

RACC

Richmond Adult Community College

Guide to Job Search



Introduction

The vast array of possibilities on offer can be confusing when you start to think seriously about looking for a job, whether you are looking for a first job, a career change, returning to work after a career break, or starting again following a redundancy.

It is very important, from the outset, that you are clear about what type of work you are looking for, what you want from it, how flexible you can be, and what you have to offer a prospective employer. Only when you have thought about all that, will you need to know how and where to look for appropriate vacancies.

There are no short cuts to a good job, that is, one that suits you and makes the most of your strengths – it takes a good deal of effort and hard work. But, hopefully, this guide will prove an invaluable guide and support.

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Where to Start

You can waste an awful lot of time in pointless job search if you haven't first asked yourself the following questions:

What do I want from work?

What have I got to offer?

The answers are not always as simple as we would like, so have a look at the following pages for guidance on how to approach this.

When you know the answers to these questions, you will be ready to start looking for jobs, and we give you some tried and tested advice on how to do this effectively.

Finally, when you have started to find jobs that you are really interested in, you need to ask yourself:

How does this job stack up against my "ideal job", in terms of job content, status, salary, location, prospects, for example?

What do I want from work?

When we offer ourselves to an employer, we are offering a package of knowledge, skills and experience. But a working contract is a two way deal – in return for your time and effort, you want a salary, of course, but what else? For example, do you want to work full- or part-time or do you need flexible hours; do you want to be office based or do you like working outside; what types of people do you like working with; what sort of business or organisation do you like working for?

It may also be helpful to think about what you want from a job in career development terms. For example, are you looking for a role which is a step up from what you have been doing so far? Or, are you looking for a role with a similar profile, but in a new or different sector? You might be looking for a second line of income to supplement something you are already doing – perhaps building a portfolio career, where you combine a mixture of work activities. Or perhaps you are professionally qualified and looking for the same thing again, but with a different employer or in a different location. Most important of all, perhaps you are looking for employment that will fit in with your other life concerns, whether it is your family, some self-employment, or caring for others.

So, it is worth spending a little time thinking about your short- and long-term career goals as this will impact on your job search. Do the jobs you are currently looking at fit into your longer term plans or not? Will this job enable you to add skills to your current skill set and improve your employability in the long-term?

Before you start your job search, try writing down your thoughts and answers to the above questions, or you could use this template:

I want a job as a:

**To do this I need to:
(e.g. do some training, study for qualifications?)**

The advantage to me (and my family) is:

The disadvantages to me (and my family) are:

In addition to these considerations, it is really worthwhile taking time to think about your work values. These are the qualities that make your work valuable to you on a very personal basis and they contribute heavily to whether or not you really enjoy your work, so they are particularly important if you are changing direction.

Work values include things such as liking:

- A variety of tasks
- Earning a high salary
- Being under little pressure
- Working in a team
- Having the opportunity to manage others
- Paying attention to detail

If you would like to discover more about your own work values, have a look at the checklist at the back of this booklet (Appendix A).

What have I got to offer?

This is a matter of taking a long hard look at your skills, experience and qualifications. You need to do this to write your CV or complete applications forms, and if you need help with assessing your skills, have a look at our *How to... Write and Develop a Curriculum Vitae* (free download from the RACC website), which has some useful tips on how to analyse your own skills and present them to employers. For a quick skills review, have a look at the exercise at the back of this booklet (Appendix B).

When you have listed all your skills, think about which ones you enjoy using and want to use again, and also the ones you don't enjoy (even though you may be good at using them) and don't want to use so much in the future. This is a useful exercise to help you focus on your strengths and you can also add in your achievements. When you have done this, review your CV and check that you really did put in all your good points.

Remember, not all your skills need have been learned from paid work or even work that is the same as what you want to do now. You may have learned useful skills from voluntary or vacation work, or picked up skills from one industry or sector that transfer easily to another. Volunteering is a fantastic way of getting work experience, looks good on your CV between periods of paid employment, and may even lead to a paid job within the organisation if and when a job comes up.

Finally, try to think ahead to where you want to be in two to five years' time. This will help you assess jobs not only for what they can offer you now, but also what they can contribute to your employability, by developing your current skills or enabling you to develop new ones. It will also help you to answer that tricky interview question: "Where do you see yourself in two/five years' time?"

Investigating your options

If you have completed all the suggestions above, you will now have a clear idea of the types of jobs you want and the career direction you wish to investigate. You will have accumulated useful evidence of what you have to offer, and you will be ready for the next, action focused, stage of your job search, which will use all your research skills.

In your research always try to get behind the stereotypical image of any job and try not to be swayed by what others may think. Remember this is your opportunity to find the perfect job. The job that is right for you might not be right for someone else. It is also important when undertaking research to have a good understanding of the labour market. Did you know that by 2010 80% of jobs will require a level 3 qualification? That's equivalent to 2 A levels or an NVQ 3. You must consider at what level you are entering employment: are you a graduate; do you have formal qualifications; or do you have years of experience? All these areas have different markets both for advertising and for recruiting.

Very few people today have a job for life, so it is important that you take responsibility for your own career. Employees are expected to be much more self-reliant, capable of handling change and using their initiative in their jobs. More employers now seek to fill specific posts rather than to recruit onto training programmes or development programmes.

How to find a job

It is said that only 30-40% of job vacancies in the UK are advertised openly, meaning that a massive 60-70% are found in the so-called “hidden job market”. So how do you know which is the best place to look? The following table¹ illustrates the relative success rates people have had in using different job search methods:

Method	Success Rate	Comment
Visible job market		
Internet	4%	The success rate improves to 10% for technical fields like IT, engineering, finance or healthcare
Written press (trade magazines, local, regional and national newspapers)	5-6%	The higher the salary, the better the odds. Trade magazines also have a higher success rate.
Recruitment agencies	5-6%	The higher the salary, the better the odds
Hidden job market		
Networking	33%	Which means asking everyone you know about jobs in their organisation
Speculative or Direct approaches	69%	A staggering result! See below for what you need to do make your direct approaches effective.

The message could not be clearer – no one can afford to ignore the hidden job market, and spending all your time on the internet (estimates suggest that people spend up to 94% of their job search time at a computer) is a waste of much of your effort.

We are now going to look at each of the five main routes to the job market in a some detail:

- Advertised vacancies
- Using the internet
- Recruitment consultants
- Networking (using personal contacts)
- Speculative or Direct approaches to an employer

Advertised vacancies

Employers post details of specific positions in a range of places, including the printed press (newspapers, journals and periodicals), Jobcentres, and specialist magazines. To find out which are the most appropriate for your field, look at the Job Profile for the role you are seeking on this website: www.careersadvice.direct.gov.uk, under the Jobs and Careers section.

¹ Source: *Metro*, 9th January 2009

Advertised vacancies can be very competitive, since so many people see them, but read the job description carefully to check how well your skills, experience and personal qualities match what is being asked for. If you calculate that there is at least an 80% match between what you have to offer and the requirements of the job, it is worth having a go.

When you are scanning for suitable jobs, it is worth looking also for information on salary ranges in your field, seeing who else is recruiting and for what positions, checking on the experience and skills most frequently asked for, and very important – what qualifications are wanted.

Using the internet

There are hundreds of websites online currently offering services to assist you in finding employment, but how do you know which ones are the best ones? When doing your research look into where particular industries advertise positions. For example, educational jobs tend to be advertised on either www.tes.co.uk/jobs or www.jobs.ac.uk and occasionally on other job search engines. On the other hand recruitment positions are often advertised through companies such as www.monster.co.uk.

A word of warning, though, when using internet companies. Many of the advertised websites for finding careers request you to upload your curriculum vitae. Check the security of this information as giving out your personal details and date of birth can be a gift for identity fraudsters!

Recruitment consultants

The positive side of recruitment consultants is that there are thousands of companies involved in recruitment and between them they have comprehensive access to all parts of the job market. The downside is that they are paid by the employers to find candidates to match a brief and generally speaking will only be interested in you as a candidate if they think you match that brief or others that they might receive.

Many of the high street agencies are generalist, but some specialise and in addition, agencies can broadly be divided into:

- **Headhunters or search consultants** – they work with the most senior clients and will spend a lot of time researching individual candidates who fit a particular specification.
- **Selection consultants** – they also start with a brief from a client employer and will shortlist about 8 – 10 to interview themselves. From this list, about 3-4 candidates will be presented to the employer for a final interview and selection process. Sometimes they are used by employers to do a first sift through the responses to an advertisement. This group includes the high street chains, which keep databases of candidates for both permanent and temporary work.

- **Placement agencies** – also interview on a speculative basis, but they will make direct contact with employers who might be interested in the skills the candidate is offering. They usually place people in technical or junior roles.

It can be a quite bruising experience dealing with an agency, since they will drop you instantly if they feel that you have no value for them (i.e. you don't fit the sort of briefs they are receiving and therefore you will earn no fee for them). However, because of their networks and knowledge of the job market, you cannot afford to ignore them. To get the best out of them you must make sure that:

- You know what sort of role you are looking for, and salary, location and benefits
- You have an up to date CV with you which promotes your skills well
- You are selective – they won't be interested if they think that you have flooded the market with your CV
- You don't believe them when they say a meeting is informal – it isn't! Or when they say you are a frontrunner for a position – they say that to everyone!
- You do ask them about the job, the organisation and the people before you go to an interview they set up for you – the client will expect you to be well informed.

Networking (using personal contacts)

This is an essential job search activity, not least because it can give you access to 50-75% of the total employment market. You use it not only for advice and information about the availability of jobs in organisations, but also for personal referrals within organisations for jobs that you have your eye on.

If you approaching someone you don't know well for information you need to do your homework in advance so that you get the best out of the meeting and also so that you create a good impression. So, you need to decide:

- Why are you making the approach? Make it clear that you are asking for information and not a position. If you have lost your job recently, do not be apologetic – be positive about what you are looking for and what you bring with you to a new role
- What is it you need to know about the job, the organisation, prospects for the future, the state of the market?
- Do you want advice on whether you have the right skills or experience?
- Do you need further contacts following on this meeting?

To make your networking effective, start by making a long list of all the potential contacts you could develop, beginning with your own address book, and include customers, suppliers, competitors, colleagues, past employers, people you have met professionally, locally, and through different groups in your community.

Set up meetings by telephone or in writing, explaining clearly why you are asking for the meeting. It may be that you would like information or advice on the type of role they have, the organisation they work for, or the market they operate in, or to look over your CV to see whether it is 'fit for purpose'. Half an hour doesn't sound too onerous for people to manage, and it should allow you to cover what you need.

Make sure that you know what your objectives for each meeting are, and make the meetings as business like as possible. Afterwards, make sure that you make a record of the key points discussed and a note of your follow-up actions, and write a note thanking them for their time.

Speculative or Direct approaches to an employer

This is not as 'hit or miss' as you might suppose, as evidenced by the massive 69% of people who find a job this way. The reason is because your approach might just arrive at the right time, perhaps when the organisation has decided to recruit, but have not yet advertised. If you fit the bill, they can save all the recruitment costs by hiring directly from your approach.

The key to speculative approaches is good research – is the company or organisation expanding, moving into new facilities, or developing new activities? Always aim to approach the person needing to hire – not HR or personnel, who may not yet be aware of the opportunity. If you are able to target areas where there are skills shortages, changes in the market, or where you know there has been a problem with hiring, you can present yourself and your skills and experience as being part of the solution to the problem. You can use your personal contacts as an invaluable resource to help you find these opportunities.

Your CV and a good covering letter will be crucial here, so make sure that you have worked hard on them and they look first class.

Dealing with Job Offers

When you are job hunting and receive a result from one or more jobs be aware that this, although good news, can sometimes bring with it some difficult decisions. If you are offered a job be sure that it is what you want before you accept. A formal offer of employment will be in writing and will outline the terms and conditions. If you feel anything is unclear refer back to the employer and ensure you clarify all the information you need to make a decision. Don't commit yourself too early or rush anything. It is possible to ask for more time to consider an offer. As long as you keep employers informed, they are usually prepared to be reasonable.

Finally: How not to find a job!

- Lack of self-assessment, not having worked out what you have to offer
- Limiting your search to highly competitive occupations or prestigious employers
- Limiting yourself too narrowly to one geographical area
- Going for too wide a range of jobs

- Poor application and interview technique (invariably the result of poor preparation)
- Unrealistic expectations

Keep your job hunting strategies under review. Good luck with your search!

Further Resources

The Information, Advice and Guidance team can be reached by email or telephone, and we provide one-to-one career guidance sessions as well as group workshops.

For further information contact the RACC Information, Advice and Guidance Team:

Email: iag@racc.ac.uk

Tel: 020 8843 7921

APPENDIX A

Working out your current work values

This exercise will help you to focus on your values related to work and identify what is important to you in a job. Your values are likely to change over time and in different circumstances, but being clear about what you value most about a job now will help you to decide what to look for now.

Step 1

Work through the checklist below and rate the importance of each work value to you by ticking the appropriate column. Try to complete the checklist quickly and be honest with your answers, choosing what is most important to you in a job **right now**:

CURRENT WORK VALUES - WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU?*

Work Value	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Steady income with good benefits			
Chance for advancement; increased pay			
Doing a variety of tasks			

Having an established routine of work			
Respect and recognition			
Friendly fellow workers			
Pleasant physical surroundings			
Expectations by boss clearly defined			
Being in charge/supervising/ managing/having authority			
Persuading others			
Motivating and inspiring others			
Teaching/training others			
Flexible hours; control over own time			
Regular hours (little overtime)			
Leaving my mark on the world			
Chance to use my own ideas/creative expression			

Working as part of a team			
Working on my own			
Being my own boss			
Chance to use my initiative			
Working on one project at a time			
Time and energy left for outside activities			
Opportunity to learn new things			
Working for a cause; being of service to others			
Having clearly defined tasks			
Spirit of competition; chance to be successful			

No responsibility			
Producing a tangible product			
Having responsibility			
Working with details, data, numbers			
Working with things/machines			
Working with people			
Working with ideas			
Challenging work			
Job security			
Good salary			
Seeing results of work; accountability			
Opportunity to use my special skills/knowledge			
Working with an organisation/people of high integrity			
Producing high quality work			

Step 2

Now look through the completed checklist. Of the items you've rated as **Very Important** pick the three that are most important to you at the moment. When you are considering applying for a different job, consider whether or not it will meet the work values you have identified as very important. Occasionally you may decide to take a job that doesn't quite meet your criteria, as you see it as a 'stepping-stone' to the career you really want.

If you are trying to change direction in your career, it is equally important to check whether you will be required to use those skills that you really don't want to use much in the future. Unless you are clear about this, it is likely that you will end up remaining in your comfort zone, i.e. in a role using those skills that are familiar to you, because you find it easier to persuade an employer that you have lots of experience using them. So have a look at the list again, and identify these skills – you may be very good at using them, but if you go back into a role using them the majority of the time, then you are very likely to very quickly become unhappy in the new job.

Adapted freely from http://www.csd.uwa.edu.au/job/guide/ex_3.htm

APPENDIX B

Working out your transferable skills

This exercise will help you identify those skills and abilities that you have developed so far, and those that you enjoy using at work. The clearer you are about these, the more effectively you will be able to focus your job search on roles where you can use them. You will also be able to communicate them better to a potential employer in your CV, application form and at interview.

1. Use a competency rating of 1-4 to rate each of the skills in the first column of the table below. Remember that you may have developed some of these skills in unpaid or voluntary work as well as paid employment, or through social or leisure activities. Think about feedback you have had from friends, family or colleagues to help you be as objective as possible.
2. Use the second and third columns to identify skills you enjoy and would like to develop – tick a maximum of 25 in each.

1 = undeveloped 2 = adequate 3 = competent 4 = very competent

SKILL TYPE	Skill competency (rate 1-4)	Skill I enjoy using (✓)	Skill I would like to develop (✓)
PEOPLE SKILLS			
Mediating, resolving conflict			
Coaching, helping individuals develop			
Appreciating strengths in others			
Actively listening, assessing needs			
Building and maintaining relationships			
Influencing, persuading others			
Meeting new people			
Motivating people			
Selling goods or ideas to others			
Managing or supervising others			
Putting others at ease			
Teaching or training others			
Encouraging people to change			
Leading others			
Empathising, conveying warmth to others			
Interviewing others for information			
Caring for others			

Entertaining, amusing others			
Representing others			
Advising others			
Leading others			
Presenting, performing in front of a group			

Using a foreign language			
Negotiating with others			
Building teams			
Providing a service for others			
Others (<i>add your own</i>)			
INFORMATION SKILLS			
Forecasting, predicting the future			
Investigating, finding out the facts			
Evaluating alternatives			
Observing, examining people, trends			
Analysing, dissecting, seeking explanation			
Problem solving, troubleshooting			
Interpreting and explaining			
Classifying and recording information			
Writing clearly and concisely			
Editing, summarising information			
Planning tasks, projects			
Managing knowledge, information systems			
Operating computers, using IT			
Making decisions under pressure			
Improving systems, procedures			
Assessing risks, probabilities			
Researching, gathering information			
Estimating, making costings			
Working with numbers, statistics			
Using IT to handle large amounts of text or data			
Managing money, budgeting			
Examining and observing detail accurately			
Taking an inventory			
Following instructions, diagrams, blueprints			
Others (<i>add your own</i>)			
PRACTICAL/PHYSICAL SKILLS			

Constructing, building, assembling			
Installing, fitting, adapting			
Making, crafting things or materials			
Fixing, repairing machines or equipment			
Using special instruments			
Operating machinery or machine-tools			
Driving vehicles			
Manual dexterity			
Hand-eye co-ordination			
Using hand tools			
Playing a musical instrument			
Drawing or draughting skills			
Quick physical reactions			
Handling things with precision and speed			
Accuracy, attention to detail			
Keeping physically fit			

Others (<i>add your own</i>)			
IDEA/CREATIVE SKILLS			
Innovating, creating new solutions			
Thinking 'outside the box'			
Designing a plan for a project or object			
Creating new systems and procedures			
Developing ideas of others			
Writing creatively			
Organising events			
Composing lyrics, tunes			
Improving, adapting to novel situations			
Expressing ideas through body, face, voice			
Reading for ideas			
Improvising under pressure			
Having insight, using intuition			
Assessing people and situations quickly and accurately			
Designing using shape and space			
Using colour creatively			
Conveying feelings or thoughts through sketching, drawing or painting			
Designing machines, technology			
Using IT to come up with new solutions			
Initiating, starting up new projects			
Thinking strategically, seeing the big picture			
Others (<i>add your own</i>)			

When you have highlighted those skills where you have rated yourself as “competent” or “very competent” (first column) AND that you enjoy using (second column), note which skill types these fall into and discuss the results with a friend who knows you well. You might find it helpful to focus on your favourite top ten if your list is very long.