You might think that careers fairs are old-fashioned - why do employers bother when they can do everything online now? The fact that lots of employers turn up tells you they are very important to them and therefore should be important to you.

Careers fairs are a valuable way of finding out about opportunities in a range of job sectors, both for those who are aware of what they want to do, and those who are looking for ideas and inspiration. Careers fairs give you an opportunity to talk informally to a range of professionals (recent graduates as well as qualified staff), so that you can start to form your own ideas about a variety of jobs or postgraduate study options.

Here at Stirling, the Careers and Employability Service run a careers fair in both semesters:

- **Next step** ([stir.ac.uk/careers/nextstep/](stir.ac.uk/careers/nextstep/)) in early October is all about summer internship and graduate opportunities, in line with when most large employers start recruiting for the following summer. This fair is particularly targeted at 3rd and 4th year undergraduates, although all students can attend.

- **This is your life** ([stir.ac.uk/careers/tiyl/](stir.ac.uk/careers/tiyl/)) in early February focuses more on making the most of your time at university, offering you the chance to meet large and small organisations offering paid work experience opportunities, study abroad opportunities, as well as the chance to find out about self-employment and volunteering opportunities in the UK and abroad. This is a great time for 1st and 2nd year students to start thinking about their future plans and making the most of their time at university to help them get there.

- On a larger scale, the **Scottish graduate fair is held in Glasgow every October** ([strath.ac.uk/careers/sgf/](strath.ac.uk/careers/sgf/)) with large graduate employers attending from all over the UK. There are also several smaller careers fairs for graduating students towards the summer in most large cities in the UK, if you have not yet finalised your plans after graduation by then.

**Preparation: It’s all about preparation!**

- **Do your homework** by checking the fair’s web pages to find out who will be attending. Research the organisations who interest you by checking out their website and make a list of those you want to speak to so you can visit them first when you get to the fair.

- Think about how you want to **sell yourself**, prepare a brief introduction about your knowledge, skills and abilities. Developing a **sound bite** or pitch to say to the employer educates the listener about what you have to offer and helps you focus. It can also calm nerves!

- Take along a copy of your CV. You can get help and advice beforehand by booking an appointment to speak to an Adviser. We offer 15-minute Quick Query appointments with an adviser or you can attend our CV Clinic. Both can be booked online via [stir.ac.uk/careers/students/advice/](stir.ac.uk/careers/students/advice/).
If you are an international student, remember to check your visa regulations before you go so that you have a clear understanding of the options available to you. If you need to clarify your eligibility to work please make an appointment to speak to the University International Student Adviser Internationaladvisor@stir.ac.uk. Alternatively look at the guidance notes on ukcisa.org.uk.

One final note on dress code. There is no need to buy a suit for the occasion, however fairs are ‘dress up’ events. Treat fairs like a job interview as they could well lead to one. Some fairs are less formal, but making an effort to impress could set you apart from the rest!

**Once you are there:**

- **Familiarise yourself** with the setting - walk round, find your bearings and get comfortable.
- **Don't approach potential future employers with a casual attitude** as if you aren't really sure why you're there, or as if the idea of working with them is just a passing whim. Questions like "So what do you do then?" or "Why should I consider working for you?" don't go down too well with professionals who have given up valuable time for your benefit. Know who you want to see and have a list of specific questions you want answered.
- **Be considerate**, do not monopolise their time, they have many people they want to meet. Be aware when it is time to move on and keep questions relevant. Pick up business cards and contact details.

**After the fair:**

Hopefully you’ll have a better idea of the types of career areas and companies you would like to work for. Don’t be afraid to follow up on any contacts or business cards you’ve picked up. Employers will have talked to hundreds of people on the day so reminding them who you are might put you ahead of the rest.

**Get applying!** Many graduate schemes close very early, some before the end of October, so don’t leave it too late.