout school and university, which gave me a real grounding in the sector and an understanding of the day-to-day challenges faced on the shop floor. Throughout my degree, I also volunteered with the LEAPS schools programme, which was a great opportunity to get out into the community and speak with young people, and was a member of the Hare & Hounds running club, which pushed me out of my comfort zone (and was a wonderful way of exploring Edinburgh!). I was passionate about both of these activities and always highlighted them in job applications.

It’s important to have interests outside of your degree to show versatility and to differentiate yourself from other candidates when applying for jobs – it can lead to all sorts of interesting conversations and a prospective employer is far more likely to remember that you played an active role in the Chocolate Society than your exam grades from the previous semester.

* **Reflecting back on your career path between graduation and your current job; what career decisions did you make and how?**

I used the Milkround website (<http://www.milkround.com>) for information on companies’ graduate schemes and closing dates for applications – many schemes close by December so if you are seeking a job for the same year you graduate, it’s advisable to apply early. You can search by sector or job role, which really helps narrow down the choice as there are hundreds of schemes available.

I also visited the university Careers Service to talk to a careers advisor and see which fields former students in my area of study had gone into after graduating. There was a wealth of information available for every conceivable employment sector and I found it particularly useful to read former students’ accounts of the application/interview/assessment centre processes.

* **What advice would you offer to students who want to get into your area of work?**

Work experience and/or internships are crucial in the Retail sector – most employers specify this as a minimum requirement. If you are unable to secure an internship or find paid part-time work but are interested in a career in Retail, I would recommend volunteering in a charity shop – greatly rewarding, easy to fit around your studies and you’ll still learn lots about the industry.

* **What general advice would you offer students making career decisions today?**

Whilst the academic side of your degree is obviously important, make sure you dedicate some time to activities outside of your studies – whether part-time work, societies, sport or volunteering. Not only will this stop you from going stir crazy spending every waking hour in the library, but it will also give you lots of material to use in application forms and discuss during job interviews.

If you are unsure of the type of role you’d like to do, target a specific company instead. Choose a company that aligns with your values and where you could really imagine yourself working – whether that’s a small start-up or a well-established international organisation. Once you have joined a company, it’s fairly easy to move around internally until you find something that suits you.

Finally, make sure your enthusiasm shines through in any job application or interview – demonstrate how you’ve researched the role, emphasise that you are willing to learn and cite examples that show how your skills match those in the job description to convince any prospective employer you’d be an asset to their team!

**Case Study 2 - Scandinavian Studies, 2007**

* **Short description of your current job**

I am an in-house translator at a large accountancy firm. The company has around 3,000 employees all over Sweden, with a tiny translation department of 2 people. My main responsibilities are translating and editing both internal texts and texts on behalf of clients from Swedish to English, as well as arranging translations between other languages with freelancers.

* **Brief career history**

After graduation I had no idea what to do, and no real ambition. I floated around for a bit, moved to Berlin and set to work on frittering away all my money while keeping afloat doing dead-end jobs like call centres and data entry. Around a year after graduating, I saw a job advert on the Edinburgh careers website for recent Swedish graduates and got in touch. The ad was placed by my current employers, and from there that started me on working freelance. I did that on and off for a couple of years, then moved to Sweden for other reasons (they say people move there because of love or war, and I haven’t got any gunshot wounds). Once I was there I was offered a full-time job pretty much out of the blue.

* **How have you used the skills and/or knowledge developed during your degree in your career?**

I suppose learning what you might call a niche language is the only thing that has helped me, that fact alone.

* **What experience do you feel helped you get you where you are now?**

Living and working abroad while at university to some degree. I was never afraid to up sticks and take a chance somewhere else, which is probably fairly important if somebody really wants to do something with languages.

* **Reflecting back on your career path between graduation and your current job; what career decisions did you make and how?**

“*Stumbled upon an interesting vacancy*” is really the one to describe it. Also, having done really soul-sucking jobs certainly gives you much more of an appreciation for having a better job, and makes you work harder at it too.

* **What advice would you offer to students who want to get into your area of work?**

I think for the majority of new translators, having a speciality is important. Whatever you’re interested in and knowledgeable about, there’s probably a company or two somewhere that make money off it. Find out where they are and then pester them. Get in touch with as many agencies as you can find and pester them too. Eventually somebody will send you something, and there’s your foot in the door.

* **What general advice would you offer students making career decisions today?**

Whether or not it applies to all students, I don’t know, but I would tell myself not to worry too much about what you want to do. Just get any old job, and you’ll see that once you’re actually in gainful employment, your ideas about what you want out of it will gain much better clarity and urgency.

**Case Study 3 - Spanish and Classics (Latin), graduated in 2009**

* **Short description of your current job**

Currently I am working as an ABL Assistant Relationship Manager in the Corporate Bank of The Royal Bank of Scotland. I support effective risk management of a portfolio of Clients through regular collateral monitoring routines such as financial analysis of forecast, management and statutory information received, and through the preparation of regular reports to our Credit and Portfolio Risk management teams. I regularly attend client meetings where exceptional customer service and delivery of our Client’s goals / requirements is at the forefront of everything we do.

* **Brief career history**

I got a 2:1 at The University of Edinburgh with a distinction in oral proficiency for Spanish. Since graduating, I have held a number of positions:

1. Recruitment Consultant
2. Earnings Analyst at Bloomberg LLP
3. UK Retail Graduate at RBS
4. Corporate ABL Assistant Relationship Manager at RBS – current role

* **How have you used the skills and/or knowledge developed during your degree in your career?**

My proficiency in Spanish helped me to secure a job at Bloomberg, as in order to be considered for the role, I had to speak a foreign language. During my time there, I often had to speak to Equity Analysts / Sell-Side Analysts on the phone in Spanish, which was slightly daunting at first given that I had to converse with them on financial matters, but it became easier with time.

Latin has helped me to think quite methodically and logically, and overall my analytical skills have enhanced as a result. It’s crucial for my current role that I am able to think analytically when I am analysing financial data for example.

Early on in my career, I was able to draw upon some of my experiences gained during the course of my degree at job interviews. I would have struggled to answer some of the competency-based questions otherwise!

* **What experience do you feel helped you get you where you are now?**

I think my degree ultimately helped me to secure a good graduate job. When I graduated, I had a banking job lined up which fell through unfortunately due to the ‘Credit Crunch’. Therefore, I went into recruitment for just under a couple of years always knowing that it was a stop-gap measure. My experience at Bloomberg to an extent also helped me to get me where I am now, as I was exposed to financial markets, and it paved the way for my path into banking, which is where I’ve always wanted to be. My varied work experience, drive to succeed, and number of interests (sport, travelling, etc), have helped me to get to where I am today, as I am able to demonstrate that I am a well-rounded individual and not just academic.

* **Reflecting back on your career path between graduation and your current job; what career decisions did you make and how?**

I haven’t attended any careers fairs between graduation and my current job, but I have been helped by having a good network of friends and family that I can turn to for advice, and ultimately being the master of my own destiny. In my current role, which I really enjoy, I fell into it by chance as I wasn’t enjoying the graduate scheme so decided to start applying internally and ‘roll off’ the scheme early. I hadn’t even heard of Invoice Finance (unlocking the value tied up in invoices by providing immediate cash advances against a percentage of them, and thereby assisting businesses with their working capital needs /cash flow), nor did I know much about ABL, but it’s a growing market in the UK and a good space to be in currently.

* **What advice would you offer to students who want to get into your area of work?**

The thing about banking is that it opens you up to a wide range of opportunities and roles, and it’s really down to the individual firstly to make the most of it, and secondly find something that you like and are good at. If you want a job that is relatively secure, fast-paced and one where you are constantly learning, then banking is for you. You have to show drive, initiative, flexibility and a real enthusiasm to learn and more importantly, improve with, and on the job.

* **What general advice would you offer students making career decisions today?**

Try to be as open-minded as possible. The job market is very difficult nowadays with more and more graduates flooding the market, so it’s important to not try and limit yourself to one job / one particular space, even if it is your dream job. It took me almost 3 years to get into banking, and so if you can’t get what you want first time, take something else for the interim and work towards securing that position you really want. Equally, don’t spread yourself too wide as you want to be able to demonstrate at interviews that you’re not applying for every job going!