Unadvertised jobs and work experience

Many jobs, particularly in some sectors, are never formally advertised. Access those opportunities by approaching employers directly.

By taking a proactive approach you demonstrate your initiative and motivation for working for the organisation.

You will probably also find yourself facing less competition compared with applying for an advertised job. But don't be put off it you don't get a response every time - you will usually still need to make plenty of applications.

1. Turn job search into job research

This approach is often most effective with smaller employers, which is where the majority of graduates jobs can be found. Larger organisations are more likely to have standardised application processes and less flexibility to consider direct approaches.

Look for 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 – perhaps there is a link with your studies or with voluntary or extra-curricular activities you have been involved in.

How to find potential employers:

- Scan vacancies online to get to know names of relevant organisations; even if roles you see advertised don't fit, the company might have other suitable opportunities either now or in the future.
- 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 describe your skills and experience using key words for the sector that interests you. Attend careers events (whether in person or online). That will help you develop contacts with people who can help you identify job vacancies or might refer you to colleagues.
- 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 to find companies you might want to work for.
- See if there is a professional association for the industry you are interested in. 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 understanding of the industry.

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

- Read the websites, blogs, and social media 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 try to find people to 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 interacting with them on Twitter or connecting with them on LinkedIn. 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 particular roles.

Target your CV and cover letter:

- Always try to write to a named contact. You may have established that contact during your research or may be able to find who the relevant person is by phoning the company.
- 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.
- Always back up expressions of interest with evidence. For example, talk about what you learned about the company from talking to an employee or attending an event, or link your interest to relevant extra-curricular or voluntary experience.

- If you have a couple of roles in mind (for example web designer/ programmer) it is acceptable to mention both, provided they are related. 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 service 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.

Discuss your approach with your careers department or people working in the sector, they may be able to provide feedback on things you can improve.

This resource is available in alternative formats.

Please contact your careers service or email careersgroup@careers.lon.ac.uk