Researching Employers

Before making any job application it is important that you research employers and industry sectors. You will be up against applicants with similar experience to you, so your enthusiasm for and interest in an organisation can make your application stand out from the crowd.

**Why do I need to know about employers?**

The graduate job market is very competitive. Gaining the opportunity you want is partly about demonstrating that you have what it takes in terms of skills and ability, but also about showing the employer that you know what their company/organisation is about and that you are genuinely keen, driven and motivated about the opportunity that’s on offer.

**What information do you need to know?**

**Background information**

- What and who are the organisation's products/services/clients/competitors?
- Where do they operate and in which markets?
- Have there been recent or are there imminent changes in the market/developments/initiatives?
- Ownership, organisational structure or key personnel; financial information e.g. market share, turnover

**Company culture**

- Determine the company’s ‘core values’ and aims
- Think about: how the company likes to see itself? how it is viewed externally (by peers, the media, the general public?)? how do you view the organisation?
- Ask yourself why working for the employer appeals?

**Job opportunity**

- What are they looking for?
- What does the job involve?
- What are the key skills, qualities and knowledge this role requires?

**SWOT analysis**

A **SWOT analysis** is an acronym for *strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats* and evaluates those four elements of an organisation, company, product, place, industry, or person. It can be a very useful way of framing your investigations, and thinking about the internal and external factors that might be currently impacting on an organisation and/or their wider industry.

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<td><strong>Internal</strong></td>
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<td>Strengths</td>
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<td>characteristics that give it an advantage over others</td>
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<td><strong>External</strong></td>
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<td>Opportunities</td>
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<td>elements in the wider environment or industry that they could exploit to their advantage</td>
<td>elements in the environment or industry that could cause trouble for the organisation</td>
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By searching online for “*name of company* + SWOT”, you may find someone has done the hard work for you! Business Source Complete (below) also has 1000s of company profiles, including SWOT analyses, via the library.
Where do you go to research employers?

Here are some suggestions of where and how to search for information about prospective employers:

- **Job description and person specification**: These are key documents for researching the opportunity on offer and may also provide useful information about the company or organisation and how it operates.

- **Media and press (including trade press)**: Find out what has been reported about the company/organisation and their sector recently. Are there new developments or challenges to be aware of? Professional associations and journals can be brilliant for industry-specific news of this type. news.google.co.uk is a very good place to start your search for mentions in the mainstream media and press journals, while www.prnewswire.co.uk is your go-to for any press releases the organisation may put out or be mentioned in.

- **Companies’ own websites**: You should always visit an organisation’s website to find out more before you apply. In particular, read up on the latest news and sections such as About Us, Media or Press Centre. Graduate employers often have a dedicated Careers section which can include case studies and graduate profiles. Many are also active on social media so do engage with them via Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and elsewhere.

- **Company, client and customer literature**: This is a must! Find out what the organisation says about itself; what values it promotes and how it markets itself. What makes them stand out? What is different from the competition?

- **Your contacts and network**: Think about your friends and family - do you know anyone who has worked for this company or organisation? Friends of friends? LinkedIn can help you search for friendly contacts or alumni. Background information from someone who has worked there recently can be very valuable—think about which questions to ask to elicit the most useful information (having already done your research elsewhere!). Remember to form your own opinions: never rely on what others tell you, or take their opinion for granted.

- **In person!** For some sectors (such as retail, FMCG, hospitality) you could pay a visit to the organisation’s store, location, or a supplier of their products/services to ‘mystery shop’ and gain a customer perspective.

**Other sources of information** (you can find more links on: www.stir.ac.uk/careers/students/jobsearch/res_emp/)

- **TARGETjobs** has a wealth of industry information under ‘Career Sectors’, as well as an enormous database of jobs and internships. The Employer Hubs offer insight into individual employers’ application processes.

- **Prospects** has job sector information, and profiles on specific roles with extensive links for more research.

- **Inside Careers** has an employer directory with detailed profiles, and sector information (focussing on finance).

- **YouTube** is an underrated goldmine of company and sector information. Use keywords, company names or just search “careers” for millions of easily accessible insights into organisations and their application processes.

- **Professional bodies** are a great source of sector information, careers insights, news and directories of employers / members. Total Professions has a search for 300+ professional bodies, plus sector information.

- **Business Source Complete** (find via the library A-Z of databases) offers unrivalled access to thousands of company profiles, business news, industry reports and market research.

- **University of Stirling Library** (libguides.stir.ac.uk/company) has links to a further extensive range of databases and websites providing quality business information—many of which are not publicly available.

- **Companies House** is a government service and offers reliable information on over 1.7 million limited companies in the UK. Some information is free but there is a small charge for account information.