

Successful Networking

What is networking?

Networking is about developing useful two way relationships with people who can help you in your career development and your search for work experience or employment. Networking is also a great way to find out more about what different jobs involve and what it's really like working for particular companies. It is not about asking directly for employment initially – it is about building the links and connections that will put you in the best position to learn about, and take advantage of, opportunities.

With the advent of social media, networking is not just about who you know – it is now also about who knows you. A professional LinkedIn profile and presence on relevant groups, or an active (and appropriate) Twitter account could give you an added advantage and help you stand out from the crowd.

Why is networking important?

Networking is important for several reasons. The more you know about the sector you want to work in, the better placed you are to understand what skills and experience you will need to be successful. This will be vital when you are making job applications, and during interviews. It can also help you identify opportunities that may not be formally advertised.

Three key ways you can use your network as a student or recent graduate are:

- to find out more about an industry sector or job roles from people working in the field
- to identify potential employers/opportunities
- to learn from the experiences of others and find out more about their career paths

Building your network

There are many ways to develop your network including:

People you already know

- As a first step it is useful to start with a list of people you already know – this could be family, friends, work colleagues, members of your sports teams, societies, former lecturers, teachers, neighbours, and former employers from part time work/internships/voluntary work, for example. Think about whether they could help you directly or if they could put you in touch with someone else who could
- Use social media like Facebook and LinkedIn to get back in touch with people, and to browse existing connections. Make sure people you connect with know about your career plans and ambitions – they may be able to put you in contact with their work colleagues, members of their sports club, etc, who could help you

Develop new contacts

- Ask people you know to introduce you to their contacts, if appropriate. Sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn can make it easy to browse the contacts of your contacts and ask for introductions

- Attend Careers events – we hold a series of recruitment fairs and networking events throughout the year which are open to students in all years. Our Careers in... events are fantastic networking opportunities and many students have been able to make really helpful contacts with professionals working in a wide range of sectors. Even if the people you talk to initially at these events are not able to help you directly, they can be a great source of information about the organisation or sector and they may be in a position to introduce you to colleagues. See www.york.ac.uk/careers/events
- You can link with recent York graduates to get advice and ask questions through our York profiles and mentors platform. You can read about what York graduates have gone on to do after graduation and learn about their career paths www.york.ac.uk/careers/profiles. Many graduates have indicated that they are happy for current students to contact them to get advice and information about life after York. Just click the 'Ask a question' link within the profile to make contact. (Please see notes at the end of this information sheet on how to use York profiles and mentors effectively)
- Professional associations, for the industry you are interested in, may run networking events or you could attend conferences/exhibitions they organise. Some may have their own discussion forums or virtual conferences online. You may also be able to access training events, which, as well as improving your skills, could also be great networking opportunities. You can find a list of associations in the UK at www.totalprofessions.com/profession-finder
- Use social media to get involved in blogs and discussion groups, follow people you're interested in on Twitter, join company Facebook pages to keep up to date with their latest news, etc. Take part in online Q&A sessions (eg Guardian Careers <http://careers.guardian.co.uk/>) to find contacts in the sector you are interested in. See further information on using social media below

It is important that you manage your network – think about how you will record your contact with people and what conversations you have had. Keep in touch with them and keep them updated about your ambitions and plans for the future. Once someone has helped you, by either providing information or advice or making an introduction, remember to thank them. It is also important to think of this as a two way relationship so think about how you might be able to help them. Have you read a piece of research or an article that you think will be of interest to them? If so forward it to them with a brief note. This is a great way to remind them of you in a positive way. Maybe update them briefly on your progress.

Using your network

Be clear about what you want to achieve – do you want to talk to someone about getting work experience, learn more about their experiences in the organisation/sector you are interested in, get information or advice? One way you can do this is by setting up a short meeting with someone – sometimes called “informational interviewing”. The key thing is to get your approach right and be prepared.

Questions you might want to ask could include:

- Tell me about your current role
- Tell me about your career path so far
- What was the recruitment process for your role?
- What type of work experience was useful to help you get your job?
- What skills are essential/useful for this sector?
- What advice could you give me about using my time at university effectively?
- Are there any recruitment agencies I could sign up with?
- Do you know anyone else who could give me advice/information?

General points to remember

- Be polite and professional at all times
- Present yourself professionally at meetings and in writing
- Have a diary, pen and notebook with you at meetings
- Persistence may pay off, but too much persistence can be annoying – use your judgement
- Don't ask for too much time – if you've agreed a time frame for your meeting, stick to it
- If you meet someone at an event don't monopolise them, have an initial discussion, ask if it would be OK for you to contact them by email or via LinkedIn and then move on
- Get a balance during your meeting – you need to tell them enough about yourself, but don't make the conversation all about you. Learn to listen – it's a vital communication skill

When to network

Don't wait until your final year before you start focusing on your network – you need to have contacts in place well before then, especially if you are trying to organise work experience. Once you are in your first job – don't stop networking. It is a useful tool which you can use the whole way through your working life and to help you move on in your career. It is also a skill that many employers value greatly.

Using Social Media

This is a constantly developing area, and one that many people are using effectively to build networks to get advice/information and find employment. There are many social media tools to explore including:

- **LinkedIn** is a leading networking site aimed at business professionals which allows you to create an online profile to promote your skills, knowledge and experience. It allows you to connect with professionals in your field through group discussions and introductions, and receive personal recommendations / endorsements from people you have worked with. If managed carefully, this can help you to build up a good reputation which many people (including potential employers) will see. You can join groups based on interests or industry sectors, or where you have worked/studied. Many graduate employers have profiles on LinkedIn which you can use to do your research. Find out more about how to use LinkedIn at <https://students.linkedin.com/uk> (and further links below)
- **Facebook** is a more informal site than LinkedIn, but it can still be a useful networking tool. It allows you to keep in touch with friends/colleagues as they move on in their careers, and to reconnect with people who may be useful contacts to you now. More and more companies have Facebook pages to keep in touch with their customers and are using their pages to inform students about their recruitment plans and to answer questions
- **Twitter** – this is a useful resource for networking and information gathering. You can search for people working in jobs or sectors that interest you and follow their activity. This is useful for keeping up with relevant news and developments – but also allows you to contribute to debates, initiate discussions and build up relationships. Sharing valuable content is another useful way to raise your profile. Make your biography useful and relevant to what you want. Follow organisations to hear their latest news, jobs or work experience opportunities. Following people within organisations may give you more insights. You can start your own conversations and develop a network of followers. As long as you follow the right people/companies you can hear about events, articles, blogs, reports and much more. Twitter is a convenient way to receive information, but the more you put into it, the more you are likely to gain. (See information below for useful Twitter links and information on getting started).

- **Blogs/forums** – these can be found on many company and professional association websites. They give the chance to ask specific questions and receive feedback from a wide range of people – again helping you to develop your network. Writing your own blog is one way to raise your profile, while helping others and making connections. Maintaining a blog is a time commitment, but it may help you to highlight attributes such as knowledge/expertise in a certain area, willingness to share and help others, confidence, and writing skills. If you are really passionate about something, blogging about it is one way to develop your knowledge and communicate your enthusiasm to potential employers.

Getting started on social media – useful links:

There is plenty of information available online to help you use these tools successfully for networking and your job search including:

- www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUL_viKVCUyDNsOQExaFwXovXkx3izBU LinkedIn tutorials from the University of Leeds Careers Centre
- www.linkedin.com/in/samuelroutledge- example student LinkedIn profile
- <http://support.twitter.com/groups/50-welcome-to-twitter> - everything you need to get started on Twitter
- www.slideshare.net/jackievalentine/social-network-your-way-into-the-hidden-job-market - American focused presentation, but some useful tips on how to use social media to find work
- www.twitjobseek.com - a job search engine for Twitter: an easy way to find lots of jobs advertised via Twitter

A word of warning!

While social networking sites can provide great opportunities, they also mean that potential employers may be able to find out a lot of information about you and you might not always want them to find it! It is important to remember who might be reading your posts and comments online.

Try “Googling” yourself and see what comes up – is it professional? Does it fit with the personal brand you want to promote to employers? Would you be happy for a prospective employer to find this information about you?

Use Google Alerts to set up a regular search and monitor your online identity. Try a social profile checking tools like <https://salt.agency/tools/social-profile-checker/> to see what’s out there. Make sure you check your privacy settings on social media – and check friends’ privacy settings are set correctly as well. Many employers admit to checking out potential employees online. See also: <https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/networking/273059-social-networking-and-graduate-recruitment-manage-your-online-reputation>

Available for reference in Careers and Placements:

- The Art of Building Windmills (with section on skills)
- What Colour is your Parachute? (with section on skills)
- The Complete Guide to Professional Networking (with section on job hunting)

Opportunities to network on campus

- **Careers in... networking events** - a chance to practise your networking skills and make really valuable contacts. You can find out more at: www.york.ac.uk/careers/events
- **Employer presentations/skills sessions** - graduate employers often visit campus to run presentations about their graduate recruitment programmes and deliver skills sessions www.york.ac.uk/careers/events

- **Graduate Recruitment Fairs** (Autumn Term) - a chance to meet more graduate employers and make contacts with York alumni www.york.ac.uk/careers/events
- **YUSU society careers events** - some societies have a careers focus and often run events with alumni/professionals. See www.yusu.org to check individual society pages and Facebook pages
- **Departmental/college alumni events** - Departments and colleges often have good links with alumni and may arrange events where current students can meet recent alumni

Some tips on using York profiles and mentors (www.york.ac.uk/careers/profiles)

Firstly, think carefully about what help you think a York graduate could give you. Read through relevant profiles carefully and decide who might be able to help you. Think carefully about what will help you the most – profiles are not intended to be used to ask alumni directly for employment, but they can be used to get information and advice about particular job roles, work experience, training and what it's like to work for a particular company.

We find that graduates are able to respond more effectively when you ask them something directly related to their individual experience or their current role. For example:

- "I see from your profile that you had work experience with company X, can you tell me more about what that involved?"
- What do you think made your application stand out?
- What are the most important skills that I should be developing while at university to work in this sector?
- What is your day to day life like working at company X?
- What are the challenges of your role?
- What is the company culture like?

If they are not able to answer some questions they might be able to put you in touch with someone else within the company who can – ask for an introduction.

It's not helpful to ask them very general questions, or ask directly for work, or to ask them for answers to things that you could easily find out through the company website.

Don't worry about "bothering" the graduate or that they might be too busy to respond to your email. Most graduates are more than happy to help current students, and if you contact them at a time that's not convenient to them they will let you know or suggest a better time.

Please note the websites listed here are not intended to represent a comprehensive list. Careers and Placements cannot be held responsible for the content of external websites.