

Applying for unadvertised jobs and work experience

Up to 70% of jobs are found through networking and speculative applications. Access the opportunities that are never formally advertised by approaching employers directly.

Rather than responding to a job advert, speculative applications involve contacting an organisation directly to find out whether they have any suitable work opportunities available.

This proactive approach demonstrates your initiative and motivation for working for the organisation. But just like any job whether advertised or not, you might have to send out a few applications before anyone gets back to you. By going to the employer directly you could find yourself facing less competition, compared with applying for an advertised job which can generate hundreds of applications.

Increase your opportunities by following these three simple steps.

1. Research

Think about employers you would be interested in working for and who might be a good fit for your skills. Make a list of these and the reasons why you're interested. Think about contacting employers who are linked to your dissertation or interest areas - having an interest in what they do, or understanding their market and customers could put you at an advantage.

Work experience positions in particular are often never advertised, but for formal roles you may find applications are only accepted through the organisation's online application system. Speculative approaches tend to be the norm in smaller organisations, which generally have a more flexible approach to recruiting.

How to find them:

- Scan advertised vacancies online and in the press to find out who is recruiting; even if the role doesn't fit, the company might have other suitable opportunities either now or in the future.
- Attend exhibitions, conferences, or trade fairs relevant to your industry. Network and develop contacts with people who can help you identify job vacancies or might refer you to colleagues. See our *Networking* title for further information.
- Talk to friends and family and let them know you are looking for opportunities. It could lead to the suggestion of a name or company to approach.
- Check industry publications and websites for companies you might want to work for.
- Twitter and LinkedIn are great places to search for potential employers. You can follow companies and individuals and gain an insight into current news within the industry.
- Employers often use LinkedIn to look for candidates for unadvertised jobs. Make sure your LinkedIn profile is up to date and use key words for your industry to describe your skills and experience to ensure that recruiters can find you. See our *LinkedIn and social media* title for more.
- Find the relevant professional association for the industry you are interested in at www.totalprofessions.com. They often have member directories that you can use to identify potential organisations to apply to, as well as information about industry events for networking and developing your commercial awareness.

Once you have made a list, start to develop an understanding of the company and the industry in general:

- Read the websites, blogs, Twitter and other social media pages of the companies you are interested in.
- Check out industry press and business pages. This will give you up to date information on changes and developments in the industry.
- Search the company website or LinkedIn to find out who the key people are you should contact.

Identify opportunities where you can make a connection with the organisation, as the speculative approach is particularly effective when you have already had some form of contact. This could be meeting one of their employees at a careers event or interacting with them on Twitter. Networking also allows you to find out how and where an organisation recruits, as well as what skills and experience they value. Use this insight to inform your job search and target your application.

2. Send a speculative application to potential employers

Before you approach a potential employer, think about what you have to offer. Look at your skills and experience and identify those which are relevant. The job profiles on www.prospects.ac.uk are a useful guide to the relevant skills needed for a particular role.

Target your CV and cover letter:

- Always write to a named contact. The person you should write to may have come up in your research. If not, a quick call to the company will enable you to find out who the relevant person is.
- Use what you have found out about the company to give specific reasons as to why you want to work with them. This will show the recruiter you are genuine in your interest.

- If you have a couple of roles in mind (for example web designer/ programmer) it is acceptable to mention both, provided they are not completely unrelated! You should have a flexible approach to how you see yourself fitting into the organisation, but at the same time you should be reasonably clear about the range of roles you could do and the types of work you are looking for.
- Show evidence of relevant skills to demonstrate that you have a sense of what you will be doing and how your experience fits the job. Even when you are applying for an unadvertised job it helps to be as specific as you can.
- Think about your language. If you are applying for business roles, your language should be more formal. For roles in marketing, employers might expect a creative approach.
- Make an appointment with your university careers department to have your CV and cover letter checked.

3. Persevere

Don't be disappointed if you don't hear anything back straightaway. Employers are very busy but you've got nothing to lose by following up your application with a short email or phone call a couple of weeks later. You can find out if they have received your application and if there are any opportunities which might be a good fit.

It's normal not to receive a reply from a number of the places you approach, so a lack of responses may not be anything to do with you or your application.

Get some feedback from your careers department or people working in the sector on your approach; there may be things you can improve.