

Researching Companies

To make a strong application for a job and to excel in interviews, you need to show knowledge of the company and sector you have applied to. This handout will help you to understand what sort of information you should be looking for and where you can find it.

WHY DO YOU NEED TO RESEARCH THE COMPANY?

Before starting to research a company it is good to reflect on your purpose in doing this research. When on the job market, your ultimate aim is to persuade the company to offer you a job. To do this you need to convince the recruiter through the different stages of the selection process that you:

- Understand what you have applied for
- Have the knowledge, skills and abilities to be successful in the role
- Will be motivated on the job
- Will fit in well to the culture of the company

The aim of your research into the company is to help you to make the case to the recruiter that you meet these requirements. It's good to keep this aim in mind while you are researching as it will help you to focus your research. Otherwise it is all too easy to spend a lot of time reading information, but not gaining anything helpful from it.

In the case where you are applying to a very well-known company, it may feel as if there is no need to research the company because you already know who they are. This is a common mistake to avoid. Remember that having the same superficial level of knowledge as all the other applicants is not going to make you stand out to a recruiter.

HOW TO APPROACH YOUR RESEARCH

It's important to emphasise that companies are not just looking for candidates that can 'fact find'. They are looking for candidates who are genuinely interested in them, have curiosity and can evaluate information. So when you set out to research a company, start by thinking about what you would genuinely be interested to know about them. Some examples of questions about a company to get you thinking are listed below, but you can probably think of more.

- How does the role I have applied to fit into the bigger picture?
- What is this company known for?
- What are the company values?

- Who are their customers/clients?
- Who are their competitors?
- How is the company changing?
- What is the financial performance of this company?

As you read through information that you find, think about what it means. What other questions does it spark? What could that mean for you if they hire you?

Here are a couple of examples of how you could think into what you are reading:

- If you are reading about the values of a company, can you think of times in your life where you have demonstrated similar values which would indicate a good fit between you and the company? These could be useful examples for you write or talk about in applications and interviews.
- When reading about the wider sector you find out that a new technology has been developed by a competitor. Ask yourself how that might affect the company you are looking into? Can you find any information on how they are responding?

WHERE TO START?

Usually you won't have all the time in the world to research a company that you are applying to or interviewing for, so you will need to be strategic and make the most of the time you have.

An obvious starting point is the website of the company itself. Good places on the website to target include:

- 'careers' or 'work for us' pages – look for information on what they select for when hiring and details of the role/scheme you have applied for
- 'about us' – for their values and mission statement
- 'news' – for their latest PR releases

You should also check to see how a company uses social media such as LinkedIn, Facebook or Twitter. Following them on their channels give you a useful source of the latest news and insight into what topics are being discussed within the company.

Then you can widen your research into other sources of information that can give you different perspectives and broaden your background knowledge.



SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Imperial Library Services

The Library provides access to excellent sources of information that you can use to further your research. Find a list of their resources at:

www.imperial.ac.uk/admin-services/library/subject-support/business/market-and-industry-information

A highlight from this list is:

- **Marketline Advantage Reports** - a leading source of market research information which includes company profiles, information on competitors and SWOT analyses for many large companies.

City Business Library

The City Business Library is a resource for business information located in 'The City' of London, EC2. Its information is used by researchers from many of the top companies. You can access a wide ranges of resources that will help you to understand companies including financial information. Visit the website at: cityoflondon.gov.uk/business/economic-research-and-information/city-business-library/business-information-resources/Pages/default.aspx

Glassdoor

Glassdoor www.glassdoor.co.uk is a website where people upload reviews of their employer and anonymous salary information. It is a useful site to review but be aware that the information is often biased. Looking at the salary information can help you to understand the typical salary ranges for role and industry.

Networking

Talking to people who already work in the industry you are applying to can be a great way to get up to speed on the latest developments. If you have already had work experience or an internship in a related business, use the contacts you have developed. The 'Ask an Alumnus' database organized by Imperial Careers Service is also a good source of contacts. Find more information at: www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/ask

Careers Service Library

The Imperial Careers Service has a library located on 5th floor of the Sherfield Building. Within the library is a set of files with 'Company Information'. This includes:

Employer interview feedback – feedback from students and alumni on their experiences of being interviewed and attending assessment centres with many organisations

Employer visit reports – reports by careers staff on their visits to employers.

The Press

It's a good idea to keep an eye on the news relating to sectors that you would like to work in. If you do this on a regular basis over a period of time you will build up a good background knowledge of the relevant issues. Good general sources include:

- FT.com
- Reuters – international business news website
- BBC
- Businessweek – international world and business news

websites run by Bloomberg

- The Guardian
- The Economist – magazine providing world business, science and technology news

Most sectors have news sources that are sector-specific. For example 'Marketing Week' is a source of news in the UK for people working in marketing. Try to find the sources of news in sectors you are applying to and keep a regular eye on them. A great question to ask when you are networking is 'how do you keep up to date with news in the sector?'

For information on the disclosure of disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia please see information on the Careers Service website: www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure