

Business

From multinational companies to city councils, business permeates all sectors. The range of opportunities spans a range of functions including strategy, HR, IT, finance, marketing, logistics and sales to name but a few.

Many Oxford graduates enter this sector for a career with prospects of early management responsibility, good salaries and benefits and the possibility of working globally. There has been a huge shift in the business sector over the last few years, with a large proportion of companies putting a greater focus on sustainability initiatives, social and environmental impact and employee welfare. This is sometimes referred to as ESG (environmental, social and governance) matters and many organisations are focused specifically on these topics.

Given the breadth of roles available, it makes sense to consider the type of business you want to work in and the sort of role that appeals to your strengths and interests. If a deep commitment to ESG topics is of importance to you, it's worth looking at the structure of individual companies to see if the organisation takes sustainability, environmental, and social issues seriously by embedding them within company values and strategic planning. Evidence that an organisation is deeply committed to ESG can include, there being someone in a senior position within that company who is charged with leading on strategy for ESG and/or if the business is a certified B Corp ([The UK B Corporation Movement](#)).

Roles within businesses can include management activities such as:

- Defining strategy and objectives, allocating resources, meeting targets and taking responsibility for business decisions
- Project work

- Human Resources - recruiting, supervising, motivation and developing staff to ensure effective team working
- Controlling finances and managing budgets
- Managing marketing or supply chain strategies
- Client business development
- Problem solving and dealing with complaints
- Managing change

Getting in and entry points

Organisations recruit in a variety of ways. Large corporations may have extensive graduate programmes across a range of functions and smaller organisations may only recruit 1-3 people per year. Companies with graduate programmes sometimes offer the chance to try different "rotations" within different teams and/or functions in the business over the course of typically two years. Recruitment timelines can vary greatly, large graduate programmes may open applications as early as August/September and smaller organisations often recruit all year round – it's important to check on their individual websites to be sure.

Demonstrating motivation for the business you apply to is essential, as is showing your ability to work with people and build relationships. Wherever possible apply for internships and if the organisation doesn't offer internships,





find out if there are other opportunities to gain relevant work experience such as volunteering, work-shadowing, undertaking extra-curricular activities and contacting organisations to create your own work experience opportunities.

Extra-curricular ideas

- Run a “mini-business” such as a theatrical production or college ball
- Make use of EnSpire Oxford (eship.ox.ac.uk), the entrepreneurial centre for Oxford students
- Join [The Oxford Strategy Challenge](#) for an insight into the challenges faced by real businesses and for the opportunity to help solve problems faced by local companies
- Become a campus ambassador for a large company (many employers advertise these via CareerConnect)
- Sign up for other relevant student organisations such as the Oxford Strategy Group and Oxford Women in Business

Next steps

www.careers.ox.ac.uk/business-management
www.careers.ox.ac.uk/entrepreneurship-social-enterprise
www.careers.ox.ac.uk/management-consultancy-beyond-the-obvious
www.careers.ox.ac.uk/sustainability-environment
www.careers.ox.ac.uk/careers-with-social-impact

Alumni profile

Dr Janette McKnight

What: I am currently completing the Johnson Matthey commercial graduate scheme, where I undertake three rotations of 8 months in duration and have a permanent position secured at the end of the two years. My first rotation was working as product manager in clean air (think catalytic converters and emissions control), during which my commercial knowledge grew, I felt my hard work was valued, and I got exposure to senior leaders.

I am currently part-way through my second rotation, where I work as a net-zero and sustainability coordinator for our platinum group metal services business. The sustainable technologies developed at JM were a key attraction for me to apply to the company, and so choosing a role where I can have direct-positive impact on an area close to my heart was a no-brainer.

Why: I had planned to pursue the stereotypical career for organic chemists – working in a lab within the pharma industry – but I decided I wanted to explore an unknown path. Being able to get to try different things for short periods of time, while having a secure position in a company, was a great opportunity. It was still key for me to remain close to science, and I wanted to work for a company that was contributing to improving people’s lives and the planet around us.

Top tips:

- First, you need to figure out what is important to you. SeedWISE was an excellent course, run by the University, that hugely helped me to reflect.
- Then, chase something (could be the company/industry, or the role) that aligns with your values.
- For me, deviating from the expected path has been a good decision. Don’t be afraid to take a leap into the unknown.
- On a separate note – stay humble. You may well be the smartest person ever and have gone to the best university, but if nobody would like to work with you, you are unlikely to be successful in getting the job.



Position

Johnson Matthey commercial graduate scheme.

Background

DPhil Organic Chemistry, Wadham College, 2022.

Alumni profile

Tilly Morgan

What: The Swire Group is a highly diversified global corporation, with businesses encompassing property, beverages and food chain, aviation, marine, as well as trading and industrial activities. Its core businesses are mainly focused on Asia, with its key operations in Hong Kong and the Chinese Mainland.

I have been seconded to Swire Shipping for my first three years, starting in Singapore. As Assistant Commercial Manager for the Pacific Island region, I lead my own team and work closely with the Regional Commercial Manager. I am based in Suva (Fiji) and travel throughout the Pacific.

Why: While I enjoyed my degree, I wasn't passionate about becoming an engineer and the 'traditional' path to London and 'banking or consulting' didn't appeal. Given my love for travel, the Swire Management Trainee scheme allowed me to move abroad and start an exciting career with a wide range of opportunities all within one company.

Three years into the scheme, it's still the best decision I could've made. I've taken on significant responsibilities from day one, faced challenging job roles, and maintained an exciting work-life balance.

It has been an eye-opening experience living and working in Singapore and Fiji and experiencing completely different cultures. It was daunting to leave my UK-based family and friends, but everyone has been so welcoming, and there is lots of support from others who have made similar decisions, including a fellow Oxford graduate who joined with me.

Advice: While my journey may seem unorthodox, remember that you have nothing to lose early in your career so embrace all the opportunities you're given. Taking the 'scary' option can often be best – I had another offer at an incredible UK company, but it wasn't the right fit for me. Seize the chance to travel, whether a week in Scotland or a month in France. Meeting new people and discussing different experiences is invaluable.



Position

Management Trainee, Swire Group.

Background

MEng Engineering Science, Brasenose College, 2022.

Alumni profile

Wini Rizkiningayu

What: I lead a remarkable team dedicated to crafting a sustainable energy future. We blend cutting-edge technological and economic analysis with hands-on experience to develop innovative solutions for the clean energy transition. I am privileged to be part of a nexus of diverse stakeholders – government, private, and third sectors – and their strategic initiatives: it allows me to envision strategies specific to the contexts of those organisations. Through this I can guide my team to deliver impactful results which support the region's decarbonization efforts.

Why: Southeast Asia is home for me; a region brimming with potential yet vulnerable to climate disaster. My journey began in the fossil energy industry, and my own transition to working in renewable energy mirrors the region's shift towards sustainability. I often describe my journey as 'atoning my carbon sins', but more importantly it's about contributing to my home: supporting the region's full potential and fostering a sustainable, equitable economy. As an organisation, RMI aligns with my ethos of equitable clean energy. The Southeast Asia team at RMI is also relatively new, which gives me the unique opportunity to shape our initiatives meaningfully and contribute to solutions that are specific, inclusive, and just.

Advice: Firstly, network extensively. Join environmental and climate-focused societies, like the Oxford Climate Society. Building your community will provide you with insights and opportunities, as well as invaluable connection and support system. Secondly, accept imperfection. Your journey will involve continuous learning and adaptive leadership. Don't stress about perfection in your first job; diverse experiences will enrich your perspective. Finally, remember that pursuing a sustainable future is more than technical expertise; it's about the people at the heart of it. The path to building a business with purpose can be challenging and nonlinear but immensely rewarding.



Position

Regional Director, Southeast Asia Energy Program, RMI.

Background

MPP Public Policy, Exeter College, 2022.

The Summer Internship Programme



www.careers.ox.ac.uk/sip

Funded internship opportunities, exclusively available to Oxford University students in the summer vacation.

UK and international internships available in a wide variety of sectors, carried out in person or remotely.



Explore opportunities on CareerConnect

Browse full-time and part-time jobs, work experience, and internships on our vacancies database for Oxford students, researchers and alumni.

www.oxford.targetconnect.net



Are you a fluent German speaker looking to launch your career in London?

We are recruiting for our Client Service Team!

- 1 Own commercial results from day 1.
- 2 Build a track record of achievement.
- 3 Springboard your career.

Apply today



Syrie Byfield, Oxford Alumna
(BA Geography, 2019)

SWIRE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME 2025

Launch Your International Career,
Become a Future Business Leader.

APPLY NOW AND JOIN OUR
CAREER EVENTS IN OXFORD!



“My experience with the Swire Management Programme over the past five years has been diverse, empowering, and insightful. I've rotated across the company, learning business skills from investment to marketing and operations, and have worked on projects of strategic importance, gaining exposure to high-level strategic decision-making. The Programme expects you to adapt and learn quickly, but you are well-equipped to meet these challenges through comprehensive training and the strong support of our close-knit network.”

The Micro-Internship Programme



www.careers.ox.ac.uk/micro

Voluntary, short-term learning and development opportunities available in the vacation periods.

Micro-internships last between two and five days and take place either remotely or in person.



APPLY NOW FOR



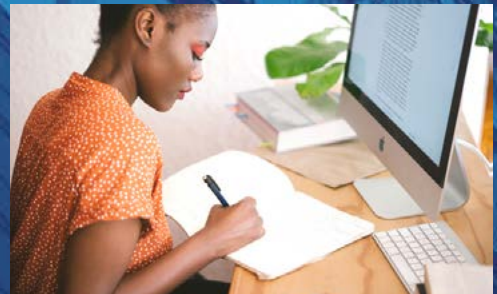
THE OXFORD STRATEGY CHALLENGE

Apply now for TOSCA, our dynamic, team-based programme where you'll dive into real client projects and tackle strategic challenges over the course of a week.

Develop the essential skills of teamwork, leadership, and business awareness while gaining hands-on consultancy experience.

Apply by 4 November (9AM)

Successful applicants will be notified on 8 November.



www.careers.ox.ac.uk/tosca