



Careers Advice Handbook

Information, Advice & Guidance

Here & Now:-

During your time with GEM Partnership, your point of contact is available to offer you Information, Advice and Guidance about your learning options and employability progression whilst you are working on assignment for us or enrolled onto one of our courses.

Information and resources are available to help you make the right decision in your journey. Contact us to help find the appropriate help and guidance requirements.

The Future:-

National Careers Service:

<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/>

Tel: 0800 100 900

National Apprenticeship Service:

www.apprenticeships.gov.uk

Tel: 0800 015 0400

www.instituteforapprenticeships.org

GEM Partnership

<https://www.gempartnership.com/vacancies/>

<https://www.gempartnership.com/category/candidate-advice/>

Tel: 0191 587 2999

AGE UK

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/services/information-advice/>

Job Search Sites:

Total Jobs: www.totaljobs.com

Reed: www.reed.co.uk

CV Library: www.cv-library.co.uk

Indeed: www.indeed.co.uk

Local Colleges

East Durham College – www.edc.ac.uk

New College Durham – www.newcollegedurham.ac.uk

Bishop Auckland College – <https://bacoll.ac.uk>

Hartlepool College of Further Education –

www.hartlepoolfe.ac.uk

Stockton Riverside College – www.stockton.ac.uk

Middlesbrough College – www.mbro.ac.uk

Sunderland College – <https://sunderlandcollege.ac.uk>

Newcastle College – www.ncl-coll.ac.uk

Gateshead College – <https://gateshead.ac.uk>

Darlington College – <https://darlington.ac.uk>

E-Learning Open university -

<http://www.open.ac.uk/>

E-Learning reading NSH Modules -

<https://web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp/>

Throughout your assignment of work / learning you will receive ongoing Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) from GEM Partnership. This may involve:

- Giving you further advice about your current learning and progression.
- Giving you personal support and guidance e.g. with money and health problems.
- Help you find out about other training and employment opportunities.
- Ensuring that the programme is developing employability skills to support progression within Job role and career aspirations.

GEM Partnership are accredited against the Matrix quality standard to deliver Information, Advice & Guidance.

The Great Gatsby Benchmarks

The Benchmarks for Colleges listed here outline the important elements of a robust career guidance programme. They have been developed from the Gatsby Benchmarks for good career guidance, following consultation with a range of colleges across England to align them with the needs of the sector.

GREAT GATSBY: THE BENCHMARKS



- 1 A STABLE CAREERS PROGRAMME**
Every school should have an embedded programme of career education and guidance that is known and understood by pupils, parents, teachers and employers.
- 2 LEARNING FROM CAREER AND LABOUR-MARKET INFORMATION**
Every pupil and their parents, should have access to good-quality information about future study options and labour market opportunities.
- 3 ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF EACH PUPIL**
Opportunities for advice and support need to be tailored to the needs of each pupil. A school's careers programme should embed equality and diversity considerations throughout.
- 4 LINKING CURRICULUM LEARNING TO CAREERS**
All teachers should link curriculum learning with careers. For example, STEM subject teachers should highlight the relevance of STEM subjects for a wide range of future career paths.
- 5 ENCOUNTERS WITH EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES**
Every pupil should have multiple opportunities to learn from employers about work, employment and the skills that are valued in the workplace.
- 6 EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACES**
Every pupil should have first-hand experiences of the workplace through work visits, work shadowing and/or work experience.
- 7 ENCOUNTERS WITH FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION**
All pupils should understand the full range of learning opportunities that are available to them. This includes both academic and vocational routes and learning in schools, colleges, universities and in the workplace.
- 8 PERSONAL GUIDANCE**
Every pupil should have opportunities for guidance interviews with a careers adviser, who could be internal (a member of school staff) or external, provided they are trained to an appropriate level.

GEM Partnership

Mission Statement

We are committed to maintaining a positive approach to learning within our local communities.

Ensuring we take the time to understand your skills, career aspirations and learning goals, to ensure you get maximum benefit from your training experience.



Writing a CV

There is no single way to construct a CV; it is your document and can be structured and presented as you wish, however, to ensure it resonates with prospective employers GEM Partnership has developed a range of guidelines which if followed will ensure your CV stands out from the crowd.

What information should a CV include?

- *Personal Details:* Most CVs start with these but take care to avoid superfluous details, such as religious affiliation, children's names and so on.
- *Education & Qualifications:* Take care to include the names of institutions and present by most recent first i.e., university before school results.
- *Work Experience:* The most widely accepted style of employment record is the chronological CV. Career history is presented in reverse date order starting with most recent. Achievements and responsibilities are listed against each role. More emphasis/information should be put on more recent jobs.
- *Skills:* Include computer skills and (genuine) foreign language skills and any other recent training/development that is relevant to the role applied for.
- *Hobbies & Interests:* Keep this section short.
- *Referees:* These can simply be 'Available on request'.

The order in which you present these and the emphasis which you give to each one will depend on what you are applying for and what you have to offer.

General Tips

- When compiling a CV, it is worth remembering that this will create the first impression of you to a potential employer, so it has to convince the person reading it that your application has merit and should be progressed further.
- Your CV should be formatted in a plain easy to read font using black or a similar dark colour. Decorative borders are not necessary, nor are photographs of yourself.
- There is a common misconception that your CV should not be longer than two pages; however, the length of your CV will reflect the amount of experience that you have. More emphasis should be placed on your most recent roles as these are likely to be more relevant to the post you are applying for. If your CV is too long, an employer may miss an important piece of information or struggle to determine your suitability because of the amount of information to read through. However, don't try to make the information fit onto less pages for the sake of it.
- A CV should be tailored to each job application, to highlight your experience relevant to that particular role.
- Your completed CV needs to be checked carefully for grammatical errors and spelling mistakes and to ensure that it makes sense. Ask an 'independent' party to review the whole document before you send this out.
- Gaps in career history should be explained and falsehoods and inaccuracies avoided at all costs.
- There is no reason to include your reasons for leaving each job on your CV, but be prepared to answer these questions in your interview.
- Bullet points should be used to prevent use of lengthy sentences and paragraphs.

Covering Letter

If you're applying for a role where a covering letter is required treat it as a vital part of your personal marketing literature, which merits attention and consideration. A cover letter introduces you and your CV and is your first, and possibly only chance, to make a good impression with your prospective employer. The objective is to entice the reader to take those few extra minutes to consider you against other applicants.

Appearance and layout

Ensure your covering letter is neatly and clearly presented with no grammatical or spelling errors. E-mails should be written in a common font with standard formatting.

The content of your covering letter should be brief and structured, avoid lengthy repetition of information covered within your CV. Unlike a CV, it is acceptable to write a covering letter in the first person. In particular, pay attention to the following points:

- Your letter should address the relevant contact, whose name often appears in the job advert. Avoid Sir or Madam if possible.
- If you are replying to an advert, say so. Mention job title, any reference number and where and when you saw it if possible.
- In some cases, an advert will indicate if a more substantial letter is required. Always follow a specific instruction and include any information if it is particularly requested, for example, current salary.
- Briefly outline your current situation and why you are seeking change. Include current or last job, qualifications and professional and academic training, tailoring your information to make it as relevant as possible to the organisation or job applied for.
- Tell the potential employer a little about their company to demonstrate you have properly read the advert and that you have done some research into the organisation. Also, state why you are interested in them as an employer.
- You need to emphasise why an employer may want to meet and employ you. Highlight your transferable skills, achievements and versatility; what you can contribute and what makes you different. Mention personality traits relevant to the role applied for, taking care not to appear too subjective.
- Ensure the letter flows freely however and don't try to match every point on the job description. The reader should be left with an overall impression that you are a potentially valuable addition to the workforce.
- Negative information of any sort should be avoided in your covering letter as well as CV.
- Close your letter with a polite expression of interest in further dialogue. Do mention that you would like the opportunity to discuss your suitability further at an interview and that you await a response in due course.

Preparing for an interview

A job interview can be daunting even for the most experienced candidates, but it is the most important part of securing a new job. There are plenty of ways to calm those interview nerves, so be prepared and get ready to make the right impression.

No matter how well qualified you may seem 'on paper' for a job, when recruiting, an employer will still be interested in your personality and presentation. If employers have more than one suitable applicant for a role, interview performance is often the deciding factor. This makes the face-to-face meeting a critical part of the recruitment process and you will need to impress from the start.

Following the interview preparation guidelines, we've provided below will help you overcome any interview nerves and provide you with some confidence for a productive meeting with your potential new employer.

Pre-Interview Preparation

Find out as much information as possible about your prospective employer in advance of your interview.

Most companies now have websites which are packed with information. Familiarise yourself with mission statements, past performance and future goals. Be aware that if your prospective employer does have a comprehensive website, you may seriously compromise your chances if it becomes apparent you have not taken time to research it.

If available, also access the press or news area of the website. This will give you articles from the media and insightful information about the company. It will also ensure you are aware of recent press releases involving the company.

If the company website does not have a press area, access information online through search engines or social media sites.

GEM Partnership Consultants are specialists in supporting candidates through the interview process and will happily provide supporting information and talk you through company expectations and interview style which will significantly boost your chances of making a good impression.

Familiarise yourself with the details of your interview.

Prior to the interview it is important to ensure you have all the details you need and that you familiarise yourself with this information. This includes the date, time and location of the interview, as well as the name and title of the interviewer. It's always helpful to write this information down and take it with you to the interview just in case you need it.

Prepare your interview outfit in advance.

Check the dress code in advance of your interview and ensure what you're planning to wear is appropriate for the style of interview you're attending and employer you're meeting with. A suit or smart office attire is the usual suggested outfit; however, casual clothing may be appropriate in some circumstances, but we would suggest to still keep it smart casual.

Familiarise yourself with the journey to the location, to ensure you arrive in plenty of time.

If driving, do a 'dummy run'. Anticipate delays, especially on unknown routes. Contact your interviewer swiftly if you are unavoidably delayed on the day.

Do not arrive over-laden with belongings!

Take any requested certificates, references etc., a spare CV and a notepad and pen. A mobile phone is always useful, but ensure it is turned off or at least on silent before arriving at your destination.

Be punctual for your meeting, but it is inadvisable to arrive more than half an hour early.

Leave yourself enough time to use the restroom and freshen up if necessary.

Remember that you start making an impression on your prospective employer the moment you arrive.

Be courteous to the receptionist and any other staff you may meet prior to your interview. Their opinion of you is often sought and may even have some influence on the final selection.

The Interview

First impressions.

Research tells us time and again that first impressions really do make a difference and that a prospective employer will form judgments in the first couple of minutes of the interview that will seriously influence their final decision.

Greet your interviewer standing, with a strong, firm handshake and a smile.

Good body language is vital. Sit up straight with both feet on the floor. Speak clearly and confidently. Try and maintain a comfortable level of eye contact throughout.

A typical interview will generally start with an introductory chat, moving on to questions specific to your application and experience.

General information about the company and role may follow, finishing with an opportunity for you to ask your own questions. (See *Common Interview Questions* for more in-depth support on this.)

Be familiar with your CV and prepared to answer questions from it.

Similarly, ensure you have read any job description thoroughly and think of ways in which your experience will benefit your potential employer.

LISTEN to what is being asked of you.

Think about your answers to more difficult questions and do not give irrelevant detail. Give positive examples from your experience to date. Be concise but avoid one-word answers. Prepare yourself in advance for likely questions. If you are unsure about what the interviewer is asking for do not be afraid to ask them to clarify the question. If in any doubt do not fabricate answers, be honest up front that you do not have an answer.

Be ready to ask questions that you have prepared beforehand.

This can demonstrate you have thought about the role and done some research on the organisation. Ensure they are open, thus encouraging the interviewer to provide you with additional information. (See *Your Questions of the Interviewer* for more in-depth support on this.)

Show your enthusiasm for the role, even if you have some reservations.

These can be discussed at a later stage.

Common Interview Questions

The key thing to remember when responding to interview questions is to keep your answers relevant and to the point. If you are faced with a difficult question, make sure you stay calm, don't get defensive, and take a moment to think about your response before you answer.

These are some common interview questions for you to consider and prepare relevant answers for beforehand. Remember, the suggested responses we've provided are only examples. Try to personalise your response as much as possible.

Q: Tell me about yourself.

A: Identify some of your main attributes and memorise them. Describe your qualifications, career history and range of skills, emphasising those skills relevant to the job on offer.

Q: What have your achievements been to date?

A: Select an achievement that is work-related and fairly recent. Identify the skills you used in the achievement and quantify the benefit it had to the company. For example, 'my greatest achievement has been to design and implement a new sales ledger system, bringing it in ahead of time and improving our debtors' position significantly, saving the company £5,000 a month in interest'.

Q: Are you happy with your career -to-date?

A: This question is really about your self-esteem, confidence and career aspirations. The answer must be 'yes', followed by a brief explanation as to what it is about your career so far that's made you happy. If you have hit a career plateau, or you feel you are moving too slowly, then you must qualify your answer.

Q: What is the most difficult situation you have had to face and how did you tackle it?

A: The purpose of this question is to find out what your definition of difficult is and whether you can show a logical approach to problem solving. In order to show yourself in a positive light, select a difficult work situation which was not caused by you and which can be quickly explained in a few sentences. Explain how you defined the problem, what the options were, why you selected the one you did and what the outcome was. Always end on a positive note.

Q: What do you like about your present job?

A: This is a straightforward question. All you have to do is make sure that your 'likes' correspond to the skills required for the job on offer. Be enthusiastic; describe your job as interesting and diverse but do not overdo it – after all, you are looking to leave.

Q: What do you dislike about your present job?

A: Be cautious with this answer. Do not be too specific as you may draw attention to weaknesses that will leave you open to further difficult questions. One approach is to choose a characteristic of your present company, such as its size or slow decision-making processes etc. Give your answer with the air of someone who takes problems and frustrations in your stride as part of the job.

Q: What are your strengths?

A: This is one question that you know you are going to get so there is no excuse for being unprepared. Concentrate on discussing your main strengths. List three or four proficiencies e.g., your ability to learn quickly, determination to succeed, positive attitude, your ability to relate to people and achieve a common goal. You may be asked to give examples of the above so be prepared.

Q: What is your greatest weakness?

A: Do not say you have none – it is both unrealistic and likely to frustrate the interviewer. You have two options – use a professed weakness such as a lack of experience (not ability) on your part in an area that is not vital for the job. The second option is to describe a personal or professional weakness that could also be considered to be a strength and the steps you have taken to combat it. An example would be: “I know my team think I’m too demanding at times – I tend to drive them pretty hard but I’m getting much better at using the carrot and not the stick.”

Q: Why do you want to leave your current employer?

A: State how you are looking for a new challenge, more responsibility, experience and a change of environment. Do not be negative in your reasons for leaving. It is rarely appropriate to cite salary as your primary motivator.

Q: Why have you applied for this particular job?

A: The employer is looking for evidence that the job suits you, fits in with your general aptitudes, coincides with your long-term goals and involves doing things you enjoy. Make sure you have a good understanding of the role and the organisation and describe the attributes of the organisation that interest you most.

Other common interview questions to consider:

1. What do you enjoy about this industry?
2. Give me an example of when you have felt anger at work. How did you cope and did you still perform to a good level?
3. What kind of people do you find it difficult to work with?
4. Give me an example of when you have had to face a conflict of interest at work.
5. Tell me about the last time you disagreed with your boss.
6. Do you prefer to work alone or in a group? Why?
7. This organisation is very different to your current employer – how do you think you are going to fit in?
8. What are you looking for in a company?
9. How do you measure your own performance?
10. What kind of pressures have you encountered at work?
11. What changes in the workplace have caused you difficulty and why?
12. How do you feel about working long hours and/or weekends?
13. Give me an example of when you have been out of your depth.
14. What can you bring to this organisation?

The Competency Interview Challenge

Competency-based interviews are interviews where each question is designed to test one or more specific skills. More often than not, prospective employers are using competency-based interview questions to distinguish relevant candidates from those who do not have the right skills or experience.

When asked a competency-based question, the interviewer wants you to talk about how you have *actually* overcome real challenges in previous jobs. The logic behind this is that past work behaviour will provide a strong indication of future job performance.

To be successful in a competency-based interview the golden rule is to give real examples that actually happened to you. Make sure you do not talk in broad terms about how you generally tackle those sorts of situations or provide theoretical examples. Instead make sure you talk about a specific example.

Every job will have a set of key competencies, which the interviewer will explore during the interview process. A competency-based question will often start with phrases such as:

1. Tell me about a time when...
2. Give an example of a situation where...
3. Describe a scenario...

Typical competencies covered during an interview include:

- Communication Skills
- Overcoming Objections
- Influencing Others
- Delivering Results
- Use of Initiative
- Teamwork
- Planning & Organising
- Developing Others

Your Questions of the Interviewer

It is advisable to prepare at least two or three questions that you would ideally like answered during the course of the interview or at the end. Prospective employers place great emphasis on the questions that you ask during the interview process, as they provide an insight into what is important to you as an individual and can often be the difference between you or another candidate getting the job.

Some questions as a starting point would include:

- What are the day-to-day duties involved in this job?
- How will my performance be measured?
- What do you see as the immediate challenges for me if I were to be given the job?
- What are your expectations in the first year?
- Are you looking for anything in particular from the person who will take this role?
- How do you see this role developing?
- What challenges is the organisation currently facing?
- Could you describe the company's culture and type of employee who fits well with it?
- What is the anticipated development route from this role in the future?

Career progression

Career progression can be mapped out on a development plan, which helps you plan and deliberate about your development in your current and future role. It will help you work towards your personal goals and aspirations by helping you identify these, set out your learning objectives, and help track your progress throughout your learning and development journey. In this document you can detail your learning experiences by writing brief reflections on what you have done, helping you monitor your continual growth and development.

Social Media

Social media has become a valuable job search tool with Hiring Managers saying they don't mind being contacted by potential candidates on LinkedIn.

Studies have shown that 92% of companies are using social media for hiring and that 3 out of 4 hiring managers will search for a candidate's social profile. Whether you're a recent graduate or a professional looking for a new opportunity, social media is a useful job search tool.

Google Yourself

The majority of employers will look at your social media profile prior to inviting you for an interview. The first step is to google yourself to see what pops up. If you find any inappropriate posts or photo's, remove them or tweak your privacy settings. You will still want the hiring manager to find you, so keep some information public such as your employment history, location and professional skills. No matter how stringent your privacy settings are, people will always be able to see your profile photos on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram, so make sure you're happy with these.

Focus on a few social media platforms

The general rule is to focus on one or two for your job search, with LinkedIn being the primary one. Confirm that your contact information is accurate and that your LinkedIn profile matches the details on your CV. Let recruiters know you're open to new job opportunities by changing that setting on LinkedIn. If you specify the types of positions that you're interested in and your preferred location, your profile will appear in search results when recruiters look for suitable candidates.

Use social media to research

You can also use social media to learn more about the organization you're interested in. Employers often post articles and other information related to changes happening within the Company or post news such as new contracts won, awards etc. This intelligence can strengthen your job search by helping you understand the culture and if it's a great place to work. Use LinkedIn and Twitter to identify leaders in the Company that you are targeting. By following them and commenting on their posts, you can get their attention. Responding to their tweets and showing your value will give you an advantage over another candidate who aren't putting themselves out there.

Establish yourself as a thought leader

Another job search strategy is to engage with industry leaders and portray yourself as a subject matter expert on social media platforms. To achieve this, inject yourself into the conversation by commenting and contributing to industry-specific Facebook or LinkedIn groups. These groups can help you develop professionally and connect with individuals in the company you are researching. Start posting and reposting items that are relevant to your career or area of expertise. Twitter is also an ideal place to establish yourself as a thought leader by sharing articles and commenting on industry news. You should be using these platforms not only to job search but also build your personal brand.

Send Personalised Messages

Building your network on LinkedIn is a great job search strategy. But when you send someone an invitation, it defaults to a generic message. Make it personalized to give some context. You'll be much more likely to receive a response. Once you hear back from them, set up a call to get to know them better. This approach is also an excellent way to learn about the company culture. Just remember, creating and nurturing genuine relationships is at the heart of social media when you are job hunting.

Don't underestimate the power of social media to highlight your skills, give employers a peek into your personality, and land you a job. And most importantly, be authentic!

Labour Market Information

Labour market information tells you about the local or national demands there is for different skills and from different industries. It also tells you:

- Which jobs are likely to be easiest or hardest to find in your area
- Which are the big employers in different areas and which have jobs on offer
- What skills employers are looking for and the type of skills shortages
- How much you can expect to be paid in specific jobs
- What qualifications will be most helpful if you want a certain career
- What the jobs of the future might look like and which jobs might disappear

All of these factors can help you make a more informed decision about what career path to take. For example, if you're considering a career in the fashion industry, research into the labour market might tell you most jobs in fashion are based in London. Depending on where you live, and whether you're willing to move, might mean you need to re-evaluate your career plans.

Recruitment Agency

Recruitment agencies are a key part of the job-seeking process. They offer a range of services, from helping people find the right position, offering training to upskill to offering invaluable advice like how to stand out and get a promotion at a company.

A recruitment agency is a business which helps to bridge the gap between someone seeking employment and a potential employer who has a vacancy that need filling. Agencies can also offer guidance on how best to approach the job search, what kind of information those seeking a job should include in their CV, and where it would be most beneficial for people to apply.

Recruitment agencies will usually advertise jobs with a list of skill sets, required experience and qualifications including other attributes the potential employer is looking for. They will also match CV with any positions for which people are suitable qualified for.

Recruitment agencies represent both the company looking to hire, and jobseeker, so it is in the agencies best interest to ensure they bring the right people together.

Job Centre Plus

Jobcentre Plus provides resources to enable job-searches to find work, through Job points, Jobseekers Direct, social media and Jobcentre Plus website. They offer information about training opportunities and

administer claims for benefits such as Universal Credit. Universal Credit is great for people who may work a seasonal or ad hoc role as it tops up their wages if they have worked less hours.

Jobcentre Plus can help support with travel costs and or help for smart clothes for an interview.