



EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund



**Career Decisions and Job Hunting in the Real World:
A Self-Help Guide for Ethnic Minority Students and
Graduates**

**Part 5b: Targeting and applying for specific jobs:
Speculative application**

June Ogden

Department of Psychology & Life Sciences

University of Bolton

Foreword

This part of the guide, Part 5b, describes the process of targeted, speculative job application. It was written for the editors by June Ogden, a Project Manager and Training Consultant who works with unemployed minority ethnic young people in Bolton and other towns in the North West of England. In the first section June explains the merits of the speculative approach and considers why and for which type of company job hunters should consider using it.

Following this, in the second, main section of Part 5b, June gives detailed advice on how to go about the process of targeted speculative job application. The first step is to select your target employers and to design a speculative letter and CV (appendix 1 gives further guidance on writing a speculative letter). The second step is to send your letter and CV to the appropriate contact in the targeted organisation and follow this up with a telephone enquiry (appendix 2 gives further advice on this follow-up telephone call). The final step in speculative application is to keep records of your action and progress using a job search diary. The job search diary suggested in appendix 3 is based on one developed from our European Social Fund research project.

We hope that students and graduates of all ethnic backgrounds will find June's detailed advice useful in their search for graduate employment. We welcome feedback on any experiences of using the speculative approach and suggestions for improving this part of the guide.

Notes

1. Contacts: June Ogden (c/o Rob Ranyard)

Editors: Rob Ranyard, Claire Hewson, John Charlton
e-mail addresses:

R.Ranyard@bolton.ac.uk; C.Hewson@bolton.ac.uk; J.Charlton@bolton.ac.uk

2. The project web pages can be found at:
www.bolton.ac.uk/uni/research/psych/behavior.html

1.1. The Recruitment Reality for Employers

Most employers will happily tell you that they groan at the thought of the recruitment process. These days with the introduction of new legislation providing even greater protection of an individual's rights, and the seemingly increasing power of bodies supporting those with disabilities and from ethnic backgrounds, companies have naturally become more cautious and careful about whom they employ.

Many employers don't fully understand the current legislation and they worry about inadvertently treating someone unfairly and ending up in tribunal situations, which can be very costly and time consuming. Add to that the extra dimension of an ethnic minority candidate who, by the fact of his or her own culture, language and upbringing is different from other candidates, the employer sometimes decides to play safe and select accordingly.

The actual process of designing an advert, placing it in the newspaper or on the web, absorbing the cost, sifting the applications (which for web applications could be in the hundreds or even thousands), setting up assessment days, interviewing the candidates and making selections can be a long and tortuous path. As a candidate whatever you can do to make it easier for the employer and make you stand out from the crowd will increase your chances ten fold. It is a proven fact that 70% of general vacancies that are filled are hidden ones, i.e. they have not been advertised.

Employer Case Study

A former HR Manager who worked with Kodak in the early 90s related a scenario which occurred on a weekly basis. He said: "We regularly received 500 speculative application letters per week. We didn't have time to read each letter/CV thoroughly and had a system for sifting them and narrowing them down to a reasonable number, which would be then kept on file for a number of months. The first sift took out all the letters/CVs which at a glance were poorly presented. The second and subsequent sifts received very little in-depth reading and analysis and were sorted into stacks of varying levels of quality. Eventually we arrived at a number which were considered worth holding on file. If only jobseekers looked at recruitment from the employer's point of view I am sure they wouldn't make the mistakes they do and would take more care to give a good impression. Someone who had applied speculatively and then followed up using a structured, quality approach would stand out from the crowd and we would certainly give their application serious consideration".

1.2. Why use a targeted approach?

This method was used in the early Job Clubs in the 1980s when there were 4 million unemployed. The Job Clubs were a phenomenal success mainly for their organised approach, professional CVs and letters, and motivational and practical support. The Speculative Targeted Approach was the method most used by the Job Clubs at this time.

Young, old, skilled, unskilled, graduate or labourer this method worked for everyone and the results of these methods ensured that the government invested heavily in Job Clubs in every town in the country throughout the 80s, 90s and right up until 2005 when they made way for an updated version called the Programme Centre.

In the 80s and early 90s there were so few vacancies advertised because companies throughout the country were going out of business or downsizing as a result of changing technologies, emerging markets and spiralling business and manufacturing costs.

At that time if you had faithfully followed the tried and trusted methods of searching the newspapers, then you could expect to be unemployed for a very long time as many jobs were taken before they ever reached advert stage. The only way you could get into a company if you didn't know someone, was to use the Speculative Approach. The Speculative Approach was the most successful method after Word of Mouth and if it was successful when there were 4 million unemployed then there are definite advantages to using this method when there are only around 1 million unemployed. This method relies on a structured and organised approach and commitment from the jobseeker and is successful because it demonstrates these qualities to the employer, and lets him or her know that you have put in the effort to make it happen. The employer thinks that if you demonstrate this attitude and level of commitment to your job search then automatically you will apply the same qualities to your job.

As a graduate competing against lots of newly qualified students and chasing an insufficient number of vacancies within your target sector it makes sense to use creative methods which may give you an added advantage. You can do this whilst still searching for vacancies in the usual way, by newspapers, specialist magazines and the internet.

If you think that this method is effective only for those vacancies not aimed at graduates or specialist professions, then consider the fact that you may have a lot more to offer than less skilled jobseekers and that as you are leaving it up to the employer to make the choice, instead of searching for the perfect position, you are multiplying your chances of success.

1.3. What makes this method so effective?

1. It tells the employer that you have the drive, initiative and work ethic to put in the effort it takes to use this method, therefore you are a good prospect for employment.
2. It tells the employer that you applied for a job because you really want to work for his or her company, rather than just because you have seen a vacancy advertised in the newspaper.
3. It can cut down the competition because you are not directly responding to an advertisement which may attract hundreds more applications.
4. It can make things easier for an employer, thus saving advertising costs, the time taken to sift hundreds of applications and the interviewing/selection of the right candidate.
5. You can build up a picture of the culture within the company, make valuable connections and determine their recruitment processes i.e. when/how they recruit. Knowledge is power, enabling you to refine your approach.
6. You are increasing the number of applications you make and are not making assumptions of what you can do, leaving it up to the employer. As any good door-to-door salesman will tell you, "If you knock on enough doors, eventually someone will open it and buy your product or service".

7. It is using tried and tested marketing methods employed by some of the most successful companies in the UK. If they think that speculative marketing approaches work for their products and services, then why not for you.

1.4. Which type of companies would be suitable for this method?

It is debatable which sectors of industry would be more susceptible to this approach but as a general rule of thumb:

- **Large corporate environments** may have specific recruitment policies which defines how they employ staff. This can often mean they must advertise all vacancies and select accordingly, so you may have to follow the system like all other job seekers. However the speculative approach may give you notice of when they are likely to recruit, where and how.
- **Large public sector organisations, such as local councils, schools, police, emergency and health authorities** are bound by specific legislation which bestows a public duty on them to demonstrate their commitment to equality and diversity. This being the case they are unlikely to stray from their policies of recruitment and selection, as they may incur strict penalties for doing so. This can often be to the advantage of ethnic minority candidates (as explained elsewhere in the guide) but rules out the speculative approach, except in order to gain information as with large corporate environments.
- **All other types of companies** would be good prospects for this type of targeted approach, as their recruitment methods may not be so rigid, they may be more open and impressed by the entrepreneurial style and they may be more concerned in cutting the time and costs of recruitment.

2.1. How do you plan targeted speculative application?

After using the tools in other parts of the guide to determine what you want and what you have to offer, you need to follow a structured step by step plan. This can be compared to a company defining a Business Plan and following a structured Marketing Strategy to raise awareness or gain new business. By following a business focussed approach in this way for all of your job hunting you are giving yourself the best chance of success.

Step 1: Select your target companies

Initially choose around 10 so that you can effectively keep up an ongoing liaison with them. If you are not prepared for that level of commitment to this approach then start with 5 or less and expand the list as you exhaust the possibilities. This is a system that is more effective if you are going to keep it up, as initial speculative targeted approaches with no follow up will be more “miss than hit” and may not be worth your time and effort.

- **Research the companies** to find out who can provide you with the kind of career progression or opportunities that you want, based upon what you discovered from your self analysis. In your research be open minded. Small companies can often give you wider in-depth experience or specialist knowledge which may be invaluable later in your career. On the other hand, corporate companies may offer you opportunities and training that would otherwise be very difficult or very expensive to attain.

- **Match the companies to your wants and needs.** If necessary score them to find out who you will approach first and then move down your list. Don't forget to decide what your priorities are in your grand career plan. Is it more important that you are in the right environment because of the overall experience you can gain in that sector, especially as you intend to move on, or is it for other reasons such as job security, specialised training they offer or your desire to be a part of this company or involved in the precise work they do. It is better to have a good idea of what you need as it helps plan your strategy but don't be too rigid in your ideas, as there is more than one method of getting to where you want to be.
- **Follow the tried and trusted method of job matching.** This matching process is used by recruitment companies all over the world, the difference being that they include their own wants and needs into the plan and will try to persuade you that their wants and needs are yours if that is more profitable for them. Vocational training providers who seek work placements for trainees also use exactly the same matching method to get you to where you want to be.

Step 2: Design a Speculative Letter and Curriculum Vitae

Although the Cover Letter and CV are covered in depth in other parts of the guide, it is worth noting that when following a targeted speculative approach they need to be designed in such a way as to open up a range of possibilities. Therefore both the letter and the CV will be less specific and customised as they may be when applying for an advertised vacancy.

- **The Curriculum Vitae.** It is wise for all jobseekers to have a general CV which displays your broad range of skills and experience and then several customised versions which can be adjusted slightly to meet the requirements of a specific vacancy. For the purpose of a speculative approach you need to produce a general CV to include all of your background, attributes, skills and experience. You will be allowing the employer to browse through your information and make his or her own decisions about where you will fit into the organisation and whether they have anything to suit you. Don't fall into the trap of assuming exactly what the employer wants to see, because unless you have inside information you cannot know the possibilities that may exist. Follow the general rules of completing a CV (as explained elsewhere in the guide) with maybe a little tailoring, if necessary, to ensure that you meet the overall requirements for the industry sector and make use of any extra useful snippets of information which you picked up from your research into the company.
- **The Speculative Letter.** The letter should give a clear indication at the beginning of why you are writing, a general summary of your skills, experience and attributes and a polite ending which leaves it open for future opportunities or further contact with the employer. Appendix 1 contains guidelines for writing a speculative letter, which should consist of three or four paragraphs detailing the following:

Paragraph 1 – Why? Employers are frustrated by long, rambling letters which do not explain at the onset the purpose of the letter. Do not be too specific about the job you want. Better to say a “technical I.T.” position, than a “Programming position specialising in web based applications”. The trick here is not to be too

general or too specific as either one can rule you out. The I.T. example was chosen because programming positions are often more scarce than networking positions and therefore you may need to choose a less direct route to your ideal job, i.e. get into the company and then plan a route into a position you want. With this example you may be offered an opportunity which is not your ultimate aim but will allow you to move into that role in the future.

Paragraphs 2/3– What? Explain what you have to offer in terms of skills, experience and personal qualities. Be aware that communication skills gained through customer service are valuable in any job, so don't dismiss the taxi driving or retail work you did whilst studying. Think about transferable skills and use your words in such a way as to remind the employer that you have the basic ingredients for what he or she needs and therefore can be trained to his or her specific requirements. Short, sharp examples of where you displayed this skill will help to reinforce your point, rather than saying I am, I can and I will. You could separate the information by detailing your recent training, experience and skills in one paragraph and your personal qualities, suitability in the other. Either way, do not put all of the information into one long tortuous paragraph, as although the information may be good the reader will not take it all in and may not want to read it all. Use the rules of marketing with shorter, sharper sentences, key action words which focus attention and demonstrate skills e.g., analysing, motivating, monitoring, negotiating etc. Layout is paramount in letters. Keeping the reader interested and displaying the information in a format which allows him or her to digest the information easily or speed read will be more effective, especially when the employer has no interest because he or she currently may have no vacancies.

Paragraph 4 – When? End the letter with a polite message and a request to be kept on file or contacted at a future date if any vacancies occur. You could take your marketing to the next level by stating a date when you will contact them to further explore any opportunities. **Do not do this if you don't intend to make that contact**, as you will destroy your chances if you don't do what you say you will. Ask any marketing executive and they will tell you that they ensure that they end all communication, written and verbal with a definite future action point e.g. "I will call you during the last week of September to find out what you think of the information I am sending".

2.2. How do you carry out targeted, speculative application?

1. **Find out the names of the people responsible for recruitment** to the type of job you are applying for. Marketing companies do this by making initial calls and confirming details such as the name of the person responsible, the job title, addresses etc. If you are asked for the reason or whether you want to be put through to the person, just say "I am sending in a letter of application". The person at the other end of the phone will often be told to screen calls and turn away unsolicited job seekers, but they rarely refuse to give you this type of information. In any case do not address your letter to an unnamed person such as a HR Manager or to the Recruitment Dept (the company may not have such a role or department). A receptionist will probably open your letter and choose to either destroy it immediately or not even pass it on to your targeted destination.

- 2. Once you have obtained your designated contact details send a copy of your letter and CV** and wait a specified time for them to receive and digest the contents before making further contact. The specified time could be around 7 days. Do not leave it too short or too long between the initial stages since, if they have only just received the CV, they may not have had time to take in the contents and to consider the possibilities or they may have forgotten receiving the CV in the first place. Call the company to find out if they have received your letter and CV. Remember to ask for the person you named in the letter and if you are asked why you are calling just say it is regarding a letter sent recently and you wanted to know whether they received it. The important aspect of telephone calls is to assume a confident manner and prepare what you are going to say. If you stumble over your words, who you want to speak to, or what you want to speak to them about, then you can be sure that a trained receptionist will question you further before putting you through. A tip is to give your full name and ask for them by their full name e.g. John Smith to speak to Joan Green. This is more likely to be seen as a professional business call rather than Mr Smith to speak to Mrs Green. Guidelines for speculative telephone calls can be found in appendix 2.
- 3. What do you say when you get through to the designated person?** That depends on their response to your initial question. If they do not recall the receipt of the CV, ask if you can send another. If they do recall the receipt of the CV confirm whether there are any vacancies at present. Remember that the key point in speculative follow up phone calls is not to gain just a Yes or No but to find out information which may be useful and lead to a job now or in the future. If you approach it in this way then you are much more likely to find out lots of good information and will make good use of the call. Engaging a person in a discussion this way will allow you to make an impression, build rapport and have a meaningful conversation which could be very advantageous to you. There are lots of questions you can ask which may be useful at a later stage and which will help you to understand how this organisation recruits and what you need to have or do to gain that job. You may not get the chance to ask all of the questions so stick to the important ones initially. Weave your questions into the conversation so that they don't seem like an interrogation and intersperse them with empathetic responses to what your contact is revealing through his/her answers to your questions. The conversation will then seem more natural and you will build better rapport, which will ultimately enhance your conversation and the quantity/quality of the information you receive.
- 4. How do you end the conversation?** Thank them for the time they have given to you, especially if they have taken even more time out of their job to give you helpful advice and information. At this stage you must confirm further contact and how you will do it. This agreement will depend on the contents of the discussion and may take the form of "I will write to you again at the end of September" or "Can I call you on a regular basis to keep in touch and determine whether you have any new opportunities" or even "I will send you another letter and CV". Whatever you do if the company denies receiving a CV from you or doesn't seem to remember, do not show any anger or frustration. Be polite at all times!! Acknowledge that they may be busy and that your CV is not their top priority. Agree to send another CV, confirm when you will do it and then do it.

5. **Building the path to a job.** After this second contact the next step is to keep up the promises you made and adjust the timing/frequency accordingly over the next days, weeks and months. For example, you may develop a regular telephone contact once per month, but according to information received on one occasion you may confirm at the end of the conversation to call back in 1 week rather than 1 month. You may have been told that a company holds CVs for 1 or 3 months and they may advise against regular telephone contact. One way or another, you must ensure that you stay on their register by keeping yourself on file. If you do this, then ensure that your cover letter reminds them that you have been on their file and you want to remain on it.

Hot Tip

The number of times the employer sees and hears your name will reinforce your enthusiasm, commitment and value, as long as you make good quality approaches and don't become a nuisance. Yours will be the first name they remember when opportunities arise and hopefully the first person they contact. So ensure that the company always has your up to date address and phone numbers, especially your mobile number. If they ring your house and there is no-one in during the day or you come from an ethnic minority background and your family does not speak sufficient English or cannot take good messages then you may lose an opportunity. It is surprising how many companies telephone candidates for interview at short notice and then, either because they leave a message which doesn't get passed on properly, or because they cannot make immediate contact, move onto the next person on the list.

Applicant Case Study 1

A recent example involved someone who was anxiously awaiting a possible interview for her dream job but subsequently failed to keep her mobile topped up with credit. As she had no credit she didn't keep her mobile charged and therefore could neither make nor receive calls. She therefore missed the vital call from the company who left a message giving an interview date for the following day, which was Friday. Over the weekend she topped up her mobile with credit and finally received the message but the interviews had by then already taken place. By the time she contacted them mid-morning the following Monday the selection had been made from those who had attended the interviews on Friday. You might think that this is unusual and unfair but in lots of companies there are all sorts of operational issues, changing priorities and unforeseen circumstances which can disrupt schedules. Recruitment may follow a procedure but rarely is totally orderly, predictable and smooth, because it is people focused and they are at best unpredictable.

2.3. Keep Records of your Action and Progress

Unless you keep records of your activity you are unlikely to make a success of this method. Just imagine the process of writing 10 letters to your target companies and then based on their replies doing follow ups which may include subsequent regular phone calls and planned action from specific information they give you, such as their next recruitment drive etc. How will you keep track of all this? How will you ensure that you are as good as your word with an influential contact you have made with this organisation? Good relationships based on trust, reliability and respect are made throughout the business world. There are numerous training courses aimed at relationship building and they all give the same message, "Build rapport, be

consistent, reliable and honest, do what you say you are going to do and always leave a lasting and favourable impression”. This is precisely what you are aiming to achieve with this method: build good relationships to help you get that job, because systems don’t choose candidates, people do.

People are only human and they may choose people who they like and on the basis of qualities they respect, provided of course that they have most of the technical requirements needed to do the job. If you are a recent graduate who lacks essential experience you need to convince a prospective employer that you have the personal qualities and skills that can translate your training into solid experience over a reasonable period of time. Even more importantly you need to prove that you are worth the time and effort needed, otherwise why employ a recent graduate when they can probably recruit an experienced one. A good way to record your activity is by use of a Job Search Diary.

- **The Job Search Diary** This is a method used in the early Job Clubs of the 1980’s, named then as the *Job Leads Log*, and is as effective today as it was then. We should refine the early model to take in the advance of technology and the more sophisticated methods of job search that have developed since then. We should include the following information:
 - Name and address of the organisation, including Post Code
 - Contact names – find out the people responsible for the recruitment.
 - Contact tel/fax numbers including any direct lines to specific staff and email addresses.
 - The type of organisation and a brief summary of what they do, where and how.
 - Method and date of approach – letter/telephone/fax/email.
 - What did you do and what was the result?
 - What further action you need to take and when?

Recruitment companies use exactly the same method to keep in touch with companies and their temp/permanent staff. They use a database to do this and never usually make a call before bringing up the record so that they always have the latest information and don’t lose business due to inappropriate communication.

[See an example Job Search Diary in appendix 3]

2.4. What do I do next?

This can depend on the results of your activities. If you followed the steps in section 2.3 and have exhausted the possibilities then you can move on to the next 5 or 10 targeted companies. Alternatively you can continue to keep your leads “warm” by making regular but less frequent contacts. Marketing companies often keep their contacts warm for future possible development or action.

However, do not ever become overly familiar or a nuisance to your company contact, because you can undo all the good work you have put in through your relationship building. Acknowledge and respect what they tell you about how busy they are; record the best times to contact them, and use wisely any inside information which they have given to you.

Whatever happens, you will learn much from this method about the art of effective job search and if you are not successful with your first 10 targeted companies, then you will approach the second 10 with lots of additional useful tips which you have discovered on the way.

APPENDIX 1. GUIDELINES FOR WRITING SPECULATIVE LETTERS

You may find these guidelines helpful when you are drafting a covering letter to a potential employer you have identified. If possible ask someone to give you feedback on your draft and to check the letter before it is sent.

Name (address your letter to a particular person)
Company address

Your address

Telephone Number

Date

Dear.....

(Opening paragraph - gain the reader's attention and explain the purpose of your letter. If you were given their name by someone known to the employer then say so in the opening sentence)

.....
.....
.....

(Main body of the letter - present the information that you want to draw to the employer's attention at a glance. Highlight your best selling points from your CV and include any new information which is particularly relevant to this potential employer. If possible give evidence of your knowledge of the company and how you can help to meet their needs.

(this could be 1 or 2 paragraphs)

.....
.....
.....
.....

(Final paragraph - end on a positive note - express your willingness to meet: state your intention to contact them to follow up your letter: thank them for their consideration.)

.....
.....

Your sincerely

Your signature
Print your name underneath

APPENDIX 2. CHECKLIST FOR SPECULATIVE TELEPHONE CALLS

Preparation

Think about the job?

What sort of opportunities could they have? What might be involved? What skills and qualifications will be required?

Think about the employer?

How big is the company? What do they do? Why might there be an opening? Who should you contact?

Think about yourself?

Look at your CV. What should you emphasise? What will the employer be interested in? What will you say? Think about this first and make some notes

Finally

Only pick up the phone when you have your CV in front of you, pen, paper, notes you have prepared. ***Remember the employer may surprise you by undertaking an impromptu interview over the telephone. Many employers now like to do this as a first screening stage of their recruitment to save time further in the process.***

Possible Questions you may ask!

I wrote to you a week ago asking if you had any career opportunities for graduates. Did you get my CV and letter?

Would you like me to send you another copy of my CV?

Can I send you my CV in case any unexpected vacancies arise?

I realise that you not have any vacancies at present but could you keep my CV and letter on file anyway for future use?

How do you normally do your recruitment?

When do you think you will be recruiting again?

What advice could you give me about gaining a position with your company?

Do you have a graduate level recruitment programme?

How would be the best way for me to progress towards a specialist /technical /management with your company?

Would I have to gain a junior level position and then progress from there?

Could you suggest any other companies who may be recruiting graduates at the moment?

Could I call you in a weeks/months time to find out if there is any change in the situation?

I will send my CV and cover letter for your attention today, **or** I will call you again at the beginning of September

Thank you for your time

Appendix 3. Job Search Diary

Date of Employer Contact: _____ **Vacancy Source** _____ **Type(s) of Contact:**

(see key)

(see key)

Company/Employer Name: _____ Contact Name: _____

Location: _____ Contact No: _____

Post Code: _____ Position applied for: _____

Graduate Level Job: Y / N (please circle) Salary (if known): _____

Outcome: _____

Would you say that the employer employs people of your a) ethnicity? Yes / No / Don't Know (please circle)
 b) gender? Yes / No / Don't Know (please circle)
 c) religion? Yes / No / Don't Know (please circle)

What would you say was the main reason for your success or lack of success with this employer? Please write in space below:

Follow up Activity

Date: _____ Action: _____ Future Action: _____

KEY	Vacancy Source
	Newspaper/journal/trade magazine = N
	Internet = I
	Jobcentre = J
	Recruitment Agency = R
	Family/friends = F
	Graduate Recruitment Fair = G
	Contacts in the local community = C

Type of Employer Contact	
Application Form – Paper=AP	Electronic=AE
Direct approach to employer by phone	= P
Direct approach to employer by letter	= L
Direct approach via Internet	= I
Other (please specify)	= O