

Mature Students

Almost 12% of undergraduate students at St. Mary's are older than 35 years of age and just under half (49%) of our postgraduate students are in this category. If you are one of these "mature students" then St. Mary's Careers Service can be of help so as to make sure you get the best possible professional start after leaving the college.

The term officially covers students from 21 up to pensionable age, male and female, married, single or divorced, with and without family responsibilities, studying to improve their career prospects or purely for interest in their subject. You might have had a career break or you may be looking to change direction completely. Whatever your situation, we can help you re-assess your skills and talents, improve your interview technique and find appropriate ways to look for your chosen role.

Deciding on a (new) career

As a mature student you are likely to have developed a good degree of self-awareness. You may already have a good idea of what you enjoy and don't enjoy in a job. You may have chosen your course because it relates to an interest you would like to use in the workplace. Look at your current skills and interests; consider your previous experience and how it might relate to a new career. A good starting point when considering possible careers is [Prospects Planner](#). This helps you to assess your skills, values and interests and links in to job profiles of 600 graduate occupations which include information on mature student entry and prospects.

What level should you apply for?

If you've had significant work experience it can be difficult to know how to pitch yourself. The best way to get an idea is by talking to people in the sector. This might be by attending careers events such as fairs and employer talks ([click here](#) for an up to date list of events planned with St. Mary's University Careers Service) or reading job descriptions for roles you want to do. Do you match most of the criteria? Are you missing a key ingredient? In some cases you may realise you have to start at the bottom. Here you might need to achieve the tricky balance of selling yourself without appearing too experienced.

Age and the law

The Equality Act (2010) prohibits discrimination on grounds of age. This outlaws practices such as age limits specified in recruitment advertising (unless there is a genuine occupational requirement) or age-related questions at interviews and importantly, you are not required to state your age on e.g. a CV.

For further information see:

- [Gov.uk](#)
- [Age and Employment – factsheet from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#)

Making applications

Your job applications should highlight the competencies you have which relate to the job being applied for, using your past experience and personal skills to give evidence of these. Employers will usually set out the personal qualities and competencies they require in the job description and it is important to analyse this carefully. Many application forms – the ones that ask you to “give an example of a time when you worked in a team/solved a problem/persuaded someone of your point of view” - are based around these competencies, and are often easier for mature candidates than for younger applicants. The more life experience you have, the more examples you have to draw on. For guidance on how to write a successful cover letter and CV go to [SIMMSpace](#).

Top tips for your applications and career planning:

- If you have worked in quite a few different jobs, think carefully about what experience is relevant to the particular job you are applying for
- Research the employers / jobs you are interested in so that you can tailor your experiences towards them
- If you have been out of the work environment for some time, think about the life skills you have gained and how they could support your job application, such as good organisational skills, multi-tasking, etc.
- Learn how to promote yourself well to an employer as you may have valuable skills to offer, and need to be effective communicating these
- Don't apologise for your age – use it positively and push the fact that you have already been in the workplace previously.
- Use our online resources, [click here](#).

Transferable skills

In our experience mature students have plenty of skills and experience to offer future employers, but sometimes the tricky bit is selling this to a potential employer, particularly if this experience isn't directly relevant to the area you wish to pursue after graduation. When changing career later in life it is very likely that a large part of your “unrelated” previous experience will be of help in your new job or career. Spend some time thinking about how your previous skills, responsibilities and achievements - how can these help you in the new career you are embarking upon? Think about them in the context of your new role and use your cover letter to show how they are relevant.

What mature students offer:

- You will often bring practical work experience, motivation and confidence into the workplace
- You may have demonstrated commitment to cope with a degree course whilst looking after a home and family at the same time - no mean feat
- You are likely to have social confidence, having dealt with a range of people in your professional

and working life

- You show determination to succeed, having started and finished a degree often with additional obstacles
- You have strong time management skills: you are often juggling many tasks at once
- You are likely to have more focused aims and once in a career are less likely to want to change career again than a younger employee.

Gaps in your employment

A gap of a couple of months shouldn't worry most employers however you should explain longer gaps. You don't need to give a huge amount of detail, for example you might say 'caring for a sick relative', 'full-time parent'. If you have had periods of unemployment try to mention any activities you were involved with during this time such as taking a short course or volunteering. If you have come to university after a period of not working, use your time studying as a transition and try to get some work experience in your field of interest. It will give you something recent and relevant to put in your job applications. Have an edited CV, one or two pages, which goes back X number of years but doesn't cover your whole life since you left school. There is nothing wrong with this and many employers won't really be interested in what you were doing 20 years ago.

I've had so much experience - how do I get my CV on two pages?

Be ruthless and limit the amount of information you give about jobs that were a while ago or experience that is irrelevant. Remember the mantra 'less is more' you may think the employer needs to know everything but sometimes the really good bits get lost in the detail. Concentrate on the things that matter. Group similar jobs or roles together and summarise your experience under each group. Split your experience into sections titled 'relevant' and 'other'.

My previous work experience is very different to the work I am applying for now. How should I deal with this on my CV?

It may help to focus your CV on the skills you have used in the past, rather than the detail of the roles and tasks that were involved. Try and identify the transferable skills that employers will be looking for from you (analytical skills, leadership, creative thinking etc.) and evidence, on your CV, ways that you have used these skills in your past employment situations. You may wish to include a separate 'Key Skills' section before you detail your work history.

The age question

Over the last 10-15 years there has been a noticeable change in attitude from typical graduate recruiters towards mature students. This has been driven by two things. Firstly, a change in the law; from October 2006 it became illegal to discriminate on the basis of age. Secondly, employers are looking for something different from their new graduates. They want them to be organised, self-motivated with a good range of skills as well as a good degree and able to 'hit the floor running'. Mature students with life and work experience to offer and often with evidence of juggling life and/or work outside of University commitments can

have an advantage. Employers will be assessing potential graduate recruits against a list of skills or competencies and as for all graduates of all ages the onus is on the individual to sell their skills and abilities to a potential recruiter. Spend some time thinking about the concerns employers could potentially have with regards to hiring someone more mature. For example, a younger manager may feel concerned about managing someone older. Show how you have enjoyed working with a wide age-range at university. Another concern might be that you are unwilling to learn new things. Use examples to illustrate this is not the case, you may have embraced social media or some kind of new technology on your course - as for technology in general, make sure you cover the basics and attend additional courses if you think your IT skills are not up to scratch.

Looking for part-time work?

If you are one of the many mature students needing to juggle future employment around other responsibilities then you may be seeking part-time or flexible work. Whilst the vast majority of advertised vacancies are for full-time positions, there are a number of recruitment organisations around who specialise in flexible working opportunities. These include:

- www.timewisejobs.co.uk (a job board featuring part-time positions around the UK)
- www.ten2two.org (largely localised opportunities in the home counties, but this company is expanding rapidly)
- 3P Search & Selection (a recruitment consultancy based in Hammersmith, dealing with part time positions in West London and the M4 corridor). No website but contactable on 0208 248 3088.

Of the more generic job boards, www.jobsgopublic.com have search criteria that will allow you to look for part-time roles. And don't forget that [JobOnline](#) will also allow you search part-time and casual vacancies.

If you would like more information about your flexible working rights, including how to apply for flexible working, [visit](#).

How St. Mary's Careers Service helps mature students

We know that the backgrounds, personal circumstances and life stories of mature students are highly differentiated. To get the best out of your time at St. Mary's make sure to use our services:

CV and cover letter checks: as a mature student you are more likely than others to have a rich professional and personal background. Not all of this background is relevant to all the applications you are making. Come and see us so that we can help you make your CV, cover letter or personal statement relevant, targeted and to the point.

Careers advice: To help you make sense of your career and work history, and how it relates to the new degree that you are taking, book a careers service appointment. Whilst you are a student at St. Mary's you can have an unlimited number of appointments.

Phone appointments: We understand that some of our mature students juggle more than just their studies. We therefore offer you the opportunity to have any of our career discussions over the phone (rather than in person) if that works better for you.

Practice interviews: Regardless of your age and levels of work experience, any job interview will try to establish whether you can do the job, whether you will do the job and whether you will fit in. However, additional questions might be on the interviewer's mind: How will you fit in with colleagues younger than you? How will you cope with working under somebody younger than you? How will you fit this job around your family's demands? Will you expect a higher salary than a 21 year old? Have you got the level of IT skills that we need you to show on a day to day basis? Book a practice interview with us, so that we can help you interview effectively whilst addressing questions potentially relating to you being a mature student.

Online resources: Visit SIMMSpace for up to date information on job sectors and best practice advice on CVs, cover letters and interviewing. [For further information see.](#)

Events (or: “But it’s all about undergraduates with no work experience”): It is true, some recruiters that visit campus (for example for job fairs or career fora) are expecting to speak primarily to third year undergraduates. However, that does not mean they wouldn't be happy to discuss your own personal career history. If appropriate, they can refer you to perhaps a different division within their recruitment team that deals with direct entries or more experienced hires. Research the potential exhibitors before attending a fair and make sure you know who you want to meet or who you would like to be referred to. For a full calendar of ALL our events, including presentations by employers, fairs, forums and workshops [visit](#).

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