

Mature Students

This leaflet looks at some of the specific issues mature students might have when applying for jobs. Use it in conjunction with the other leaflets in this series which provide more general information.

WHAT MIGHT MATURE STUDENTS HAVE TO OFFER EMPLOYERS?

- ability to cope with change, having entered an academic world
- social confidence, having dealt with a range of people in your professional and personal life
- wider experience of organisations and jobs
- determination to succeed, having started and finished a degree often with additional obstacles
- enthusiasm and motivation to start learning something new later in life, often as a result of a considered decision
- greater customer credibility
- reliability: more likely to value a job 'well done'; less likely to take time off sick
- experience of solving problems
- time management skills; you're often juggling many tasks at once.

Mature students often undervalue their experience. Try to stand outside yourself and think about how you could sell yourself to a future employer; ask a friend or the careers service for help if you find this hard.

CHALLENGING EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS

Attitudes towards employing more mature candidates are changing. The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 makes it illegal for an employer to discriminate against you because of your age. See www.dwp.gov.uk/age-positive for organisations that have already recognised the benefits of older employees. You may find some companies are concerned about your skills, competencies and whether you would fit into their organisation. It will pay to take the time to carefully assess your skills. Think about how you can positively present your experience to the employer, convincing them that you are the best person for the job. Take a look at the *Getting Career Inspiration* leaflet in this series. Sometimes contacting an organisation and requesting an informal chat can help dispel any prejudices an employer might have. The *Job Hunting* leaflet in this series gives more information to help you go about doing this.

DEALING WITH COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS IN A CV, APPLICATION FORM OR INTERVIEW.

A mature student...

will not fit into a young team and cope with young managers.

You have just spent a number of years at university, working on projects with a diverse range of younger peers. Some of your lecturers might have been younger than you. Use this as evidence that the above perception isn't true.

is set in their ways and takes longer to learn new things.

Emphasise new skills you have learnt recently and anything innovative you might have done. This might be during your degree, employment or leisure time.

is inflexible.

Mention if you have had to juggle work or family commitments with your degree. You have also adapted to university life.

is less mobile.

Did you relocate to do your degree, spend a year abroad or travel? Perhaps, if you have children who've now left school, you're much more mobile and willing to see different parts of the country. Alternatively, if you have school-age children, you could demonstrate your commitment and stability to a particular location and company for an appreciable amount of time.

will want a higher salary.

You have survived on a grant or loan for the past few years, and you may not have enjoyed a high salary in the past.

COMMON CONCERNS FOR CVS AND APPLICATIONS

Shall I mention my age?

The age legislation makes it illegal for an employer to specify an age limit on any recruitment literature. Therefore, since the question is not being asked by the employer, you do not have to mention it. Of course anyone really interested will work out your age from your compulsory schooling dates and once you're employed you'll need to submit it for official records.

What shall I do about a non-traditional education?

Employers may not be aware of all qualifications. Compare any that are unusual to A-levels, GCSEs or O-levels. You may be able to describe the qualifications using the UCAS tariff table at www.ucas.com/students/ucas_tariff. You do not need to list every qualification taken: summarise or omit irrelevant ones but make sure you do not leave large gaps in your experience.

I have had no paid work experience.

You do not have to be paid to gain valuable skills. Think about what you have learnt by bringing up a family, doing a degree, buying a house or working as a volunteer. Make sure you sell the skills this experience has developed.

My work experience is not relevant.

Emphasise the skills and knowledge you have gained from the experience rather than the job title and duties.

I am looking to change career completely.

Use your covering letter, the additional information section on your application form or a 'career objective' on your CV to offer a rationale for why you want to change career. Try to match the skills and activities from your previous work experience to the position you have applied for. A skills-based CV is an effective way of dealing with this.

WRITING YOUR CV

There are many ways to present your experience in a CV. Below are some useful hints for mature students; experiment and find out which work best for you:

Main sections of a CV:

- Personal details
- Career Profile (not compulsory)
- Education
- Work experience, covering the skills you have gained
- Additional skills, such as your level of competency with IT, languages and so on
- Other activities
- Referees (not compulsory).

Ordering the sections

Choose the order that highlights the most relevant points. If your degree is your most recent and important activity you will probably want to put your education before employment. If you have had a good amount of relevant work experience you may want to reverse these sections. Do not just list the facts; mention the skills you have developed. The easiest way is to record them under each activity; however you may find you have a long CV using this method. Other approaches might be to mention the skills after a list of similar jobs or in a separate section of their own. The work experience section below provides some ideas.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Reverse date order.

This works well if your career has progressed in a logical fashion, if you have had a small number of long-term jobs, or if you intend to re-enter the job market in a similar field to your previous career.

Split work experience into 'relevant' and 'other' sections.

List the experience that is relevant to the position applied for first. This can be paid or voluntary and can be spread over a period of time. Make sure you place more emphasis on this section. Follow with any other work experience you have had.

Grouping similar jobs together even if they happened at different times.

An effective way to avoid repetition and make a chequered career appear more logical is to place similar jobs together and mention skills and experience gained after each group.

Short summary.

This is useful for experience that is low level, unrelated to the job or that you gained a long time ago. It allows you to highlight the skills developed rather than the job title.

Skills-based CV.

A skills-based CV allows you to draw on all areas of your experience to provide evidence of the skills you have developed. This method can minimise the impact of an unconventional career path, low level and limited or unrelated work experience. Identify the key skills required for the job you're applying for and use these as headings for your CV. Provide specific evidence under each heading of how and where you have used this skill. Include a career history as employers still like to see dates even if you have got all the right attributes.

Activities or interests

Many mature students feel that juggling a degree with other commitments leaves little time for leisure. Do not forget you can use your experience of bringing up a family, community involvement or helping with a family business to match an employer's requirements. If you lack relevant experience from your working life you might be able to illustrate it in this section. Also think about dealing with the employer misconceptions mentioned overleaf. This section might be an opportunity to show an employer that you are capable of learning new things or that you can fit in with people who are younger than you.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- *Mature Students - The Way Forward*, AGCAS Booklet, 2005
- *How to Complete an Application Form*, The Careers Group, University of London, 2004
- *How to Write a CV*, The Careers Group, London, 2006. In the online publications section of www.careers.lon.ac.uk
- *How to Succeed at Interviews and Other Selection Methods*, The Careers Group, University of London, 2007
- *How to Analyse and Promote Your Skills for Work*, The Careers Group, University of London, 2006
- *How to Change Your Career*, The Careers Group, University of London, 2005
- www.efa.org.uk the Employers Forum on Age is an independent network of leading employers who recognise the need to attract and retain valuable employees whatever their age
- *Build Your Own Rainbow*, Hopson & Scally, Management Books, 1999 - covers all aspects of choosing a career
- www.dwp.gov.uk/age-positive These pages have case studies and various guides to help both older workers and their employers understand the legislation involved.

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