

MAKE A SPECULATIVE APPLICATION

Writing 'on spec' to potential employers can open up the hidden job market. But a speculative application needs to be approached carefully in order to be successful.

Draw up a shortlist of employers

If you want to work in a particular industry, use specialist business or trade publications as well as professional associations' websites to identify potential employers. For generalist careers, such as HR, IT or administration, you could use national newspaper and online business directories. If you are focusing on a particular region, you should look at local newspapers and local or regional online business directories. The Careers & Employability Service will also have information on local employers.

Research the organisation

Find out about the company and the kind of work they do. This will help you make a convincing application. Look at an employer's current vacancies, even if they are above your level. This will give you an idea of their areas of work and the skills required. LinkedIn is another useful source of company information and will give you some idea of the type of people they recruit and career progression within a company

Find out who to write to

You must write to a named contact. If you write a letter that starts 'Dear Sir/Madam', there is every chance it will be ignored. If you phone the company, you should be able to find the name of the person responsible for recruitment or LinkedIn may have this information.

Tailor your application

Even though you won't have an actual job advert to reply to, you should still tailor your covering letter and CV to a particular employer. This will be based on your previous research which should have given you some ideas about organisation and the type of skills they would find attractive. Start with some brief information about yourself and why you are approaching the employer. Emphasise what you can do for the employer rather than what you want from them. When you contact potential employers, be clear about what you are looking for.

Follow up your application

Follow up with a phone call a few days after sending a letter: personal contact can create a good impression and make you more memorable. Even if the employer can't help, this will give you a chance to ask if there are any opportunities coming up, and to find out how they usually recruit and where you should look for their job ads.