

# **See the bigger picture**

## **Planning your career**

The University of Sheffield – Careers Service

<http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students>

February 2014

# Introduction

The chances are that if you're reading this publication it's probably because you are uncertain about what you want to do when you graduate from university. Whether you're in your first, second or final year of an undergraduate degree programme, or about to complete a Masters course or PhD.....don't panic!! In this short workbook we have endeavoured to provide a simple step by step outline of how to progress your career ideas and to introduce you to a selection of resources which will assist you in this process.

This booklet is divided into 4 main sections:

**1. Understanding Yourself** – provides you with advice on how to identify the knowledge, skills, personal qualities and relevant experience which you possess.

**2. Researching Your Options** – suggests a range of strategies and resources to enable you to research your career ideas.

**3. Making Some Decisions** – highlights ways of evaluating and prioritising your career ideas.

**4. Making Things Happen** – provides advice on how to progress your career plans.

To get the full benefit from this publication we suggest that you work through the sections in the order they appear. However – take your time! You'll probably need to do this in stages, making use of the resources mentioned, together with the suggested exercises and strategies. Although the process of career decision making does require that you set aside some time, this will help you to channel your efforts and be worth it in the long run. We advise you to collect the materials you accumulate in a folder, which you can add to as your research continues.

We've tried to make this workbook as comprehensive as possible and have included links to a wide range of useful resources. Don't feel that you have to use **all** of these, but the materials are there for the areas which you may wish to investigate in more depth.

Don't forget, if at any stage you need some assistance, or would like to discuss your ideas so far, you can always contact the Careers Service (Tel: 0114 222 0910) and arrange to talk to a Careers Adviser.

## Section 1 - Understanding yourself

Career choice is not a science; it is a personal art where only you can make the decisions. To do this, you need to understand your skills, qualities, interests, motivation and personality in order to look for work that will exploit your strengths and allow you to develop over time. Of course there are other practical considerations such as your circumstances or location preferences which can have a practical impact on the theoretical possibilities you identify. Don't be tempted to skip this section - time spent identifying your key strengths and motivations is time well spent!

### 1.1 What can you offer? Building a portfolio

A good starting point in the career planning process is to think about all the knowledge, skills and personal qualities you possess. Skills could be discipline-specific (e.g. lab skills developed during a science degree), job-specific (e.g., administrative skills from an office job) or generic skills which are transferable across a variety of roles (such as teamwork, communication, problem solving, project management, leadership and commercial awareness). It is likely that you'll have developed these from a variety of experiences.

Firstly, list all your key experiences and achievements to date. Include your degree studies, employment, volunteering, work experience, community or family commitments, sports and other leisure interests as well as any involvement in clubs, societies or other extra-curricular activities.

Next think about what knowledge, skills and personal qualities you gained from each experience. Outline examples of where, when and how you used each one, to check that you do definitely possess it. Some estimates say we each have an average of 500 skills, so give this some thought! Many publications contain lists of skills and attributes to help you in the process. Resources which you might like to investigate include:

- Description of Skills handout <http://www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/pdf/skillslist.pdf>
- 'Jobshopping' workbook by Yorkshire Graduates <http://www.yorkshiregraduates.co.uk/static/jobshopping/FocusYourSkills.pdf>
- 'The Art of Building Windmills' workbook by Dr Peter Hawkins (page 12) - available to borrow from the Careers Service
- The Virtual Career Coach 'Skills Checker' - go to [www.graduatesyorkshire-vcc.info](http://www.graduatesyorkshire-vcc.info) to register and then go to 'Tactic 1' then 'Check your current skills'.
- For help with thinking about skills gained from your course, investigate the 'Careers with my degree' webpage for your course: <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/degree>
- Also look at the student employability profiles on the UCAS website: [www.ucas.ac.uk/seps/profiles](http://www.ucas.ac.uk/seps/profiles)

Ask friends, family, tutors, employers and other people who know you if they agree with your list. Is there anything to add or change?

**Don't underestimate what you have got out of your experiences** - think creatively. Book an appointment with a Careers Adviser if you'd like to talk things through. The Careers Service also offers students the opportunity to reflect on the skills and experience they've gained outside their degree course through initiatives such as the Skills for Work Certificate ([www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/advice/sfwc](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/advice/sfwc)) and The Sheffield Graduate Award ([www.shef.ac.uk/thesheffieldgraduateaward](http://www.shef.ac.uk/thesheffieldgraduateaward)).

Once you have a complete list, identify which knowledge, skills and qualities are your 'best' ones, i.e., those for which you have the most experience and/or are good at. You might find it easier to rate each skill, for example in terms of 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Satisfactory', 'Unsatisfactory'.

You also need to think about what knowledge, skills and qualities you'd actually like to use in your future job. On your list, mark those which you'd like to form a 'major' part of your future work, those which you'd like to be a 'minor' part and those which you'd like to 'avoid using'.

Finally, look at your list to identify those skills and qualities that are both a strength and something you enjoy using. Careers which require this mix of knowledge, skills and qualities are likely to be more satisfying. Keep hold of this list and refer back to it when you start to investigate careers in Section 2 and make career decisions in Section 3 of this booklet.

**Need to develop your skills?** Revisit the rest of your list - how crucial are these things to your future employability? Do you feel that some of your skills and personal qualities need further development? Investigate how the Careers Service can help: [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/advice](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/advice).

Also talk to your tutor about how you can develop your skills on your course.

## 1.2 What do you want from your future career?

Thinking about your future career; choosing something that you know you are good can be helpful but you also need to consider your preferences, interests, personality and key motivations. We all have different ideas about what we want from our careers. Some questions to ask yourself include:

- **What would be the main purpose of your ideal job?** What outcomes would you like to achieve? Is it to gain satisfaction – in what way? Is it related to your life ambitions? Is it financial gain? What else?
- **What main roles or responsibilities would your ideal job include?** For example, working with detail, ideas, people or practical things. What roles do you (and people you know) think you are good at?

- **What employment sector(s) would you like to work in?** Think about those you have experienced through your course, previous employment or people you know. Prospects, the UK's official HE careers website, has a useful overview of different sectors: <http://www.prospects.ac.uk/sectors.htm>.
- **What type of organisation would you prefer?** At a very broad level, this might include private, public or not-for-profit sector. What size of organisation appeals? Also think about what sort of organisational culture would suit you - what company values would you expect? What sort of management style?
- **What would motivate you to go into work each day?** What do you want from the job? Autonomy? Enterprise? Sense of purpose? Balanced lifestyle? Expertise and challenge? Reward and recognition? Authority and influence?
- **What type of environment would you like to work in?** Pressurised? Steady? Regular working hours or shifts? Outdoors? Office-based? Practical? Intellectual? As part of a team or alone? What type of learning environment do you work best in?
- **What are your interests?** What do you enjoy doing in your spare time e.g. IT; art; fashion; sports; conservation; cars; etc? Could you use your skills in this field of employment?

To help you answer some of these quite tricky questions, have a go at the Types Dynamics Indicator, Values Based Indicator of Motivation and Learning Styles Indicator via Profiling for Success: <http://www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/pdf/profiling.pdf>

**NB: You'll need access codes to complete these online questionnaires, which you can obtain via <http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob/psychometric> or by contacting the Careers Service if you are a graduate.**

Each resource produces a detailed report that can help you think about your career preferences. Talk to a Careers Adviser at the Careers Service if you need help interpreting your report. Other resources to make use of are:

- Jobshopping workbook by Yorkshire Graduates (also at <http://www.yorkshiregraduates.co.uk/static/jobshopping/FindTheJobStyle.pdf>)
- The Art of Building Windmills workbook by Dr Peter Hawkins (pages 22-25)
- The Virtual Career Coach 'Tactic 2' at [www.graduatesyorkshire-vcc.info](http://www.graduatesyorkshire-vcc.info)

NB: the term 'ideal job' might mean your role in life, a career or series of projects, not just one specific job. Few people actually get their ideal job so aim to get as close to it as possible.

## 1.3 Other influences on career choice

Practical considerations often influence career choice and can have an impact on how attainable your ideal job might be. Make a note of other factors that might be important to you in choosing a career. For example:

- What practicalities do you face, including family commitments and other responsibilities; your financial situation (salary requirements and current debt); geographical mobility?
- Can you afford further study, if required by your ideal career choice?
- How open are you to dedicating time to gain relevant work experience? What if it is unpaid?
- Do you have (or can you realistically develop) a useful network of contacts to help you get a job in your chosen field?
- Also think about your self image and self confidence - are you under/over-estimating your abilities to be successful in certain careers?

How directly do you want to use your degree subject? Remember that, even if you are doing a vocational course, you don't necessarily have to make it your career. It is estimated that 60-70% of all graduate jobs are open to ANY discipline. It might help you to look at what others from your course have gone on to do after graduation - investigate the 'What do graduates do?' section for your degree subject via our 'Careers with your degree' web pages: <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/degree>. Targetjobs also has some basic information: <http://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-report>. Don't forget that self-employment is also an option (for more information, see <http://enterprise.shef.ac.uk>)

---

## Section 2 – Researching your options

Working through some of the suggestions made in Section 1 will have enabled you to begin to identify a number of career ideas. These will hopefully be areas of work which initially appear to suit both what you are looking for in your career and also what you know about yourself as an individual. However – it's now time to 'dig a bit deeper' and to broaden out your ideas further, in order to have sufficient information to base your career decisions upon.

As part of your research it is worth checking out whether further study (e.g. at Postgraduate Diploma, Masters or PhD level) is required in order to enter some of the professions you are considering, or if it would give you a competitive advantage. Do some investigation before committing to further study and don't assume that all employers will automatically see a higher-level qualification as better than a first degree. For more information refer to the Careers Service website [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/worktypes/study](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/worktypes/study) and download a copy of **Postgraduate Study and Research**.

Having identified your strengths and career aspirations you may still require a bit of assistance in putting a name to exactly what type of occupation you are looking for. If so now is a good time to make use of Prospects Planner, an online career matching programme. This helps you to create profiles of your skills and work related interests, which are then matched against a database of occupations with suggestions being made as to which will be a good match for you. This can be accessed from [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/pplanner](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/pplanner)

There are direct links from this programme to a database of occupational profiles, which provide more detailed information about exactly what the job involves, entry requirements, career progression, case studies and signposting to a wealth of additional websites and resources.

Below is a list of some additional strategies which you can use to find out more and to assess which of the career ideas you have so far developed meet your criteria.

## 2.1 Occupational information on the web

- For a broad overview of job sectors a good starting place is to refer to the Prospects website: <http://www.prospects.ac.uk/sectors.htm>. You will also find it useful to read the occupational profiles on this site, for any of the areas of work you are considering: [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations) Also see: Target Jobs <http://targetjobs.co.uk> and Inside Careers [www.insidecareers.co.uk](http://www.insidecareers.co.uk). For a range of non-graduate, as well as graduate job profiles, investigate the National Careers Service website <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/advice/planning/jobfamily/Pages/default.aspx>
- and [www.icould.com](http://www.icould.com).
- Refer to the **Information Resources** section of the Careers Service website: [www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/infotree/CareersIn.php](http://www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/infotree/CareersIn.php)
- Refer to the **Graduate Case Studies database** on the Careers Service website: <http://careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/casestudies/index.php>
- Refer to the **websites of professional associations** which are relevant to your occupational interests. You will find that many have a 'careers' section and may also organise careers events for those people interested in finding out more about the profession. If you are interested in healthcare or local government, for example, see: [www.nhscareers.nhs.uk](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk) and <http://www.lgjobs.com/>. To find out which professional body represents your area of interest, refer to the Directory of British Associations available at the Careers Service.

## 2.2 Additional strategies for gathering occupational information

- Arrange to undertake some **work experience or work shadowing** i.e. a summer internship: <http://www.internavenue.com/>

- Explore opportunities to get involved with some **voluntary work**, either through Sheffield Volunteering in the Students' Union - <http://shef.ac.uk/union/get-involved/volunteering/> - or within the local community. The Do It website has a useful searchable database of opportunities [www.doit.org.uk](http://www.doit.org.uk)
- Attend some of the relevant **Careers Service events** e.g. employer presentations, careers fairs, occupational panels. Full details can be found on the 'What's On' programme: [www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/events](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/events). In addition, postgraduate researchers are encouraged to attend events delivered in partnership between the Careers Service and Research and Innovation Services: [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/postgraduates/research](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/postgraduates/research)
- Attend **Careers Days and talks** given by external speakers, organised by your department.
- Start **networking!** Who do you know, who do they know....and are there any contacts you can make through your existing network who can tell you more about areas of work you are interested in and give you some tips on entry into this field?
- Read **job advertisements and download job descriptions and person specifications** for posts of the type you are interested in. If you are not sure where to look for these, refer to the 'typical employers and vacancy sources' section of the relevant occupational profile on the Prospects website: [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations)
- Make **speculative approaches to potential employers** for further information. What qualifications, skills and experience do they look for when recruiting for a post in the field you are interested in and where would they normally advertise such a vacancy? You might even like to explore whether they could offer you the opportunity to undertake some work experience.

For a more detailed explanation of each of these, refer to the Careers Service **Briefing 'Exploring Careers'**, which can be obtained from the Careers Service or downloaded from our website: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/worktypes/options>

## 2.3 Researching Postgraduate Study

If you don't already possess a postgraduate level qualification and would like to find out more about where relevant Diploma or Masters level courses are offered, a good place to start is to refer to the 'Further Study' section of the Prospects website: [www.prospects.ac.uk/about\\_postgrad\\_study.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/about_postgrad_study.htm)

This will help you to decide whether postgraduate study is appropriate for you and when and where to undertake it. It also provides information on funding your study and a comprehensive database of course details for the UK.

If you are considering undertaking a PhD, there are a number of strategies which you might like to consider:

- Talk to your personal tutor, or project supervisor if you are undertaking a dissertation. They should be able to provide you with some feedback on whether in their opinion you have got the potential to study at this level. They will also be able to tell you what the situation is with regards to departmental funding for a PhD.
  - Check out who are the specialists in the field of research you are interested in and which university they are based at. Consider approaching them to explore the possibilities.
  - Refer to some of the relevant websites such as [www.findaphd.com](http://www.findaphd.com) and [www.jobs.ac.uk](http://www.jobs.ac.uk) as well as the Education section of the Guardian website <http://jobs.guardian.co.uk/jobs/education/> and the Times Higher Education [www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/](http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/) or other publications relevant to your subject area.
- 

## **Section 3 – Making some decisions**

By now you should have amassed loads of information and have begun to put together a list of some of the job titles which 'tick your boxes'. You can now begin to spend time really focussing on planning your career, then, when you get to the stage of applying for graduate jobs, postgraduate study or vocational training, you will be able to demonstrate your interest in and suitability for this type of work.

If you follow the steps outlined below, it will help you to clarify your career goals and to identify what you need to do next:

### **Step 1 – Allocate time!**

Even if the amount of time you can make for career planning activities is limited, decide to allocate a small period of time each week e.g. 2 – 3 hours on a Wednesday afternoon.

### **Step 2 – Identify what your work priorities are**

Make a list of what you have identified as your key criteria in relation to your future career i.e. geographical location (within the UK or overseas); salary range and future earning potential; direct entry into employment versus possession of a relevant professional qualification required; opportunities for career progression; which employment sector(s) you wish to work in. To help you, refer back to the information you gathered in Section 1 of this workbook.

### **Step 3 – Analyse the types of work you are considering**

There are a number of strategies you could use to analyse occupations. Overleaf are three examples which you might like to try out:

## A) Rating chart

It can sometimes help to construct a simple table for yourself, listing your key criteria and rating each of the types of work which you are considering on each of these criteria, say from 1 – 5 (5 being a strong match). For example:

<b>CRITERIA</b>	<b>Secondary School Teacher</b>	<b>Social Worker</b>	<b>Manager in the NHS</b>
Location – based in Sheffield	4	5	3
Direct entry from degree is possible	1	2	3
Chance to study for a professional qualification whilst working	3	1	4
Working within the public sector	5	5	5
Starting salary of at least £18,000	5	5	5
Opportunities for career progression	3	4	5
Regular working hours i.e. 9 -5 Monday to Friday	3	3	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>27</b>

## B) SWOT analysis

**S – Strengths**

**W- Weaknesses**

**O – Opportunities**

**T – Threats**

A 'SWOT' analysis helps you evaluate all aspects of the job you are considering. How well do your perceived strengths (i.e. skills, qualities, knowledge and experience) match the entry requirements for this type of work? What are your weaknesses, in relation to this work? (e.g. lack of experience). What factors would assist you in achieving entry into this field? What external factors would reduce your likelihood of success? (e.g. the competition to get work in this field).

## C) Pros and cons

Another approach which you could use is simply to make a list of the pros and cons of the different types of work you are interested in.

## **Step 4 – Rank the occupations you are considering in order of priority**

There are many other factors which you may need to take into account e.g. the employment market and availability of vacancies, other aspects of your own life, the experience and qualifications which you have and your willingness to undertake further training.

## **Step 5 – Review you career plans regularly**

There are many factors which will influence your career plans, which will mean that you may need to reassess them on a regular basis. For example, if you have decided that you wish to remain in Sheffield and the only vacancies of the type you are interested in are around London and the South East, you may need to look at different types of work.

If at this stage you need some objective advice, then you may want to arrange to talk to a Careers Adviser.

---

## **Section 4 – Making things happen**

Once you have made some career decisions, it's time to turn them into action points. Below, we've outlined some of the strategies and resources you can make use of to help you further your plans.

### **4.1 Work experience**

Relevant work experience is often a pre-requisite for many graduates entering a profession. It is also a way to develop valuable skills that will impress future employers, gain experience and a greater understanding of the workplace, and to develop your network of useful contacts in a profession. For more help with finding work experience, including converting your degree to a Degree with Employment Experience, start by investigating information on the Careers Service website: <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/jobs>

### **4.2 Further study**

If further study (for example a diploma, Masters or PhD) is a requirement for your chosen career and you aren't already working towards it, leave plenty of time to find the appropriate course. Although not all courses have application deadlines, some will be early (e.g. from October onwards in the year before you start the course). For more information, see: [www.shaf.ac.uk/careers/students/worktypes/study](http://www.shaf.ac.uk/careers/students/worktypes/study), where you will also find tips on applying for further study, as well as funding. Leave plenty of time to investigate possible sources of funding as again, deadlines can be very early.

### **4.3 Job hunting & meeting employers**

Employ a variety of strategies that include:

- Looking for vacancies advertised online (including the Career Service's 'myVacancies' facility), in newspapers/journals and recruitment agencies.
- Making speculative approaches to organisations you'd like to work for.
- Building up a network of contacts who already work in the sort of organisation or sector you'd like to work in - initially this might be to talk about their job, but once you have established a good rapport, you could enquire about jobs (the Careers Service organises a variety of presentations, workshops, panel events and other activities where you can meet employers: [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/events](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/events))
- attending recruitment fairs, including those held in Sheffield: [www.sheffieldcareersfairs.ac.uk](http://www.sheffieldcareersfairs.ac.uk)

For more information, see Careers Service Briefing on 'Job Hunting Strategies':

<http://www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/briefing/jobhunting.pdf>

## 4.4 Applications and interviews

Given the level of competition for most jobs, it is vital to make a good first impression with your CV/covering letter or application form. You then need to convince them of your suitability and commitment at interview stage. Get some top tips from the Careers Service: [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob). You can also have your CV/covering letter and application forms reviewed by a Careers Adviser.

Recruiters need to be able to judge your personal strengths and careers motivations during the recruitment process. Developing your understanding of yourself through self-assessment and researching careers will stand you in good stead to compete effectively for jobs, work experience, or places on courses.

## 4.5 Overcoming obstacles

The whole process of career planning can seem a very daunting one. Here are some top tips for overcoming some of the more common problems - adapted from 'The Art of Building Windmills' by Dr Peter Hawkins (p.53) available from the Careers Service.

1. **Feeling overawed by the whole process** - set yourself regular, short-term objectives or tasks that are achievable - make the first ones easier so you have initial success. Get support from friends, family, a Careers Adviser and your tutor. Don't put it off - you'll still have to make a career choice at some point and you might miss out on valuable opportunities to help you get your ideal job if you leave it until after graduation.
2. **Poor time management** - Give yourself a realistic time each week to achieve your objectives. Have a clear action plan, which prioritises your objectives. Allow time for reflection.
3. **No focus or direction** - Start by increasing your self-awareness. This may take some time and involve trying different experiences to find which you like / dislike. Keep open-minded and flexible but over time try to focus your thoughts.

4. **Lack of self-confidence / unwillingness to leave your comfort zone** - seek positive feedback on your abilities and ideas from people you trust and don't undersell yourself. Look for 'safe' opportunities to stretch yourself and consider courses designed to build self confidence and assertiveness.
5. **Fear of failure or rejection** - Rejection isn't uncommon and even bad experiences can have a positive learning outcome. Try not to take it personally - keep trying.
6. **Lack of relevant experience / skills** - Identify where your gaps are and organise activities to fill them (e.g. work experience, volunteering, involvement in clubs / societies, etc). Seize opportunities and apply your skills in different contexts to show you are 'well-rounded'. Act NOW - some opportunities might not be open to graduates!
7. **Scared of making the wrong decision** - Don't worry about making the wrong decision, you may have to test different options out before finding the ideal one. Many people make career changes during their working lives, especially in the early years. Your first career move should be a good first step not necessarily a commitment for the next forty years!

#### **And finally .....**

- Don't choose something because others tell you to.
- Be prepared to change your mind / compromise if needs be. Try something new – you might like it!
- Don't be afraid to talk to people and use your contacts in the career planning process. Look for role models and mentors in the profession of your choice.
- Never make enemies on the way up in your career - you might need them later on in life!
- If you can't get your ideal job at first, build your experience in other ways.
- Think positively throughout the process!

This booklet has provided you with a structured way of working through the process of career choice. If however you'd like to try out a completely different approach you might like to refer to an article on "The Chaos Theory of Careers: A User's Guide", which has been developed by Bright and Pryor, which focuses on 'luck readiness' and the ability to respond to unexpected events

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/219402663>