

Creative Job Search Guide

Career choice should be treated as a process rather than a snap decision. The process is about you, your interests, your skills and your values. The earlier you start the process the more time you will have to work through your options. Remember you are in charge of your own career. You need to be proactive.

You are responsible for managing yourself and improving your skills, be it through in-house training or further education.

Your career plan is not set in stone and will probably change as you progress in your career.

The first stage in any career search is research. Find out as much as you can about the job in which you are interested go online, look at career videos, job descriptions, talk to relevant people in that area.

This stage is essential, because no potential employer will be interested in you unless you can show them that you have at least gone to the trouble of finding out the basics.

Creative Job Hunting

A creative career search involves a creative, active approach to researching careers and making job applications. Rather than being passive (reading books and surfing the Web) and reactive (waiting for a vacancy to appear before making an application) you take the initiative in finding out what is involved in a career or about job opportunities.

How do you do that?

- Self-assessment: knowing your skills, interests, values and personality.
- Researching jobs
- Information Interviewing
- Networking
- Take Action - Marketing yourself
- Review

Self-Assessment

You need to identify:

- Your skills, e.g. communication skills, IT skills
- Your interests, academic/non-academic
- Your personal values i.e. what it matters to you, variety etc.
- Your talents
- Your academic achievement to date
- What motivates you
- Your preferred work environment

Review skills you have achieved through:

- Your Coursework
- Your Work Experience
- Your Free Time Activities

Having identified the skills you possess you will need to work out which of these skills you wish to use at work. An important part of the matching process is your values e.g. helping others, status, independence.

You also need to identify:

- What you want to do
- What you have to offer an employer

The purpose is, to be better acquainted with yourself, be aware of your strengths, your personality, which working environments appeal to you and what sort of a lifestyle you want.

How can you do this?

Try out some self-assessment exercises, such as:

- www.careersportal.com self-assessment; career interest profiler
- www.gradireland.com careers report; career planner
- The Careers Service also has other assessment worksheets/psychometric tests which we can use, to find out more contact us and make an appointment.

Research, explore the opportunities available

Many employers recruit graduates from all disciplines.

Do not develop tunnel vision about the types of careers your course qualifies you for. While your certificate/degree is important, it should not be the sole determinant of your career choice.

Information Gathering – Be resourceful & be web wise!

- Look at the Careers Notice boards on a regular basis. These are located in the Main Corridor on entry to the Atria and in the waiting area of the Careers Service.
- The Careers Service will be able to provide you with information on graduate recruitment. Some larger firms make application forms available to the Careers Service, while others may require direct application, usually online.
- Check out the Careers Service website page, <http://www.mycit.ie/careers> click on the 'Find a Job' tab
- Go to www.gradireland.com and click on the 'Graduate jobs' tab, filter by chosen sector/location etc.
- Attend the annual Career Fair at CIT, talk to the various employers, what type of graduates are they looking for? Take down names and relevant info
- Go to Graduate employer talks, listen to what they have to say about their company and about the graduate programmes which they are offering. Follow their application procedures. Take note of deadlines/closing dates etc.
- Be aware of and consult professional associations
- Search for smaller companies in your chosen field
- Check relevant jobs websites regularly

Be long-sighted

- Get relevant work experience (particularly if you don't have a course placement consider finding your own placement in the summer holidays, or perhaps try volunteering?)
- Having a full driving licence may be important
- Improve your IT skills
- Be prepared to work your way up
- Make an appointment to see a Careers Advisor, who will help you explore the options open to you

Information/Employer Interviewing

Information interviewing is basically talking to people about the work they do and can be a great help in making career decisions. It will enable you to:

- **Gather information** about various careers by speaking to professionals in those fields.
- Learn what **types of job opportunities** exist in a given field/organisation.
- **Develop contacts** with key people who either do the hiring or who know those who do.
- **Enhance your confidence** and improve your interview skills by speaking to a variety of professionals in a non-threatening, open-ended situation.

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- **Visit people** in a variety of work settings to gain insight into different working environments.

Remember, you are not asking the person for a job: you are **gathering information** on which to base decisions. Make sure your contacts understand this.

Unless the person has asked you to call him/her directly, it is best to write a letter or send an email explaining your intention to arrange a meeting. Follow up your letter with a phone call to set the appointment time, asking for just a few minutes. The meeting may well last much longer than this, but if you only ask for a short time, you're more likely to be seen.

Be punctual and professional. If they say that they haven't got vacancies, reassure them that it's information you want.

The following questions are a guide to help you when researching the suitability of specific careers to match your interest(s) or as part of a creative job-hunt.

Potential Questions to ask at an Information Interview

- What do you do as a....?
- How do you spend a typical day/week?
- What kinds of problems do you deal with?
- What are your major responsibilities?
- What do you find most/least satisfying about your job?
- What is the competition for jobs like in this career?
- Where are vacancies advertised?
- What would you look for in a new applicant for the work?
- What sort of salary could I expect?
- Is there a typical career pattern for new graduates in this field?
- How is performance at work assessed?
- Which parts of this field are expanding and likely to offer opportunities in the future?
- What is the 'work culture' here? i.e. is it very informal, formal, do people work autonomously, does everyone come in early, stay late?
- What are the typical entry level jobs?
- What are the toughest challenges that your organisation is facing?
- Are there any professional journals in this field that I should read or professional bodies that might be helpful in providing information?
- Are there any related careers that I could consider?
- Could you look over my CV and offer suggestions for improvement?
- Do I appear to lack any skills or qualifications that would be necessary?
- Can you suggest anyone else to whom I might talk?
- Are there opportunities for work shadowing or voluntary work experience?

Networking

Networking can be used, once you have completed your initial research, to gain a first-hand insight into jobs and careers that will help you to ensure that you have made the right choice. It can also be helpful later when you are actually seeking jobs.

At its simplest, networking is just asking people to help you. Most people enjoy talking about their work and are usually happy to help others who are interested in that work.

Your network is bigger than you think it is. It includes all of your family members, friends, neighbours, co-workers, colleagues, and even casual acquaintances. Start writing down names, and you'll be surprised at how quickly the list grows.

Think about people you know from former jobs, school and college, church, your child's school, the gym, social media, or your neighborhood. Also think about people you've met through your close connections: your sister's co-worker; your best friend's boss; your college roommate's spouse; friends of your parents; your uncle's business partner. Don't forget to include people like your doctor, landlord, accountant, dry cleaner, or yoga instructor.

Make contacts at **Careers Fairs & Graduate Employer Talks** at your college, write down the name of the person whom you talk to. Make an effort to speak with them and ask questions. Follow up.

Careers fairs are a great opportunity to make personal contact with leading graduate employers, and allow you to meet many employers in a short period of time. You will collect a lot of useful information. And you will be able to distribute your CV, with the possibility of setting up future interviews.

Take Action - Marketing yourself

You need to set about producing an action plan to make your vision of the future a reality. Success depends on having some goals in mind, and seeking opportunities to move towards them.

One of the major hurdles in getting the sort of job you want is the selection process

1. Know why you want the job. Primarily this is about understanding your own motivation for applying. If you really understand your work interests and values, you will be in a good position to do this.
2. You must be able to convince the potential employer that you have the skills i.e. that you are the right person for the job. Work done on reviewing your skills, knowledge and experience should help.

3. You will need to prepare a good, strong CV. Some employers will require you to fill in an application form. Some employers may ask you to upload a short video. Call into the Careers Service/CV Clinic to have your CV reviewed.
4. You will need to prepare yourself for interview with your potential employer.
5. The selection process may also require you to undergo tests, attend assessment centres, make presentations etc. If it does see the Careers Service Factsheets on 'Assessment Centres' & 'Psychometric Tests'.

When is the best time to start making applications?

Final year students should consider their options from the beginning of the academic year. Some employers advertise graduate programmes and traineeships between October and Christmas even though the start date for the jobs will not be until after graduation. Early recruiters include Accountancy firms, Banks and multi-nationals.

The most effective job-hunting strategy for you will depend on

- The type of jobs and employers that interest you
- Where you want to work – are you confining your search to Munster, to Ireland or are you interested in working abroad? If so, where and will language be an issue?
- When are you available to start work

Speculative Applications

Not all graduate vacancies are advertised, so sometimes the only way in is to apply 'on spec'. One of the only ways to tap into this hidden graduate job market is to write a speculative application. This can also be a useful way to approach small employers who don't recruit graduates onto a formal scheme or to find jobs in a highly specialised field or specific location.

Just like applying for advertised vacancies, this needs a targeted approach to be productive.

- **Draw up a shortlist of employers.** If you are looking for jobs within a specific industry or profession, you need to look up employers in the graduate career sectors that interest you. Use grad Ireland/enterprise Ireland for a list of employers as a starting point. Don't forget the value of SME's either.
- **Prepare.** Once you have your employer shortlist, you need to do your research. You need to not only find out details about the company, but also get a feel for the kind of work they do. The organisation's website might tell you about its recent projects, specialities, aims and values, which will help you explain why you want to work for them.
- **Find a named contact.** This is the number one rule of making a speculative job application. 'Dear Sir/Madam' letters sent to HR departments are likely to be ignored. You may be able to get a specific referral from networking or from a

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recruitment event, but if not, a quick phone call to the company to ask for the name of whoever is responsible for recruiting will enable you to personalise your letter. Be sure to check the spelling.

- **Be Focused.** You need to be clear about what you are looking for when contacting potential employers speculatively. Use the speculative job-hunting approach to find permanent vacancies, temporary or part-time jobs, work experience or work shadowing opportunities. You need to keep your options open. While your ultimate prize may be a permanent position, you don't want to close down the opportunity of a temporary job or miss up an opportunity to meet with someone working in the business.
- **Tailor your CV & Cover letter.** Most students and graduates make contact with an organisation by sending their CV, and this should be accompanied by a covering letter. These will be similar to a standard covering letter and CV, and they still need to be tailored even though you do not have an actual job advert to respond to. It's essential that your speculative covering letter is concise and that it emphasises what you can do for the employer rather than what you want from them.
- **Follow up.** To improve your chances of success, follow up your speculative application with a phone call a few days after you have sent it. You might get some rebuffs but personal contact can be very useful. Even if the employer cannot help with your main request, talking enables you to explore if there are any future opportunities coming up, how the organisation typically recruits and where you should look out for their job ads.

Using Social Media, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter etc. for your Job Search

Social media and networking sites can be used for careers research, job seeking and to market yourself to future employers.

However there are generally **different sites for professional networking and for social networking** – your Facebook profile may not present you to employers in the best possible light, therefore make sure you have your profile settings set to private and be careful about what profile pictures you post!

That said many employers do use **Facebook** to promote their brand and their graduate programmes so you can certainly 'like' a page to keep up to date with what is happening. This information can help you to pick up useful tips on the company and the recruitment process and to come over as a well-informed candidate so it is well worth making use of.

LinkedIn www.linkedin.com is a **business-oriented social networking site** with over 90 million members worldwide. It provides opportunities to network online with professionals from all kinds of different employment sectors: there are also groups for different regions and institutions such as universities.

Make sure that your LinkedIn page sells you effectively - it should be a bit like an on-line CV, and also allows you to mention your career goals. It's a good idea to put your photo in your profile as apparently, people are more likely to connect to you if you have one.

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It is a useful way to expand on the info which you currently have in your CV and you can list it on your CV for an employer to follow up if they require further information.

YouTube www.youtube.com is not just about funny animals and music videos – **it is the second-largest search engine** and a great way to find advice from graduate recruiters on interviews or get insights into what it is like working at different companies.

Twitter www.twitter.com As with Facebook, **graduate recruiters make extensive use of Twitter**, giving out information about their organisations as well as actually posting job vacancies. You don't have to tweet yourself – you can just follow companies or topics and retweet. You can use your own tweets to show your interest in a particular career: tweet about current affairs in the sector you wish to work in. Your Twitter bio should include your degree and some relevant skills.

Review your situation

- For all graduate jobseekers and job changers, employment-seeking strategies have to be flexible and responsive to the current employment market
- The more research and planning you do, the more likely you are to be successful and happy
- Don't underestimate the value of contacts in helping you to find out about the different types of work and job vacancies. Network - use family, friends, lecturers and previous employers if appropriate to help you
- Tailor your CV to each and every job!
- Keep an open mind and be creative.
- Attend as many Careers events/fairs/employer talks as you can.
- As the year progresses, you need to review your situation. Individual appointments are available at the Careers Service we can help you assess yourself, offer you careers advice, and give you direction as you chart your career prospects.

Sources

Job Search Guide CIT Careers Service

www.prospects.ac.uk

www.target.com

www.gradireland.com