

Informational Interviews

1. What is an informational interview?

An informational interview is a short, informal conversation with someone that is working in a career area, job, or sector of interest to you.

You can plan and organise an informational interview in advance, or you can approach relevant people at conferences and events.

Informational interviews:

- Help you receive up to date, 'insider' information about the realities of working in a specific area, organisation, or role.
- Provide opportunities to expand your network in a new area or sector. Sometimes the people you interview may let you know about future job opportunities in their organisation.

2. Identify relevant people

The first step in organising an informational interview is to find people of interest. Do the following:

- Seek out people you have worked with in the past. For example, on LinkedIn, go to your current or past institution's LinkedIn site and then click on the 'alumni' or 'people' tab. Scroll across to 'What they do' and then add 'PhD' or another key word as a search term. Alternatively, look at alumni profiles on your departmental website and then contact them by email or on LinkedIn.
- Contact people on the [PFDC Contacts Database](#).
- Ask senior academics for their contacts. Ask them 'Do you know anyone of interest working in job X or sector Y that I could contact for an informal chat about role Z?'
- Seek out relevant people talking at internal and external events. Find events on your social media feeds. [Eventbrite](#) is also a good place to look for external events.

Start with individuals at a similar level of seniority to you. Also, look for 'warm contacts' i.e., people you know or connections of people you know. Human relationships are based on reciprocity, so warm contacts are more likely to accommodate a request for their time. An Imperial alumnus may talk to you because they want to give back to their university.

There is nothing to stop you reaching out to people you have no connection to, although this may be less successful and uncomfortable for some people to

initiate. Use platforms like Twitter (X) and LinkedIn, posting an open request for support and advice. People that have been on a similar journey to you are more likely to understand your situation and be willing to help.

3. Contact them

Unless you encounter people at talks, events, and conferences, you will need to reach out and contact people electronically to secure an informational interview.

If you are sending an email, below is the type of content you could use. This is an email to an Imperial alumnus that is not known to the person but with whom there is a connection through a Group Leader.

Dear Dr X

I notice that you were a Research Fellow at Imperial College last year, working in collaboration with Professor Bright.

I am currently a Postdoctoral Researcher, working on the application of AI to MRI images in Alzheimer's Disease with Professor Bright. I am exploring a career in industry as a future career option.

Do you have 20 minutes over the next two months to speak to me online about how you made the transition from Research Fellow to Analyst (AI) at MedAlcin? It would be extremely useful to hear your perspective on how you made a career transition to industry.

If you can spare the time, would you let me know your availability in the next two weeks? I will then confirm and send a meeting link.

Yours sincerely

Dr Super

The style and content of your email will depend on how well you know the person. In general, the less you know the person the more formal the email should be.

You can also ask for an informational interview when you are connecting with people on LinkedIn. Add your request when you are offered the option of adding a note in the [personalised connection request](#). In this case, you will need to shorten the message to three hundred characters. LinkedIn messages also tend to be more informal e.g., some people use each other's first name when connecting and messaging on the platform.

4. Research the people and prepare your questions

Before speaking to people, do some research on them. Look them up on LinkedIn, explore their website, company profile, and publications. Research their company and their role. You should also put together the questions you would like to ask. Phrase them in a way that is natural for you.

Here are some suggested questions.

- What does your day-to-day work involve? How does it compare to being a Research Fellow or Postdoc?
- Why did you choose to move to industry from academia?
- What skills and experience, gained from academia, are you using now?
- What are the most interesting elements of your role?
- What are the most challenging elements of your role?
- What advice would you give to someone that wanted to work in your role?

Do not ask questions that you can find the answers to online! This is likely to irritate the person you are interviewing and show a lack of motivation. Remember that their time is precious so use it effectively.

5. Get talking

Once you are talking, remember to focus the conversation on the person you are interviewing. There is no need to promote yourself in these conversations, unless asked. Listen and be curious about your interviewee's role; this will help to build rapport.

If you are facing challenges in your current role, avoid bringing this to the informational interview. Although it may be tempting to talk about the challenges of your current role in academia, this may reflect negatively on you in this context and waste the interviewee's time.

Have your questions ready but, if you feel comfortable, let the conversation take you in different directions

rather than sticking to a script. Ask questions, to which you genuinely want to know the answers. This will help you to come across as authentic and interested.

Keep the session brief, say 20 minutes. If people have more time, that is great but assume people are busy. People may not be happy for you to record the session on Teams or Zoom as they may want to be open without fear of repercussion. However, ask them if they are happy for you to take notes and keep a record of the informational interviews that you do.

Also, try to think about what is in the conversation for the person you want to speak to. Many people just want to support others that are walking the same path as them and are happy to help. However, you may also have relevant expertise that their company may be interested in. Volunteer this information if they ask you.

6. Follow-up

Add your new contact to your LinkedIn connections, if you have not done this already. Send a follow-up email within two days to thank them for their time. If you felt that the conversation went well, stay in contact e.g., send occasional emails or LinkedIn updates about your career progress.

7. Manage expectations

You may have to ask several people for an informational interview before you are secure one. That is typical! Just keep trying and remember a lack of response is often not personal. People are often just busy.

Some informational interviews will be more helpful than others. You may find that a company or role seems less appealing after an informational interview. This is useful information that will help you make decisions about companies and roles that will be good for you.

An informational interview is not about securing a job, it is a piece of research. However, there may be occasions when an informational interview may lead to a work opportunity. Many people secure roles through engaging with people and networking!

