

Is temping a real career route?

Can't get a job if you haven't got experience – but how do you get experience if you haven't got a job? **GILL LONGMAN** explores a familiar but uncomfortable dilemma of the working world

Temporary work can give you the experience you need to start your career. But how effective is it? Will it provide a leg-up into your dream job or will it be a series of dead-end jobs that no one else wants to do?

Well, as always, that depends on you and how you approach it. Recruitment consultancy Reed International say that last month one-fifth of their permanent positions were filled by people who had begun temping for the client company. A survey they conducted into reasons why people temp revealed that 30 per cent saw it as a stepping stone into a permanent career.

Maintain focus

Director of Careers at Newcastle University, Nick Keeley, says it's important to keep a strategic focus about why you're temping – rather than seeing it simply as a means of earning money while you make a decision.

"We encourage students to develop their ideas about where they want to work and to aim for temporary jobs in that area. It's a bit like work experience and should be treated like an extended interview.

"Take the chance to watch how people behave around the office, observe the dress code and learn the specialist jargon. Learning at first hand issues affecting the industry will give you an advantage over other candidates when you go for an interview. Make the most of networking opportunities: ask people if you can shadow them during your lunch hour and accept any invitations to meet up with colleagues.

"If new graduates make the most of temporary opportunities it can give them a real chance to impress. Even if there's no job in that particular organisation, they may be referred on somewhere else."



University of Manchester

Temping success

Publishing is one sector where there are few graduate recruitment schemes and companies frequently demand specific experience even at entry level.

Kirsten Ferguson graduated from Glasgow in 2003. Although she had always fancied the idea of publishing, she was put off by stories about the competition. Instead she went to South America to teach English as a Foreign Language.

She laughed: "I didn't speak any Spanish to start with so it was a bit of a struggle! When I came back I decided that publishing couldn't possibly be any harder so gave myself a few months to make the break.

"Agencies were very unhelpful. I was told the usual stuff about not taking graduates without experience so I approached publishers directly." Kirsten bravely offered to work for nothing in exchange for the experience and was given her first chance by Random House in London. During the day she learned all she could about publishing, at night she worked in a pub to pay the rent.

"I knew I couldn't keep it up for

long, so at the same time I was applying madly for jobs – and once I had some experience on my CV I started getting interviews."

One of those interviews led to her current role as a publicity assistant with Macmillan. She does a lot of administrative work but also gets to help on regional publicity campaigns and author's book tours. One year on, she now has work experience people helping her out – and she knows that in doing so, they are already demonstrating a sense of initiative and dedication to the role.

The well-trodden path

But it's not just publishing where temporary jobs may open doors into the world of permanent employment. In the pharmaceutical industry, processing and production line work could provide an entry to Quality Assurance and management roles. In teaching, supply work is a well-trodden path to a permanent position. Elsewhere in the public sector there are many good career paths for graduates but they are not always advertised. With a temporary role, there usually comes access to

internal vacancy lists. It's up to you to make the most of them and seize every opportunity to impress people.

One person who did exactly that is Helen Nugent, now a reporter for *The Times* in London. She graduated from Newcastle University with an English degree in 1995 and was offered a deferred place on a post graduate journalism course.

"I couldn't see any point waiting around. I'd always done secretarial work during university holidays so I moved to London to begin temping. I applied for every job imaginable and ended up with a temporary job in one of the advertising departments of EMAP. That became a permanent job which I did for about a year. It wasn't what I really wanted but I started applying internally for editorial assistant jobs.

"I also started writing bits for the staff magazine and emailing editors and deputy editors for advice. Then a writer's position came up on a financial title: they wanted someone cheap and keen and that gave me

an opportunity." A few months into that job, Helen began offering financial stories to *The Independent* and before long she was freelancing for several national newspapers.

But Helen was already planning her next move. She wanted to do news not features so she volunteered to write business news stories. From there she considered the difficult leap to home news and so began presenting the newsdesk with ideas for consumer stories. Like a human dynamo, she volunteered to do Sunday shifts ... It meant a six-day working week but when a job came up after a few weeks, she was in the right place.

Her story is encouraging – and exhausting. It illustrates that temping can be a springboard to exciting career opportunities but if you want to be successful, it's not a soft-option.

Liz Bregazzi is Head of Careers at University College Winchester and cautions against a romanticised view. She spent seven months temping after leaving university – and hated the monotony of routine work.

"Realistically some graduates have to take temporary work because there are increasing numbers chasing traditional graduate employment – and they can't all be successful at the first opportunity.

"Some people are suited to temping because of the variety of work it can provide and undoubtedly, it can be a way of getting a foot in the door of popular companies and industries. But people need to remember that routine work does get boring and temps often don't get included in staff development.

"However, it's always better to be doing something – anything – while you look for the job you really want."

So it's up to you: don't expect temping to catapult you instantly into a dream career. You need to work hard and tackle even tedious jobs as you build up your CV.

Use the time pro-actively as a chance to develop your skills and meet people who may be able to help with the next step. With temping you never know what may be around the corner.