

The Hidden Placements Market

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All students need to check with their course-co-ordinator whether they are allowed to source their own placement and check whether the placement they find is eligible for consideration.

Many placement opportunities are never advertised, so it is vital to be pro-active in your search. Effective ways of seeking these hidden opportunities include making speculative applications and networking.

****Speculative Applications***

For some employers, speculative applications are their principle method of recruitment. You will need to identify employers who you are particularly interested in, conduct thorough research on their business and make direct contact with them highlighting your suitability and interest in completing your placement with them. By making contact before you send in your cover letter and CV, you can tailor it towards their needs.

Contacting people you've never met, puts the pressure on you to make a good and quick first impression. Very often the first contact a placement seeker has with an employer is by telephone. Research of hiring practices consistently reveals the importance of first impressions made by the placement seeker. A good telephone manner is crucial to a successful placement search.

Practice does make perfect in talking to employers on the telephone. Perhaps a friend or relative will role play with you - this can make your telephone calls go more smoothly. Your manner should be friendly but business-like. Remember that you will get better at cold calling with practice. You may want to start by calling the bottom of your list and save your top choices for the end.

Top Tips for making speculative applications:

- Research the target company's history, needs and future goals or plans.
- Telephoning to simply ask for a placement severely undermines the likelihood of your success. The company is unaware of your potential benefit and may dismiss your enquiries as unimportant or desperate. It is very important that you show a keen interest in what they do, plus an interest and knowledge in the area you are looking for experience in.
- Talk to the right person at the right time. Seek to speak directly with the manager or executive who has hiring authority for your targeted department. Ideally you should know this person's name so you can ask to speak with him or her directly. Try and source it from their website or ask the receptionist for it. In addition, be aware that certain businesses have busy times when they would not appreciate a phone call, ask the person is it a convenient time for you to talk.
- If the person you want is not in when you call, don't leave a number and wait for your call to be returned. Ask what is the best time to call the person and say that you will call back later.

- Plan what you are going to say. Introduce yourself and what you are calling about. Briefly explain your background – education / employment / skills /personal qualities that are relevant to the organisation and explain your interest in their organisation and that you are calling to discuss whether they have any openings for placement.
 - Practice what you are going to say. To help you sound natural, friendly, confident and professional. Use every day, conversational language without being too informal.
 - Think about answers to any questions the employer might ask you. *For example, about your skills, qualifications and experience. Keep your CV close by.*
 - Make sure you won't be interrupted when you call and are somewhere quiet.
 - Have a pen and paper ready to take notes.
1. **Show that you are a good communicator** - something that is highly valued by employers. Make sure you speak clearly and they can hear you. Say 'thank you' for any help they give you.
 2. **Vacancy / No vacancy:** If there is a vacancy, ask how you can apply. If not, ask whether they have any advice they might give you that might help you attain a placement in this area.
 3. **Follow up as required.** If they ask you to send in an application, follow it up promptly!
 4. **Ending the Call** - Thank the person for their time. Summarise any action you are going to take. For example, 'Thank you very much Mr. Jones and I'll see you at your office at 10am on Monday with my CV and the contact details for two referees'. Make sure you do what you said you would.

* Networking

Many students find opportunities through contacts they have made themselves - e.g. friends, relatives, tutors, neighbours, friends' of friends, past students, or people they have met through their leisure interests, voluntary work, casual part-time jobs or work placements. Not all of these contacts will be able to help you, but they may be able to put you in touch with those who can. Developing an industry network list is also very important. Talk to people who work in your chosen career area, they will be able to assist you with your search for a placement by giving you advice on the best ways to get into the profession. Using social networking sites is beginning to emerge as a way of building contacts.

8 Steps to Effective Networking

1. Determine your goals

The first thing you must do is determine what you are looking for out of a potential contact. Is it a business relationship, career mentor?

2. Make a list of potential contacts

Compile a list of those persons you think will help fulfil your goals. Figure out what you need from the contact and the role you expect him or her to fill. The list should be diverse and expand "outside the box" to indirect possibilities and contacts. Be open to those outside of your field of interest. You may be pleasantly surprised.

3. Research the contacts

Once you have selected your potential contacts, research their backgrounds, company, position and if possible, hobbies & traits. Think of questions to ask the contacts; both direct questions pertinent to your goal as well as indirect questions that may filter into your interest.

4. Make the initial contact

Build up your confidence and pick up the phone, send the e-mail or introductory letter. Establish a rapport, and don't be shy... but be polite.

5. Request help

Once you establish a contact and determine that he or she is willing to help you, be forward and direct. Let him or her know what you are looking for, your goals and aspirations.

6. Send a "Thank You" or follow up letter

After speaking to your new contact, don't forget to send a "Thank You" letter or follow up letter. Be cordial and gracious.

7. Keep in touch

Remember to keep in touch with your contact. Even if the "network" does not generate immediate results, do not be discouraged and lose touch. Everyone is busy; it's your job to keep in touch with them, not the other way around. Keep in mind who is helping whom.

8. Leverage your new contacts

You asked for help once, don't be shy to ask for it again. If your contact cannot help you, maybe they know someone who can. If they were willing to help you in the first place, chances are they'll do it again. Just don't get out of hand... be respectful of their time and commitments. You are not their sole priority.

Other strategies include:

Find a Mentor

Develop a relationship with someone that you can discuss your concerns and worries with and who can give you advice and support on aspects of the placement search.

Follow developments

Keep an eye on developments within your chosen field, to see growth / development in organisations e.g.: who has won tenders / grants / funding / awards. Also be aware of new legislation which will impact on sectors and keep an eye on new foreign investment into the country.

Join professional bodies and organisations

By joining professional organisations and attending appropriate events / exhibitions / conferences / trade fairs, you will have increased opportunities to meet new people in your chosen field.

Word of mouth

Tell everyone that you are looking for work – the more people that are looking on your behalf the better.

Graduate Outcome Survey

Each careers service has to keep a record of the status of their graduates, upon 6-9 months after graduation. By looking at these reports you will be able to see what types of roles graduates have gained in the past, and which employers have recruited these graduates. You could then consider targeting some of these companies of interest to you.

Think Big and Small

Remember to think of smaller to medium sized companies and organisations, rather than just the big names.

Useful Websites to help you generate lists of companies**Business Directories:**

Kompass directory (Irish & Global companies)

www.kompass.com

Irish Golden pages

www.goldenpages.ie

Irish Companies

www.indexireland.com

State Bodies and Organisations

<http://www.gov.ie/>

Labour Market Information:

Enterprise Ireland

www.enterprise-ireland.com

IDA Ireland

www.idaireland.com

IBEC

www.ibec.ie

Economic and Social Research Institute

www.esri.ie

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

www.skillsireland.ie