Making speculative applications

A speculative application involves approaching an organisation about the possibility of working for them, rather than applying to an advertised vacancy. Going out of your way to actively seek opportunities – especially when vacancies are not being advertised – is a great way to prove your drive and initiative to potential employers.

Speculative applications are common in many competitive areas of work, such as journalism, the media, advertising, PR and publishing which rarely advertise jobs or work experience. They are particularly useful for:

- Finding work in a particular geographical location.
- Contacting organisations that are expanding and may need someone like you.
- Targeting particular organisations or specific sectors.
- Finding work in a sector when other job hunting methods have not been successful.
- Getting unpaid work experience or work shadowing.

Some sectors recruit more at different times. TV companies, for example, tend not to recruit many people in the middle of winter. Try to find out from contacts at what time of year your application is most likely to get noticed. You can develop contacts through networking or social media. Our leaflets How to Network and Using social media for job hunting gives lots of advice.

A speculative application usually consists of a CV and covering letter; but could be preceded or followed up with a telephone call. Think about why the organisation should want you and what you have to offer. You may have to sell yourself more in the letter than you normally would, because you want to convince the employer to consider hiring you when they may not have an obvious vacancy.

Tips for making speculative applications

- Identify your target (by researching recruiters and talking to people about their jobs). Establish good reasons why you are interested in working for them specifically. Is the company one of the most reputable and successful in its sector? Do you share their ethos and values? What interests you about their work?
- Tailor your CV and a concise covering letter specifically for them. In your covering letter clearly explain the reasons for your application, and emphasise your knowledge of the company and the skills you have that may be of interest to them. Do not just send your CV and ask if they have any jobs. Tell them what you would really like to do. If your goal is work experience, don’t cut out any chance that the recipient may be able to offer, say, a work shadowing opportunity. Be clear about what you would be interested in.
- Write to a named individual if at all possible. Call the company to get this information if necessary. This ensures that your application gets to the most relevant person. In a large organisation this is usually a manager in the HR (Human Resources) department.
- Tailor-make each approach; show how your experience and achievements are relevant.
- Always follow up your application with a phone call to try to arrange a meeting to discuss any opportunities. This shows you are serious about your application and are keen to work for them. Say you will do this in your covering letter and make sure you do it.