

## Graduate Leadership Programme: A Guide for Applicants

March 2019

The Graduate Leadership Programme (GLP) is a programme exclusive to Ulster University Graduates which supports them in making a successful transition to the next stage of their career, helping them to stand out from the crowd.

- Open to all final year students graduating in July 2019
- Lasts for 6 months (16<sup>th</sup> Sept 2019-14<sup>th</sup> March 2020)
- Graduates receive £1,100 bursary per month and £1,967 course fee paid
- There are a total of 35 places across subject areas and locations within Northern Ireland
- Fully funded Postgraduate Certificate in Graduate Leadership designed to develop future leaders

To register, search for vacancies and apply go to:

**[recruit.ulster.ac.uk/internships](https://recruit.ulster.ac.uk/internships)**

All GLP vacancies will require you to apply with both a cover letter and a CV. Outlined below are the key tips for putting these together

### CV Guide

The purpose of a CV is to tell a recruiter all about you, your skills and experience – and hopefully persuade them to invite you to interview. It's often the first opportunity you have to make an impression.

Your CV should always be accompanied by a covering letter, unless the employer tells you otherwise. It is a key part of your application. Your letter should demonstrate your suitability for the vacancy and highlight the most important parts of your CV.

### CV format

As a current student or recent graduate you must try to keep your CV to two pages in length. Aim for a professional-looking CV. This means it should:

- be consistent in layout
- have a good balance of text and space
- have careful use of italics, bold and underlining
- be printed on good quality paper (if posting)

The traditional – or ‘reverse chronological’ – CV is the most commonly used. It often lists your education, work experience and additional activities – with your most recent achievements first. The sections of the traditional CV will normally be:

- **Personal information** - such as contact details
- **Profile/Career Objective**
- **Education**
- **Work experience** – paid or voluntary
- **Additional skills**
- **Interests and achievements**
- **Referees**

This format makes it easy for employers to spot relevant information fast and gives a complete picture of a candidate in a clear and structured way. See [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) under careers advice for examples of content and format of CV's and covering letters.

**Profile /Career Objective/ Summary** - This should be a short summary of your experience, skills and abilities, and be contained in four to six lines of text. Only list the attributes that will be of interest to an employer. Read the following link for further advice and tips. <http://www.dayjob.com/content/writing-a-career-objective-for-a-cv-426.htm>

**Education / Qualifications** – Provide dates, full and correct title of your degree with modules completed in the final year of your degree. If you are a graduate you do not have to list all your 'O' Levels/GCSEs, you can indicate the number of GCSE's gained highlighting the subjects Maths, English and Science.

**Experience** - Your work experience should be listed in reverse chronological order starting with your most recent job first and then work backwards. You only need to include the year you started and

the year you finished each job. You do not need to include the month or day, e.g. put 2016 - 2017 rather than 1.8.2016 - 4.6.2017. If you have had a lot of jobs you may need to group some of the earlier jobs together, e.g. '2010 - 2014 various retail positions'.

When you are describing your experience for each position you should start with the strongest point in your favour and then work backwards. If you have a lot of points to put under one specific job you may want to break this description into two or more sections. You could break up this section into responsibilities and achievements or you could break it up into specific functions, e.g. management, sales & marketing; the choice is yours.

**Skills** – This section sets you apart from other applicants and shows what you can bring to the job. Here are some of the top employability skills that you can write about on your CV. <https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/career-planning/273051-the-top-10-skills-thatll-get-you-a-job-when-you-graduate>

**Interests and Achievements** – Keep this section fairly short. Read the following link for further tips and advice. <http://www.totaljobs.com/careers-advice/cvs-and-applications/how-to-write-about-hobbies-on-a-cv>

**References** - You should include two references, one of which should be an academic reference, e.g. your studies adviser tutor, while the second reference could be from an employer you have worked for.

There are numerous formats to present your CV. Some will be more appropriate for certain industries or personal circumstances as they enable you to highlight your best selling points in different ways. The following link provides a breakdown of the other formats: <http://www.dayjob.com/content/cv-examples-430.htm>

## VMOCK

Once you have completed a draft of your CV log on to VMOCK, our latest online CV platform that will provide you with instant personalised feedback and grade your CV. This 3 steps to success resource platform (upload your CV; get instant feedback: and improve and succeed) can be accessed 24/7 at: <https://advice.employability.ulster.ac.uk/cvbuilder> or via [www.vmock.com/ulster](http://www.vmock.com/ulster)

Develop an effective student (or graduate) **LinkedIn** profile to complement your CV, follow the link for tips and advice <https://www.topcv.co.uk/career-advice/cv-linkedin-profile-writing>

## Tailor your application

The needs of employers vary. Make sure that you find out the employer's requirements by looking at the job advert. Typically they will outline:

- The type of person sought (skills required/desired)
- Experience required
- Key duties or work activities
- A description of the organisation (what they do, their key values, who their main clients are etc.)

Make a good impression by:

- Checking there is no incorrect spelling or bad grammar
- Make sure you do not have an unprofessional email address
- Recruiters have reconsidered candidates based on their social media profile, do an audit and check what is on your public profiles

Effective techniques for highlighting what you have to offer include:

- Give relevant items more space on your CV/LinkedIn profile
- Prioritise relevant skills or experience within a section
- Use action orientated language when describing your experience (e.g. led a campaign, managed a team etc.)

## Covering Letter

Each cover letter you write must specifically match the job vacancy that you are applying for. The closer your CV and cover letter matches the job you are applying for, the more likely you are to secure a job interview. For examples and further resources see:

[www.prospects.ac.uk/links/cvwriting](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/cvwriting)

<http://gradireland.com/careers-advice/cvs-and-applications>

Keep your cover letter brief, while making sure it emphasises your suitability for the job. It can be broken down into the following sections:

- **First paragraph** - The opening statement should set out why you're writing the letter. Begin by stating the position you're applying for, where you saw it advertised and when you are available to start.
- **Second paragraph** - Cover why you're suitable for the job, what attracted you to this type of work, why you're interested in working for the company and what you can offer the organisation.
- **Third paragraph** - Highlight relevant experience and demonstrate how your skills match the specific requirements of the job description. Summarise any additional strengths and explain how these could benefit the company.
- **Last paragraph** - Use the closing paragraph to round up your letter. Reiterate your interest in the role and indicate your desire for a personal interview. Now is the time to mention any unavailable dates. Finish by thanking the employer and say how you are looking forward to receiving a response.

## Top Tips for Cover Letters

- Take some time to look into the role you're applying for and the company – and use this information to tailor your cover letter accordingly. Here are a few key things you should find out before you start writing:
  - What does the company do?
  - Who are their competitors?
  - Who are their target audience?
  - What does the role involve?
  - What are the essential skills?

Once you've found answers to these questions, you'll be able to make it clear in your cover letter how your skills and abilities match up with what the employer is looking for.

- Not only will doing research give you the knowledge you need to tailor your cover letter and CV to the style of the company, it also demonstrates that you've got a real interest in the specific role and company.
- Aside from ensuring its written using clear paragraphs – it also should be the right length. Aim for half a side of A4 (or one page maximum)
- Identify your USPs - They're your unique selling points. Be positive about what you have to offer and clearly outline how your skills and experience meet those requested in the job description. Demonstrate why you're the perfect candidate.
- Include examples - Back up the claims in your cover letter with real evidence or examples that show how and when you've used your skills and experience.

### Useful Websites

[http://www.prospects.ac.uk/applying\\_for\\_jobs\\_write\\_a\\_successful\\_job\\_application.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/applying_for_jobs_write_a_successful_job_application.htm)

<https://jobs.theguardian.com/article/how-to-write-a-cv-a-guardian-jobs-guide/>

### Interviews – Preparation & Performance

Interviews are a key element in any application process. Having made a written application, either by CV or application form, an employer will select the candidates who best fit the identified criteria for the post. These are the people who move to the next stage where an interview is most likely.

#### Why Interviews?

a) so that the employer can:

- collect information which cannot be supplied by an application form or CV
- fill in some of the inevitable gaps
- see what you are like as a person
- find the right person for the job

b) so that you can:

- expand on and elaborate on things you wrote on your CV or application form
- give additional examples
- demonstrate you have what it takes to do the job

- decide if the job/company is right for you

## Types of Interview

**Biographical** – Biographical interviews are used by employers as a means of finding out more about you and whether you are suited to both the role and the company. Questions are based on the information given on your CV or application form.

**Technical** – if the job requires technical skills you can expect to be asked about specific knowledge including projects, placements and work experience. Be prepared for hypothetical questions and practical exercises such as interpreting a diagram or deciphering a computer programming code. Thorough preparation is needed. Not all technical interviews will be conducted face to face, some might be conducted over the telephone or by Skype.

**Academic study** – admission to courses may depend upon a mixture of subject knowledge, achievement, interest and motivation.

**Panel** – Panels may consist of two or more interviewers. This may seem daunting but it can be fairer to be assessed by more than one person. Direct your answers to the person who asked the question but still be inclusive of the others on the panel. Interviewers may take notes whilst you are talking, this is normal procedure.

**Telephone/Video** – This is used in the early stages of an application to screen candidates but they can occur at any point. The use of Skype is making this more common. The questions are more likely to focus more on your general competences and skill. Your aim is to try to show your enthusiasm and commitment in a short conversation. Prepare yourself well before hand, speak clearly and ensure you take the call where there will be no interruptions.

**Group** – used a good deal in Assessment Centre and for PGCE courses. You are often given a topic to discuss or a task to complete in front of the other applicants.

**Second Interviews** – If you are asked to a second interview it means you have made it through the first screening. These interviews are generally more intensive and detailed. The interviewer will now be looking for evidence that you have the skills, abilities and interest to carry out the job and that you are able to bring something of value to the organisation.



**Strengths-based interviews** – A new style of graduate interview which focuses on what you enjoy doing as a way of assessing your personal attributes. For this type of interview, you will need to consider the academic achievements and activities that you included on your CV. Assess what you most enjoyed and what you took pride in. Interviewers will be seeking to identify your abilities, such as working with others and analysing problems.

**Competency- based interview-** Increasingly, companies choose to employ a competency based interview approach. These are also known as skills-based, behavioural criteria or structured interviews and work on the principle that: ***past performance is the best predictor of future performance***. Competency based interviews are where the interviewers have clearly identified the skills required to carry out the job for which you are applying and will ask specific questions about the skills involved.

The aims of a competency based interview are:

- to obtain information about how you have previously demonstrated the key competencies for the post through specific questions, and
- to explore the examples further to obtain a clear understanding of the situation, what you did, your contribution and the outcome.

### **Preparing for a Competency-Based Interview**

Preparation is the key to performing well at any interview. Below are some tips on interview preparation:

- Ensure you have a copy of the job description clearly defining the key competencies for the role
- Think clearly about additional key competencies needed for the job.
- Take some time to reflect on your experience and the evidence that you have included in the application form and its relevance to the job, i.e. from employment, academic, vacation or part-time work, university clubs and societies, holidays and travel or personal and family experiences.
- Think about examples, either past experiences or projects, which you can use in the interview situation to illustrate each competency.
- Think positively about why this role appeals to you, and why you think you should be considered for this role and be prepared to talk about this during the interview.

A possible starting point is to think about your past achievements:

- The things that you have done that you are proudest of,



- Situations you feel that you have handled particularly well,
- Ways in which you have contributed to the success of the business as a whole.

As the interview will be focused on past specific examples, consider:

- What was your role in the situation?
- Were there any potential barriers or pitfalls and how did you overcome them?
- Is there anything you would have done differently?
- Is there anything that you have learned?

Compose a paragraph or so for each situation, outlining what happened, how you approached it and what the outcome was. The **"STAR"** format should help you to structure these outlines:

**S** – situation - What was the situation in which you found yourself?

**T** – task - What was the specific task which you had to achieve?

**A** – action - What action did you take?

**R** – result - What was the outcome of your action?

Sometimes an additional **R** may be added for 'Reflection'. You may be asked questions such as "What did you learn from the experience" or "What would you do differently". The focus should be on you even if the situation involved a group, interviewers will want to know what your specific role was in achieving the desired result. The following examples of competency based questions will be useful to work through as you prepare for the interview.

Try out the Interview Simulation activity at <https://employability.ulster.ac.uk/>, which will give you an insight into the types of questions asked and an opportunity to practise a mock interview.

Most vacancies for the GLP will be with small/medium businesses. These types of businesses are more likely to use a more traditional Panel style interview with typical competency based questions. Usually a company will give you an indication if the type of interview will deviate from this style but it is good to have an awareness of all types of interviews.

### **At the end of the interview**

Generally, most interviews will end with the employer asking you if you have any questions. It is not essential that you ask any questions but it's an opportunity to make an impression. You may want to find out about a particular project you are interested in, the team you will be working with, if successful, feedback on performance or opportunities for professional development.

## Ten Golden Rules

### 1. Do your homework

Set aside enough time to thoroughly research the company/job role. You may want to explore the company website/articles in the press/industry magazines etc. Fairs and employer events are excellent opportunities to find out information first hand. Visit 'Careers Connect' for a full list of events.

### 2. Review your Application Form/CV

Re-read your form and be in a position where you can elaborate on what you've written.

### 3. Anticipate questions

Put yourself in the interviewer's shoes and make a list of 10 – 20 questions and scenarios where *you've* done something really well and can talk about it. Match your examples to the skills and qualities they are seeking.

### 4. Prepare your questions

Good questions imply research. Prepare questions which demonstrate *your* interest in the company / role. Avoid asking questions which are clearly answered in employer literature. Avoid asking about salary until you are offered the position.

### 5. Practice makes perfect

Make full use of any practice sessions organised by your Employability & Careers Hub. Remember, your interview day might also involve psychometric tests and written exercises.

### 6. Dress for success

Appearance is not more important than what you can offer as a person but your presentation will reflect on how well you will fit into a company and your motivation for the opportunity.

### 7. Time it right

If you can't be relied upon to be punctual for a first meeting, what hope is there for the long-term? Plan your journey well in advance and leave home with plenty of time to get there, bearing in mind traffic, weather etc. Take your mobile and contact information with you in case you need to phone. Ensure you turn it off before the interview.

### 8. Body Language

The way you come into the interview room and sit down can suggest interest and confidence. Be conscious of your body language and the signals it sends. A confident handshake is one way to create a favorable impression. Use eye contact to engage panel members. Direct your answer to the person who asked the question.

### 9. Think attitude

Feeling nervous? It's natural, but there are ways to diminish your stage fright. Remember that this is a two-way process.

### 10. Ask for feedback

Some graduate recruiters offer feedback to candidates. Take up the offer of feedback if it is

given. If you fail, it might not be because of bad interview technique; it could be that the job didn't suit your interests.

### **Further Resources**

#### **Interview Simulator & Mock Questions**

Available on the Employability Portal: <https://employability.ulster.ac.uk>

#### **Useful Websites**

<http://careers.theguardian.com/interview-help>

<http://www.irishjobs.ie/careeradvice/interview-advice/>

<http://www.jobs.ac.uk/careers-advice/interview-tips>

[http://www.prospects.ac.uk/interview\\_tips.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/interview_tips.htm)

<https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice>

[www.interview-skills.co.uk/competency-based-interviews.aspx](http://www.interview-skills.co.uk/competency-based-interviews.aspx)

### **Support from Employability & Careers Hub on your Campus**

Call in to the Employability & Careers Hub on your campus for one-to-one guidance and support for your application. You can find us at:

#### **Employability & Career Hub locations**

**Jordanstown (13G01), Coleraine (H214), Magee (MF226E), Belfast (library)**

Alternatively you can book a consultation via <https://advice.employability.ulster.ac.uk/careersadvice>

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