

# Networking



University of the  
Highlands and Islands  
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd  
agus nan Eilean

Careers and  
Employability Centre  
Ionad Dhreuchdan agus  
Freagarrachd airson Cosnaidh



[www.uhi.ac.uk/careers](http://www.uhi.ac.uk/careers)

## What is networking?

'Networking' can sound terribly formal, however, everyone 'networks' the whole time – think of your 'network' of friends, your family 'network', all the people you've met in social groups, sports clubs, workplaces etc. When we think of building a network to improve chances of finding a job, we are thinking about the same thing – using your personal and social skills to make contacts – but with a specific aim: to make contacts in organisations, professions or with people who may be useful in your career.

## Why is networking important?

The role of personal contacts and networking in finding jobs shouldn't be underestimated. Think about this: if you're an employer and you want to take on a new member of staff, do you take on the person who is slightly less qualified but who you know, you trust and you believe will do a good job, or do you take on the person with better qualifications but who you don't know and you're not sure if you can trust?

In terms of facts and figures, it is estimated that as many as 75% of jobs are never advertised - and therefore networking can be essential to accessing this 'hidden' jobs market. At the university of the Highlands and Islands data from our recent graduates shows that on average over a third of graduates find jobs through their previous employers, family, friends and wider networks.

## How can a network help?

Networks can help you to find work in different ways:

- You may be sent information about advertised jobs by people within your network.
- You may be approached directly and offered work by organisations that you are connected to.
- The increased knowledge of the workplace, careers and employers that you build up through your network helps you to:
  - Have greater success with speculative applications, because you'll be able to identify potential employers, potential needs of these employers, and find out the best people to speak to at these employers.
  - Perform well at interview, because you will have greater understanding of the sector and the organisation.
  - Potentially identify 'gaps' in the market, which will help you to generate your own work.



## Creating your network

### Who should be in my network?

Your professional network will contain a mix of people who are more or less useful to you and with whom you have different kinds of relationship. So, for example your network may include friends or family friends, peers, ex-bosses, professionals etc. There is no right or wrong as to who you include in your network – as long as the people you include are potentially useful to you in your career.

#### Activity 1: Create your network

1. First of all you need to identify what career or line of work you are interested in. Write this in the centre of your page on the worksheet at the back of this advice sheet. If you are not sure what career interests you, you may find it useful to refer to the 'explore options' section of our website: [www.uhi.ac.uk/careers](http://www.uhi.ac.uk/careers)
2. Now think about all the people you know who might be useful to you in terms of that career, and all the people who would be useful to get to know. Ask yourself:
  - a. Who do I already know?
  - b. Who do my close friends and family know?
  - c. What people would be good to get to know?
  - d. What organisations would be good to get to know?

Record your thoughts on the worksheet by mindmapping your thoughts (an example is given).

3. Look back at what you have written, and now try thinking creatively – is there anyone else who might be useful? Someone who isn't immediately obvious but who may be useful or have useful contacts?

### How can I develop my network?

Once you know the kind of people you would like to network with you can build up your contacts by:

- **Making direct contact:** If you know of specific people you would like to meet, you may make direct contact with them through calling or emailing to see if you can arrange a short conversation (20 minutes is a good guide). You can treat this conversation like an information interview (there is



[www.uhi.ac.uk/careers](http://www.uhi.ac.uk/careers)

more information about information interviewing on our 'Researching Careers' advice sheet)

- **Making indirect contact:** your existing contacts are often sources of other useful contacts. You may ask your existing contacts if they know of anyone else you could speak to, and in some cases they may be able to pass on email addresses or to introduce you themselves.
- **Attending conferences & events:** making sure you attend events related to the kind of work you are looking for is a good way of meeting potentially useful contacts.
- **Joining professional networks & associations:** if there is a professional association for the area of work you are interested in then joining the association can be a good thing to do. You can check relevant associations by researching your career interests (further information is available on our 'Researching Careers' advice sheet). It is also very useful to stay up to date with the activities of relevant associations and employers by regularly checking their website or following them on Facebook or Twitter. Some professional organisations arrange networking events or have mentoring available.
- **Work experience & work shadowing:** current and ex-employers are often very good connections. If you don't have work experience in the kind of sector you are interested in then arranging some work experience will give you the opportunity to extend your network (giving you access to people working in the field) *and* give you some useful experience (further information is available in our 'Work Experience' advice sheet).
- **Voluntary & community work:** like work experience, voluntary and community work in an area you are interested in will give you a range of connections. As volunteering attracts many people from different employment and social backgrounds it can also be a way to meet different people from different working backgrounds. In smaller communities being part of voluntary or community work can be a very good way to 'get known' and can be particularly useful for people new to an area or just establishing themselves in the working world.
- **Social groups:** social groups are often good sources of an extensive network of contacts. Joining a sports club, a film club, a book group or other social group can be a good way of meeting a wide range of people.

Activity 2: Extend your network

Reading through the information above can you think of any ways that you could extend your networking potential?

Looking at your Mindmap, add in any details of events or activities that you could undertake to increase your networking potential



[www.uhi.ac.uk/careers](http://www.uhi.ac.uk/careers)

## Guidelines for creating strong networks

When making contact with useful potential contacts there are some useful rules to follow:

- **Be positive:** when talking about work matters do not criticise current or past employers. Your contacts may become employers in the future, so remember to create a good impression. You should also be prepared to talk about your key skills, interests and what you have to offer the industry if appropriate.
- **Be interested in the other person:** when speaking to someone ask them questions about their work and their lives, in particular think about how you can reciprocate the help they are offering you – i.e. can you become a good contact for them? Are there people you know or information that you have that could help them?
- **Use subtle flattery:** everyone likes to think they're doing a good job, and subtle flattery can be very effective. You may do this by telling your contact that you really wanted to speak to them because of their experience in the field or because you've heard a lot about them or by telling them that you have enjoyed speaking to them.
- **Do some background research:** networking has to be complemented by desk based research. Researching a career or an organisation online before you meet someone is important for allowing you to seem knowledgeable and interested.
- **Don't ask directly for work:** it is good to let contacts know if you are looking for work, however, a direct request for work may be perceived as pushy. A good alternative is to ask for advice about where to look for work or if they know anyone who may be recruiting. This will often generate a number of leads.
- **Seek introductions:** Ask your contacts if they know of other people it would be useful to speak to and then if you get names always ask your contact if you can use their name when you make contact with them: 'Joanne Simon suggested I speak to you'.
- **Maximise your contacts:** make sure you get contact details from people who you meet, store these contacts safely, and make sure that you stay in regular communication with your contacts. Social media, and particularly LinkedIn can be an excellent tool for these purposes.

## The importance of Social Media

Social media plays an increasingly important role in networking. If you live in a remote area it can be a particularly useful way of communicating with a wide, national, network of people. Connecting with your contacts through social media can also help to keep your contacts 'live', because you will be able to stay up to date with their activities and update them about your own.

There are a range of social media sites that can be used effectively in developing a network. Which site(s) you choose to use will depend on what you are looking for, and their inclusion in this list does not indicate that the Careers and Employability Centre endorses them.



University of the  
Highlands and Islands  
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd  
agus nan Eilean

Careers and  
Employability Centre  
Ionad Dhreuchdan agus  
Freagarrachd airson Cosnadh



[www.uhi.ac.uk/careers](http://www.uhi.ac.uk/careers)

- **LinkedIn** ([www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)) – a professional networking site. Users complete a profile (rather like an online CV) and can then ‘link’ with other users. This can make it a useful site for storing professional contacts. Once you are connected with one person you can then also see who they are connected with and use this to identify other potentially useful connections. The site also hosts some job adverts and some discussion groups so it is worth checking to see if there is a discussion group in an area that interests you.
- **Facebook** ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) – predominantly a social networking site. Because it is largely social in nature Facebook is not often recommended as a way of managing all your contacts, however some contacts (more ‘personal’ ones) may effectively be managed on the site. If you choose to add useful contacts to your Facebook friends it is worth being extra vigilant about the content you are posting on the site (or that your friends are posting on your page) – drunken photographs are likely to put most potential employers off. One way of managing this is to organise your friends into groups and limit the release of information to different groups. Another use of Facebook is to ‘follow’ organisations that are of interest to you – increasingly employers are posting news and job adverts on their social media pages.
- **Twitter** (<https://twitter.com>) – twitter is a microblogging site, allowing you to post very short updates and links (within 140 characters). All ‘tweets’ are publicly viewable, although twitter users may ‘follow’ each other to ensure they receive all tweets by people they are following. Twitter is a particularly useful way to share news and information among people with similar interests.
- **Youtube** ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)) – videos can be uploaded to youtube and users can follow the channels of other people. This can make it an effective social media platform for the dissemination of audio visual material and is often used by performers to increase their profile. Many companies also have a youtube presence, and it is worth searching for videos from relevant employers.
- **Flickr** (<http://www.flickr.com/>) – flickr is an image and video sharing website. Users can upload a profile and make contacts with other users. This site is particularly useful for photographers and other people who work in visual media.
- **Pinterest** (<http://pinterest.com/>) – pinterest allows users to create ‘pinboards’ of images and links around different themes. Users can follow each other and see who has ‘pinned’ the same images. This site is particularly useful if you want to collect, store and communicate using visual images.
- **Blogging** – there are a number of free-to-use blogging sites. Users can write short blogs about any relevant topics. Typically a blog can be ‘followed’ by other people and comments can be made on the content. If you are blogging, identifying other blogs and following these can be a useful way of creating a network. Sharing your blogs on Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms can increase their reach.



## Guidelines for effective use of social media

When using social media for networking there are some basic rules, such as be polite, positive and professional. Particular things to think about when using social media are:

- **Create a professional, consistent presence:** you want to make sure your online presence is professional and relatively consistent. So, for example, you should carefully consider what kind of 'headline' you want to give yourself on LinkedIn, and make sure that how you describe yourself here matches the kind of presence you have elsewhere online.
- **Understand privacy settings:** make sure that you select appropriate privacy settings to split or manage your social and your professional contacts, this is particularly important on sites like Facebook.
- **Make sure you maintain your presence:** social media is a great way to keep in regular contact with your network, *but only if you use it*. Set yourself regular times to review or refresh your LinkedIn profile, set goals for how often you will blog etc.
- **Check your presence:** some employers will check your online presence before they appoint you, so regularly searching for yourself on an internet search engine and seeing what comes up can be useful. Employers may also check details included in your application against, for instance, your LinkedIn profile to check for consistency.

### Activity 3: Check your internet presence

1. Using an internet search engine type in your full name and your location.
2. Look at the top ten results that come out. What do they say about you? If you aren't 'found' by the internet search engine what does this say about you?
3. Record your thoughts on the worksheet.

### Activity 4: Consider your use of social media.

1. Look back at your mind map of people, organisations and activities that you have identified as part of extending your network.
2. Consider how you are currently using social media to connect with these people, organisations and activities.
3. Record your thoughts on the worksheet.

### Activity 5: Identify ways to improve your social media presence.

1. Reflecting on the outcome of the last two activities, can you think of 2-3 actions you could undertake to improve your social media presence?
2. Record your thoughts on the worksheet.



University of the  
Highlands and Islands  
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd  
agus nan Eilean

Careers and  
Employability Centre  
Ionad Dhreuchdan agus  
Freagarrachd airson Cosnadh



[www.uhi.ac.uk/careers](http://www.uhi.ac.uk/careers)

## Further Help and Resources

Information on this and other careers and employability topics can be found on the Careers and Employability Centre website: [www.uhi.ac.uk/careers](http://www.uhi.ac.uk/careers). You can also follow the centre on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/UHlcareers](https://www.facebook.com/UHlcareers), and on Twitter: [twitter.com/UHICareers](https://twitter.com/UHICareers).

You may find our 'Researching Careers' and 'Job Searching' Advice sheets particularly helpful. These sheets are available on the 'Resources' section of our website.

Free confidential advice is available to all students on an HNC course or above via telephone, videoconference or email. Contact our advisers by clicking on 'speak to an adviser' on our website. This service is also available to graduates within two years of graduating from an HNC course or higher.



University of the  
Highlands and Islands  
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd  
agus nan Eilean

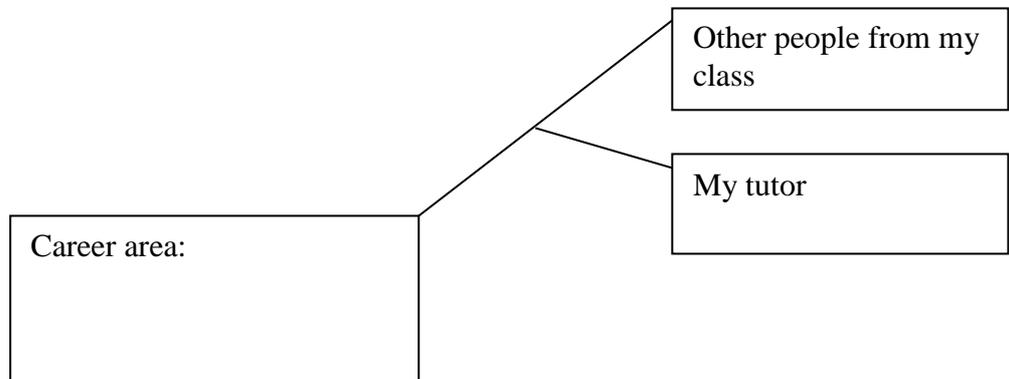
Careers and  
Employability Centre  
Ionad Dhreuchdan agus  
Freagarrachd airson Cosnadh



[www.uhi.ac.uk/careers](http://www.uhi.ac.uk/careers)

## Worksheet: Networking

Activity 1: Networking mindmap: put the career area you are interested in in the box in the centre of the page. Write your ideas for your network in 'branches' off the central box – two have already been completed for you.





University of the  
Highlands and Islands  
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd  
agus nan Eilean

Careers and  
Employability Centre  
Ionad Dhreuchdan agus  
Freagarrachd airson Cosnadh



[www.uhi.ac.uk/careers](http://www.uhi.ac.uk/careers)

Activity 2: Identify up to three things you could do that could extend your networking potential:

Activity 3: Identify what your current internet presence is and what this says about you:

Activity 4: Identify how effectively you currently use social media to engage with your network:

Activity 5: Actions I could undertake to improve my social media presence:

1)

2)

3)