



ICAS Foundation

Student Development Toolkit

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Section 1: Maintaining a Positive Mindset

With everything that's currently happening in the world, it can be difficult to keep focused.

This toolkit is designed to help you focus on the positive and practical steps that you can take to ensure you keep preparing for what comes next – whether that's your next year at university or your career.

Whatever you decide to do with your time, it's important that you:

- **Stay positive.** Check the tips on Young Scot's website: <https://young.scot/campaigns/national/coronavirus>
- **Stay focused.** Make a list of what activities you could undertake to benefit your studies or career.
- **Stay motivated.** Keep a record of what you've achieved so far, including extra research or online learning
- **Stay organised.** Make sure you have a routine that prepares you for future studying or work.
- **Stay flexible.** You don't know what opportunities might come up unexpectedly so be ready for anything.
- **Maintain your confidence.** Emotional resilience is important during stressful or anxious situations.
- **Maintain your social networks.** Whether Facetime, Skype or WhatsApp, keep talking to your friends & family.

Don't forget to reward yourself for your hard work – take a break and do something fun!

Section 2: Continuing Your Personal Development

While university provides you with academic learning, it is important to have a range of additional experience you can include on your CV. This shows that you are interested in developing your skills outwith the university environment, and that you are willing to take opportunities (for example, during the current shutdown) to learn and expand your knowledge in other relevant areas.

Online Learning

There are a range of online learning platforms which give you the opportunity to undertake free courses.

Webinars and Podcasts

There are various companies providing free webinars and podcasts which can help you develop your skills in new areas.

Journals and Magazines

Access online editions of journals such as the Financial Times, The Economist and the ICAS CA Magazine

Section 2: Continuing Your Personal Development

Online Learning - Software

There are also online **training courses for accounting software** such as Sage and Xero – many clients are starting to use these types of software, so it's useful to already have an understanding of how they work. Paid courses can provide certification badges for display on LinkedIn or CVs, but you can also start your learning with free resources available online:

- Sage are offering limited time free online training (<https://www.sage.com/en-gb/shop/traininglanding.aspx>)
- Xero have a set of free videos to learn basic tasks (<https://tv.xero.com/#category/videos/xero-101>)

Along with accounting software, it's important not to forget the #1 accounting programme – **Microsoft Excel**.

There are a huge number of free resources on the web to help develop your skills in the more advanced areas of formulas, Pivot Tables and much more.

- Microsoft's own site at <https://support.office.com/en-us/excel> is a good place to start - you can also follow [@MSEExcel](https://twitter.com/MSEExcel) on Twitter for new tips every couple of days.
- For more, try HubSpot's list of Excel resources across the web: <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/learn-excel-resources>

Section 2: Continuing Your Personal Development

Online Learning - Skills

FutureLearn offers a range of high quality online courses from a range of providers, including universities and specialist organisations. There are a number of short courses which are free of charge and can give your CV a boost in particular areas.

Look for the 'Included in Unlimited' or 'Free Digital Upgrade' courses at the links below:

<https://www.futurelearn.com/subjects/business-and-management-courses>

<https://www.futurelearn.com/subjects/study-skills-courses>

There are lots of other interesting and relevant courses on the site if you want to expand your horizons!

The **Open University** offers over 1000 free courses, some of which provide an achievement badge for download and use on LinkedIn or your CV - discover them all at: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses/full-catalogue>

The **Google Digital Garage** provides a number of free online modules and courses to help improve your business skills in the online workplace: <https://learndigital.withgoogle.com/digitalgarage/courses>

Section 2: Continuing Your Personal Development

Webinars and Podcasts

There's a range of interesting and informative podcasts out there which can help you keep up to date with your professional development. These are just some examples – there are many more topics covered by these types of content, so look out for those produced by companies or well-known individuals you can trust.

ICAS:

- Ask ICAS Webinar series: <https://www.icas.com/professional-resources/coronavirus/ask-icas-webinar-series>
- CA Agenda Podcast: <https://www.icas.com/thought-leadership/ca-agenda-podcasts>

Institute of Leadership and Management: <https://www.institutelm.com/free-tools.html>

Section 2: Continuing Your Personal Development

Journals and Magazines

Financial topics are covered in various journals and magazines. Understanding the current landscape in your sector will help you apply your academic knowledge to real-life situations, and ensure you're aware of the latest news in your sector. Headline stories provide good examples of case stories to research for interview questions and presentations, as they indicate the current issues in the sector.

Most journals have a student discount rate for subscription, but you may also be able to access these for free through your university's digital subscription (usually via your university library website).

Financial Times - <https://www.ft.com/>

The Economist - <https://www.economist.com/>

The latest editions of the ICAS CA Magazine are also available to read online for free, with a range of features and news stories relevant to CAs. (<https://www.icas.com/members/ca-magazine>)

Section 3: Gaining Relevant Experience

Gaining relevant experience is critical for developing your skills and your CV.

Paid Employment in the Sector

There are still opportunities out there for students looking for work in the financial sector.

Paid Employment Outwith the Financial Sector

Relevant paid experience doesn't have to mean a summer internship in a financial services company.

Volunteering Experience

Online volunteering can help you add to your skills and experience without having to leave your home.

Online Internships

Make the most of freely available online experiences to find out more about financial companies

Section 3: Gaining Relevant Experience

Paid Employment in the Sector

There are still roles available in the financial sector for internships and graduate opportunities.

Where to Look

ICAS Become A CA website: www.becomeaca.org.uk/

ICAS Foundation LinkedIn page: www.linkedin.com/company/icasfoundation/

You can also look at company websites to find out who is advertising roles.

Section 3: Gaining Relevant Experience

Paid Employment outwith the Financial Sector

There are a huge range of roles currently available in the key services areas. If you have the opportunity and circumstances to apply for these roles, don't forget that you are developing skills which will help you when applying for any job in the future:

- Resilience: working during difficult circumstances / stressful situations
- Customer Care: handling a range of customer queries while they are socially isolating
- Time Management: ensuring you are able to handle sometimes irregular working hours

Volunteering Experience

If you're self-isolating, you can also add to your experience through online volunteering opportunities. Check out this website for some ideas: www.careeraddict.com/online-volunteering-opportunities

Section 3: Gaining Relevant Experience

Online Internships

Just because you don't have a full-time paid internship, doesn't mean you can't gain experience in other ways.

Companies like **InsideSherpa** provide free online internship programmes for completion by students. Although they don't generally provide individual feedback, they do allow students to complete work similar to that of relevant companies. Each course is self-paced and takes around 5-6 hours to complete.

Find out more about two of the available programmes at the links below:

- KPMG Virtual Internship (Data Analytics): <https://www.insidesherpa.com/virtual-internships/theme/m7W4GMqeT3bh9Nb2c/KPMG-Data-Analytics-Virtual-Internship>
- Grant Thornton Virtual Experience (Audit): [https://www.insidesherpa.com/virtual-internships/landing/DuL6LxWTMMBf4xemd/Audit-\(Big-4\)](https://www.insidesherpa.com/virtual-internships/landing/DuL6LxWTMMBf4xemd/Audit-(Big-4))

You can also check out the [insidesherpa.com](https://www.insidesherpa.com) website for a full range of available internships - why not try a Strategy Consulting Virtual Experience with BCG, or a Project Management Discovery Program with Accenture?

Section 4: Preparing for Job Applications

This is a good time to ensure that you are prepared for any job applications or work experience which might become available at short notice.

CV / Covering Letter

Make sure your CV looks professional and is up to date, and draft covering letters for relevant jobs.

Interview and Assessment Preparation

Read articles, create generic answers to popular interview questions and try recording your responses. Try online tests used by companies, such as Numerical Reasoning Tests.

LinkedIn and Personal Branding

You can set up your LinkedIn profile, make contacts and follow relevant professional companies. It's also important to make sure your digital footprint and personal branding matches your professional persona.

Section 4: Preparing for Job Applications

CVs and Covering Letters

Employers see a range of **CVs and covering letters** when recruiting. Make sure your submission stands out from the crowd in a positive and professional way by keeping it up to date and looking for good examples online.

There are a huge range of websites out there which offer templates and tips for CVs. Pick a template which allows you to present your experience and abilities in the most effective way, and then adapt and personalise it.

It's okay to have a standard CV and covering letter to use as a starting point, but it's important to ensure that both documents are updated specifically for the role and organisation where you're applying. Look at the job description and make sure you highlight how your experience is relevant to that role and the organisation's values.

KPMG's website provides a good example of the strengths they look for in their employees, but you can also use this list to develop your CV: <https://www.kpmgcareers.co.uk/graduate/applying-to-kpmg/is-kpmg-right-for-me/>

Don't forget to ask your mentor for feedback - many of our mentors have been involved in recruitment within their own companies and can give you good advice on how to edit your CV effectively.

Section 4: Preparing for Job Applications

Interview Preparation

You can prepare for interviews by reading advice articles or undertaking free courses (FutureLearn has a free 3 week course from the University of Sheffield Careers Service).

You can research and develop a range of resources now to help you prepare for interviews in the future:

- Reflect on your experience and develop case studies which can be used for popular interview questions. You can revise these and take them into interviews as examples of demonstrating relevant skills.
- Research specific financial services topics, create a presentation for each area and practice presenting these to family members or friends
- Carry out research on your target firms and create a one-page summary of the company for reference. This should include the company policies, pillars and strategic aims, as recruitment often focuses on these areas.
- Be prepared to describe your personal motivations for applying to that firm and particular area of work
- Make sure you're aware of the latest financial news headlines before going into interviews – many employers like to see a commercial awareness and will sometimes ask candidates to talk about a recent news story.

Your University Careers team are probably still working, so look online to see what resources your university offers, or contact them to see if you can book an online one-to-one careers appointment.

Section 4: Preparing for Job Applications

Assessment Preparation

Video interviews and online assessments are becoming more important in recruitment processes. Try recording yourself giving answers to some popular interview questions, to see how you come across on screen for video interviews, and how you come across on audio recordings for telephone interviews.

Research and practice the types of assessment used by companies where you might want to work:

- Run an internet search for example interview questions to help you prepare sample answers. As a starting point, you can find a list of common accounting interview questions (and answer suggestions) at: <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/accounting-interview-questions-2061424>
- For Situational Judgement Tests, study the organisational behaviours and answer honestly.
- There are various Numerical Reasoning Tests available online to try for free.

Complete your practices and the assessments in a quiet environment with no distractions.

Section 4: Preparing for Job Applications

Developing a SOAR case study

An effective SOAR case study should help you answer a range of interview questions.

If you sometimes have difficulty remembering examples in interviews, it can be helpful to take a few case studies into your interview as a back-up. Remember – an interview is an opportunity for the employer to meet the candidate and assess their business potential. Just like you would prepare for a business meeting and take any relevant notes along with you, taking relevant notes into an interview demonstrates that you have effectively prepared for meeting your potential employer.

For each interview, focus on the job description and the key qualities that the employer is looking for. Then, identify which of your case studies best fits each of the key aspects you want to demonstrate. Look for 4 or 5 case studies which could be relevant for a variety of questions.

Employer / Job Title: xxx

Strategic Aims: Growth, Diversity

Key Qualities:

- Customer Care: A – Difficult Client
- Calm under Pressure: B – Time Restriction
- Solution Focused: C - New System

Work Activities:

- Innovation: B – Time / New Processes
- Technology: C - New System
- Curiosity: D – Learn from Mistake

Section 4: Preparing for Job Applications

Sample SOAR case study

Case Study C: New System. **Competency:** Solution Focused, Technology, Data Management.

Potential interview question: Describe your experience of: developing new systems / developing an effective solution to improve processes

S (Describe the Situation)	In my recent internship, I've been closely involved in record keeping. Two of the main areas of work have been maintaining personal data on an ongoing basis, and involvement in the development and implementation of new database systems.
O (What was your obstacle/task?)	When I joined my employer, the database was a Microsoft Access system which was limited in its reporting and retention facilities. It had been recently built, and contained details for only around 100 clients – not the 300 clients for which there were paper records. My task was to build up the database to include all clients, in line with audit requirements, and to ensure that the details were accurate.
A (Actions – what steps did you take?)	Initially, I went through all the paper records to confirm which were already listed on the database, and updated the information held on these with any additional details. I was then able to see which clients were missing, created records and populated these with information. Over time, I looked into new ways of ensuring that new clients were quickly added on to the system. My most successful way of ensuring new clients were added to the system was to set up a new template for issuing invoices, as where a client was not listed, no invoice would be issued.
R (Results or Outcomes)	This work had positive results: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The client records were regularly checked and confirmed as up to date, ensuring that we met audit requirements• I was able to assess records and produce statistics, with an increased level of confidence in the data held.• Communication with clients was more effective as we held one source of up to date contact details• I helped improve compliance with DPA 2018 and GDPR requirements

Section 4: Preparing for Job Applications

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the social network for professionals - it's important to have a presence on the site that allows potential employers to find you and ensures you come across as someone they will want to employ. This includes both how you describe yourself, and the career-relevant content that you write and share.

Find out how to create or update your LinkedIn profile at the following sites:

- LinkedIn Help: <https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin>
- Sample LinkedIn Profile: <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/09/25/example-template-of-perfect-linkedin-profile-according-to-harvard-career-experts.html>
- LinkedIn Tips for Job Seekers: <https://www.themuse.com/advice/the-31-best-linkedin-profile-tips-for-job-seekers>

Section 4: Preparing for Job Applications

Personal Branding

Personal Branding is a big topic for current job seekers.

Get some tips on building your own personal brand (and lots of other career advice) at

<https://www.randstad.co.uk/career-advice/career-guidance/3-essential-personal-branding-tips-for-finance-and-accountancy-professionals/>



Section 5: Starting a CA Training Contract

Already have a CA training contract or other financial services job lined up for the Autumn? Congratulations!

Here are some top tips contributed by former ICAS Foundation students to help you make the best start:

- Complete some training in online accounting packages (See Section 1: Online Learning)
- Improve your advanced Microsoft Excel skills (See Section 1: Online Learning)
- Make sure you're up to date with the latest finance news (See Section 1: Webinars / Journals)
- Update your LinkedIn profile so you're ready to connect online with new colleagues and clients (See Section 3: LinkedIn / Personal Branding)

Section 5: Starting a CA Training Contract

Top skills and qualities a young CA needs ICAS

-  Drive and enthusiasm for what they do
-  Collaborative and good at relationship building
-  Honesty and strong moral compass
-  Communication
-  Resilient, motivated and not afraid of failure
-  Forward-thinking and adaptable

Section 6: Useful Sources of Information

Kick Start Your Career

Download this free guide from Curriculo Solutions: <https://info.curriculosolutions.com/offer/kick-start-your-career>

Prospects.ac.uk Interview Tips

There are a wide range of tips and practice tests at www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/interview-tips

My World of Work

Find a wide range of online courses at <https://www.myworldofwork.co.uk/learn-and-train/find-free-online-courses>

Developing Career Resilience

Identify your strengths and develop resources to help you at <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/money-business/developing-career-resilience/content-section-overview?active-tab=description-tab>

Coronavirus and the Accounting Profession

Stay up to date with the ICAS professional resources at <https://www.icas.com/professional-resources/coronavirus>

Section 7: The ICAS Foundation Staff team

Name	Job Title
Linda Jamieson	Director
Amy Drysdale	Operations and Engagement Manager
Vacant	Operations and Fundraising Officer

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