Why do it?
If you are exploring and gathering information on occupations, talking to people doing that type of work can give you a specific, personal and up-to-date view. Apart from actually working in a real job, interviewing and observing people in their work setting is the most effective way of finding out whether you would like it or not. Such ‘information visits’ make it easier for you to decide between occupations and to be more convincing to employers when you apply for work.

At first you may feel apprehensive about asking strangers to provide career information. Many people, in fact, like to give advice and enjoy talking about themselves and their work. Information visiting can put the initiative in your hands, for it is up to you to work out what you are looking for in a job and to define possible occupations of interest. It is then perfectly practical for anyone to visit any job, to answer the questions ‘Do I like it?’, ‘Could I do it?’ and ‘How can I get in to it?’

Who should I ask and how do I find them?
Most undergraduates do not carry out information visiting, pleading lack of assertiveness, time or contacts. If you do take the initiative, you are likely to put yourself at a significant advantage when it comes to job hunting.

We have some books and leaflets in the Careers Library with advice on using networks. There are several sources of potential contacts, including family, friends, school, university, previous employers, and relevant professional bodies and by direct approach to employers. Many employers have graduate liaison officers.

Possible questions to ask at an information visit…
Here are a small sample, see the reverse of this sheet for more detailed suggestions:

- Can you tell me some of the things you do on a typical day?
- What aspects of work are the most (or least) satisfying?
- What is the typical careers progression in this field?
- Are there particular qualities that distinguish those who progress in this field from those who do not?
- What is the future of this field in terms of new and expanding opportunities?
- What are the major challenges and problems your organisation is facing and what are some possible solutions?
- Could you suggest any useful sources of information about this work?
- What background experience is required or helpful?
- How competitive is the job market?
- What would a well-qualified candidate be like?

Networking Questions

Job satisfaction and motivation
What do you enjoy most and least about your job?
Why do you do your job?
How does the job differ from what you expected?
What made you choose this career?
What other options did you consider?
What percentage of your time do you spend feeling satisfied in your work and what percentage feeling frustrated?
What is the biggest reward you get from your job?
What made you go for this job?
What is the main reason why people leave the job?
What makes you keen to get to work in the morning?

Some suggestions for the interview…
The interview will be a ‘conversation with a purpose’. In this sense it has similarities with a selection interview. Prepare well. This means becoming as well-informed as you reasonably can beforehand about the type of work and the organisation (use the Careers Service’s Information collection). Prepare your questions, but be prepared to be flexible if something of unexpected interest crops up.

This is not a selection interview, but it is helpful to consider some points about selection interviews in your preparation.

Think about the first impression you will make. In the selection interview, first impressions count and many interviewers have made up their mind in the first few minutes! For an information interview to be effective, it helps if the person you interview has a favourable impression of you. Some research on selection interviews suggests that first impressions are made up as follows: 55% facial expressions and other body language; 38% tone of voice; 7% what you say.

There is a huge body of literature to guide you through the process of selection interviews (see helpsheet on Interviews in the careers office).

Top Tips
- Dress as if you were going to an interview for a job;
- Arrive early, take advantage of any tour that is offered, or the opportunity to talk to others;
- Develop a positive manner, be open and natural: be yourself; be enthusiastic;
- Avoid fidgeting and off-putting mannerisms;
- Develop a firm handshake and look the interviewer in the eye, sit up straight.

At the end of the interview express appreciation of the time that has been spent with you. Write after the interview mentioning how the discussion has helped you.
In what way does your job give you a sense of purpose (feeling of being in control, a chance to indulge your love of your subject, a chance to do something worthwhile, an opportunity to develop yourself, etc.)?

**Details of the work**
Can you describe some actual examples of the sort of activities that your job involves?
How much of your time do you spend on each of these activities?
Can you tell me the things you do on a typical day?
If you could change one thing about your job, what would it be?
What were the most important lessons you learnt about the job in the first few weeks?
What are the hours like?
How do you know you are doing a good job?
What is the most important thing you have learnt through doing this job?
What skills do you use most often?
What makes someone successful in this job?
How much autonomy do you have in the role?
Was there anything that surprised you when you started this job?

**Career progression and development**
What is the typical career progression in this field?
How long would you expect to stay in this job?
What sort of jobs do people move on to?
How has the job changed in the time you’ve been here?
Are there any training or development opportunities?
How do you see this job developing in the future?
How do you keep up to date with developments in this field?

**Colleagues, culture and working environment**
What proportions of the time are you working on your own or as part of a team?
Is there a particular type of person who works in this field?
How supportive are your superiors?
What, if anything, annoys you about your colleagues?
How would you describe the organisation culture here and is it the same in other organisations in this field?
What sort of person would I have to be to fit in to this environment?
What are the facilities and resources like here?

**The sector**
What are the most important current issues in this sector that are likely to affect your job?
Are there any particular individuals or organisations that I should be aware of?
Who are your major competitors?
What other organisations do you interact with?
How competitive is the job market?
How often do vacancies arise and where do they appear?
How secure is the job situation?

**Job hunting**
What would a well-qualified candidate be like?
What background experience is useful and how to people typically obtain it?
Are there any particular types of experience or any courses that would be helpful to get into this area?
What skills are most relevant to the job and have you any suggestions for how I could obtain those skills?
What would you look for on someone’s CV?
Where, if anywhere, are vacancies advertised?
How did you get into this job?
What advice would you give to someone in my position?
How could I go about building up my network in this area?

**Asking for favours**
Are there any opportunities for work shadowing/voluntary work/temporary work with you?
Would it be possible to let me know if anything comes up which might be suitable for me? (Would it be all right if I ring you occasionally to check?)
Are there any small projects that I could help on to get a flavour of the job?
Who else do you think it would be good for me to talk to? (Can I say that you recommended I talk to them?)

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