

ASK us about...

Job Prospects



“So I have made contact. Now what do I ask for?”

Employment: if you want to ask someone for a job you need to be prepared, since even speculative applications should be as targeted as a response to an advert. A professional, well-prepared approach will help you to make a strong first impression, so do your research on the job and the company and have a relevant CV ready, in case your contact asks for it.

Work experience might be useful. Can you spend a couple of weeks or even just a couple of days in the workplace? Even if you do not want a job in that particular office, extra experience can be useful in your future applications and decision-making processes. Be ready to propose how you will be able to make yourself useful, too. See our **Making Yourself Employable** leaflet to figure out what skills you have.

Work shadowing is a useful alternative to work experience and allows you to see a typical day at work for someone doing your target job. You have more chance of doing this if you can be flexible about dates and times, but in some jobs (for example, where confidentiality is very important) it may not be practical.

Informational interviewing is when you discuss prepared questions about the work or company, maybe over coffee or lunch. It's great if your contact can only give you a short time, because you can still gain a lot! It's a good way to boost your knowledge quickly.

Remember...

Networking is not just about what you can get from one person, it is about building your knowledge and your contacts to gain a better understanding of the work you want to do, the employers you hope to work for and the industry you want to become a part of. Getting diverse information from several different contacts can help you build up a full picture of information such as:

- The employment sector(s) you are considering
- Contacts, who are likely to remember you when they have a vacancy that they want to fill
- The level of commitment required in your chosen career path
- What to talk about at interviews

Keep Track of Networking Activity

1. Make a list of everyone you know and what they do. This will include family and friends (including all your Facebook friends!), but also colleagues, friends of friends, and so on...the list can end up longer than you think!
2. Fill in any gaps by making sure you find out what people do (or even what they used to do), what kind of work it is, and what industry they are involved in.
3. Make sure everybody knows that you are looking for work and give them as much information as possible about what you want.
4. Ask for introductions to relevant contacts – but you don't have to ask them for a job straight away. Try the options in the box below (note: the “hardest” options to ask for are listed first).
5. Keep track of your progress; keep a record of every conversation, phone call or email. It may also be useful to record what you want to do next. Make sure that you always record the **who, what, when, where and why** of your job hunting plan.

Tip: Keep a job-hunting file including your CV, application forms and notes on the evidence you can offer to demonstrate your skills. You can also use this to record the outcomes of any contact you make with potential employers



T: 0121 331 5588
www.bcu.ac.uk/student-services

Networking

Many Birmingham City University graduates work for small and medium sized employers. These employers recruit in various ways, so you need to make full use of all vacancy sources available to you and be creative in your job search.

Many vacancies are not advertised, because employers often do not want the expense of advertising. Therefore, having a proactive approach to job hunting may put you at the head of the queue when it comes to getting that job.

Need more help? Just ASK!

- Visit the Help Zone at Student Services:
 - City North Campus (Perry Barr), First Floor Baker Building
 - Gosta Green, room G27
 - Edgbaston Campus, Second Floor Seacole Building
- Dates and times of drop-ins are available on our website www.bcu.ac.uk/student-services/see-us, along with details of how you can contact us.
- You can access useful links and information at www.bcu.ac.uk/student-services/careers, or telephone 0121 331 5588 for help and advice.

Student Services Career Zone, October 2009
 View our full range of leaflets online:
www.bcu.ac.uk/student-services/careers/handouts.html

Making a start

Your social network of friends and relatives may be the last place you would think of looking for work, but it is probably the easiest place to start.

Let as many people as possible know that you are job hunting. Think about speaking to the following:

- Friends and family
- Previous employers
- University tutors and lecturers

Tell everyone what kind of opportunities you are looking for, and contact them regularly so they will think of you straight away if they hear of any relevant information or opportunities.



The speculative approach

A “speculative approach” means contacting an employer to find out about any opportunities they might have now or in the future, without waiting for an advertisement. You should prioritise which employers to contact according to your preferences and speak to the appropriate person in each organisation.

But who is the appropriate person? Think about who has the power to recruit you and who has the specialist knowledge about your chosen area of employment. You may find that the head of the relevant department or team has more information about opportunities in a specific career area than a personnel or recruitment Officer. Try to find out the name of the person in charge of the department you’re interested in (receptionists can be very helpful for information like this) and contact them.

After a couple of weeks, whether you've heard from them or not, phone your named contact. Rather than asking for a job (which makes it easy to say “no”) ask what advice they can offer you. Use this opportunity to find out as much as you can about the job, the company and also their selection criteria (see some suggested questions listed below and overleaf).

This kind of research will help you to understand fully what you’re likely to go into and that knowledge will help you at interviews:

- Do you need to refine your CV further to reflect their requirements?
- Might a visit, a meeting, work shadowing or a voluntary placement be possible?
- Are there any opportunities for which you could be considered either at present or in the near future?
- Is there anyone else they think you should talk to?

Making use of this information

Remember to keep notes on what you find out about different employers, so that you can compare and contrast them. Knowing what is involved in the industry or sector will help you to decide where you really want to be and give you a strong focus for discussions at interviews.

Whenever you get good feedback and suggestions during your job hunt, try to act on them. Thank your contacts for their help and let them know how you are getting on. Employers who are impressed may not be able to give you a job right now, but they might have the perfect opportunity for you when you’re looking for the next step up in your career development and it will help if they remember you.

Be proactive

If you feel you are capable of doing the job, why not let the employer know it? All it takes is a phone call; it can be daunting to do this, but is a great way to prove initiative and commitment and give you the edge over other applicants.

Examples of questions to ask an employer

About the work role	Getting in
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can you tell me about the things you do in a typical day/week? • What are your main responsibilities, tasks and priorities? • What are the skills needed to perform well? • What are the most and least satisfactory aspects of this kind of work for you? • Who else do you work with in your team and across the organisation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you get started? • Is it different now? • What qualifications or qualities do people look for when recruiting? • Are there useful stepping stone jobs or voluntary experience I should look for? • Did you have to overcome any barriers to get this work (e.g. age, gender)? How did you do it? • Where are the vacancies advertised?
Career Development	About the organisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long do people stay in this organisation? • What additional responsibilities can staff take on? • How is the work changing? • What sort of jobs do people move on to? • What do you need to do to get on? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the culture within the organisation? • Are there any changes happening? • What can you tell me about your organisation’s equal opportunities policy e.g. job sharing, promotion, development etc? • What about attitudes to older graduates? • What about salaries on entry and opportunities for progression? • What are the misconceptions people have about working in this field?