The law does not recognise discrimination on the grounds of social background, but there are still issues to be aware of when dealing with employers.

**Finding social-and-class positive employers**

Social and class issues are notoriously difficult to define. If you come from a working-class background, are the first person from your family to attend university, or live in an area where hardly anyone goes to university, you may have less support at home or information when it comes to progressing into employment.

However, various governments have tried to improve social mobility and a number of employers are aware of the benefits of recruiting a socially diverse workforce.

**What kind of career interests you?**

To get you started on your career planning you can access the various activities organised by your careers service, which can help you develop relevant skills and give you the opportunity to meet employers.

If you’re not clear what work you want to do, you can book a discussion with the staff at your university careers service. You may also find the material and tips on [Windmills Interactive](#) or [TARGETjobs Careers Report – job matching exercise](#) helpful.

According to the Fair Access to Professional Careers (May 2012) report, the UK’s leading employers target an average of only 19 universities for their graduate recruitment programmes. Their selection of universities will include some, if not all, of the Russell Group. This group is an association of 20 major universities in the UK, including the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester and Queen’s University Belfast.

However, don’t assume that because an employer doesn’t visit your university that they won’t consider an application from you. It’s impossible for employers to visit every university or market themselves everywhere, so if you meet the entry requirements for a job, apply.

The increasing requirement to have completed an internship, or other unpaid work experience, disadvantages those who are financially unable to work without pay. Without suitable contacts, family with businesses or connections for example, it can be very difficult to secure such positions.

Try to make use of your university alumni network, and check whether employers are offering insight days instead, or if you could manage unpaid work experience for a short period of time while working through the rest of vacation.

**Diversity**

Some employers are more open to change and to increasing the diversity of their workforce than others. If an organisation adopts a plan to ensure that they recruit from as wide a range of applicants as possible, social or class background should not be an issue. A commitment to diversity is likely to be made clear in the website for the organisation.

**Identifying employers**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a growing feature in many organisations who wish to assess the impact of their activities on, for example, the
environment, local communities and their employees. A clear commitment to CSR might hint that an employer’s recruitment practices would encourage applications based on ability and not background. A good source of information on companies with a record of community involvement is Business in the Community (BITC) and Scottish Business in the Community.

If business doesn’t appeal, you could consider a social enterprise, or look at the not-for-profit sector including charities, the health service, non-government-organisations (NGOs) and local, regional and national government. Organisations that are not for profit often have clear and comprehensive recruitment practices that are intended to ensure equal opportunity for all, regardless of background or circumstances.

Small employers are everywhere and may be a good target in your job search, especially if you’re reluctant to or unable to move away from your local area or if larger employers are not represented there.

**Sources of help**
There are initiatives and programmes for graduates, offering support, advice, placements and training in job search skills. Examples include the Intro programme in Northern Ireland.

Many university careers services offer support and advice for up to two years after graduation and can provide access to vacancy and employer information as well as information on local and national initiatives.

**Self-employment**
If you’re self-employed, many barriers associated with the recruitment process are, of course, removed. However, you will need to know what you’re doing and have a compelling business plan. There are various sources of help and advice, including GOV.UK, HMRC, Citizen’s Advice Bureau and The Prince’s Trust - which helps young people get started in business. Most of the high street banks have information and support facilities, to attract new business customers, as well.

**Disclosing your social-and-class status when marketing yourself to employers**
Reading recruitment literature, job advertisements and looking at employers’ websites will help you to identify their requirements. Then think about how you can demonstrate, with evidence, that you have the skills, qualifications, knowledge and attributes they need.

It’s your decision whether you mention your social and class background in an application or at interview. There’s rarely any need to do so, but there may be occasions when your background and life experience are an advantage and relate well to the requirements of the job - familiarity with a particular client group, for example.

A degree is not enough to get you a job. Employers look for skills and experience, so think about how you can add to yours. Consider internships, placements, voluntary work and roles in student societies or community groups.

However, if outside commitments have prevented you from getting involved in student life as much as you would have liked, think about the experiences that
you have had. If you have had to overcome obstacles and juggle other priorities to get your degree, this can be presented as a positive.

**Demonstrate your skills**

When you’re making applications or being assessed by an employer, the quality of the evidence you provide will matter more than where it comes from. Many employers value experience gained in family businesses for example, whether this is in a shop, a restaurant, a factory or a firm of solicitors. Whatever your experience, you could well have developed many of the work skills that employers want.

Browse job advertisements for graduate training schemes and you will see certain skills and attributes are required time and again. It’s highly likely that you can demonstrate you have many of the qualities, such as persistence and determination, and skills, such as problem solving, teamwork and time management, which employers regularly look for.

The Council for Industry and Higher Education produces reports such as Graduate Employability, which identifies what employers want.

**Be positive**

When applying to employers, concentrate on the positives that you have to offer and don’t point out the negatives. Focus on telling a potential employer about the experience you do have and relate it to their needs. When you look at employers’ recruitment literature and websites, pay particular attention to the language that they use. When applying for jobs, use similar, formal language and terms.

Be confident and positive about what you have to offer. Employers need a diverse workforce to help them understand customers’ needs and increase their capacity for innovation.

If you’re concerned about revealing your background when providing detail in applications, or on your CV, such as where you live, remember that some employers will remove personal data from applications passed to selectors. It’s also common for detail from equal opportunities monitoring forms to be removed from applications before selection.

You might not have traditional qualifications such as A levels, for example, but you can contact the employer to find out how they would like you to include your qualifications and their equivalents. Sometimes employers are willing to take extenuating circumstances into account when reviewing applications from those whose qualifications don’t fully meet entry requirements. However, the reasons for not achieving particular results at A-level or degree level need to be genuine and beyond your control. You may also have to make contact to discuss this with the employer before making an application.

It’s not necessary to disclose age, gender or marital status in a CV. However, all application methods will require a full employment history. If you have had various jobs that were short term and perhaps not very relevant, these may be grouped together, e.g. ‘February 2009 - August 2012: Various customer facing roles including’

If you volunteer, share the details with potential employers. If you’re asked about spare time interests, concentrate on items that you can use to highlight your positive personal qualities without selling your key interests short or giving the impression that your life outside lectures was a complete void.
References
References can be extremely important. If you’re asked for a personal reference, ask someone in a position of responsibility who can express him or herself well and will put forward your good points effectively.

Your rights around social-and-class issues
Although social inequality is recognised in the employment market, at present there’s no legislation to prevent employers discriminating against applicants on the basis of social class. The Equality Act 2010 does not include social background as a protected characteristic.

Bias
Despite companies’ efforts to employ objective and fair criteria, personal and corporate preferences may still have an effect on selection processes.

The Fair Access to Professional Careers progress report, published in May 2012, addresses these concerns and assesses the progress made in this area. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) points out the limitations of interviews in their Selection Interviewing Factsheet. These limitations include reference to the ‘similar to me’ bias that might influence an interviewer to prefer a candidate that they believe, for example, has a similar background, attitudes or personality to their own. If an interviewer is influenced in this way, this could place you at a disadvantage when trying to enter work that is dominated by people with a different social background to you.

If you do feel you have been discriminated against unfairly by an employer, you will only be able to make a legal complaint if the form of discrimination is illegal. Illegal forms of discrimination – including race, gender, age, and disability – are covered by legislation. Details can be found in other sections of this publication and on the Equality and Human Rights Commission website.

Find out if the work that interests you has a professional body, they may be able to advise you on the employment application process in your chosen field. By gaining an understanding of potential employers before making your application, you can tailor your approach and give yourself the best possible chance of success.

Further information
Social Enterprise UK
http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk

Intro
http://www.introprogramme.com

The Prince’s Trust
http://www.princes-trust.org.uk

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)
http://www.cipd.co.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission - Equality Act

Government Equalities Office
http://www.equalities.gov.uk
Selection Interviewing Factsheet
http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/recruitmen/selectn/selnintvg.htm?IsSrchRes=1
Fair Access to Professional Careers