

Careers in Palaeontology

Your guide from age 16 to fossil science careers

Liverpool and Merseyside | Post 16 study | University and apprenticeship routes

◆ What Palaeontologists Do

- Study fossils to understand ancient life, evolution and environments
- Record field sites and collect specimens responsibly
- Prepare, identify and catalogue fossils in laboratories or collections
- Analyse images and data, including CT scans and 3D models
- Publish research or help visitors and students understand discoveries
- Work may combine field, laboratory, museum, office and teaching tasks



Fossil preparation in a museum laboratory

◆ Skills and Personal Qualities

- Curiosity about fossils, rocks, evolution and past environments
- Careful observation and patience when preparing or recording specimens
- Confidence with science, maths, data and digital tools
- Clear writing and speaking for reports, research and public engagement
- Teamwork for fieldwork, laboratories, museums and universities
- Practical fitness for fieldwork, sometimes outdoors and away from home

◆ Useful School Subjects

- Biology - evolution, anatomy, ecology and classification
- Chemistry - minerals, sediments and laboratory analysis
- Geography and Geology - rocks, landscapes and Earth history
- Maths and Computing - statistics, coding, mapping and 3D data
- English - reports, presentations and explaining evidence



◆ Your Choices After Year 11

At 16, choose a Level 3 route that keeps science and higher education open. Check each course and university before applying.

Sixth Form and College Routes

- A levels: Biology plus Chemistry, Geography, Geology, Maths or Physics can form a strong combination
- Applied Science BTEC or another Level 3 science qualification may be accepted by some universities
- A Science T Level can build laboratory skills; confirm acceptance for your intended degree
- If you do not yet have Level 2 qualifications, ask colleges about foundation, GCSE resit or supported study routes

Degree and Postgraduate Study

- Relevant degrees include palaeontology, geology, Earth sciences, zoology and biological sciences
- Compare course modules, fieldwork, placements, collections access and Geological Society accreditation where relevant
- Research and university careers usually require a relevant degree followed by a masters or PhD

Experience While You Study

- Join a geology group, volunteer with a museum collection, attend open days and keep a record of practical experience

◆ Apprenticeships and Alternative Routes

- There is no standard palaeontologist apprenticeship route; vacancies are uncommon
- The Level 6 Geoscientist integrated degree apprenticeship is an approved route into wider geoscience
- Laboratory technician, geospatial and heritage roles can develop useful skills before later specialisation
- Apprenticeships are jobs with training, so entry requirements and locations depend on the employer
- Search live opportunities at www.findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk
- Ask a careers adviser to compare the course or apprenticeship with your long-term goal before you apply

◆ Jobs, Volunteering and Work Experience

Palaeontology combines fossil evidence with geology and biology. Jobs exist in research, museums, universities and specialist geoscience, but competition can be strong.

Role	Where You Work	Typical Starting Route
Palaeontologist	Universities, museums, research institutes	Relevant degree; masters or PhD often needed
Fossil Preparator	Museums, universities, commercial laboratories	Relevant degree or strong technical experience
Museum Curator	Museums and university collections	Relevant degree; postgraduate study often preferred
Collections Assistant	Museums, archives and collections stores	Level 3 or degree plus collections experience
Research Technician	Universities and laboratories	Relevant degree or laboratory qualification
Geoscientist	Consultancies, surveys, engineering and resources	Geoscience degree or Level 6 apprenticeship
Biostratigrapher	Geoscience consultancies and specialist labs	Geology or Earth science degree; often postgraduate study
Science Communicator	Museums, media, publishing and education	Science knowledge plus communication experience
University Lecturer	Universities and research institutions	Degree and PhD, usually followed by research experience

National Careers Service guide: palaeontologists typically earn about £25,000 as a starter to £45,000 when experienced. Pay varies by role and employer.

Work Experience and Volunteering

- Ask local museums whether they offer collections, documentation or public-engagement volunteering
- Join supervised field trips through geology or fossil groups and follow collecting laws and site rules
- Build evidence of lab, data, coding, mapping, writing and presentation skills

◆ Next Steps and Contact Information

- Compare post-16 science courses and attend college or sixth-form open days
- Use UCAS to compare relevant degrees and read each course entry requirements
- Check official career information, professional bodies and live apprenticeships

TAGS Careers	www.tags.careers - local careers information and resources
Study and Careers	www.ucas.com nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/job-profiles/palaeontologist
Professional Bodies	www.palass.org www.geolsoc.org.uk www.nhm.ac.uk
Apprenticeships	www.findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk skillsengland.education.gov.uk