

# Career Planning

**How to choose the right career path**



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## **Just think .....**

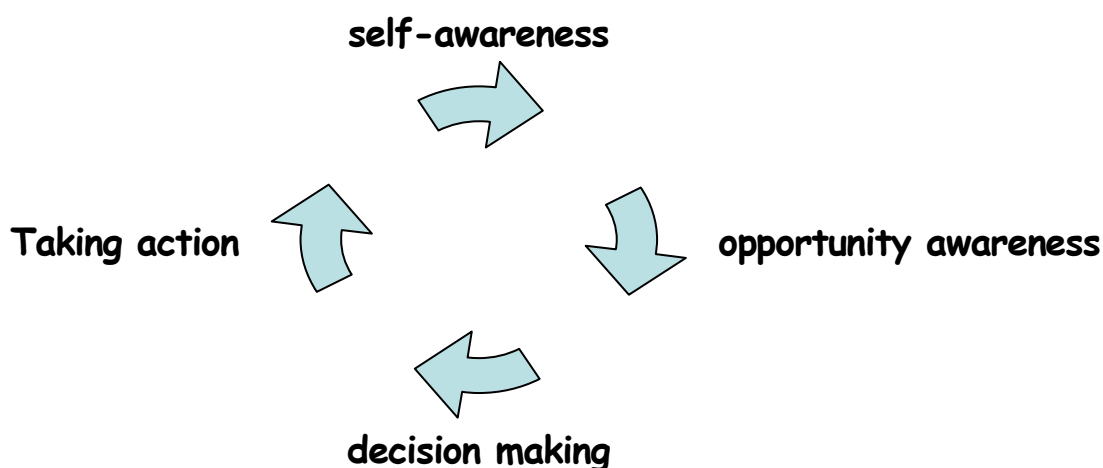
40 hours per week  
40 weeks per year  
for 40 years

Ok, not everyone works for this length of time but many do! Yet most people devote more time to planning their annual holiday than to thinking about a whole lifetime in work. This booklet is designed to help you to choose the right career path for you. Participation in higher education has increased significantly in the last 20 years and is set to continue to rise, which means more competition for graduate level jobs. Therefore it's very important to:

- assess your suitability for various jobs
- explore a range of options
- consider what you have to offer
- focus on how you want to develop

*“to be employed is potentially risky but to be employable is to feel secure”*

### **The “Career Planning” cycle**



### **So career planning is not just about jobs it about asking**

What kind of a person am I?

What opportunities are open to me?

What do I want from life?

What am I good at and interested in?

What have I done?

The following pages look at each of these areas in more detail and give you the opportunity to complete practical exercises to progress your ideas.

## What Kind of Person Am I?

Picture the scene: you are in an interview and the employer has just given you a brief outline of the position and the organisation. She then leans forward and asks... "So, tell me about yourself – what kind of person are you?"

We all have our own perception of the kind of people we are – or would like to be described as. Our personalities can affect our choices and decisions in all areas of life, including our careers. We all have some idea of our personalities; however, when it comes to talking about them out loud or committing them to paper, it can be tricky.

### What am I interested in?

#### Consider:

- What jobs am I interested in? \_\_\_\_\_
- Do I have a dream job – it may not be possible, but what is it about that job? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What do/did I find interesting about my degree subject? (researching, lab work, being creative, team projects, government politics, etc) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What do/did I not enjoy? (Laboratory work, presentations) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What did I enjoy about my previous jobs? (Although you may not want a career in bar management you may have really enjoyed customer contact) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Is there a job that I have always admired? (a friend / on TV) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Why so? (the responsibility, the type of clients, the sector, fun?) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What hobbies have I chosen to pursue out of work/study? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What does that say about what I enjoy doing? (perhaps helping others, outdoor workings, leading/co-ordinating people) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

You could try making a list of activities that interest you and rate them; for example, playing chess, rock climbing, organising social events, writing computer programs, designing posters etc. Next look at your list and identify which interests give you most enjoyment. By choice, to which do you give most time? Is there an overall pattern of preferred activities? If you can, use the following table to rate the interests from 1 (most) to 6 (least) preferred.

| Type of interest     |   | Preference |
|----------------------|---|------------|
| Scientific/Technical | Experimenting, researching, design, analysis, understanding |            |
| People (caring)      | Assisting, caring, advising                                 |            |
| People (influencing) | Controlling, organising, communicating                      |            |
| Creative             | Art, craft, music, design of all sorts                      |            |
| Information/Data     | Numbers, analysing, classifying, processing                 |            |
| Practical            | Making, shaping, building, physical                         |            |

If you want to pursue this further the good news is that there are lots of useful personality inventories on the Internet that can help you. Your personality can have a big impact on many different aspects of your life; these tests attempt to identify your personality traits, analyse your personal qualities and motivations.

To get the most out of them, as soon as you get the results, jot down a few lines about your immediate impressions, to act as prompts later. Some may produce feedback with which you may disagree but what they will provide is food for thought.

Here are a few examples:

**Myers-Briggs Personality Type** [www.personalitypathways.com](http://www.personalitypathways.com)

A famous and well-recognised test which helps you to establish your personality “type”.

**PersonalityType.com** [www.personalitytype.com](http://www.personalitytype.com)

Suggests some career ideas based on your answers to the above.

**Keirsey Temperament Sorter** <http://keirsey.com>

Are you Introvert or more Extrovert? Are you more likely to trust your experience or a hunch? This test produces a four-part personality type along the lines of Myers-Briggs.

**Enneagram Test** [www.9types.com](http://www.9types.com)

Another interesting personality test that “measures” your personality traits against 9 types.

## What is my preferred learning style?

When faced with a new situation, some people learn best by throwing themselves in the deep end whereas others prefer to do some background research first. Knowing your preferred learning style can help you to identify situations, and perhaps occupations, which would best suit your own personal approach. For example, someone who adopts a cautious approach to new situations may not find a career in field sales suits them best.

Take a moment and think back to the last “learning experience” you had that you felt taught you most (this could be formal – e.g. a lecture or participative course – or informal – e.g. learning HTML from a book or a friend showing you how to play the guitar).

Now think back to one which you felt was relatively ineffective. What were the differences between them? What worked best for you and why? It’s worth considering these issues as they may have an impact on your career choice. For example you may learn about a job best by interacting with colleagues and taking part in team tasks; or you could prefer spending solitary time familiarising yourself with the task in hand. Most jobs will contain an element of both but your bias may be towards one or the other.

## How do I work with other people?

There are very few situations when we do things completely independent of other people. But what part do you usually play when you work with other people? A typical response to this question is that “we all did everything” but in reality, this is rarely the case. Teams operate most effectively when their members contribute in different ways. Take the typical football team, for example; eleven strikers is not likely to result in a landslide win! Think about yourself in relation to teamwork – are you a leader, motivator, listener, contributor, negotiator?

## What is my temperament?

Your temperament is concerned with:

- how you come across to other people and interact or deal with them
- how you approach and deal with tasks
- how you react and feel comfortable or otherwise in various situations.

Some qualities can be developed with experience or are trainable, so don't be too hard on yourself, but you may feel very uncomfortable if a big part of your job does not match your temperament. The more you can become aware of your temperament, the sounder the assessment you can make of job possibilities both in terms of meeting the demands of the job, and finding it satisfying.

**Consider, am I? (on a scale of 1 [agree strongly] – 5 [disagree strongly] rather than yes or no)**

|            |             |                     |
|------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Assertive  | Outgoing    | Sensitive to others |
| Confident  | Imaginative | Warm                |
| Reliable   | Energetic   | Decisive            |
| Methodical | Competitive | Independent         |
| Consistent | Cheerful    | Objective           |
| Tactful    | Reserved    | Adaptable           |
| Organised  | Cautious    | Adventurous         |
| Meticulous | Relaxed     | Persistent          |

Make a note of the key characteristics which are most descriptive of you. Be honest with yourself and remember that there is nothing intrinsically good or bad about any of these characteristics, but some relate to particular jobs.

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## What Opportunities are open to me?

Do you know?

What % of all graduate jobs are open to any degree discipline?

What people who have done your degree subject have gone on to do?

The kind of jobs where a degree like yours would be most relevant?

*read on.....*

### **“I want to do something related to my degree ....”**

There are a couple of starting points to investigate this further. The first is to find out what people who have done your course have gone on to do. You can access this information by checking out the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) results from your course. Your tutors and careers service have access to this. A compilation of destination statistics from UK higher education courses called “What do graduates do” is available in the Careers Centre and provides interesting information on trends in career / further study choices.

You can look at resources such as “Options with your subject” on prospects web [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) which lists occupations where your degree would be relevant or useful. Another way is to check out careers material published by professional institutions allied to your subject area e.g. the Royal Society of Chemists or the Engineering Council

### **“I want to do something related to my interests and skills ....”**

Many people fall into this category; they enjoy their degree but don't necessarily want to work in that field after they graduate. In fact around 50% of all graduate jobs are open to any degree discipline. Plus, with further training, such as a vocational conversion course, the choice gets even wider. There are various tools available to help you match what you like doing and what you are good at to a range of occupations. **Prospects planner** is a computer programme available to use in the careers service or on prospects web. It can be a very useful way of exploring ideas, identifying areas of possible interest and generating job ideas. You may have done something similar at school but this is specifically designed for graduates.

### **“I want to go on to further study....”**

For some people, three to four years of study at undergraduate level is “just enough thank you” but for others it inspires them with a passion for their subject. Alternatively, some decide that in order to follow the career of their choice they need to do a vocational or conversion course.

The Prospects website has a complete searchable database of all post graduate opportunities in the UK as well as vocational course surveys. You can search by subject and by institution.

### **“How else can I find out about opportunities?”**

- Pick up free careers information from the careers centre e.g. employer directories, vacancy bulletins
- Attend careers fairs and employer presentations
- Do some work shadowing / talk to people doing the job
- Look at job advertisements
- Talk to family and friends about the jobs they do

## What do I want from life?

When you are career planning its important to consider your life choices too. What sort of work / life balance do you want? What are your ambitions / needs / desires, both within work and outside of it? Life planning is a continuous journey - we change as we learn from a variety of experiences. It's quite common to start a degree thinking that you are interested in one area but by the end of your course you have changed your mind completely. So this process needs review and reflection on an ongoing basis as part of your self-development. The word "career" means different things to different people. Career paths used to be quite narrowly defined but now the global market and technology have increased opportunities and new working patterns. Rarely do people have the same job throughout their working lives any more and the scope for changing direction is far greater.

What are your career drivers?

- material rewards
- power and influence
- search for meaning
- expertise
- affiliation
- autonomy
- security
- ethics
- status
- creativity

Which ones do you identify with most? These can give us energy and direction in pursuing our goals, without them you may feel de-motivated and unfulfilled. Have a go at designing your ideal job - what would it involve?

- **Purpose** - live to work or work to live?
- **Role** - work with people, ideas, things?
- **Organisation** - public or private, large or small?
- **Career motivation** – security, variety?
- **Work environment** – steady, pressured?
- **Sector** – IT, media, health?
- **Skills** – organising, teamwork, initiative?

Complete the 'careers motivation' questionnaire (appendix 1) and note down any additional aspects that are important to you.

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## What am I good at?

We take lots of our achievements for granted. Often we think “anyone could have done that” However that is probably not the case.

All jobs increasingly require a broad range of skills such as problem solving, communication and team working. Specialist skills or particular strengths are more or less important in specific roles. Understanding where your strengths lie and what you would most like to use in a job can help you steer your decisions towards something you would be particularly good at.

### Consider:

- What makes me competent in my degree course/ part time job? (being organised, motivating others, planning ahead, IT skills?) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What about other jobs I have had? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What have I particularly enjoyed about my experiences so far and why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What made me successful in my degree? (researching skills, visual problems, working to deadlines, co-ordinating team projects) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What gets/got in the way? (last minute working, shy of leading a group, lack of IT skills) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Are there things I could do to develop the skills I lack? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What does my lecturer /manager/work colleague/ friend/ partner say about me (ask for an honest opinion). \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Remember you are more skilled than you think. Skills can be gained through various jobs, voluntary work, your social life, hobbies and working at home. It all counts!

### Transferable skills: Example 1

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interpersonal</li><li>• Leading and directing</li><li>• Developing people</li><li>• Time management</li><li>• Planning</li><li>• Problem solving</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Creativity</li><li>• Decision making</li><li>• Communicating</li><li>• Organising</li><li>• Profit and cost awareness</li><li>• Analytical/research</li></ul> |
|--|---|

### Transferable skills: Example 2

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Working in teams</li><li>• Focusing on results</li><li>• Self management</li><li>• Influencing others</li><li>• Information search skills</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Communicating and presenting information</li><li>• Demonstrating self confidence and personal drive</li><li>• Thinking and decision making</li></ul> |
|---|--|

Once you have got into the habit of analysing what you have achieved in terms of transferable skills you will be more successful at convincing future employers. You will also be able to seek out opportunities to develop the skills that you wish you had e.g. devising and staffing a stall at an open day could enable you to develop self confidence, negotiating skills, proactive organising. **Try to keep your CV up to date so that you have a record of your skills and achievements.**

Look at the skills portfolio (appendix 2) and highlight

- The things you think you do well or like doing
- The things that you can do to a reasonable level
- The things that you feel you could do better or don't like so much

Be as honest as you can – try to list those you really are good at rather than those you feel you should be good at! When you are happy with your list, look to see if there are any patterns or trends in your responses. If you have attempted some of the tests in the “What kind of person are you?” section, can you see any links?

### What have I done?

Look at the examples of transferable skills identified on the part time waiter/waitress chart (appendix3a). Then have a go on the blank chart, (appendix 3b) choosing an experience of your own, this could be voluntary work, part time job. **If you feel you have not done as much as you would have liked, why not start now and join a few societies, do some volunteering or apply for work experience? There's no time like the present!**

### Family and friends are a good source of information

Ask your friends and family “what do I do really well?” Consider all the things you can do now that you could not do many years ago – things you take for granted such as IT skills, language skills etc – and make a note. If they are honest and tactful, they may also be able to suggest areas that you need to improve!

## Resources

### **Internet Resources:**

- **Prospects** – [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) – Over 500 careers profiles go under the microscope in the ‘Explore types of jobs’ section including case studies on real people.
- **DoctorJob** – [www.doctorjob.com](http://www.doctorjob.com) – More career profiles and links in the ‘Areas of work’ section
- **Inside Careers** – [www.insidecareers.com](http://www.insidecareers.com) – A detailed resource for 9 professional career sectors.
- **Occupations** – [www.connexions.gov.uk/occupations](http://www.connexions.gov.uk/occupations) - Includes both graduate and non-graduate Careers.
- **Learn Direct profiles** – [www.learndirect-futures.co.uk](http://www.learndirect-futures.co.uk) – Searchable directory.
- **Choosing a Career – Guardian** – [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk) – Search the career centre for useful articles and strategies.
- **Changing Direction – The Careers Portal** [www.careers-portal.co.uk/cc](http://www.careers-portal.co.uk/cc) and [www.trotman.co.uk](http://www.trotman.co.uk) Overview of career change decisions and links for returning to further study.

### **Careers Service Resources:**

#### **Books**

The following books are available for reference in the Careers Service, Eagle Mall.

- *“The Art of building Windmills – Career tactics for the 21<sup>st</sup> century”* – Dr Peter Hawkins (1999, The Graduate into Employment Unit) – Excellent strategy book, also available online at [www.windmillsprogramme.com](http://www.windmillsprogramme.com).
- *“What Colour Is Your Parachute”* - Richard Nelson Bolles (1999, Ten Speed Press) Probably the best selling job hunting book in the world.
- *“Build Your Own Rainbow”* – Barrie Hopson & Mike Scally (1995, Lifeskills Publishing Group) Strategies, tactics to analyse your life and make positive career decisions.
- *“No Idea About A Career”* – Gti (1996, Gti Specialist Publishers) Strategies for exploring options and making careers decisions.
- *“Moving on – Graduate Careers Three Years After Graduation”* (1999, DFEE / AGCAS / CSU) – A survey of graduates’ experiences, jobs.