

Networking



Networking is a method of asking someone you know to help you or to *introduce* you to someone who can help you. Put simply, networking is about talking to people. You can easily start to develop your own network of useful contacts by talking to your friends and family about your job search. Generally, people are very happy to help others if they can. Whether you are networking to obtain information about a potential career area or to tap into the hidden job market, you will be more successful when you are clear about what you want and what you have to offer.

➔ Why network?

- **Network to tap into the hidden job market**

When adopted as a job search strategy, networking can dramatically increase your chances of getting a job by enabling you to tap into the hidden job market. The hidden job market refers to the many jobs that never get advertised and are routinely filled by speculative applications, word of mouth or internal transfers. Some estimates put these job vacancies at more than 50% of the job market.

- **Network to get information**

Networking can give you invaluable information before you even start your job search. Consider the advantages of conducting your own information interview. An information interview is less stressful than a job interview because you get to choose who to talk to, what questions to ask and to evaluate your findings. It will enhance your network and provide you with first hand knowledge of a career or an industry via a brief meeting with someone working in that career or industry.

By talking to key people who can give you an insight into the work in which you are interested and ways to do it, you will be able to find out more about the jobs, organisational cultures, employment sectors and individual organisations which interest you. You will also be able to find out how to gain relevant experience and training and an insight into how your career might develop in these areas and eliminate less suitable options.

➔ Before you begin to network...

- **Decide what you want to achieve**

Think carefully. You may want to find out about a particular job, career or what it would be like to work within a specific employment sector such as retail or local government. Or you could be well beyond that stage and looking for a chance to impress a potential employer with what you could actually do, in which case you should also see the Careers Service leaflet “Speculative Applications”. Even if you are looking for a job, it is probably a shrewd move to start with a request for advice or information as this is more likely to get a response. Before you can begin to network, however, you must be clear about what you can offer a potential employer.

- **Be clear about what you can offer**

Preparation is the key to successful networking. Evaluate your skills, interests, values, and experience to clarify what you can offer potential employers and to tailor your job search more effectively to your preferences. You could begin by reflecting on your personal development at Aberystwyth perhaps through your engagement with AberGrad.

If, like many others, you need some help to evaluate your skills, generate ideas and undertake some initial research in the areas you are interested in, please book an appointment with a Careers Consultant.



Explore Prospects Planner, an invaluable career exploration and self assessment tool designed to help you to identify your motivations, interests and skills, and identify a range of occupational possibilities - www.prospects.ac.uk/planner.

Even if you are networking to get information, the better you can present yourself, the more you know yourself, the more useful the networking experience will be.

➔ Know your target

When you are clear about what you can offer, you will need to understand the employment sector, industry or employer(s) you will target. Most people only focus on finding out information about the target job they have in mind. Your job search will be more effective when you apply for a job if you understand the employment sector and industry as well, and a bit of research will help you to present yourself effectively and get the most out of any discussion.

The **Prospects** website available at www.prospects.ac.uk has an excellent section for **exploring job sectors** and includes links to job profiles relating to each sector. Information about the state of the industry in the past, present and future is included as well as how to break into the sector, types of jobs available, case studies and invaluable contacts and resources to help you to increase your network. The **types of jobs** section focuses on specific jobs rather than whole industries, helping you to identify the precise skills and qualities you will need. Employers in every sector are complaining that fresh graduates come to them with plenty of theoretical knowledge but relatively few transferable skills. *Be aware that there may be subtle differences in the skills and qualities required for similar job roles depending on the culture, structure and commercial activity of an organisation.*

The **National Guidance Research Forum** website available at www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/ngrf publishes Labour Market Information researched by the Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick. It offers easy to follow information on both regional and national employment trends for a wide range of sectors in the UK, including information on the career destinations of graduates.

Use resources such as www.prospects.ac.uk and www.yell.com to widen your search. Use Nexis which is available at www.aber.ac.uk/en/is/elecinfo/eiaz/#N to research larger employers.

➔ How to network

Generating contacts...

When you have done your research and decided what you want and can offer and found out something about the area in which you are interested, you will be in a very strong position to network. Begin by telling everyone you're looking. The good news is that you already belong to many useful networks. It is well worth:



- asking those you know personally for an information interview or for a referral - start with friends and family, people on your course and people you work with in term-time and vacation employment and don't forget about contacts made during work experience placements and any work tasters you have done.
- asking academic staff as they might have excellent connections to your preferred employment sector.
- trying other sources such as Careers Service staff, student societies, alumni, and websites such as Facebook and LinkedIn.
- attending conferences, exhibitions and career events.
- contacting professional organisations in your field as these often produce lists of individual and corporate members and sometimes employ training professionals who are likely to be very happy to talk to you.

➔ Get organised!

Organising yourself is as important as generating contacts:



- Set goals regarding how many contacts you want to make daily, weekly or monthly to achieve your aim. Try to generate at least two new contacts from every meeting or discussion you have by asking for a referral.
- Combine the leads you have gained from networking with your research into job sectors and organisations to create a list of companies and individuals you want to contact.

➔ Approaching your target

Decide carefully how to approach your target:

Whatever approach you take, make a good first impression. Have access to a pristine copy of your current and targeted CV at all times so that you can easily give it to a potential contact.

If you are writing to an organisation to organise an information interview and don't have a specific contact name, make sure you research until you get one. Don't be put off if the majority are slow to get back to you. Be prepared to chase your contacts with a polite follow-up phone call.

Using email. Be wary of using email if you do not know the person you are contacting, even if you have a contact name. While you should address letters to a named person within an organisation in order to ensure a response, contacting people you do not know by email can be perceived as intrusive.

Making telephone calls. If you are nervous, prepare a simple script so you don't get flustered. Explain that you want to learn about their industry, organisation or career and ask if the person has some time either to talk to you now, later, or to meet you face to face for an information interview.

Telephone or Information Interviews. Compile a brief list of questions to ask such as:

- **Background:** Tell me how you got started in this field. What educational background might be helpful in entering this field?
- **Work Environment:** What are the daily duties of your job? What skills/abilities are important for success in this work?
- **Key Issues:** What are the toughest issues you deal with? What issues does the sector have? What issues does the organisation as a whole have? What is being done to solve these issues?
- **Life Style:** What obligation does your work put on you outside the work week? How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, work hours, holidays?
- **Rewards:** What do you find most rewarding about this work, for example, job satisfaction, training opportunities, work-life balance, the money?
- **Earnings:** What salary level would a new person start with? What are the fringe benefits? What are the other forms of compensations and benefits (bonuses, commissions, pension)? What might the future earning potential be for this work?

Develop a system for recording to help keep track of whom you talked to, what you talked about, and your mechanism for follow-up. Always send a thank you letter or email.

➔ Postgrad?

Networking is important within academia for a successful career. In addition to all of the above, you should aim to develop a good relationship with your supervisors and talk to contract research staff about what they are doing and how they are funded. Find out what is going on in your field and make sure you are knowledgeable about the latest research. You need to know who the key players are both inside and outside academia. Join a professional body. Attend conferences - see and be seen. Give papers and write articles. See the Vitae website (www.vitae.ac.uk) for a range of useful resources to help you in your networking quest. Prospects website also has an area devoted to finding a job with your PhD (www.prospects.ac.uk/your_phd_what_next.htm).



➔ Resources

Explore the Prospects job hunting tips web pages which include a useful guide to networking to help you to generate your own network.

Use your Careers Service for practical help with targeting your CV, writing a covering letter and in preparing for an information interview.

Attend a workshop and/or take advantage of fifteen minute drop-in sessions with a Careers Adviser or book in advance for a longer appointment.

Read and act on Aberystwyth Careers Service leaflets such as: “Making the Most of Your Time with a Careers Adviser”; “CVs”; “Covering Letters”; “Work Experience”; “Speculative Applications”; “All about Interviews”; “What do Employers Really Want”.

If you want a quick and helpful guide on networking in general, view the **10 minute** AGCAS video clip - www.aber.ac.uk/en/careers/how-we-can-help/in-house-publications/.

Have a look at the students’ online guide on making the most of LinkedIn—<https://students.linkedin.com/uk>

Access our web pages which include information on finding jobs, as well as employment in specific geographical areas and employer vacancy information both for final year students and graduates as well as more job hunting advice at www.aber.ac.uk/careers/.

Finally - don’t forget that everyone wants to help!

Don’t assume you are being a nuisance. Many of us feel uncomfortable about approaching other people and asking for help. In fact, most people are more than willing to talk to someone who is just starting out and will be flattered to be thought of as an expert and impressed by your enthusiasm. Don’t forget, you too will be in a position to offer someone this help yourself one day.

Location and Contact Details

➔ **Careers Service**
Students’ Union (next to the Union shop)
Open Monday -Thursday 9am - 5pm and
Friday 9am - 4pm
Closed between 1pm - 2pm
Tel: 01970 622378
E-mail: careers@aber.ac.uk