

CREATIVE JOB SEARCH & NETWORKING

If you don't know what you want to do, you are certainly not in a minority. And unfortunately for those who have some ideas, the opportunities we really want are often either not very easy to find, or really quite competitive. The ability to network and search for jobs in a more creative way can help anyone to explore their options, overcome obstacles and unlock the hidden job market.

This document provides practical information as well as examples of how previous Bristol graduates have used the approaches successfully.

- A **Creative job search** involves finding the vacancies that are not readily advertised, either due to a high demand for such roles, or because an organisation, perhaps a small company, can't meet the high costs of advertising and recruitment.
- Lots of jobs are never advertised at all so you would need to take a speculative approach to securing a job. Developing contacts and opportunities for experience form part of this process. Get noticed and be remembered.
- **Networking** is a process by which individuals make use of other people (contacts) to develop knowledge and opportunities within sectors, organisations and specific job roles.
- The process of planning our careers can be much more effective by participating in real experiences from which we can base decisions.

“Don't underestimate the importance of being a good networker and self-promoter, and use every contact you can think of.”

2006 Graduate of BA German and Spanish, now working in Media

YOUR EXISTING NETWORK

You already have a network of contacts. It is made up of people that you already know all of who will have contacts within networks of their own. The different contact areas in your network could include:

- Family
- Family friends
- Friends (school, college, uni, clubs etc)
- Friends of friends and friend's family
- Colleagues
- School, academic staff
- Previous work experience
- And more...!

ACTION POINT:

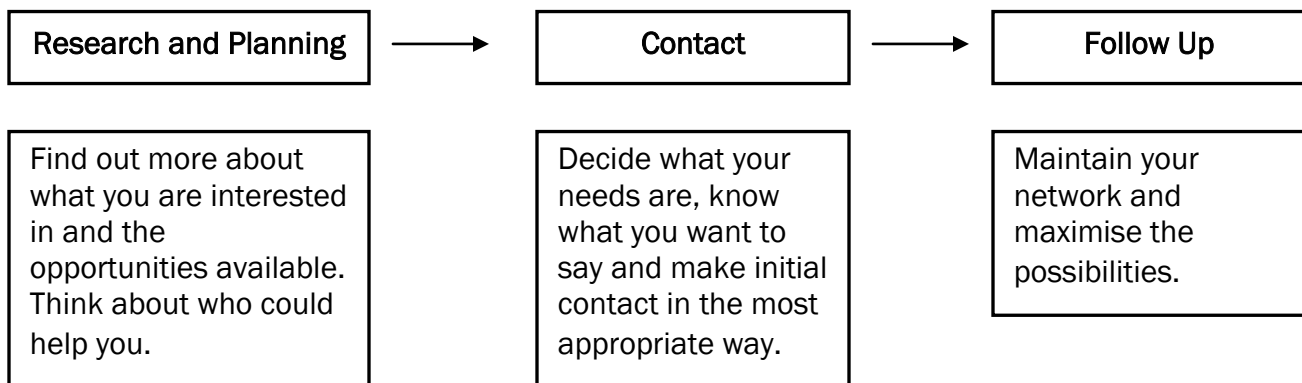
Try mapping out your own network – use the example mind map in Appendix One

“My cousin works as a Geologist and approached me in my final year about working in Australia. After graduation I had an interview in London, was successful and was flown to Australia by the company. It was my aim to work abroad after university. Use your contacts. It's not what you know, it's who you know!”

2006 Graduate of MSci Geology, now working within Geology

HOW DO YOU NETWORK

Lots of people have heard the term ‘networking’ but don’t really know how to apply in to their own situation in practice. This guide addresses the process in 3 main stages:



STEP ONE – RESEARCH AND PLANNING

Firstly you need to decide where your interests lie. Most people have very few ideas about what is out there and what they could do. Even if you do know, some research will help you check your preconceptions. You need to know:

What jobs are out there?

- Use your network.....** By now you will have considered your existing network of contacts – this will provide a useful start point.
- Careers Service.....** It is often hard to get your head around what is out there, but also what might suit you. **Careers advisers** hold short drop in appointments for you to get some advice or guidance on any careers related issue. The **Information Centre** is full of information on job areas and employers as well as publications with sections on networking and planning your career. You can access the Internet, read the information on hand and chat to staff.
- Web.....** The web has information on different occupations, sources of further help and vacancies, destinations of previous graduates, further contact information and job vacancies. **Careers Service website** (www.bris.ac.uk/careers) - see ‘I want to work in’ and ‘my degree, where next?’. **Prospects** (www.prospects.ac.uk) – see ‘careers advice’ and ‘jobs and work’ sections. Prospects also has ‘Prospects Planner’, which is a IT based questionnaire that generates a profile of suggested career areas for you to research, based on your responses to questions.

What do these jobs involve?

You can read about up to some extent – see sources above. This might be something you want to research through networking i.e. talking to people in the know and/or getting first hand experience.

Who would employ you to do these jobs?

You will need to know which employers you could approach. The following sources of information will give you a start point.

Prospects	Gives typical employers for each role (see ‘Explore types of jobs’, choose a role, then go to ‘typical employers/vacancy sources’).
Vacancy sources	Browse websites, publications, professional journals, industry press. Our vacancy site is www.bris.ac.uk/careers/jobs
Sector	Look for employers in both public and private sectors
Careers Fairs	Allow you to talk directly to companies
Yellow pages	Look for companies under the relevant section
Careers Service	Website and Information Centre www.bris.ac.uk/careers/resources and look at employer links to search companies within particular sectors
Your network	Ask questions
Graduate recruitment	Publications (available in careers service)

What sources of specialist information are there?

- **Industry journals** e.g. People Management (Human Resources), New Scientist (Sciences).
- **Professional bodies** – sometimes employ training/information advisers e.g. BPS (British Psychological Society), RICS (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors).
- **Sector Skills councils** e.g. Skillset (for Audio Visual industries).
- **Google** - see what you can find!

Throughout your research you will have been making judgements relating to your own interests and motivations and you will have decided what areas you might want to try out. The research you do now will help to impress those you do decide to approach by showing that you know something about them already!

ACTION POINTS:

- Develop a shortlist of job ideas/companies/sectors you are interested in
- Consider whether there are any matches to your mind map and whether there are any gaps you need to fill.
- Write down where the gaps exist in your knowledge and existing network.

Pre Contact Exercise

If you decide to contact an organisation, these are some questions you should consider before making contact.

- What does the organisation do? What are the main products/services/purposes of the organisation?
- How is the organisation structured? Which departments are you most interested in?
- What roles exist within the organisation that you would like to know more about? Have you read up on the basics?
- How successful is this organisation and what does it regard as its major achievements and strengths?
- What recent news stories have featured the organisation (positive and negative)? Check the BBC news pages and do a search.
- What is the appeal for you from what you have found out so far?
- Do you think you have skills or experience that relate well to the organisation and/or particular roles within it?
- Which similar organisations exist?

You don't have to know absolutely everything, - you can ask them about the information you couldn't find yourself.

“I was offered my job just as I was finishing my degree by a company I'd previously done work experience with. I'd been looking into publishing and literary agenting, but had thought I'd have to apply for internships/graduate training schemes after graduating. Both my employers are Bristol graduates, but I don't think that influenced their choice. However, I got my job through my best friend at uni, so yes, UoB connections help!

Do some research about the subject/company you are applying for - it's not very easy to bluff when you are faced with people who know everything there is to know about your chosen industry. So be honest about what you know, and demonstrate enthusiasm and an ability to work efficiently and learn quickly - that's more important.”

2005 Graduate of BA English, now working in Publishing.

Who do you contact?

- **Existing networks** – use your own network
- **Careers Network** – Careers Service database of alumni signed up to offer help to current students
- **New contacts** – the ones you are going to make....

During your research you will have identified some companies to approach and established who you can access through your existing contacts. With new contacts, you need to decide who to approach within the company. Sometimes, it will be a case of politely phoning up and asking to speak to the relevant person, e.g. the head of a particular department.

Referral..... when someone else recommends someone directly.

Name on job advert..... lots of job ads give the name of an informal contact that you can call. Even if you are not going to apply, this is an excellent way to talk to someone who will be well informed. Ask about the activities you could undertake to get to the required level.

Head of department..... try the web first – or phone main reception and ask to speak to someone in the department. It is likely that you will be asked what it is regarding – have a response prepared.

Recruitment manager..... (within larger organisations). This might be useful as a central first point of contact, but be clear about your intention. It is likely that they can put you in touch with someone in the right department, but beware of saying that you are applying on spec for a job or experience. It is better to say you are hoping to get information, or an insight. Some may be quick to say they are not taking speculative applications or offering work experience.

Careers Network..... Former Bristol students might be able to help you even if they are in a different department. Check the database under a particular company name – www.bris.ac.uk/careers/network

“Always try to meet people from the company to which you're applying as that's how you can learn the most about the job and whether it would be right for you.

There are numerous campus events organised by UoB for many professions where you can do this. If the profession/company that you are interested in isn't represented, try and arrange your own visit.”

2005 Graduate of BSc Physics, now working in Financial Services.

ACTION POINTS

- Consider the notes you made about the gaps in your knowledge and network of contacts - use the information above to consider which groups of people could help you increase your knowledge.
- Before you contact them, read the next section!

STEP TWO - CONTACT

How to make a speculative approach

- **CV and Covering Letter** – a good initial icebreaker for those who prefer to do some ground work before a phone call. Be aware that some will not be answered. It should always be followed up with a phone call – perhaps after two weeks. Be very clear in your letter why you are writing and what you're asking for. See guidelines on www.bris.ac.uk/careers/skills
- **Phone** – you could arrange a conversation, a meeting or arrange to send your CV. Know what you want to say before you start. Ask if there is a good time to talk to them, and check whether the best

way is to phone, e-mail or meet them in person. The video 'Can I have a few moments of your time' (available in the Careers Service) shows you how.

- **In person** – either when you know someone well, or if attending an event such as a company open day/visit. You might be working/volunteering for a company already and find someone you want to approach. Take your CV to fairs and make sure you prepare some questions. People often don't make the best use of these opportunities because they don't know what they're looking for or, what to ask for. Take some general questions to break the ice. For example:
 - I am studying for a degree in, and expect a 2.2, what opportunities are there within your company for someone like me?
 - What sort of skills and interests would ideal graduate recruits have?
 - What things give successful candidates the edge in the recruitment process?
 - What are the benefits of working at
 - How do you recruit? What are the closing dates?
 - What sort of experience would I need?
 - Do you run any taster events for undergraduates/recent graduates?
 - How can I find out more about
 - What is your background?
 - I am not sure that I will have all the entry requirements, are there any alternative ways into this sector/job role?
 - What will graduates recruits do in their first two years in the company?
 - Can you tell me about some of the projects new graduates have worked on in the past?
 - What are the main challenges/frustrations in this type of work?

If you stop and think about it, there are probably lots of things you would like to know. If you want to know the answer to a question, don't be afraid to ask!

“I networked extensively and got to the final round consulting interviews on the basis of a chat at a careers event.”

2005 Graduate of MSc Management, now working in Business Consultancy.

What you decide to ask for, and at what stage will depend on a number of variables. There are no real rights or wrongs – but common sense and professionalism are important.

Variables:

Limitations..... such as: *Time* for you and them, *Location*, *Present commitments* – like work or study.

Availability..... What will your contact be likely to be able to offer you?

Relationship..... How well established is your relationship? – a request for information/conversation might be a good place to start with new contacts

Needs..... What stage are you at? What do you actually need from each contact?

What do you ask them for?

The answer to this depends on what you want to achieve. Consider some of the following options:

- Information** Ask the questions you need to help you move forward (covered later). Ask a real person what their job is like – including the frustrations and challenges. You will need to ask your contact how long they are willing to talk for. If it is your first phone call to a company, try to get the right names to send your CVs to.
- Work Shadowing**..... See what someone does day to day. Requires much less time than work experience. You might also be able to observe someone higher up within the organisation.
- Work Experience**..... Being in the right place to see how the company/department/role works over a time period of usually two weeks or more. Potentially well placed if jobs are advertised while you are there. Opportunities include: Internships, Placements, Project work, Voluntary work
- Other Contacts**..... Once you have talked to one person, you might be put in touch with others.
- NOT a job**..... Don't ask for a job initially – you are on a research mission that could help you get a job
- Visits**..... Or other opportunities to meet in person, if that has added value.
- Be kept on file**..... If nothing is available, ask if your details can be kept on record for jobs that come up in the future.

“I spent a month doing work experience at several different broadcasting companies, and whilst at the BBC I was offered some freelance work answering the telephones to listeners. I also offered to spend one day a week working voluntarily as a Researcher/Broadcast Assistant, and after a few months began to be offered paid work as a Researcher.

Everyone told me, and it's true - work experience is the key. It shows employers that you're keen and it can teach you things you'd be expected to know at an interview. And you really can be in the right place at the right time - lots of people get offered work whilst on work experience - look at me! Work experience will also help you to build up a list of contacts who can give you advice, let you know of job opportunities or even recommend you for a job.”
2006 Graduate of LLB Law, now working in the Media.

Need to be in paid work?

Not everyone can afford to take lots of time to do unpaid work experience. Some of the less time consuming activities could be combined with some of the following to get your foot in the door whilst being paid! For vacancy sources, refer to the guideline from Step One.

- **Short term, maternity and temporary** contracts are good options as more experienced candidates might dislike the insecure nature of the roles.

- **Supporting roles**, such as assistant, administrator and PA positions, help you work within your preferred area whilst earning. You will learn how the organisation works, be able to talk to people in roles you aspire to and be in the right place when vacancies arise.
- Identify the **temping/recruitment agencies** that recruit for your preferred sector. Again, this could help you learn more about an organisation and the sector whilst being paid. Use the Recruitment Employment Confederation website to search by location and subject - www.rec.co.uk

“Consider voluntary or temporary work as well as checking websites and publications for vacancies. (The) Operations Director (at the company) receives 50-100+ CV's from graduates (for each job). Most of these are deleted unless the applicant has spoken to and/or met a junior member of the team in which they want to work, and can demonstrate an understanding of the organisation.”

2006 Graduate with a Geography PhD, now working in Research.

Action Points:

- Consider the variables and establish your limitations – prioritise activities on this basis.
- From your list of people to contact establish what you really need from each one
- When approaching new contacts and asking for things, start basic, but aim high.
- Decide how to contact each one and plan your approach carefully.
- If you are going to phone, the DVD ‘can I have a moment of your time’ is a really useful and practical example. See further information at the end of this document.

Dos and Don'ts of Networking

DO

- Consider how well you know the person before deciding how to contact them and what to ask for
- Consider your own confidence and communication skills – perhaps send an introductory letter before you make your phone call
- Write to a named person
- If writing – follow up with a phone call
- Ask for a few moments of their time
- Clarify how you got their details
- Be clear about what you are asking for
- Prepare questions carefully
- Have a notepad, with questions next to you when you are making a phone call
- Be professional
- Thank them
- Be positive, genuine and be yourself
- Emphasise what you have to offer (where appropriate)
- If they can't help, ask for any alternative sources of help/information
- Keep careful records of all experiences and contacts

DON'T

- Ask questions that you could have found the answers to on the website or in obvious company literature
- Ask for a job – this is not the point....
- Be too pushy or too persistent
- Use the same approach for everyone
- Use the same version of your CV for everyone
- Send CV's without a letter clearly spelling out your request/intention
- Compromise your personal safety
- Forget that you never know when you might meet these contacts in the future

Action Points:

First impressions count. By this point, you will know roughly what you want to achieve, but before you go ahead, clarify your aims and think about the specifics e.g.

- why you are contacting them,
- questions to ask,
- what you can offer them,
- times you are free etc.

You should be as clear as possible in your approach in what you are asking for.

What kinds of research questions are contacts useful for?

About the organisation:

- What is the culture like?
- Misconceptions about working there
- What is changing for the company at the moment?
- Biggest rivals?
- Biggest challenges?

About the role:

- How would you describe your role?
- What do you actually do in a typical week?
- Main responsibilities/tasks/priorities?
- What skills are needed/used?
- Best and worst aspects?
- What is different from your expectations?

Career Development:

- Starting salary and rate of progression
- How long do people stay in the company?
- How does progression work within the firm?
- What do people move on to do?
- What do you need to do, or be, to get on?

Getting in:

- How did you get in?
- Would you have done anything differently?
- Is it different now?

- What qualities and qualifications are looked for?
- Useful stepping-stones (previous jobs or work experience)?
- Any barriers to overcome and how?
- Where are vacancies advertised?

STEP THREE – FOLLOW UP

What is the point in following-up a networking approach?

- Maintaining relations
- Future opportunities
- Look more serious about a role in that firm

How can you maintain a relationship?

- Thank them for any help they do provide
- Only bother them when you need to and try to respect the fact they're doing you a favour and its they are in no way obliged to help you
- Keep all your requests short and to the point – never ask for anything you could have looked up on the company website – that's just lazy!
- Don't drop their name in to your applications/interviews with their company unless it is explicitly expected or allowed.

WHAT NEXT?

Whatever steps you take, there is no need to stop there! Your experience might have told you that the area of work is not for you – so try another! If you are encouraged by what you have heard, seen or experienced, think about the next step you can take armed with your new information. Maybe you have had a discussion with someone and you want to request some work shadowing, or, you spent two weeks of work experience finding out what steps to take to get into the industry – you could start putting the advice into practice.

FURTHER READING/SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Video/DVD Can I have a few minutes of your time? – AGCAS – Running time 23 minutes

Available in Careers Information Centre at the Careers Service

University of Bristol Career Planning Guide (available from the Autumn term onwards)

Guides CVs and Covering Letters
Application Forms

Books What Color Is Your Parachute? – Richard Nelson Bolles
How To Get A Job You'll Love – John Lees
The Art of Building Windmills – Peter Hawkins

Key words to search for in the index: **Information Interviews, Contacts, Networking**

Copies available in the Careers Information Centre at the Careers Service

Websites www.bris.ac.uk/careers - see 'Resources' (Careers Network, Employer Links), 'Skills' (CVs, covering letters, speculative applications) and 'I want to work in.....' sections.
www.prospects.ac.uk - see 'Explore types of jobs' section in particular.
Also use the search engine.

Workshops CVs and Applications
Interview Skills
How to Shine Through
See www.bristol.ac.uk/careers/events to view events and book a place.



www.bristol.ac.uk/careers

Do you subscribe to the Careers Bulletin? – your way of keeping up to date with all Careers events.

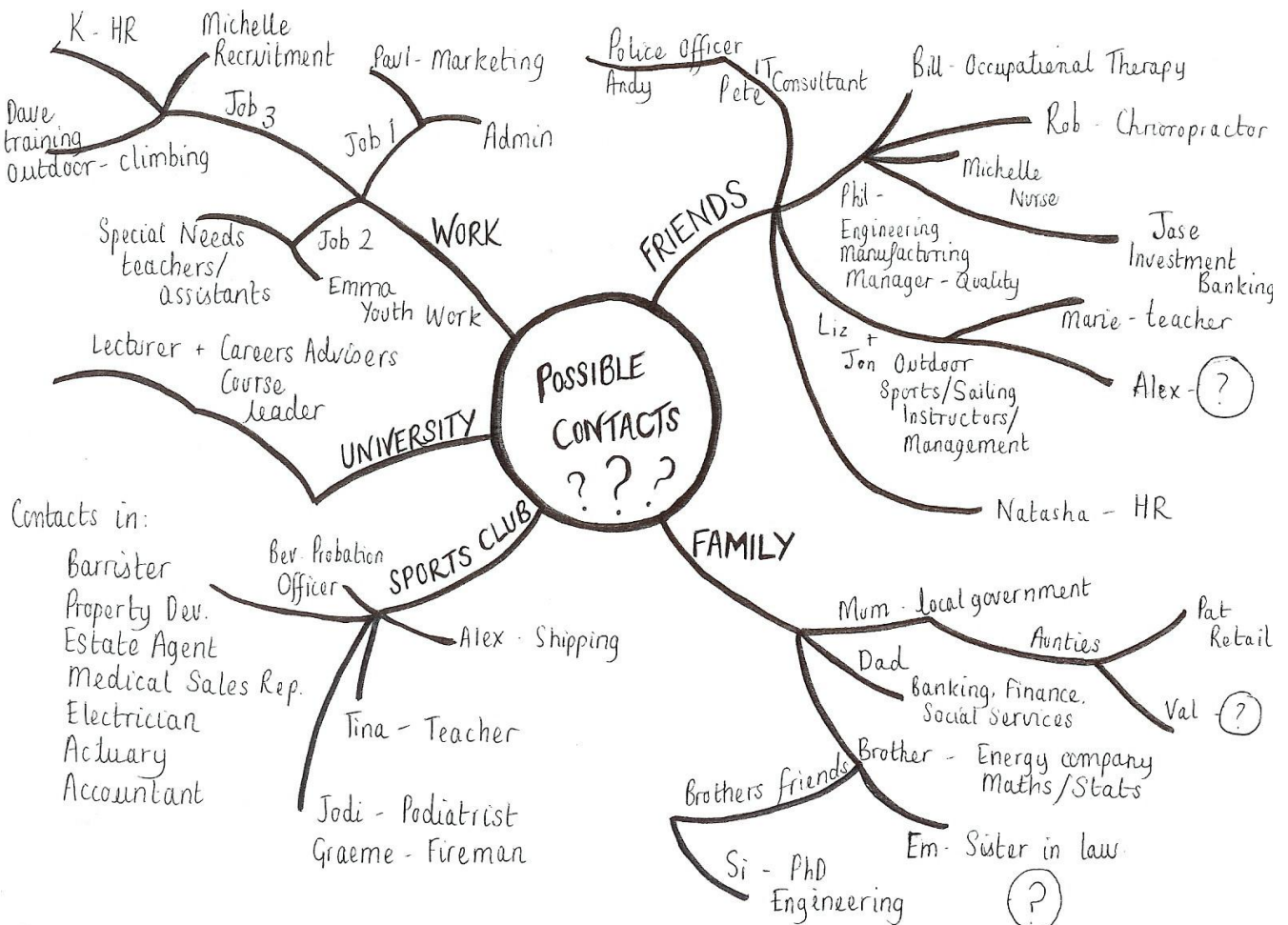
Have you signed up for Jobs by Email?

Manage your email subscriptions at:
www.bris.ac.uk/careers/myaccount/emails

Appendix One

Mind Map Your Network

- Produce a diagram of all your potential contacts. Consider the following groups:
 - Family
 - Family friends
 - Friends (school, college, uni, clubs etc)
 - Friends of friends and friend's family
 - Colleagues
 - School, academic staff
 - Previous work experience
 - And more...
- The example below is limited by space – it could have stretched much further. Take yours as far as you can.
- You can decide whether to be general, and consider all your contacts, or look at a particular area, for example, contacts who could provide information on Law.
- This example is general, i.e. considering all contacts no matter where your interest lies. Taking this approach allows you to consider pathways to information that you might not have thought of. Focussing on one area could limit your perception of how wide your network reaches.
- If you have any question marks on your map – find out the answers.



QUESTION AND ANSWER SHEET

Company:

Contact:

Date of meeting:

Question:

Notes:

Question:

Notes:

Question:

Notes:

Questions:

Notes:

Questions:

Notes:

RECORD OF CONTACT

Trying to recall the finer details of your experiences is hard – especially when it comes to applying for jobs. Recording the details of your meetings, discussions, work shadowing and work experience can be extremely important later on:

- For revision
- For information when writing your CV, application form and covering letters
- In case you are going to meet them again, or someone else they know well – you will need to recall the details of your prior encounter
- You might be interviewed by them at some stage
- They may, if they got to know you well enough, be prepared to provide a reference

Keep your question and answer sheets and the following record together. The table shows the sort of information you might find useful later on.

Details	Contact	Follow up activities	Main discussion points/ Tasks undertaken & Skills used/ What interested you most/
Date:..... Method of contact: Location:	Name:..... Job role:..... Organisation:..... Phone:..... E-mail:..... Address:.....	1. 2. 3. 4.	▪ ▪ ▪ ▪