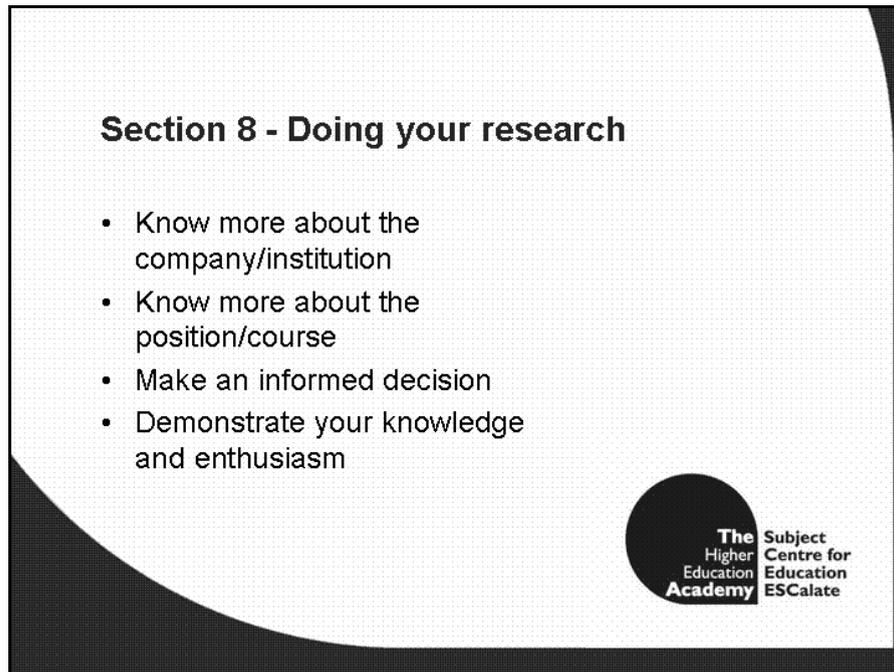


## Section 8 - Doing your research presentation



**Section 8 - Doing your research**

- Know more about the company/institution
- Know more about the position/course
- Make an informed decision
- Demonstrate your knowledge and enthusiasm

The Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Education ESCalate

Doing your research is a vital part of the process of looking for a job or course. Without this research, how will you know if the job or course is suitable for you or if you would be happy with that employer or university.

This presentation will look at the kind of information that you need to find out in your research and some places where you can begin your search.



**Employer Research resources**

- Company website
- Information pack
- Shareholders report
- Careers Service files
- Newspaper business sections

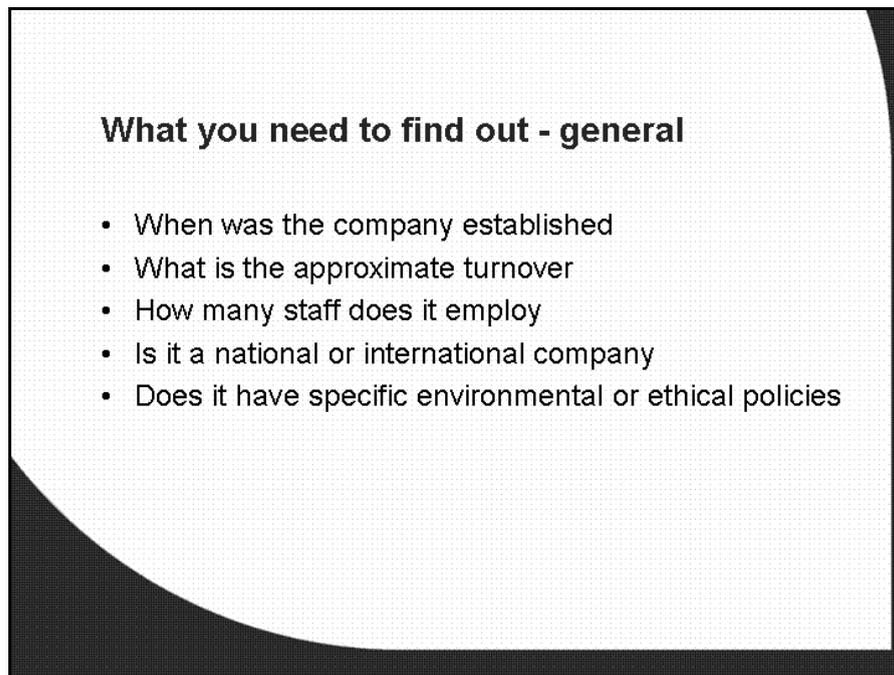
Where can you find information on a potential employer?

- The company website is often the best place to start as it should contain all of the general information that you need about the employer. However it is unlikely to give many details about job opportunities other than how to apply for them. You should be

able to get a general feel for a company from its website, but bear in mind that the website is like an advertisement for the company, so it will only let you know the good things about it.

- If you are interested in applying for a job at the company or are at the stage when you want to know more about a specific position, then ask the company for more information. This will normally be in the form of an information or application pack. This will contain more specific information about the available posts along with more information about the company as a whole. Again be aware that these are marketing materials you are being sent so may not show the true picture.
- Shareholder reports are sent out to shareholders on an annual basis. They show the financial condition of the company and provide information on what the company plans to do in the future. They can give you a good idea of how well the company is doing. Some companies may send you a copy if you ask for one. Some publicly funded organisations such as the BBC have to make their reports available to anyone who asks to see them.
- Your Careers Service should have files on the majority of larger employers. These may only contain the company's promotional materials or they may include things such as reports from students who have had interviews for that firm, so they are well worth a look.
- If you are having trouble finding the information that you need, another idea is to look at the business sections of the national newspapers. The simplest way to do this is to use the newspapers' websites and search their archives for the company you are interested in. These articles will contain the latest information on the company and as they will not have been written by the company they are more likely to be objective.

Note that whilst these suggestions relate mainly to private companies, in many cases these can be adapted to apply to public sector organisations and institutions.



**What you need to find out - general**

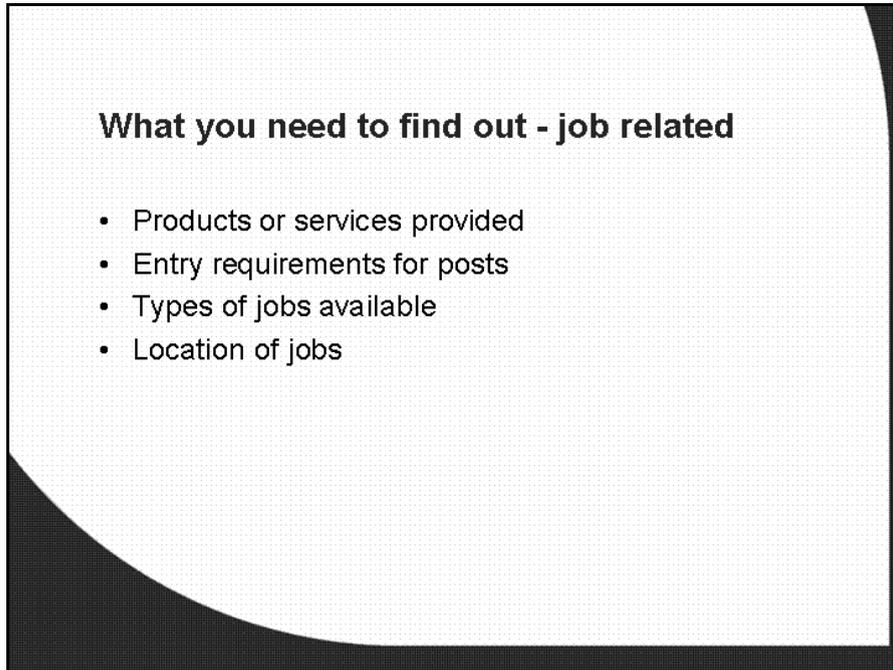
- When was the company established
- What is the approximate turnover
- How many staff does it employ
- Is it a national or international company
- Does it have specific environmental or ethical policies

This slide lists some of the more general information that you might need to find out about a prospective employer.

Finding out the answers to questions like these should give you a better feel for the company as a whole and give you an idea of what it might be like to work there.

For example, if the company has several overseas offices, then it may be possible to get transferred abroad at some stage or travel to meet colleagues in other countries. The number of staff may also provide an idea of whether the whole workforce acts as a close knit team or

if it is more like series of disparate groups working together. The ethical and environmental policies are also important - if your ideals do not match up well with the company's ideals, this could cause problems.



In order to know whether a particular job would suit you, you need to do some more research.

First of all you need to know more about what the company does. Is their product range or range of services something that really interests you? For example, if you have no interest in paper products, would you be happy trying to market them?

One of the most vital things that you need to know is what entry requirements are required for the position that interests you. Do you have all of the qualifications and skills that they are looking for? Is there anything that you can do to ensure that you match their requirements as closely as possible?

If it is the company that you are interested in more than a specific post then you will certainly need to know as much as possible about the various career options open to you at that company. This research can also be useful if you think that you might want to change career direction after a few years - would you be able to switch to a different kind of job without leaving the company?

It is also vital that you find out exactly where the job vacancies are located. You may also need to be moved from department to department and office to office within your training period.

## University course resources

- Course-finding website
- University website
- Prospectuses
- Campus visit
- Times Higher

If you are not sure exactly what type of postgraduate course you want, then the first step is to look at a website which lists all available courses, such as [www.Prospect.ac.uk](http://www.Prospect.ac.uk).

Once you have chosen the type of course you want, the next step is to investigate the universities that offer it. The first stage in your investigation should be to look at the websites for each institution. The websites should provide you with information on the locations of the campuses, rough numbers of students and staff, and usually any positive press that the university has had recently. As with the businesses, bear in mind that this is marketing material.

If the information available on the website interests you, ask the institution for a copy of its postgraduate prospectus. This should give you a bit of information about the course along with details pertaining to student life at the university.

Sometimes it is hard to get a feel for a place without actually being there and this is where a campus visit comes in handy. This might be as part of an official open day, or you might just like to have a wander around campus by yourself. This should give you a better idea of what it would be like to actually study there.

The Times Higher Education Supplement's website allows subscribers to view articles from 1994 to the present issue, and so is ideal for finding out information about the institution of your choice, particularly if it is in financial trouble or if there are any disputes. Although there is a fee to subscribe to the site, you can get trial access to the full site for 14 days for free.

## What you need to find out - general

- Status of the university/department
- Location of campuses
- Number of staff
- Facilities available

This slide lists the general information that you should find out about a university.

First of all, how respected is the university? Is the department that you are applying to known as a centre of excellence for your subject? How was it rated in the last RAE (Research Assessment Exercise)?

Where would you be studying? If the university is based on multiple sites, which site houses the department you are applying to?

How large a university is it in terms of staff and student numbers? Is it likely that you would get to meet staff and students from across campus or would you only have the opportunity to get to know members of your own department?

What kind of facilities are available both around campus and in the department? Do they have the latest equipment for your subject (if appropriate)?

## What you need to find out - course related

- Entry requirements
- Support available
- If extra modules need to be taken
- Professional accreditation

The first thing that you need to find out about the course itself is whether or not you would be eligible to apply for it. If you find that you just miss the requirements, then you can always contact the department and find out if the requirements are at all flexible.

You need to know if there is support available for postgraduate students. This could range from part-time teaching opportunities to help you fund your studies to having a very supportive and helpful supervisor.

Some universities encourage postgraduate students to build up credits outside of their projects. These can include giving presentations to conferences, or courses in career skills or research and writing skills. These courses are designed to help you make the most of your time at university and to ensure that you are able to market your skills when you start looking for work. It is important to find out what kind of provision has been made by the institution.

If you are planning on taking a course in order to enter a specialised field then it is worth checking out the professional bodies for that field in order to see if they run an accreditation system. Accredited courses will, because of their accreditation, be more respected in the trade and some jobs may specify that you have to have taken an accredited course. You may also find that taking an accredited course is needed for entry into the professional associations.

## How can you use this information?

- Choose between similar jobs/courses
- Find out if a job/course is right for you
- Find out if a company/university is right for you
- Demonstrate enthusiasm at interview

This presentation has provided a quick run through of some of the things that you need to find out about jobs and courses. But what can you use this information for?

- Knowing all of the details will allow you to make an informed decision between similar jobs or courses
- Once you know exactly what is involved you will be in a better position to decide whether you would enjoy the job or course
- If you know exactly what you want to do then you can use your research to work out which company or institution would suit you best

Finally, if you know a lot about the company or institution that you have applied for then you will be able to demonstrate that you are enthusiastic and committed to the job or course. Also, by doing this research you will be able to explain exactly why you chose that employer or institution over others offering similar jobs or courses, which will be very useful in an interview situation.