Employer presentations

Employers visiting Cambridge during term to deliver a presentation offers you the chance to meet with their representatives, find out about their opportunities for graduate jobs and vacation schemes (including those for students with specific concerns or requirements) and appreciate something of their culture and values.

Open and Closed cases
‘Open’ presentations happen mainly during the Michaelmas Term. Recruiting organisations use them to position themselves early in the graduate marketplace. In other words, they use them in competing to attract the very best from the pool of potential applicants. ‘Closed’ presentations, mainly in Lent, are strictly by invitation and for interview candidates only. In recent years the City recruiters have run presentations where a potential attendee is required to submit their CV in advance before the venue is disclosed to them and they can attend. This is to ensure that the recruiter’s target group for the presentation is correctly aligned with the attendees e.g. postgraduate, first year undergraduates, STEM subject groups and so on.

There are as many styles of presentation as there are employers hosting them. They range from a whole evening based in a plush hotel setting, with copious refreshments, an impressive turn-out of senior directors, and aptitude tests thrown in for good measure, to a modest slide-show and informal chat in quiet college rooms, or a ‘drop-in’ session at lunch-time.

A typical presentation ... might start around 6.30 pm with a talk about the organisation (half-an-hour or so) by one of the 3 or 4 management representatives present, followed by a brief outline of their work experience by a couple of recent graduates. A short case study might follow, to give some flavour of the work offered, with a break afterwards for buffet-style refreshments and a chance to ‘chat informally’.
Informality ... how careful do I have to be? How should I dress? And how can I get the most out of these occasions?

You can of course use them quite creatively. It’s all part of a two-way ‘presentation’ process. While it gives employers a chance to describe what is on offer to students and make a note of interesting potential applicants, it gives you a chance to dig deeply. Grill recent graduates on their experiences and get answers to questions about work style: "Do you really finish at 9pm every day?" and about levels of responsibility: "What’s the most worrying decision you have had to make? How big is the budget you are handling? What if you make a mistake?" You soon get a sense of organisational culture. Ask yourself: "Do I really like these people enough to spend 8 hours a day with them?"

Diversity ... while you may want to impress them, how impressive and responsive are they? Most organisations are keen to embrace diversity, but if you feel there is clearly some under-representation, ask why and what measures they are taking to redress the balance. Those organisations that run events specifically targeting particular under-represented groups occasionally attract criticism but at least a serious effort is being made in being prepared to stand up and be counted. Explore attitudes to gender and career development, or flexible working, but don’t be confrontational and let campaigning lose you a job opportunity.

Trawl for tips and advice ... on the selection and interview processes. Ask their new graduate trainees: – "What sort of questions will I be asked on futures and options?" – "How well researched do I need to be?" – "How many people are on the interviewing panel?" – "What sort of questions did you get asked after your 10 minute presentation?" – "Did they give feedback on how you performed?"
Use the chance to gain experience and confidence … from talking to people in a business context before you get to interviews - indeed these are likely to be the very people you meet at first interview. And you can use the opportunity to make an impression if you choose to. A bit of research into the organisation beforehand, a list of carefully thought-out questions together with a well-crafted CV tucked up your sleeve may pay substantial dividends (Mature students, older or ‘non-standard’ applicants take note).

Dress smartly … It’s not necessary to go suited up even if you are seriously trying to make an impact. If however you turn up after a sporting event or are notably scruffy, you risk being memorable for the wrong reasons and both you and the people you talk to may suffer agonies of embarrassment! Keep a wary eye out for the persistent ‘glass-filler’ – inhibitions vanish with alarming speed and many aspiring candidates have awful recollections the following day of the surprising ease with which they imparted acute observations and strong personal opinions to their genial host.

Try out ideas … on deferring offers for ‘time out’, advice on relevant postgraduate courses, prospects for vacation work, the chance to work-shadow or even ideas for your dissertation. There are those who have successfully scouted for sponsorship contacts on behalf of societies, or sought help in promoting particular causes.

Practice networking … resolve to meet at least two senior members of the presentation team and come away with their business cards, (always useful to quote in letters later: During a discussion I had with Joe Bloggs at your Cambridge presentation, he suggested ...). Try to get the names of two other people you can arrange to meet at a later date if you are really keen. See also the Quick Guide title on ‘Networking’.
Organisations hosting presentations … during the Michaelmas term are listed on our website. Check timings and venues carefully beforehand – they do sometimes change. Sign up by email if they ask you to – it is courteous and helps them plan their event. Register for our CamCareers email service for regular listings and newcomers – straight to your inbox. Don’t overdo things by trying to go to each one but, if at all possible, get to those that you intend to apply to … and try to enjoy the experience!

Additional opportunities to meet firms … the Careers Service runs a number of Careers Panels throughout the Michaelmas and Lent Terms. Members of these panels are professionals from occupations addressed by the wide range of careers panel topics. There is often an opportunity at the end of these sessions for informal networking with the speakers.

Student societies and colleges organise term time activities and publish these to their members. City based organisations are keen to interact with students in these more informal settings so ensure that you join any society that may be relevant to support your career process. All registered student societies are listed at http://www.societies.cam.ac.uk. Checking out the “sponsors” page will give you some idea of the firms targeting the society members.

Presentation fatigue … all too quickly academic pressures pile up and the attraction of attending an evening or lunchtime presentation diminishes. Those employers attending in the second half of term are extremely disappointed when their attendance figures are low. However this gives those who do attend an especially valuable opportunity to have a sensible conversation and to stand out. Do persevere…there have been many students who have gone on to apply successfully to an organisation they met largely speculatively.

A final word about Careers Fairs … the Careers Service runs several large recruitment events in Michaelmas and Lent where you can meet with upwards of sixty organisations in a single afternoon. Many of these will not be hosting their own presentation and so provide you with an excellent opportunity to cover a lot of the ground.