



Making the most of a Career Event

Careers Focused Events run on campus throughout the year and usually include fairs, workshops and employer presentations .

So what do you need to do to get the most out of these events?

The key issues are: **be prepared and be professional**. Remember that this could be your first opportunity to make an impression on what could be your future employer. Treat any event as a preliminary stage of selection. Make a good impression and you could already have your foot on the ladder, make a bad impression and you have fallen at the first hurdle!

Keep the following points in mind:

Sign up, turn up!

Many events require you to sign up in advance. This is often for pragmatic reasons e.g. planning catering etc., but companies may also be interested in having a record of who attended. Regard this sign up as a commitment on your part. Sign up – turn up! This is a matter of courtesy if nothing else and students who do not show up for what is, in effect, an appointment will not be well regarded. Remember that non attendance creates a negative impression of both City students and the Careers Service and employers will not be running similar sessions if students fail to attend presentations and workshops that they have booked for.

Be on time

This makes you look more professional. If you are late, make a point of apologising to the host employer.

Use www.city.ac.uk/maps to find internal events. Use www.streetmap.co.uk to find external events. Allow enough time to arrive without rushing. You can check journey times by using <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/> and clicking on to *journeyplanner*.

Dress like a professional

Imagine you are already working for the company - this could help the company see that you fit into their culture.

Do some research beforehand

Although you may be attending to find out more about the company, still do some homework in advance. It will look better to the recruiter if you can show you are interested enough to have done some research beforehand. If you appear ill-informed you will not impress.

Plan in advance how you want to use the event

Prepare some relevant questions, not just about the company and the job prospects, but show you have an interest in the area of work generally and can discuss current issues. Are there specific things you wish to find out about the company or the sector? Don't just think in terms of factual information. Aim to pick up a sense of the company culture. Do they recruit a particular "type" and do you match?

To help you get started here are some suggestions:

- How did you get started in your field?
- What skills and experience do you think are necessary for success in this area?
- Can you suggest how I can improve my chances of working in xxx?
- Can you describe a typical working day/week?
- What are the key challenges you are faced with in your job?
- How does your work affect your lifestyle and your out-of-work life?
- Can you suggest any tips for a successful job hunt?
- Has the occupation changed since you first started your career? If so how?
- Could you say what are the most significant trends taking place in your occupation and business sector – and what do you see as future trends?
- Can you suggest any other people who may be able to help me?

Prepare a "30 second CV"

Be ready to sell yourself positively and succinctly in response to a general opener like "tell me about yourself". It can also be a good idea to bring several hard copies of your CV. If you are visiting a single company, make sure your CV has been tailored to them. However, don't force it on people, just have it to hand to give out if asked or if the direction of the conversation suggests it is appropriate.

Avoid standing in the corner talking to your mates.

The point of the event is for you to find out anything that can help you make more effective applications to this company and to others. Don't waste the chance of talking to those in the know. You can talk to your friends another day. Above all don't take root by the buffet table or get drunk!

Ask for business cards

If you spend some time with an individual and feel you are getting on well, consider asking for their business card or note down their name and job title so that you can refer to them along with your application or during your interview. But be sensitive to body language and avoid monopolising a single person to the point of boring them to death! Be respectful of employers' time.

Develop your networking skills

The above points mean working hard at developing your networking skills. This is a combination of being able to make intelligent, polite and relevant small talk, being able to listen and respond appropriately to questions asked of you and also the capacity to use these conversations as an opportunity not just to gain information but to build a list of personal contacts, who may be able to help you in the future.

Forging and developing relationships with the right people can help you find out more about an industry or obtain an insight into an organisation to help you put a strong application together. You can discover what the key issues are in the business so that you will impress at interview. You may find out about vacancies that aren't advertised so that you can make a speculative approach without all the competition that goes with advertised vacancies.

Are there other ways to find contacts?

Whilst you may gain lots of useful ideas from someone over an informal chat at the end of an employer presentation, there are also more formal ways to network.

The Ask Alumni database can put you in touch with one of over 2,000 City graduates who have volunteered to assist current students – ask for further details at the Career & Skills Development Service.

You can search for people:

- On company websites, work out who might be useful to you in the organisation.
- Through relevant professional bodies and societies who also may hold events you can attend.
- at recruitment fairs
- By finding relevant companies in graduate employer directories (available at the Career and Skills Development Service) or on graduate careers websites.
- by talking to family and friends – they may have links with relevant people and could introduce you.

Getting in touch with your contacts

- Research the occupational area and/or company so you come across as interested and informed.
- Make your first contact by phone or e-mail which is more direct and immediate. Emails can be easily ignored so may need a follow-up phone call.

- You can write a letter if you prefer a more formal approach, but be sure to follow up your letter with a call a few days later.
- If you contact by phone, ask them if they have the time to talk to you or if they would like you to call back at a more suitable time.
- Do not make them feel under pressure.
- Ask for advice and help and tell them that you are exploring careers in a certain area – don't ask them directly for a job.
- Make it clear that you are making minimal demands on them at this stage – then they are more likely to agree to a meeting.
- If you arrange a meeting keep it to 20-30 minutes - you can arrange a longer meeting in the future.
- Always ask for another useful contact they can recommend. In this way, your network continues to grow.
- After the meeting write to them to thank them for their time – good manners helps create the right impression.

Remember - Networking is not just about whom you know, it is about *who you get to know*. Think laterally here – even someone with a fairly tenuous connection with your chosen area of work may be able to give you some useful ideas and/or contacts. People are usually happy to be asked for their advice. All you need to do is approach the right person in the right way.

When approaching contacts for information and advice, you may be considering whether to disclose particular personal information. If you have concerns about this and would like to discuss it further, then please arrange to see a Careers Consultant by calling 0207 040 8093

Further sources of information can be found at:
http://delicious.com/City_Careers/Networking

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