Careers, Internships & Entrepreneurship

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Part Three of The Imperial Manifesto series

A Quick Word Before You Start

Everything outlined in this document is simply my opinion. It shouldn't be treated as fact, since these are all technically subjective. So to quote Bruce Lee, "take away what is useful and discard what is not." And a reminder, I don't know everything either, but I try my best.

My name is Khuselee. I was born in Mongolia and came to the UK to live in London when I was very young. As of the time of writing, I have just finished three years studying an MEng in Materials Science and Engineering. I've had four internships, I've started a business, I've earned over £30k so far. I was president of and started a calisthenics society, I gained positions within two of the largest societies within Imperial, I've done 17 muscle ups in a row, I read books, and I make content that goes semi viral in a particular niche.

I spent my first year completely broke. I travelled alone for the first time during my second year. I met some of the most driven and successful people my age. I've felt stupid and completely unqualified and behind. I've earned a 2:2 grade and changed my approach to get a higher grade. I've also felt the smartest and most qualified in a room. I've met some of the richest people my age having come from a background on free school meals and borrowing laptops to use. I have one more year left in university and I intend to make the most of it. These notes help me track myself, reevaluate my approach, and make sense of everything going on in my life, and hopefully inform and help others.

So far, during my time in university, I've learned, unlearned and rediscovered lots of new processes, mindset changes, and approaches to life, self development and success in achieving my goals. My goal has always been, since young, to achieve financial freedom in order to realise my true goal to build my character and achieve multiple lifestyles and freedom to go and do whatever I wish. I imagine a lot of people share this goal, or say they do. So I write these notes assuming we share the same goal.

Going to a top university like Imperial will undoubtedly change your life. I like to think reaching success is like being on a rollercoaster, and the track's trajectory, how high up or low down it is, is determined by your actions in the present. As they extend out like different plots on a graph, some choose to make it more exponential, some at a slower linear pace, and from these different rates of progression, wider and wider gaps form. You start to see why some people are destined to find success while others may not. In the very beginning the gap is almost unnoticeable and there appears to be no difference between person A and person B, but one does things more regularly, and that compounds and grows into a trajectory aimed at success.

Going to a top uni will introduce you to people, friends and networks who will discuss things you didn't consider, and it opens your mind to all the endless possibilities. Iron sharpens iron, and that holds true for ambitious people being friends with even more ambitious people. The famous saying, if you're the smartest person in the room, you're probably in the wrong room, is a very true statement within a top uni like Imperial. Many times in my life I have felt out of my depth and frankly stupid, but these offer chances to accelerate yourself and grow into a more successful version of yourself.

I imagine you're reading this to:

- get into your dream uni, which is most likely Imperial
- you're a fresher and want to understand and learn how to navigate uni life
- you just want to listen to someone going to one of the hardest unis in the world

All of these are fine and I hope to help you in your goals, but first a caveat.

If you fall into the first group, you must understand the nature of top universities. My personal list is Imperial, Oxbridge, UCL and LSE for the UK, and these are applied to by hundreds of thousands of students from countries all across the globe, not just the UK. Some courses may see 10+ applicants for each space. At a certain point you begin to understand why these unis have high entrance requirements, it's because they can afford to given the number of applicants. Even students with top grades will still get rejected, and in a lot of cases there's seemingly no good reason.

So if you don't get in, it's not because you're not good enough. You have to realise you were always qualified for it, and that mathematically and logistically, unis like Oxbridge, Imperial and LSE just can't take everyone who applies even if they wanted to. Lots of people are qualified and would thrive if given the chance, but not all of them will be given that chance. So if you end up somewhere that wasn't your first choice, keep your head high. It's not rejection, it's redirection. A lot of uni is purely what you decide to make of it, and this should also explain why plenty of people go to lower ranked or lesser known unis and still outperform some students at Oxbridge and Imperial.

I cannot promise you will get into Imperial just by reading this, but I can give you a much clearer picture of what Imperial is like, the patterns and trends of thinking and working in a top university, and things you can carry out yourself that will be applicable wherever you end up. My aim is to lessen the uncertainty that comes with this transition, give you a broader picture, and help you carry a head start that can begin compounding as soon as you start reading.

This particular guide, Careers, Internships & Entrepreneurship, is written for the stage after you've settled in and want to actually build something, whether that's landing internships in a competitive industry or starting something of your own alongside your degree. It covers four internships across three years, distilled: applications, online assessments, assessment centres, and real accounts from student founders building alongside their studies.

Now, on that note, let's begin.

Part 1: Career & Internships

Chapter 1: Where Imperial Students Actually End Up

Before diving into how to actually break into these paths, it's worth being upfront about the rough shape of where Imperial students end up, based on what I've personally seen across my course, my societies, and the people I've interviewed for my content. This is not an official university statistic, it's my own honest estimate, but I think it's a genuinely useful reality check before you commit years of effort chasing one particular path.

My rough breakdown, by career direction:

- **Consulting (business, management, engineering, tech): 30%.** By far the most common landing spot, and covering a wide range of consulting types, not just the classic MBB image
- **Engineering, STEM industry, or medicine: 30%.** The other largest group, people who go on to work directly in the technical field their degree actually trained them for
- **Further academia (Masters, PhD, research): 20%.** A genuinely large chunk, larger than most people expect walking in as a fresher
- **Finance: 10%.** Smaller than the perception on campus would suggest, given how loud and visible the finance recruiting culture is
- **Business or entrepreneurship: 5%.** Small in absolute terms, but this is the group building things rather than joining them, and it's a genuinely more viable path than the culture around it suggests
- **Quant: 2%.** The smallest formal category, and also the most technically selective
- **Random or unclassifiable paths: 3%.** People who end up somewhere nobody, including them, would have predicted in first year

Why this matters

The perception on campus, especially around career fairs and LinkedIn, massively overweights finance and consulting relative to how many people actually end up there long term, and it almost completely obscures how many people quietly go into further academia or straight into engineering and STEM industry roles. If you're a fresher feeling like "everyone" is gunning for banking or consulting, that's a visibility effect, not an accurate picture of where people actually land.

> **Key takeaway:** The loudest career path on campus is not necessarily the most common one, and it's definitely not the only legitimate one. Nearly a third of people end up in engineering, STEM industry or medicine, and a further fifth go into academia, both quieter, less LinkedIn-visible paths that rarely get talked about at career fairs but account for half of all outcomes combined.

What My Own Internships Actually Paid

Numbers like these rarely get shared openly, so here's mine, across four internships over three years, to give you a genuine reference point rather than the vague ranges most people quote secondhand.

- **Newton Europe (Summer Intern, consulting):** £24,000 pro rata.
- **Deutsche Bank (Spring Intern, banking):** £400 total for the week, spring weeks are unpaid or token-paid by design, they're a recruitment funnel into the summer internship, not a real income source.

- **Cutover AI (AI Engineering Internship):** £40,000 pro rata.
- **UKAEA-funded UROP (Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme, 8 weeks):** £4,500 total. This was a genuine academic research internship, not corporate, benchmarking machine learning interatomic potentials for silicon carbide, supervised through Imperial. UROPs are consistently underrated as a paid option, since most students assume research placements are unpaid or reserved for postgrads.

The spread is the actual point here. A single-week spring programme paying £400 and an eight-week research placement paying £4,500 can both be genuinely worth doing, for completely different reasons, one for the recruitment pipeline it opens, the other for the direct pay and the research experience itself. Don't judge an opportunity purely on the headline number without asking what it's actually buying you further down the line.

Chapter 2: My Four Internships, What Actually Happened

The numbers in the last chapter only tell you what these internships paid, not what they actually involved. Here's the real texture of each one, the application process, the assessment centres, and what the day-to-day work was actually like.

Deutsche Bank: Spring Week

The week itself was mostly talks, in-depth sessions on how the bank functions and what its different divisions actually do. Depending on which division you'd applied for, you'd either do trading exercises or IB-style case studies. On the final day, there was a group task specifically designed to see who could be fast-tracked straight into the assessment centre for the summer internship. I got fast-tracked.

That assessment centre had three interview stages:

- **A standard behavioural interview:** why banking, questions pulled directly from my CV (know your CV inside out), and the usual "time you showed leadership", "time you hit a tight deadline" format. I used being President and founder of Imperial's Calisthenics Society as my teamwork example, and a group engineering project, a twelve-person team given a budget to design and build a machine, presented by a fixed deadline, for a second one. The specific examples don't matter as much as people think, it doesn't matter if it's Tesco, private tutoring, or the best bank in the world, it's all about how well you can link it to the transferable skill they're actually asking about.
- **A case study interview:** you're given a sheet in advance covering two companies at different funding stages, their products, and you have to argue whether you'd invest. This one was for the Fixed Income and Currencies (sales and trading) division specifically, so it helped to already understand exchange rates, market basics, and concepts like quantitative easing. I'll be honest, I was a bit waffly in this one, and the interviewer was on her phone for most of it.
- **A technical interview:** questions like "what is quantitative easing" and "what's the formula for GDP", both fairly standard and listed in these course notes. I also got a Fermi estimation question, how many phones are sold worldwide per year, and talked through my assumptions out loud rather than freezing. My answer (around 1.2 billion) ended up being one of the closest in my cohort, but the actual number matters far less than showing clear, defensible logic, that's genuinely what they're testing.

One honest note: my interviews got rescheduled and I ended up fast-tracked into mine earlier than planned, which cut into my prep time. It felt a bit unfair at the time, but it happens, and you adapt.

Worth mentioning alongside this: a similar spring week assessment centre I did with BNP Paribas. A group task simulating building a sustainable factory, where everyone gets different pieces of information (cost, energy savings, carbon impact) and has to combine them into one coherent, cost-minimising, low-carbon solution, then present it as a group. There was also a genuinely tough initial written assessment, closer to an IQ test than anything finance-specific, where they seemed more interested in seeing your working than getting a correct answer. The final interview was commercial awareness rather than technical, given a live market event and asked how it would affect the markets, relevant to the Global Markets sales and trading role I'd applied for.

Honest reflection on spring weeks generally: the actual content you learn is usually very bank-specific and not hugely transferable. The real value is the prestige and CV signal (spring weeks are genuinely

competitive to get), the possibility of converting into the summer internship, and, in Deutsche Bank's case, it was paid.

Newton Europe: Strategy & Operations Consulting

The process started with a fairly difficult online assessment (similar prep to Watson Glaser-style tests), then a telephone interview I'd prepared for heavily through mock interviews. I was asked about recent market events (this was around Trump's tariffs and a recent election), plus standard “time you worked in a team” and “time you hit a deadline” questions. At the end, I asked the interviewer what skills people don't talk about enough for the role, she said hitting deadlines consistently matters more than people expect in fixed income and currencies sales and trading.

The final assessment centre was fully online, and structured like this:

- **An intro and rapport task:** fourteen of us on a call, paired up, had to learn a partner's name and a fun fact, then introduce them confidently to the whole group. This tests how quickly you build rapport and how well you retain and present information under pressure.
- **A case study exercise and a second online assessment.**
- **A group task with distributed information:** genuinely difficult online, since collaboration has real friction over a call, you have to actively make sure everyone's actually listened to and everyone knows what information is on the table. A supervisor would drop in every ten minutes and quiz specific people, and it was obvious who hadn't been engaging. My approach was to always be the first to answer, even with a rough, partial explanation, since staying silent looks worse than trying. Newton explicitly told us beforehand not to compete with each other, that they could genuinely onboard everyone if we all did well, which felt reassuring, right up until half the group got cut after the lunch break.
- **A behavioural interview:** relaxed, almost conversational, standard team and self-improvement questions.
- **A case study interview:** given a large, dense diagram and ten minutes to memorise and understand it, then had to explain the process clearly to a supervisor from memory.

The actual work itself was strategy and operations consulting: breaking a client's costs down into categories, identifying inefficiencies, and quantifying the potential savings. During the live internship specifically, that meant presenting findings to the client, and a lot of self-directed coordination, reaching out to different teams, introducing yourself, building the relationship, then asking for exactly the information you need, aggregating it, and making sense of it well enough to present. A genuinely typical consulting workflow.

UKAEA-Funded UROP: Materials Research

I found this through Imperial's own internal listings, they flag opportunities like this directly to students. The application was a cover letter plus a research-specific CV, tailored differently from a corporate one. The interview covered technical knowledge in nuclear materials, which I'd already covered through a nuclear physics module, genuinely easier for me because of that background, but worth knowing it'd be a steeper climb without a related module or degree. The other half of it was just showing real enthusiasm for the field, that matters as much as the technical knowledge.

The actual work was 3D atomic-scale modelling, simulating defects and how they'd behave under nuclear fusion temperatures, looking at thermal expansion coefficients and thermal conductivity, and

training machine learning potentials to simulate silicon carbide specifically. A lot of it involved regularly checking in with my supervisor on what results would actually be useful to present back to UKAEA, the sponsor. It ended with a site visit to UKAEA's own department, where I presented my findings and gave a poster presentation.

Cutover AI: AI Engineering (Ongoing)

The process was a cover letter and CV, then three separate conversations: a meeting with the CFO, a technical interview with an engineer covering practical AI concepts (RAG, why token usage can balloon unexpectedly, how to explain “temperature” in an LLM to a non-technical person), and a final conversation with the COO about motivation and fit, where I specifically talked about guardrails and security, since that's close to what the company actually specialises in.

The role itself is agentic AI engineering: building and automating agents for internal processes to speed up manual work. Day to day, I sit between the engineering teams and the non-technical teams, translating technical concepts for people who don't need the full detail, and working directly with different departments as the projects evolve. It's ongoing, so the specific work keeps changing as new projects come up.

> **Key takeaway:** Four completely different interview formats, technical, case study, group task, pure conversation, but the same underlying skills kept mattering across all of them: know your own experiences well enough to link them to any transferable skill being tested, talk through your logic out loud even when you're unsure, and show genuine interest in the specific field, not just competence. The actual work varied wildly too, but every single one rewarded the same thing: being proactive enough to ask the right people the right questions rather than waiting to be told.

Chapter 3: Understanding Internship Application Cycles

Different industries open their internship cycles at completely different times of year, and knowing this in advance is a genuine advantage most students don't have until they've already missed a deadline once. Here's a breakdown by industry.

Which Year Does What

Before the industry breakdown, the general shape by year: first years typically apply for spring weeks (short, insight-focused programmes, mainly in finance and consulting, that exist to feed the following summer's internship pipeline). Second years apply for the actual summer internships, the main event, and for most industries this is the primary route into a graduate offer. Third years, especially if you didn't convert a summer internship, apply directly for graduate schemes. This isn't a strict rule, plenty of people apply for internships across multiple years, but it's the default pattern worth knowing before you plan around it.

Finance

Major finance firms start around September, sometimes late August. These dates matter enormously, since applicants come from every degree imaginable, and firms can afford to be picky, cutting people off based on when they applied, small errors in their application or CV, and running long, multi-stage interview processes, even for internships aimed at students with no prior professional experience. You'll need to master specific interview techniques here, speaking clearly, using the STAR method, and understanding the jargon and current news relevant to whichever division you're applying to, M&A, S&T, asset management, each has its own technical question style and expected knowledge.

Consulting

Consulting generally opens around the new year, with a similarly high application rate to finance. Consulting has its own distinct interview format, most notably the case study, using something like the bucket method to structure your answer. You have to think on your feet, be genuinely inquisitive and creative with proposed solutions, and, honestly, be comfortable with corporate waffle, sounding smart and structured while effectively saying "I don't have a fully confident answer to this," since that's a real skill in itself.

Being at a target or semi-target university does genuinely help here, but I'd argue the real driver isn't the university name itself, it's the peer group and alumni network actually applying and supporting each other through the process. At a non-target university, far fewer people around you are even aware these roles exist, let alone actively applying, which means less shared knowledge, fewer mock interviews, less insider information passed around informally. That makes it genuinely harder to break in from a non-target school, purely due to fewer resources being available to you, but it's definitely not impossible.

Quant

Quant internship timing varies, but these roles generally expect you to have shown things like Olympiad experience, chess club achievements, or genuinely impressive coding projects, evidence you're operating at a very high technical level. They're less focused on professional experience and more purely meritocratic, but you're competing against some genuinely exceptional people. Most successful

applicants I've seen personally study Maths, Computing or JMC at Imperial, or come from Oxbridge engineering courses.

Software Engineering

Generally aimed at Computing or EIE students. There's a common narrative that computer science is "cooked" given AI's impact on entry level roles, but from what I've seen, if you're studying CS at a genuinely top 5-ish UK university, Oxbridge, Imperial, UCL, Warwick, KCL, you're still in a reasonably strong position. Outside of that tier, the picture does look more challenging right now.

Random / Niche Internships

These pop up throughout the year in all sorts of fields, and can be a genuinely good way to try out a completely new industry, marketing, sales, or increasingly, AI engineering roles as they start to appear more broadly. Worth pursuing simply because doing something productive over summer beats being idle, even if it's not in your "main" target industry.

Engineering

Timing is less predictable here, but these roles are genuinely competitive too, since applicants come from different countries and different stages of study, not just UK undergraduates in your exact year.

Startups

Apply via LinkedIn, by DMing the founder directly, or through a direct application if one exists. Show genuine interest and passion, and make clear you're willing to work hard for them, that's what startups are actually looking for. They also tend to hire very quickly if they like you, since there's often no formal process, so you might start working before or straight after your summer holidays, startups don't really pause for term dates. It's arguably better experience than a regular corporate internship in some cases, depending on the startup's success and how much responsibility you're given in a fast moving environment.

UROPs (Undergraduate Research Opportunities)

These generally start being advertised in autumn. The process is a lot more informal than the ones above, mostly messaging professors directly, showing genuine interest, reading a few of their papers, and demonstrating some competence in their specific field. If they like you, they can offer you a UROP. You're generally competing against far fewer people than for a standard internship, and your relationship with the professor matters a lot, which is easier to build naturally if you're already seeing them regularly through your course.

On Online Assessments

- Consider using practice platforms like JobTestPrep, since for some firms (UBS was one example I encountered) even scoring 100% isn't necessarily enough, since they can start ranking based on completion time too, which makes practice genuinely worthwhile
- Ask peers or current interns what the actual test or interview covered, most people are happy to share if you ask directly in group chats or through your network

> **Key takeaway:** Knowing roughly when each industry opens its cycle is half the battle, missing a deadline by being unaware it existed is one of the most avoidable mistakes a student can make. Build

> a rough calendar for yourself each year, September for finance, January for consulting, autumn for UROPs, and check regularly for the rest.

Chapter 4: The Step-by-Step Internship Playbook

This is the practical, chronological version of everything else in this section, what to actually do, and when.

First year: build something worth putting on a CV

This assumes you don't already have major internship experience before starting university. If you do, you're genuinely ahead of 90% of people already.

- Apply to insight days and spring weeks
- Update and properly brush up your CV, using the tips from the CV chapter to give it real character rather than a flat list
- Do relevant online courses
- Go to career events and join relevant societies, both to build technical knowledge and to develop connections and a genuine understanding of the industry, which you can then reference in interviews and applications
- Join free academies and organisations that help you out, career societies within your university (and if you're genuinely proactive within them, that looks great, since it's the best available to you at that stage), or external organisations like SEO London

You almost have to scrounge, and at times effectively beg, for that first experience to get onto your CV. Taking a job is genuinely noteworthy too, tutoring being one I've mentioned before. Or start something yourself, or do a personal project relevant to whatever you're trying to break into:

- **Finance:** DCF models, analysing stocks
- **Software engineering:** engineering projects, hackathons
- **Consulting:** case studies through your society, or external case study competitions

It can be genuinely difficult to get into some opportunities, but making your own opportunities is far more feasible by comparison.

Second and third year: the summer internship cycle

Once you're past that initial stage (first to second year, depending on whether you're on a three or four year course), you'll be eligible for summer internships.

One thing that doesn't get talked about enough: **you don't necessarily have to do an internship in the summer.** You can do internships in winter or spring too. These are usually at smaller firms, you have to cold email them (research good templates for this properly), and they're often quite informal, you might join simply because they happened to have space and liked you. It's rare, but genuinely underdiscussed.

Applying

- Apply on the day the internship opens, especially in this job market
- Have your CV already prepared in different versions for different industries, changing which experiences you list and how you frame the bullet points
- Have cover letters prepared in advance

- Predict roughly when firms open by checking previous years' dates, so you can prepare ahead of time

Stage 1: Online assessments (OAs)

Use a site like JobTestPrep for preparation and mock tests, and genuinely brush up until you're good at them. You usually need to score quite high nowadays given the competition. Some people do use AI for these. I don't advocate that, but I'd be dishonest not to mention it, so at least be aware of what you're up against.

Stage 2: HireVues

In most cases these use the same general questions with slightly different wording. You can usually find out the questions by asking people in career group chats or coordinating with friends, then practise accordingly.

- Practise properly, they're timed, and a lot of people freeze up talking into a camera
- Be likeable, show character and a bit of personality, but don't overdo it, you still need to seem presentable and serious enough to put in front of clients
- Aim to be loose and relaxed, that's when you come across most confident and are least likely to stumble over your words
- Try to hit relevant buzzwords, in case there's ATS scanning of your CV or the HireVue itself

Stage 3: Telephone interview

Similar principles to the HireVue, sound confident and have practised beforehand.

- You can have a book or notes with you to jog your memory. Not a full cheat sheet, you won't have time to read it in the moment, but small prompts that will unstick you if you freeze
- Have 7-10 experiences or talking points ready, some of them memorised and completely second nature, but without sounding robotic or over-rehearsed
- Ask them questions at the end
- Do research on the firm beforehand, and ideally the interviewer too, niche news articles or even the firm's recent posts show genuine interest

Stage 4: The assessment centre

Usually the final stage, and these are absurdly stressful for what is ultimately just an internship. They generally consist of a test, a group task, and a final interview. I've done three proper assessment centres at top firms.

The key is not to be too stressed out. Remember it's just an internship, it's genuinely not the end of the world. You feel a large sense of attachment purely because they make these processes so absurdly long. Try hard, revise, go in with confidence, but if you don't get it, don't feel too bummed, it's always a numbers game, and honestly the whole assessment centre format is a bit of a performative exercise at times.

The test: try your hardest, brush up on technicals, and practise online assessments again. These usually aren't heavily technical, they're more a validation check that you can perform at the OA standard without AI or the internet helping you.

The group task: work as a team. Yes, it's an ultra-competitive environment, and some people in your group may be incompetent or difficult to work with, but don't let that distract you from the actual objective, which is to collaborate and be genuinely helpful.

- Switch off gatekeeping and being nonchalant. Switch on overtly nice mode, be extroverted, and follow closely what's happening in case you get questioned on it and fold
- Know exactly what the group is doing, and fill a specific role. The classic one is timekeeper, if nobody's taken it, offer to track time and remind everyone at intervals, but don't lean into it too heavily
- Aim to be the second loudest person. The loudest is usually the naturally bossy one with a superiority complex. If you're genuinely competent though, being the loudest isn't necessarily a problem
- Help others out, explain things clearly so everyone understands, and offer thoughtful suggestions
- If the group is heading in what looks like the wrong direction, interject and offer your view, but don't be confrontational. If they still don't follow you, don't get annoyed, you've shown you can disagree and still work with people, which is exactly what's being assessed

The final interview: generally a repeat of the telephone interview but in person, sometimes slightly more casual since they know it's the last stage. Usually a behavioural interview and a technical one, prepared using the same methods as the earlier stages.

Afterwards

Network with people at the event. Be genuinely interested in everyone, offer your thoughts without being presumptuous, ask thoughtful technical questions that show real depth, and just be kind.

After that, there's nothing left to do but cross your fingers and get on with your life. Hopefully you get it. If you don't, don't be too bummed out. And if you fail at one of the earlier stages, don't worry, that's completely normal. There are countless internship applications that didn't even get me past the CV stage. It's just part of the game. Keep your head up and keep moving.

One investment banking respondent to my own survey summed up the same idea from the other side:

> **[Investment Banking]** *Use the people around you, previous interns will always help because they've been in your position. Personally I'd say obsess over your applications, the role, the company, since the more prepped you are, the more confident you'll be throughout the process, and confidence matters a lot.*

> **Key takeaway:** Every stage of this process is preparable, and most people fail not because they're incapable but because they didn't know the stage was coming or what it actually tested. Work backwards from the deadline, prepare each stage specifically, and treat rejection at any point as statistical rather than personal.

Chapter 5: Real Accounts, Breaking Into Competitive Internships

I also collected real, specific advice from students who landed internships in investment banking, quant/trading, and consulting, the exact fields covered earlier in this manifesto. Below is what they actually said, kept as close to their own words as possible.

The underrated, tactical tips barely anyone talks about

- *"Talk to, or reach out to, students directly one year above you who have just come out of the process."* This came up more than once, and it's a genuinely underused tactic, someone who went through the exact same cycle twelve months ago has far more current, specific knowledge than a generic guide.
- *"Have someone else already in the process that you know."*
- *"Be interested in the stuff other people aren't."* One investment banking intern specifically read their target team's actual deal flow and commented their own view on those deals during the process, that level of specific, demonstrated interest is what tipped it in their favour.
- *"Speak to people who have just gone through the process. A LinkedIn message costs nothing, and from that, you could get exactly what you need to increase your chances."*

A genuinely strong reframe on competency questions

One investment banking intern gave a detailed, tactical method worth quoting at length: *"I don't agree with typical ways of prepping for competency questions, 'tell me a time...' There are so many possible questions that it's infeasible and a waste of brain capacity to remember bullet-pointed answers for each one. Instead, use the 'stories' method, have three to five stories where each one covers a different skill, one leadership story, one success story, one failure story, one adding-value story, and so on. Not only is it far easier to remember and speak about naturally, it means you can adapt the same story slightly to answer almost any question they throw at you. This saves a huge amount of prep time, which frees you up for technicals, company analysis, and other applications."*

On what actually made people stand out

- *"I was pretty good technically."* Sometimes the honest answer really is that simple.
- *"I always got great feedback on how I presented myself, using my hands, not speaking in monotone, using facial expressions, structured answers. Some feedback was that I seemed like a natural presenter. In IB you need to be able to talk to people and speak with confidence to seniors. Part of this is being likeable, do you have cool experiences, travel, a competitive sport, an interesting niche hobby? People want to see character and personality, not the same CV they've seen a thousand times. I always try to play a game in interviews where I see how long I can keep the conversation on small talk before it moves on, it gives you time to ease in and break the ice."*
- *"Being personable and enjoyable to talk to."*

Top tips, condensed from across responses

- Prep technicals properly (400 IB Questions or the WSP Red Book were both named specifically), actually understand the material rather than memorising it, and use AI to explain anything you genuinely don't understand

- Prepare and practise delivering your stories for HireVues specifically, don't just write them down
- Treat application season like the equivalent of two extra modules worth of work, and do targeted, non-generic applications rather than mass-applying
- Quality over quantity, firing off hundreds of half-arsed applications is close to pointless, research each company properly instead
- Use the people around you, previous interns will almost always help, since they've been exactly where you are

On resources and communities that actually helped

Named directly by respondents: Mergers & Inquisitions (BIWS) for technicals and modelling prep, the AmplifyME podcast, the Wall Street Prep Red Book, the "tradinginterview" resource for quant/trading specifically, the IHSAAN Network, and Reddit.

> **Key takeaway:** The tactical advice here consistently points toward two things this manifesto has already emphasised: talk directly to people who just went through the process rather than relying on generic guides, and prepare a small set of flexible, well-rehearsed stories rather than trying to memorise an answer for every possible question. Both are low-cost, high-leverage moves that most applicants simply don't bother doing properly.

Chapter 6: Building Your CV & Cover Letter

Your CV

I spoke with employers and friends who'd landed good internships, and asked them to review my CV directly. Having an actual professional's opinion on this is genuinely useful and telling, far more useful than guessing on your own. I also occasionally use AI to rewrite specific lines while keeping the same underlying message, useful for tightening wording without losing meaning.

A few small formatting things that each improve your CV by maybe 1%, but together compound into something that genuinely stands out:

- Consistent font and font size throughout
- Consistent spacing between sections
- Punctuation at the end of every bullet line
- Bullet points that stick to one line each, don't let them wrap awkwardly

On writing the actual bullet points

Don't just state that something happened, describe what you did and what impact it had. "Attended an insight day" reads flat and forgettable. "Completed a group task on real-time trading simulations, generating a 20% return" immediately reads better, even if there's a bit of waffle involved in getting there. Recruiters have no idea who you are before reading your CV, it's your job to fill in every relevant detail about yourself in the space you're given.

Also include genuinely noteworthy, unique achievements, something like "top 2% grades in secondary school cohort." It won't cost you extra lines, but it signals something distinct and gives you more of the aura of an exceptional candidate.

Keep it current

Pull out the most relevant points for whichever industry you're applying to, and regularly update your CV. Nobody wants to read about an experience from four years ago that you both know isn't relevant anymore. As you gain newer, better experiences, remove the older, weaker ones rather than just stacking everything on top of each other. You shouldn't list every experience you've ever had, even if all of them are technically relevant, be selective, sometimes less is genuinely more. As long as your CV shows a clear journey of experience and interest within an industry, it's done its job.

Tailor your CV per industry

Make different versions of your CV for the different industries you're interested in. The same experience can be framed differently depending on what you're applying for, a consulting internship is obviously highly relevant on a consulting CV, but on a finance CV you might instead pull out the financial or quantifiable parts of that same experience if you don't have much else finance-specific to talk about. If you do have genuine finance internships already, it can actually be better to remove unrelated experiences entirely rather than waste limited page space on something that isn't relevant to the CV you're sending.

Formatting for readability

Your CV should be one page. Nobody is going to read two or three pages from someone at your stage, and frankly you're too early in your career to warrant that much space unless you're actively over-waffling. Keep it simple, clean, and easy to scan, a recruiter forms a judgement within about 8 seconds of looking at it. You want it to read well, look professional, and clearly show you're suitable and genuinely interested in this role or industry.

Get friends or working professionals to look it over. Once you've hit a solid baseline, your CV has done its job, everything after that comes down to how you perform in interviews and later stages. Your CV's whole purpose is to get you through the door, past the ATS screening, and into the room, the rest is on you.

You probably have more experience than you think

A lot of people underestimate what actually counts. Career fairs you've attended, short work experience placements, part time jobs, an online course you completed independently, a personal project, all of this counts for something. There's a bit of a meme now about embellishing job titles ("underwater ceramics technician" for "dish washer"), and the honest truth is almost everyone does this to some extent, since you're competing against thousands of other applicants doing the exact same thing. The key message is: LARP wisely and sparingly. Don't lie outright, getting caught out is embarrassing and will cost you the role, but framing your actual experience in its strongest, most professional light is a completely normal part of the process.

If you're more than a year into uni, you can also draw on your uni projects, assignments, and things you naturally do on the side, societies included. This is where the idea of transferable skills stops being a meaningless buzzword and starts actually mattering: you don't necessarily need the exact matching experience, you need to show what you already do that proves you'd be good at the role in question.

A Full Worked Example: My Own CV

Everything above is theory. Here's the actual document: a recent CV of mine, used for finance and consulting applications, with a breakdown of why it's built the way it is.

[redacted]

EDUCATION

Imperial College London — **London, United Kingdom**
MEng Materials Science and Engineering: 1st Predicted — October 2023 – June 2027
- Implemented a machine learning algorithm predicting steel properties on 50+ samples.

[redacted] — **London, United Kingdom**
A-levels: A, A, A in Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry — September 2021 – June 2023
- Achieved 1st place in the Cambridge Chemistry Olympiad in a cohort of 750.

[redacted] — **London, United Kingdom**
GCSEs: 6 A*s, 3 As — September 2016 – May 2021

WORK EXPERIENCE

Newton Europe Consulting — **London, United Kingdom**
Summer Intern — July 2025 – August 2025
- Applied Newton methodologies to identify inefficiencies of 20% across local authority public sector projects.
- Worked to identify cost levers of £3.72 million and recommended solutions without reducing service quality.
- Delivered a summary report to key directors, highlighting £1.1m potential in savings for key budgetary decisions.

Deutsche Bank — **London, United Kingdom**
Spring Intern — April 2025
- Placed 1st in a macro debate, presenting analysis of the impact of US tariffs on Germany's export-led economy.
- Completed DCF Modelling workshop on Nvidia as part of an M&A rotation and networking sessions.

Ruffer LLP — **London, United Kingdom**
Insight into Asset Management — August 2024
- Managed a 10-stock equity portfolio by rebalancing in response to relevant news, beating the index by 7.1%.
- Pitched Meta stock, recommending a strong buy with a projected 16.5% return, using P/E and EPS analysis.
- Shadowed asset managers at due diligence and client meetings, gaining exposure to investment processes.

Total Media Ltd — **London, United Kingdom**
Finance Department Intern — August 2023
- Handled invoices totalling £750,000 by creating an automated invoicing system for emailing and calling clients.
- Implemented cost saving strategies via financial data management totalling £48,000 in synergies.

LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES

Imperial College Calisthenics Society — **London, United Kingdom**
President, Co-Founder — February 2025 – present
- Created and led Calisthenics society, growing total membership to 400+ students over 6 months.
- Ran weekly sessions for 40+ students, tailoring workouts for different abilities and maximise engagement.
- Expanded committee roles to 6, delegated positions through hosting interviews and societal elections.

Field Focus Media — **London, United Kingdom**
Founder — August 2024 – March 2025
- Created a marketing agency specialising in scaling businesses through adverts and software, delivering 120% ROI.
- Implemented GoHighLevel automation software to able to deliver requests for clients, optimising their workstream.
- Participated in multiple B2B networking events, pitching my services to potential clients and industry contacts.

SKILLS & INTERESTS

Languages: Mongolian (Native), Kazakh (Fluent), English (Fluent), Spanish (Basic)
IT Skills: Microsoft Office (PowerPoint, Excel, Word: Advanced) Python (Proficient), SQL (Intermediate)
Affiliations: SEO London - 2024 Finance Academy Cohort Member, [redacted]
UpReach Candidate – Gold Springboard Award
Interests: Martial Arts - Volunteered at Fight for Peace (2023), taught Martial Arts to support youth empowerment.
Calisthenics - Achieved recent PBs of 25 pull-ups, 46 dips, and 12 muscle-ups.
[redacted]

A recent CV of mine, used for spring and summer internship applications (contact details, school names, one affiliation and one interest line redacted).

Line-by-Line Breakdown

- **Education leads with the specific, not the generic:** Rather than just listing my degree, the bullet under Imperial names a concrete project ("machine learning algorithm predicting steel

properties on 50+ samples"), and A-levels lead with a competitive result (1st place, Cambridge Chemistry Olympiad, cohort of 750) rather than just the grades. Specific numbers do more work than adjectives.

- **Every work experience bullet is quantified:** £3.72 million in identified cost levers at Newton, a 7.1% index outperformance at Ruffer, £750,000 in invoices handled at Total Media. None of these say "helped with" or "assisted in", they state the actual scale of what happened. This is the exact principle from earlier in this chapter: describe the impact, not just the activity.
- **The internship order tells a progression story:** Total Media (general finance) → Ruffer (asset management) → Deutsche Bank (investment banking) → Newton Europe (consulting). A reader can see a deliberate narrowing toward specific industries over time, not a random scattering of unrelated placements. That progression is itself a signal, it shows sustained, escalating interest rather than one-off exposure.
- **Leadership activities carry real numbers too:** "Grew total membership to 400+ students", "delivering 120% ROI", these aren't padded with vague language like "helped grow" or "contributed to". Founding something (the Calisthenics Society, Field Focus Media) also signals initiative that an internship alone can't, worth including even when it's unrelated to the target industry, since it demonstrates a transferable trait: the ability to start and run something from scratch.

Notice What's Not Here

Tealink, a live product I co-founded, and paid tutoring experience both genuinely exist and appear on other versions of my CV. They're deliberately absent from this one. For finance and consulting applications specifically, Ruffer's portfolio work and Newton's cost-lever analysis demonstrate exactly the skills those recruiters are screening for, while Tealink and tutoring don't move that needle as directly for this particular audience.

A CV isn't a complete record of everything you've done, it's a curated pitch for one specific reader. Including everything you're proud of, regardless of relevance, dilutes the document rather than strengthening it. Keep two or three versions of your CV, weighted toward different industries, rather than trying to make one CV serve every application.

Same Experience, Different Wording

Tailoring isn't just about which experiences you include, it's also about how you word the ones you keep. The same underlying experience can be reframed depending on which industry is reading it. Take the Newton Europe internship as an example:

- **For a consulting application:** "Applied Newton methodologies to identify inefficiencies of 20% across local authority public sector projects", leads with the methodology and the structured problem-solving process, since that's what consulting recruiters are screening for.
- **For a finance application, the same internship:** could instead lead with "Delivered a summary report to key directors, highlighting £1.1m potential in savings for key budgetary decisions", pulling the financial and quantitative angle to the front instead, since that's what a finance recruiter cares about most.

Same six weeks, same underlying work, two different framings depending entirely on who's reading it. This is a five-minute edit once you have the base CV built, but it's the difference between a bullet that lands and one that gets skimmed past.

> **Key takeaway:** A CV isn't one document, it's a template you rewrite slightly for every audience. Quantify everything, cut what isn't relevant even if it's impressive, and reword the experiences you keep to lead with whatever that specific industry actually screens for.

Your Cover Letter

Whether a cover letter is necessary depends heavily on the industry. For finance, banking, and consulting, I'd say it's genuinely necessary, given the sheer volume of competition. A cover letter lets you explain your interest in that specific firm, written specifically for them, and gives you space to link your experiences and interests to the exact role and company, plus mention things that don't come across clearly on your CV.

Keep it tight:

- Half a page to a page maximum, recruiters are scanning through hundreds of these
- Three clear paragraphs: why you, why this role, why this company
- For competitive finance roles, it's common to pre-write your cover letter weeks in advance of the application opening, so you waste no time submitting the moment it goes live

A genuine data point: some LSE students consider it a "late application" if they don't submit on the exact day applications open, that's how intense the competition can get in certain industries. Not every industry or internship works this way, I got my last two internships near the end of my academic year with no rush required, but in some industries, speed genuinely can make or break your application, so it's worth knowing which category you're applying into.

> **Key takeaway:** Your CV and cover letter aren't meant to get you the job, they're meant to get you through the door. Treat them as filters to survive, not the full pitch, the actual pitch happens in the interview.

Chapter 7: Cold Emailing, Referrals & Networking

Networking Events

For finance specifically, there's usually a wave of student networking events during the first month of the application cycle, around August and September. Depending on how competitive the event is (yes, even for a free half day networking session), you may need to submit a CV and a cover letter explaining why you want to attend. These events let you network with actual professionals at the firm, give you a genuine talking point for why you're interested in that firm specifically, and can set you apart from other candidates. Some firms, JP Morgan being a notable example in a recent cycle, only gave interviews and offers to people who'd attended their networking dinners. This pattern is most exaggerated within finance and banking specifically, though similar networking events do exist across other industries too.

Referrals

The UK is considerably less network-dependent than the US, where you often need a set number of referrals just to be eligible to apply to certain firms. It's less extreme here, though some UK applications will still ask if you know anyone at the firm, and let you provide their name or work email as a soft referral.

- If you do a coffee chat with someone, they'll often be willing to let you use their details as a referral
- That said, whether you get in or not can sometimes reflect on the person referring you, so people may give referrals sparingly rather than to everyone who asks
- Always ask permission first before listing someone as a referral, never assume
- It genuinely does help to leverage any connection you have, but treat it as one extra input, not a guaranteed shortcut

Hearing Back After Applying

Banking and consulting especially can take a long time to respond, purely given the volume of applications they receive. Don't read too deeply into a long wait either way, sometimes it means something, often it doesn't. The key mental shift here is: once you've finished an interview stage, don't let it dominate your headspace. You'll have applied elsewhere too, you have other things to focus on in the meantime, and given the current job market, it's genuinely impossible to only pin your hopes on one specific outcome.

If you progress, good news. If you don't, it's not the end of the world, you'll have other chances. At the end of the day, it's just an internship, not a full time job, and it might not even end up being enjoyable anyway. I was rejected by the vast majority of my internship applications every single year. Second year, I only got my two internships after failing an assessment centre stage with a bank first. First year, I didn't get any internships at all. Third year, I didn't land either of my two internships until May.

The actual message here is simple: keep applying, keep your head up, since you genuinely still have a chance. Don't view it as rejection, view it as redirection, the same principle that applies to university offers applies just as much here. And even in the worst case, if you don't secure an internship at all, you can still build your own projects, get involved with a startup, learn high value skills, take online courses, or start content. As long as you're willing to self-start, you'll always have something worthwhile to do.

Not getting a traditional internship doesn't stop you from making real progress toward your goals, it just means the progress looks different.

The same question, asked of student founders instead of interns, got a similarly specific answer:

> **[MedTech founder]** *An Imperial entrepreneurs panel talk, where I met the right alumni, that's what actually moved things forward.*
>
> **[Tech startup founder]** *Redwood Founders and STEM Muslims, specific communities, not generic networking.*

> **Key takeaway:** Referrals and networking events give you a real edge, but they're an addition to a strong application, not a substitute for one. And rejection at this stage is closer to the statistical default than the exception, even for people who go on to have a genuinely strong track record, myself included.

Chapter 8: Interview Technique & Getting Liked

Be genuinely passionate about what you're applying to

If you're actually passionate about a specific industry or role, my nuclear research internship being a good example, you'll naturally read up on it in your own time, simply because you find it interesting. That makes it far easier to express genuine interest, eagerness and motivation in an interview, and it also helps you waffle your way through questions you don't fully know the answer to, since your enthusiasm carries a lot of the weight.

Questions worth asking at the end

Most interviews end with "do you have any questions for us," and this is a genuinely underused opportunity to stand out. A few that work well:

- "What are some things successful interns do when they first start?"
- Something technically specific that shows you've actually been thinking about the role, not just generic curiosity
- If you know their LinkedIn background, ask about a specific project or experience of theirs, without sounding like you've been stalking them
- "What do you personally like about working here?"
- "Is there any hidden advice you'd give a new intern, based on your own experience?"
- "Is there anything I haven't properly clarified that I could quickly address before we finish?"

I also like asking, after giving each answer, "does that answer your question?" It shows you're actively thinking about the conversation rather than just reciting prepared lines, and most of the time they'll say yes, which psychologically reinforces in their head that you're a strong candidate.

How to actually practise

- Record yourself speaking to your own camera
- Practise with a friend, supervisor, or mentor
- Try practising with someone listening while muted, with your screen hidden, so they can only hear how you naturally speak without you being able to see or hear them, this is probably the most realistic version of interview pressure you can simulate
- Practise your actual talking points and reference experiences specifically, so you can reliably pull out the key details from them instead of rambling into an unstructured stream of thought. This is exactly why the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) is so useful

Being likeable

Show some emotion. Don't be a robot. Be comfortable laughing at yourself, be genuine, laugh at their jokes without overdoing it. Smile, don't stay deadpan throughout. You don't need to be loudly extroverted or performative, but you should come across as positive and engaged at minimum.

Networking is part of the interview process, not separate from it

For finance especially, there's usually a lot of networking happening during, before, or after formal interview stages, and you should genuinely treat this as part of the actual assessment, because it most likely is. Firms are very particular about who they ultimately let in.

A few things worth balancing here:

- Be likeable and curious, ask questions that go beyond the surface level ("what do you do?" gets old fast)
- Have solid technical knowledge of what's actually happening in the industry, so you don't come across as a total novice who needs everything explained from scratch
- But don't overcorrect into sounding like a smartass either, nobody enjoys that, no matter how technically impressive it is
- Be confident without being arrogant or boastful, genuine presence, not bravado, tends to earn quiet respect
- Respect people's time and personal space, don't bombard them with question after question just because you can
- Remember you're still there to learn, they have the experience and knowledge, you don't yet, and that's fine

The best approach here is to not overthink this checklist consciously while you're actually in the room, that will just fry your mental bandwidth. Go in and speak to people as naturally as you can. Acting naturally is genuinely one of the most important things you can do, since most people can sense insincerity fairly quickly, and if you get rejected purely for being yourself, it probably wasn't the right environment for you in the first place.

Building your character and your story

Build genuine character through different experiences, putting yourself out there, doing things worth talking about, having a real hobby. When someone asks you to describe yourself, you want more to say than "I'm a student studying X at uni." Have a clear, natural introduction nailed down, almost like your own personal signature, but in words rather than a fixed script.

People remember specific things: a boxing match, running a content page, volunteering, having travelled to 40+ countries, running a business. You don't need to lead with the most objectively impressive thing either, sometimes something as simple as "I'm Mongolian, I do calisthenics" is more memorable than a longer list of achievements, since it's unpredictable what will actually stick with someone. The goal is having a genuine locker of experiences (not just professional ones) so you come across as a well rounded, multidimensional, interesting person.

Prove your technical competence first, of course, that's the baseline. But once you've done that, the real game becomes differentiating yourself from everyone else who's equally or even more capable than you on paper. At the end of the day, it usually comes down to whether they remember you and like you, since roughly 90% of people could probably do the job competently after a few months of training, which means firms can afford to be genuinely picky about who they choose.

One respondent's specific answer to what actually tipped it in their favour:

> **[Investment Banking]** *I read the team's actual deal flow and commented my own view on their deals.*

> **Key takeaway:** Interviews aren't purely a technical assessment, they're an assessment of whether someone wants to work alongside you for the next several months. Preparation gets you through the technical bar. Being memorable, likeable and genuinely yourself is usually what actually tips the decision.

Chapter 9: Converting Your Internship

Getting the internship is only half the job. Converting it into a full offer, or at minimum a strong reference and network for your next move, comes down to a fairly specific set of behaviours, most of which have very little to do with raw technical output.

What actually moves the needle:

- **Be punctual, every day.** Aim to arrive around 15 minutes early on most days, especially early on, it's a small signal, but it reliably communicates eagerness before you've said a single word
- **Take initiative on your tasks.** Complete what you're given without needing everything spelled out, being self-sufficient is one of the clearest signals of competence to a manager who's juggling their own workload
- **Ask for feedback constantly.** Regular check-ins with your manager show you're adaptable, genuinely want to improve, and care about the quality of your work, not just about getting through the internship
- **Network with as many people as possible.** A positive impression across the team means more people can genuinely vouch for you when your name comes up in conversations you're not even part of
- **Go to after-work networking events.** Showing up outside of core hours signals genuine investment, not just clocking in and out
- **Offer to help others with their tasks.** Even small, unprompted offers to help build goodwill fast, and they cost you very little

The uncomfortable truth about conversion

It's usually the person who's most liked and memorable who gets picked, not necessarily the one who talks the least and simply gets the work done quietly in the background. Conversion decisions are rarely purely meritocratic, they're closer to "who would I actually want to work alongside every day," and that's a genuinely different question to "who did the best technical work this summer."

> **Key takeaway:** Technical competence gets you taken seriously, but it's rarely the deciding factor in conversion. Visibility, likeability, and being someone people actively want on their team tend to matter more than being the quietest, most productive person in the room.

Chapter 10: Placements & Sandwich Years

A lot of universities run sandwich years or placement years, some are genuinely excellent for this, Bath is a well known example. Certain courses at Imperial give students time in third year to take a 3-6 month placement, designed specifically to build real experience for your CV, so you don't leave uni with nothing tangible to show for your degree.

The genuine case for doing one:

- Teaches you what the actual working world looks like, not the theoretical version
- Gives you a full year of real, sustained experience rather than a short summer snapshot
- Almost guarantees a job outcome, since you'll effectively already be working there for a year
- You earn money throughout, rather than it being unpaid or minimally paid like some shorter internships

My own course didn't traditionally run a placement year, though you can still arrange one by speaking to your department and formally interrupting your studies for it. I was never personally drawn to the idea. My reasoning:

- I felt I could build equivalent CV experience through summer internships without delaying graduation by a full year
- You still pay student finance fees during a placement year, which felt like an unnecessary added cost
- Committing a full year to a single corporate placement felt a bit too "rat race" for where I was at, especially knowing I'd already be working for decades after graduation anyway
- Having already done four internships and various other experiences, I felt I'd built comparable, if not more, experience than a placement year would have given me

That said, the benefits are genuinely real for the right person. If you're someone with limited experience so far, no internships under your belt, not particularly confident navigating applications, I'd actively push you toward a placement year. It's a reliable way to build a full year of consistency, reliability, and adaptability that's hard to fake any other way, and some people on placement years even find time for side projects alongside it, genuinely making the most of the year.

The catch: placement years are far sparser than standard internships, there are simply fewer of them to go around, and depending on your course, taking a year away from uni for one might create its own logistical complications.

> **Key takeaway:** A placement year is a strong move if you're behind on experience or want the security of a near-guaranteed job outcome. If you're already actively stacking internships and experience through your summers, it's genuinely optional rather than essential, weigh the extra year and extra fees against what you'd otherwise be doing with that time.

Chapter 11: Negotiating Overlapping Offers

I had to negotiate with both my nuclear research internship and my AI engineering internship, since I wanted to do both, and needed enough flexibility across the summer to actually fit them in. I was completely honest and upfront with both organisations, clearly outlining what my goals were and directly asking what flexibility they had on start and end dates. Luckily, I was able to make both work. I ended up with minimal breaks between them, but I was genuinely glad to fit both in rather than having to choose one over the other.

A few things worth knowing before you try this yourself:

- Not every internship can flex like this, larger firms generally run fixed, non-negotiable dates, especially for structured internship cohorts
- Smaller firms and organisations tend to have far more flexibility, since they're not running the same rigid, large scale programme structure
- Being upfront about having two offers, rather than hiding it, tends to work in your favour, most reasonable organisations would rather know early and adjust than find out later

> **Key takeaway:** It never hurts to ask. The worst outcome is simply being told no, and you default back to picking one. But especially with smaller organisations, there's a genuine chance both sides can accommodate you if you're transparent about what you're trying to make work.

Chapter 12: The Corporate Race vs. Entrepreneurship, My Realisation

Living in the UK, there's a fairly subconscious cultural pull toward the corporate route, almost as if it's the only real path that exists. There's nothing wrong with going into corporate work, and I genuinely understand why people choose it. But I do think the UK, compared to somewhere like the US, places far less emphasis on entrepreneurship or working for yourself. UK work culture is generally quite risk averse, and that means a lot of students never seriously consider self-starting as an option, they default straight to applying externally instead.

I've done a genuine mixture of both. I've done internships, worked at both rigid and more flexible firms, and tried starting my own ventures, albeit unsuccessfully so far. I also have a solid network of friends split across both camps, some in the highest branches of traditional internships and grad schemes, others deep into the startup world. Until second year, I honestly hadn't seriously considered the startup route for myself at all, everything in my head always led back to working for a good company eventually. It was speaking with friends, particularly internationals from places like Dubai with a more global perspective, that opened my eyes to how countries like the US genuinely favour entrepreneurial pursuits far more than the UK does.

The tradeoff, honestly stated: entrepreneurship is harder and less stable than a standard corporate role, but it carries far greater potential upside, and arguably more genuine innovation and excitement. The UK's corporate, bureaucratic default means a lot of people never really get exposed to the vision of building something themselves, or forming and leading their own team. Not everyone can, or should, go down that route, but everyone should at least know it exists and understand what it can genuinely offer.

A lot of people get put off purely by the fear that it might not work, or by assumed startup costs, often without actually knowing what those costs look like anymore. AI has brought the cost of building something down significantly, and your status as a student can unlock funding and grants that simply aren't available once you graduate. It might not work out, but that's genuinely fine, it's dependent on you and the effort you put in, and even if it fails, you'll have picked up real skills and knowledge along the way. I'd encourage students to develop these pursuits on the side, rather than assuming corporate is the only real option available to them.

Just try it, even briefly. If you try it and don't enjoy it, that's a perfectly good outcome too, you now genuinely know, rather than someone who never tried at all and is only guessing. The best time to start is always now, and as early as possible. As you get older, responsibilities pile up, a mortgage, a family, children, and it genuinely becomes harder to take a real risk or step away from a stable job once those are in place. Uni might honestly be the most golden period you'll ever have for this, low responsibility, low cost of failure, and time that's genuinely your own.

On the flip side: don't drift either

There are also people who neither apply for internships nor start anything, and simply drift through their time at university. You should absolutely have fun and enjoy your time without constantly stressing yourself out, but especially in this economy and job market, gaining real experience during your degree genuinely matters. As covered earlier in this manifesto, uni is only worth it if you actively make it worth it. Sitting through lectures and doing nothing else leaves you one-dimensional, with very little to actually show for your time. Someone from a lower ranked university with a 2:1 and strong internship experience will consistently beat someone from a higher ranked university with a first and nothing else, that's just how it plays out. You'll hear real stories of Oxbridge graduates struggling to find work post-graduation, the need to build genuine experience is real, regardless of where you study.

A few honest reminders here:

- You don't need to know exactly what you want to do for the rest of your life, aiming in a general direction, or exploring something purely out of curiosity, is a completely valid starting point
- It doesn't have to be finance or consulting specifically, data analysis, law, patent law, volunteering, building your own project, all count
- Your degree doesn't have to match either, there are usually far more transferable skills than you'd assume. I know engineers trying to break into law, medics and historians trying to break into banking, it genuinely doesn't matter as much as people think
- If you're still unsure where to start, audit yourself honestly and build a quick, practical action plan to make yourself busier and more proactive. This genuinely shouldn't take more than a couple of days of properly dedicated thinking to land on a rough goal and a path to walk down, and it's completely fine if that changes further down the line

That's genuinely one of the defining traits of Imperial students, most people are doing something, as long as you're not being a complete bum, that's already a solid place to be.

Follow your own internship path

If you already know finance or consulting genuinely isn't for you, don't get pulled into it purely because everyone else seems to be doing it. I've named those two industries specifically throughout this manifesto because they're the most competitive, most talked about options, and people naturally default to naming them as career goals, even when most have never seriously applied or had real exposure to what the work is actually like.

This was a bit of a late realisation for me personally, but I genuinely enjoy the idea of upskilling myself and improving my technical capability. That's why, this year, I'm doing internships in nuclear machine learning research and AI engineering instead. Both of these roles were genuinely easier for me to secure than any finance or consulting role I applied to, and arguably far more rewarding and skill building in the process.

If neither traditional corporate roles nor a specific technical path appeal to you, consider working for a startup instead. It'll push you to use a far wider range of skills than you'd typically encounter in a more structured, corporate environment, and it's never something to be looked down on. I'd argue this matters even more for people in the UK specifically, given how corporate-focused the culture already is, with comparatively little encouragement toward self-starting. Some people go through their entire working life never starting anything themselves, and never fully realising there's a whole world outside the corporate one. Entrepreneurship genuinely isn't for everyone, and it never will be, but it's worth understanding it exists, and if it interests you, acting on that while you're still young, rather than waiting for some imagined "right time" later.

One student running a MedTech venture alongside their degree described their actual week like this:

> **[MedTech founder]** *9-5 medicine. Three and a half hours of team meetings across Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Work for the startup whenever I can, usually weekends or evenings.*

> **Key takeaway:** The corporate path isn't wrong, but it shouldn't be the default simply because it's the most visible or most talked about option. Try things outside it while the cost of trying is genuinely low, as a student, you have access to funding, time, and forgiveness for failure that disappears almost entirely once you graduate.

Chapter 13: Real Accounts, Building a Startup at Imperial

I asked current and recent Imperial students who are actually building something, not just talking about it, to share their real, unfiltered experience. A small sample, but a genuinely honest one. Here's what they said.

On the actual first step, not the idea

- One student building in robotics/materials put it simply: *"Learn, learn, learn. Learn the field and skills necessary for that field."*
- Another, now running two ventures, decided one night they wanted to start a company and immediately messaged the one friend they trusted enough to be "crazy enough to start one with me."
- A MedTech founder's first real step was networking specifically to find the right people, not a general "network more," but a targeted search for specific collaborators.

On actually balancing it with a degree

One student, building a private equity startup and a dynamic pricing platform for restaurants while studying medicine, gave a genuinely blunt account: *"I would try to do Imperial up until 6pm and after 6pm work on the business. Unfortunately business always crept into the day. If you want to do a startup alongside university, you should seriously be prepared to lose a lot of your time to it, and be prepared to say no when your friends ask you to hang out. There really is no workaround, you just have to cope and get everything done even if it means not having fun that day. Work life balance is not always possible, and this is a sacrifice you must be willing to make, because you won't get this time back in your prime university years when you probably should be having fun."*

Another, balancing a MedTech venture, described a genuinely structured week: 9-5 medicine, 3.5 hours of team meetings spread across Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and startup work squeezed into evenings and weekends.

My Own First Venture: A Social Media Marketing Agency

Alongside these, my own first real attempt at a business was in first year, an SMMA (Social Media Marketing Agency), run with a cofounder. The actual mechanics: I'd find small businesses in my area through Google Maps and a data scraper, cold call them, and pitch running their Meta and Instagram ads. I built the website, the logo, and the brand myself for the first time, went to networking events, and set up automated workflows to capture leads from the ads, then convert those warm leads into paying clients through calls, emails, and exclusive offers. The pitch to the business owner was simple: you stop worrying about acquiring customers, we handle it entirely, a genuinely symbiotic arrangement when it worked.

The honest reflection: cold calling converts at roughly one in a thousand, and that number moves a lot depending on your confidence, your pitch, and your tolerance for hundreds of consecutive rejections. SMMA is also a genuinely crowded space, a lot of people try it. Getting your first client is by far the hardest part of the entire business. But once you land it, assuming you actually deliver, the model becomes far easier and more lucrative fast, clients in this space tend to be high-ticket, and a happy first client will often refer you to others they know. That first client is the real unlock, everything after it moves noticeably faster.

My Second Venture: Tealink

My second venture, Tealink, came during my second year summer, an idea my friend and cofounder brought to me after seeing how desperate the finance and consulting recruiting process makes students, given how competitive it is. The idea was to democratise coffee chats: we networked with people at established, highly competitive firms and put them on a website where students could book paid, on-demand coffee chats, some contributors offered theirs for free too. Alongside that, we sold finance, sales and trading, banking, and consulting notes, aimed at giving people a genuine edge in interviews and applications. Marketing ran through LinkedIn and TikTok UGC content, this was around summer 2025.

We made a bit of money, a couple of hundred pounds, but it honestly didn't go that well. Coffee chats didn't sell nearly as much as we expected, mainly because students are broke, and a lot of people reasonably assumed they could just get a coffee chat for free anyway, so why pay. Looking back, even a successful coffee chat was never a guaranteed route to a career, that expectation was probably always a bit oversold.

The real problem we were trying to solve was genuine though: when we tried getting coffee chats ourselves, recruiters were constantly too busy, replies took months if they came at all, and most responses were vague or noncommittal. We saw that problem, built a website to fix it, and did the entire thing ourselves. I'm genuinely glad we tried, it's a strong thing to talk about regardless of outcome, but as an actual business, it didn't perform well.

Accelerators and Programmes Worth Knowing About

If you're serious about entrepreneurship at Imperial specifically, get involved with the Entrepreneurship Society, they regularly bring in established founders and CEOs for talks and fireside chats. They also run their own accelerator, Idea Forge, which gives genuinely useful support to early-stage student startups and brings entrepreneurial students together in one place. Outside of Imperial specifically, it's worth knowing about programmes like Entrepreneurs First and Y Combinator, along with the many other accelerator programmes that exist beyond university.

On the real mistakes that cost time or money

- *"Hiring people because they were 'okay, good enough.'"*
- *"Read every legal contract or agreement in its entirety, and don't skip over anything you don't understand. Search it up and make sure you understand every clause. I almost lost six thousand pounds from not fully checking a legal contract."*
- *"Not aligning the team with a clear mission. Not moving fast enough to reach breakthrough velocity. Focusing too much on the academic and research side, not enough on the commercial side."*
- *"I quit too many ideas too early, but they actually had potential further down the line. I was building browser agents before browser agents were really a thing, and quit because I thought, who would even use this?"*

On what actually moved things forward

Genuinely mixed opinions here, worth reading together rather than picking one as universal truth. One student found that formal events were largely useless, and the best people they met were simply on

their own course. Another credited an Imperial Entrepreneurs panel talk specifically, where they met the right alumni connection. A third named specific communities directly: Redwood Founders and STEM Muslims. And one was unambiguous that their business partner, not any event or community, was the single thing that actually moved things forward.

The most repeated piece of advice: your unfair advantage is your degree itself

This came up independently from multiple respondents, worth taking seriously given how consistently it appeared: *"Do shit related to your degree. You're one of the best in the world at it for your age group and are surrounded by such people, that's an unfair advantage. You have literally world leading experts and researchers available to you. You can get help from the department."*

On finding a co-founder

"You must find a good business partner who matches you well. This has to be someone you can trust when things go wrong, and someone who will pull through when you really need them to. They don't need to be a workaholic, but they should be someone who will stop you from giving up when the tough times start."

On ambition specifically at Imperial

One MedTech founder was direct about a pattern they'd noticed: *"Imperial shouldn't be good enough for you, aim for more. Don't think you're special just because you go there. Have a plan to drop out if you reach a certain milestone. Read '0 to 1' and 'The Lean Startup.' Dream bigger, for some reason ICL students are tame with their ideas. Don't waste time on B2B SaaS in a saturated market. Go build something bigger."*

On the actual risk of trying

One closing thought is worth repeating in full: *"People think taking the entrepreneurial path is worse than it is, if it doesn't work out you can always get a 9-5 after. The experience you get is valued. Plus you learn so much about yourself, and the upside can be immense."* And from the student who'd already tried five startups before their first real success: *"You will lose sleep. You will be stressed. It will not work at first and you may need to change plans. But if you keep going and eventually get even just one win, you will feel something great that cannot be experienced elsewhere. The feeling of pulling something out of the bag for you and your team, effectively from nothing, is one of the greatest feelings I have ever experienced."*

One founder's actual first step, word for word:

> **[Femto / TableTurn founder]** *Decide one night I wanted to start a company and immediately message the one friend I trust the most, who I also knew I would be crazy enough to start one with me.*

An AI consulting agency founder gave a similarly blunt first step, discipline routine, and the one mistake that actually cost him money:

> **[AI consulting agency founder]** *The first step I took was just reaching out to people and telling them what I was doing, and asking if they were interested in any of my services. I got lucky, and someone said yes.*

[AI consulting agency founder] *I wake up, go to the gym straight away, that's the time for the day. I make sure I'm very disciplined, if I let one thing slip, I'm cooked, so I have to stay dialed in with everything. I've got a to-do list synced to an AI agent that adds tasks based off my inbox, but it also keeps me accountable, it's like: okay, I've got all this to do before today ends, if I don't do it...*

[AI consulting agency founder] *The one thing that hit for me was undercharging, undercharging clients because I thought I wasn't qualified enough, or that they wouldn't pay it. In reality, you don't have a service problem, you have a closing problem. Sales fixes a lot. Don't undercharge yourself because you're scared you're going to lose the client, we're still profitable in the end regardless.*

[AI consulting agency founder] *Being a student is a superpower, you can use that in your content and your hooks, and to raise funding as well. You can enter competitions that only students can enter. Having no time is an excuse.*

What Real Success Actually Looks Like, Anonymised

I'll keep this one anonymous since I know the people involved personally, but it's worth including because it genuinely shows the ceiling. Two students in my own course, at the very start of second year, built an EdTech platform, one of the first to wrap a major LLM API behind a genuinely polished, professional interface, right as that became possible. Being early mattered enormously: they were memorable simply because almost nobody else was doing it yet, and being first meant they didn't have to fight for attention in a crowded space.

One cofounder handled the product itself, constantly shipping fixes and improvements, actively asking users for feedback and turning it around fast. The other handled marketing entirely through his own TikTok and Instagram content, creative, genuinely entertaining, consistent, and unmistakably himself. He grew to around 20,000 followers and one to two million likes within three or four months, and the product converted that attention into real revenue, four figures a week at its peak, from a genuinely simple idea with very little overhead.

It eventually fizzled out over the following year or two, as more EdTech and AI products entered the space and the first-mover advantage wore off. But the lesson isn't really about the ending. It's that two students, working from a dorm room with barely any costs, built something that generated real weekly revenue purely by moving fast and committing properly to both the product and the marketing. The marketing cofounder still creates content today and has grown to over 200,000 followers, we're in the same year. Seeing it happen to people I actually knew, not a distant success story online, made the ceiling feel real rather than theoretical. Don't let anything convince you it's out of reach.

> **Key takeaway:** Across every response, the same honest thread runs through: there's no shortcut, and work-life balance genuinely suffers while you're building. But every single respondent, without exception, still framed it as worth doing. The clearest, most repeated tactical advice was to build on top of your actual degree rather than starting from a completely unrelated idea, since your course puts you closer to world-class expertise than almost any other stage of life will.

Chapter 14: Creative Ways Students Actually Make Money

Beyond the traditional internship and grad scheme route, I know a genuinely wide range of people who've built real income streams on the side, some small, some genuinely substantial. Here's an honest breakdown of what I've actually seen work, with realistic numbers attached where I can give them.

Content creation and brand deals

Income here scales heavily with audience size and effort quality. On the low end, small creators (around 1k followers) making generic UGC content, AI-generated slop, or repetitive marketing templates might earn around £30 a video. On the higher end, larger creators (200k+ followers) who put genuine effort into a video worth watching can earn upward of £4k a video. The gap between those two numbers is almost entirely about audience size and whether the content is actually good, not just about who asks for the highest rate.

Private tutoring

A genuinely reliable option, and one I've spoken about earlier in this manifesto. Finding clients usually comes through family friends, Facebook groups, WhatsApp parent group chats if you can find your way into one, leaflets in public places, referrals, or promoting yourself on social media. A student from a top UK university can typically charge around £30 an hour, which lines up closely with current UK market data: average private tutoring rates sit around £35-40 an hour nationally, with specialist or university-level tutoring often reaching £45-70+ an hour, and London rates running noticeably higher still. If anything, £30 an hour is on the conservative end of what a genuinely strong academic background can command.

Owning a tutoring business, rather than just tutoring yourself

A step up from individual tutoring: reliably acquiring clients, then funnelling them to other tutors who do the actual teaching, taking a cut of each payment. This requires you to ensure consistent service quality, since your reputation is now tied to other people's teaching, not just your own. Realistic income here tends to land in the low three figures a month once it's running properly.

Course creation and high-ticket sales

Requires genuine sales skill and the ability to persuade warm leads, and generally involves being involved in the sales process for expensive, high-ticket courses on behalf of someone else, rather than necessarily building the course yourself.

E-commerce and Amazon FBA

Works best with a genuinely niche, differentiated product that's limited in supply chain availability, ideally one you have some personal connection or access to. Generic dropshipping in an oversaturated category is a much harder game than it looks from the outside.

Day trading

Worth being honest about here: only a small minority of people who try day trading actually make consistent money from it. That's not just my own impression, it's well documented, published estimates for the proportion of day traders who achieve consistent long-term profitability typically range from around 1% to 5%, depending on the exact study and time horizon used. That said, I do know some

genuinely sharp people at uni who make a comfortable four figures a month from it. The honest takeaway is that it's a real but statistically difficult path, and I personally prefer long-term investing for that reason, covered elsewhere in this manifesto.

SMMA (social media marketing agency) for small businesses

Requires a genuinely large volume of cold calling, and leveraging any existing business contacts you have for referrals. Realistic income once established tends to land in the four figure range monthly, but the cold outreach volume required to get there is substantial and often underestimated by people starting out.

Photography

A more traditional creative income stream, still genuinely viable, particularly for events, portraits, and content work for other small businesses or creators.

Automating workflows via AI agents

Especially doable right now given how accessible AI tooling has become. You can genuinely undercut established competition on price while still earning well yourself, since your overhead is minimal compared to an agency. Realistic income for someone doing this properly and consistently tends to land in the four to five figure range.

Building an AI startup, particularly vertical AI within a field you understand

Very doable now, but the market has shifted. Early "edtech" specifically was extremely profitable and a genuinely open market a few years ago, since it was the most obvious unfair advantage available to a student building something, they understood the student experience directly. That specific niche has since become heavily saturated, since so many students default to building in education for exactly that reason. The more defensible move now is going vertical within a field where you personally have a genuine unfair advantage, not just "I am a student building for students."

Building apps for clients

Especially accessible now given how much AI accelerates development, and you can genuinely undercut traditional agency pricing if you're proficient. The real bottleneck tends to be finding clients, not building the product. Realistic income sits in the four figure range once you have a steady pipeline.

Short-term stock trading, distinct from day trading

Needs meaningful starting capital, around £5k or more to see noticeable returns, and carries genuinely high risk alongside the potential for high reward. I personally prefer long-term investing over this approach, for the same reasons covered in the day trading section above.

> **Key takeaway:** None of these are passive or guaranteed. Every single one requires either a real skill (tutoring, photography, development, AI automation), genuine capital and risk tolerance (trading), or a large volume of unglamorous outreach (cold calling for SMMA, client hunting for app builds). The students actually making meaningful money from these routes are almost always the ones who picked one, went deep, and treated it like a genuine skill to develop, not a side bet.

Chapter 15: Societies as a Career Sandbox

The two biggest societies at Imperial are Algosoc and Investment Society. Algosoc leans more toward trading and quant, while Investment Society is the largest general finance society on campus. There are plenty of smaller societies covering similar topics and industries, but these two are consistently the biggest across the whole university.

As a fresher, I'd genuinely say it's worth joining both, since they're free, and going to a few events costs you nothing. Go even if you feel like you're not good enough yet, a lot of the content is deliberately tailored for complete beginners, and nobody actively gatekeeps, these societies exist specifically to democratise access to information, connect you with professionals in top industries, and help you build the technical skills and knowledge needed to land internships. They're genuinely valuable for first years and anyone with limited exposure to a given industry.

That said, with over 1000+ members in each society, be deliberate about which specific events you attend and what you actually want to get out of them, rather than just showing up passively. I personally stopped attending regularly after second year, since by that point I'd extracted most of what I actually needed from them.

Having a genuinely good relationship with committee members also helps a lot, they can get you into events, sessions, or opportunities that aren't as easily accessible otherwise. It's a fairly direct lesson in the actual power of nepotism and connections, even at a relatively small, low stakes level like a university society.

Societies are a massively underrated tool, and can genuinely be used as a sandbox to gain real experience within a specific sector before you've committed to anything formally.

Using societies to explore a career path

Take consulting as an example. Joining the consulting society can lead you to networking events and genuine connections beyond the surface level, plus events where you work through case studies alongside like-minded people who can help with your applications, and simulate real case study projects you can later talk about directly in interviews. You can then go further and try to secure a role within that society itself, which shows genuine passion and interest, and opens up a whole new set of transferable skills, running events, helping organise sessions, that you can reference elsewhere too. Compare that to someone who simply says they want to break into consulting with no connections, no experience, and nothing to reference their actual interest, the difference is stark.

Using societies to explore genuinely new interests

Imperial has societies for almost everything, robotics, skiing, rowing, you name it. I've never done any of these, and likely wouldn't have any exposure to them left to my own devices, but these societies exist precisely so people like you and me can try something out, see if it clicks, and walk away having at least answered the question either way. You won't get another period in your life where you can explore this many interests without any real judgement or cost attached. As you get older, responsibilities pile up and that window shrinks fast. So join something, try it properly, and if it's not for you, simply don't go back, there's no binding contract. Acting on a genuine interest, even briefly, gives you a real talking point and teaches you something about yourself either way.

Starting or running your own society

A third option is building and leading your own society entirely. I started the Calisthenics Society and was president for a year, forming a committee, designing a logo, writing a manifesto, organising a consistent schedule and location, marketing it to show genuine demand, and taking in feedback along the way. You end up learning to lead others, teach new skills, and manage a small organisation, not identical to running a company, but genuinely comparable depending on the size and nature of the society. Founding or running a society looks strong on any application, and if you do a decent job of it, teaches you a huge amount about yourself in the process.

A word of caution on committee roles

Committee positions within larger, established societies can be genuinely impressive experience, especially in societies where you interact directly with sponsors or run your own events. That said, a lot of committee members end up being fairly lazy in practice, keen on the title but inconsistent on the actual delivery. Running Calisthenics Society, I often had to pick up the slack myself, sometimes down to my own failure to delegate properly, I'm nowhere near perfect at this either. It's almost a guaranteed reality you'll encounter running or joining a committee. In my final year, I've become genuinely happy to just be an active member rather than someone running things, if you can manage a committee role well, it shows real leadership, but it's not the be all and end all. There's a whole life and plenty of other valuable opportunities outside the society bubble too, so don't let it consume all your time and energy.

Getting elected onto a committee

If you want to run for a committee position, write a relatable manifesto that also demonstrates genuine credibility within that field or subject, so people trust you as a candidate. Get your friends registered to the society in advance and encourage them to vote for you, this genuinely matters and heavily depends on which specific role you're running for. Bigger positions, like president of one of the largest societies, are close to a part time job in themselves, ensuring everything runs smoothly, maintaining sponsor relationships, delegating across a large committee. Smaller, less demanding society roles can be far more manageable alongside a full course load, know what you're actually signing up for before you commit.

> **Key takeaway:** Societies are one of the lowest-risk, highest-value tools available to you at university, whether you're using them to test a career path, explore a completely new interest, or build genuine leadership experience by running one yourself. The only real mistake is not using them at all.

Part 2: Skills That Make You Employable and Fundable

Chapter 16: Developing EQ vs IQ

IQ matters, but for financial success specifically, you generally only need to be slightly above average, competent enough to pick up new things and understand "complex" topics like basic maths, physics, or economics without major issue. Being a genius isn't a guarantor of financial success, and can even work against you, since it's easy to overthink things that don't need overthinking. I'd personally put the golden range somewhere around 110-140, which is probably where most students at top 5 UK universities already sit anyway.

What I really want to focus on here is EQ, since it's genuinely developable, and it's been consistently shown to correlate with higher salaries. EQ, in practice, just means people generally like you, and you know how to navigate social dynamics without coming across as majorly awkward or socially off.

I wanted to cover this specifically because a lot of Imperial students have the raw IQ side sorted, but are genuinely misplaced on EQ. That tracks, a lot of us grew up smarter than our peers, carrying the classic "nerd" stigma, less focused on sports or social activities, which often means fewer genuine friendships growing up.

My own story with this

I had a similar experience growing up, right up until Year 11. Throughout that time I knew I wanted to be more socially confident, so I actively studied and replicated things I noticed in friends who were more naturally popular than me. This was mostly Year 7-9, when puberty is in full swing and, frankly, I was obsessing over popularity and validation from others. I noticed the common thread was usually being funny, making people laugh effortlessly, and being genuinely in the loop socially. Socially awkward people often try to crack jokes that land at the wrong time, or reference something nobody around them actually understands or finds funny in that context. Knowing your audience is a real skill, and it comes almost entirely from experience, the same way getting comfortable talking to someone you're attracted to without melting down only comes from actually doing it repeatedly.

Most of building EQ comes down to:

- Putting yourself out there and trying new social situations
- Actively overriding your fear of embarrassment rather than waiting for it to disappear on its own
- Ignoring your own internal "mental defense system" long enough to actually take the action
- Remembering that 99% of the time, people genuinely aren't thinking about you nearly as much as you assume, everyone's mostly preoccupied with their own stress, especially in an anxiety-heavy era like this one
- Realising a lot of the social pressure you feel is self-inflicted, which, once you actually internalise it, makes putting yourself out there noticeably easier
- Not taking things personally, a genuinely strong EQ trait in its own right
- Being humble and comfortable laughing at yourself, without tipping into being a pushover, this specific balance is hard to explain and really only comes through experience

One concrete method worth trying: read fiction. Fiction puts you inside constantly shifting stories, dynamics and emotional situations that the author has deliberately constructed. It's a genuinely good practice ground for observing and understanding how people think and interact, and it builds EQ at least somewhat, even from behind a book. That said, real practice matters just as much, actually testing this

out in person is where most of the actual learning happens. Friends who are honest with you also help enormously here, they can flag things you don't notice about yourself, or point out what you could've handled differently in a specific situation.

Why this actually matters for your career and income

Strong EQ makes networking easier, makes you a better negotiator, and generally means people like you, want to help you, and want to work with you, which directly opens up more opportunities. All of this forms a genuinely golden mix of traits when it comes to earning more, since the distribution of wealth, whether we like it or not, isn't a purely meritocratic system. Knowing how to read people, speak to them well, and be likeable is a genuinely important, learnable skill. So is understanding basic psychology, and practising a bit of regular metacognition, genuinely checking in on how you actually think, what you're like, and how you work best, then deliberately building an environment and systems around yourself that maximise you and your strongest traits, rather than fighting against them.

This is part of why a lot of ultra successful people have such specific, almost rigid morning routines. They haven't just copied a routine off the internet, they've crafted and engineered one that's genuinely tailored to how they personally function best, which lets them perform reliably at a high level.

> **Key takeaway:** IQ gets you into the room, but EQ is what determines how far you go once you're in it. Unlike IQ, it's genuinely trainable through deliberate exposure and reflection, not something you're simply born with or without.

Chapter 17: Content Creation, Starting From Zero

How I actually started

I started posting content roughly a year before writing this. My very first video was me teaching basic calisthenics tips, dips, push ups, pull ups. It got around 1k views the day after and maybe 50 likes, and I was genuinely gassed at the time. But almost immediately I hit a real problem: idea generation stress, since there's only so much pure calisthenics tip content you can realistically make before it runs dry.

From there I drifted into fairly random territory, Duolingo audio clips playing over an Imperial lecture, POV-style videos with on-screen text and no speaking. I'd obsessively track the like count on each post for minutes right after posting. I was inconsistent, posting maybe once a week, with no real clarity on what I was actually trying to cover. I felt like I had plenty to offer, I just didn't yet know how to translate that into something people would genuinely want to watch.

The first real breakthrough

Eventually I landed on my first genuinely semi-viral format: "this is your future if you go Imperial" style clips, using an AI voice describing an exaggerated, unfavourable situation and tying it to what prospective Imperial students might face. It made people laugh, it went semi-viral, so I made a few more in that same format.

The key lesson for any early creator: experiment constantly, keep posting, and once you notice something working, double down on it hard. This is how you become known for something specific, rather than known for nothing at all.

Growth once you find your niche

Once you've settled into a niche, based on what's genuinely easy for you to keep producing and what people respond well to, growth tends to follow, though the speed varies a lot depending on the content itself. I quadrupled my following in three months by posting daily. A friend on my course who also creates content reached over 200k Instagram followers within 11 months of posting for the first time, a genuinely rare outlier, not something reliably reproducible, but it shows the real ceiling once you've found a niche people actually like and that makes you memorable. If you're a new creator posting a bunch of random, disconnected content with no clear direction, ask yourself honestly: why would a stranger choose to watch that over an established creator doing it better already?

Diversifying once your niche starts running dry

Eventually you may need to evolve your format to keep growing. I ran uni interview videos from March through July, and by the end it had started to feel stale, partly my own fatigue from repeating the same format, partly audience fatigue from watching something too similar too often, and partly the natural dip of summer holidays reducing my target audience's engagement. So I've started shifting toward more speaking-to-camera videos, showing more of my actual personality and giving direct advice and opinions, to build a slightly wider audience while still staying broadly within the university and younger demographic that's genuinely my core audience.

On getting recognised

If your content performs well, depending on your niche, you may start getting recognised in person fairly regularly. I get recognised a fair amount, purely because my content is uni-focused and I'm literally on

campus around my target audience daily. If your content isn't tied to your actual day to day life, you likely won't experience this as much, and that's completely fine too.

On posting frequency

Spamming content constantly doesn't work for everyone. I've seen creators post 3-4 times a day, grow quickly at first, then burn out hard once they can't sustain that pace, and the early gains often get cancelled out by the later drop-off. The real principle is: be consistent, but find *your own* sustainable consistency, not someone else's. My 200k+ friend posts about once a week. I post more frequently than him and still have far fewer followers. Everyone's case is genuinely different, so you have to study your own specific audience and figure out what you're actually trying to get out of content in the first place, growing followers and virality, marketing a product, documenting your life, or simply contributing consistently to a niche you care about, they're all valid goals, but they lead to different strategies.

Skills you build along the way

Content creation pushes you well outside your initial comfort zone. For me specifically, that's meant getting comfortable speaking to a camera, editing footage, picking up basic cinematography, thinking about marketing, learning how to actually visualise and structure a story, and getting comfortable interviewing new people I've never met before.

On maintaining your image

I genuinely enjoy being recognised, it feels good, and it gives me an instant talking point when meeting new people. Not everyone will feel the same way about that, and that's fine too. I also deliberately avoid posting anything that would embarrass me if recognised in person, a lot of creators chase cheap notoriety or virality through content that degrades their own image, and I think that comes at a real cost long term. I'd rather grow a bit slower and keep a public image I'm genuinely comfortable with, than go more viral through content I wouldn't want to stand behind.

My one key piece of advice: just start

Waiting doesn't make your future audience any more aware of you. The judgement you're probably scared of is almost always smaller than you expect, most of your peers will genuinely respect you for trying something new and actually working toward it. If anything, starting filters out who genuinely supports you from who doesn't. Only seek advice up until the point you actually start, after that, you're better off learning entirely on the job, since that's realistically about 90% of the actual process. There's no single reliable playbook here, everyone has a different personality, vibe, and audience. A good video is good regardless of your current following or when you posted it, and a bad one is bad regardless too.

Why I personally keep doing this

I see content creation as a genuine hidden niche in its own right, not many people from Imperial specifically create content, so there's a real gap there. I also believe that as AI generated content becomes more common, genuinely watchable human content, real people and personalities you actually choose to follow, becomes harder to replace, not easier. People consistently choose real personalities over generic AI slop. In that sense, doing content is a way of enriching myself, my personality, my network, and my broader skillset, while also functioning as a genuine hedge and investment for whatever comes next in my life.

The same founder's take on why starting matters more than being ready:

[AI consulting agency founder] *Having no time is an excuse. Go to the gym, take care of your body, take care of your mind, you'll make better business decisions. You also look better to people, and people want to buy from you because of the halo effect. Just start posting, start selling, start talking to clients.*

> **Key takeaway:** Nobody starts with a clear niche or a working format, mine came from a year of trial, error, and a lot of content that went nowhere before one format actually landed. The only reliable move at the start is to post consistently and pay attention to what resonates, then double down hard once you find it.

Chapter 18: Building Your Professional Presence

Start earlier than you think you need to

Back in sixth form, around 2021-23, we had a short LinkedIn workshop, and afterwards only around 15% of people in my year actually had a LinkedIn set up. Most of those were bare minimum, just a name, no profile picture, an education section and nothing else. Only a small minority had anything genuinely filled out. Then in first year of university, once I got interested in banking and finance, I saw everyone around me with a fully stacked, highly professional-looking LinkedIn, and it genuinely made me second guess every choice I'd made up to that point. I'd imagine this has only intensified since, LinkedIn seems to be creeping earlier and earlier, with even sixth formers and secondary school students starting to build a presence on it now.

The practical advice: make a simple LinkedIn now, whatever stage you're at

Add your education, and any experience you have, however small it feels. Part time jobs, insight days, short courses, all of it counts for something at this stage. Look at other people's profiles for inspiration, particularly people slightly ahead of you in the direction you're interested in, and notice what kind of things they choose to include. Then think specifically about what you can include that's genuinely impressive and unique to you, rather than just copying a generic template.

Beyond LinkedIn: GitHub and a portfolio

If you're doing anything even loosely technical, coding projects, data work, AI-related builds, a GitHub profile matters just as much as your LinkedIn does, arguably more to a technical recruiter. It gives people tangible proof of what you can actually build, not just a list of claimed experiences. A simple portfolio, even a basic one, showcasing a few projects with a short explanation of what you built and why, adds real credibility that a CV alone can't communicate.

> **Key takeaway:** Your professional presence compounds the same way everything else in this manifesto does, the earlier you start building it, even in a small, imperfect way, the less catching up you'll have to do later when it actually matters for internship or grad applications.

Chapter 19: Networking as a Long-Term Asset

Growing up in sixth form and secondary school, I'd often have to slightly dumb myself down around friends, since I couldn't really discuss my full range of interests with them, they simply didn't share them. Going into uni, I had my two choices, Cambridge or Imperial, and I always knew the friends I made at whichever one I ended up at would end up being some of the most important relationships in my life. University is a place where people with broadly similar backstories and trajectories all end up in the same environment, coming from every walk of life imaginable.

I'd genuinely argue now that the network you build at a top university is probably equal to, if not more valuable than, the actual degree itself. You get access to people from different countries, gain new perspectives, learn things you'd never have encountered otherwise, and meet potential co-founders and future professional connections. You have to keep in mind that in 10-20 years, a lot of the people around you now will be the managers and decision makers running things. So who you know now matters far more than it might feel like at the time, and meeting people at uni, where you're all sharing the same broad worries, exams, gym, general uni life, gives you a genuinely golden opportunity to forge connections that last.

I'd argue this is even true of living in student halls in first year specifically, purely from the networking angle, meeting genuine people by going to lectures together, going to the gym, going out, these things build real bonds. That said, these have to be **genuine** friendships, I use the word "connections" because that's technically what they are, but the only way to build something that actually lasts is if you genuinely like each other as people and get along. If you approach it purely exploitatively, trying to network without any real interest in the person, it gets sniffed out fast, and it won't hold up.

One founder put the actual mechanics of this more bluntly than most:

> **[AI consulting agency founder]** *Right now, if you're trying to sell anything in life, personal brand is the main thing. Anyone can tell you that, but you need to actually start feeling like a human, make sure you're likable, people buy from people. Build your personal brand, talk to people, be human, give out free value, try to help people. Not everyone will pay you back, but one person will pay you back a hundred times over for everyone else. I help everyone, and one person I helped ended up paying me multiple four figures and put more clients my way.*

> **Key takeaway:** Don't treat networking as a separate, transactional activity you do on top of making friends. The strongest professional networks come from genuine relationships built during a period in life when everyone's roughly in the same boat, use that window deliberately, but never at the cost of authenticity.

A Final Word

That's everything I've got on breaking into competitive industries and building something of your own. Whichever path you end up on, corporate, technical, or founder, the same underlying pattern shows up throughout this guide: the people who do well are the ones who ask directly for what they want, treat rejection as redirection rather than a verdict, and build something worth talking about alongside their degree, not instead of it.

If you haven't read the first two guides in this series, "Getting Into Imperial" and "Navigating Uni Life," they cover everything that comes before this stage.

Kind regards,

Khuselee