

# YOUR CAREER PLANNING GUIDE





# CONTENTS

Introduction	4
<b>01</b> Know yourself	12
<b>02</b> Exploring possibilities	49
<b>03</b> Making decisions and taking action	72
<b>04</b> Getting the job	87
<b>05</b> Equality and diversity issues	151
<b>06</b> Further support and resources	183



# Introduction

**Deciding what you want to do with your career can feel like the start of an exciting journey, but it can also feel daunting if you're not sure where to begin.**

This guide will help you through a structured career planning process to help you identify your career goals, plan how you're going to get there, and build the skills and confidence to put your plans into action.

Your career may not just be about your journey to achieving work-related goals; it might also include, or be focused on, personal development, education or achieving other life goals.

It takes time to manage your career and it's a process you'll use throughout your life. This guide will help you build the skills by helping you:

- Learn about yourself and your skills
- Explore different elements of the world of work and other opportunities
- Make informed decisions about your career
- Plan your career journey
- Look and apply for jobs and work experience.

The guide will also help you develop a positive and resilient mindset and build a network of people who can support you on your career journey.



## A career planning process

### 01. Know yourself

The first process involves developing an understanding of yourself; learn what you're good at, what you're interested in and what motivates you. This will help you match opportunities to suit your values, interests and skills. You'll also be able to recognise any constraints that could affect your career goals or path. As you progress through or decide to change career, you can revisit this phase time and time again to re-evaluate your life and experiences.

### 02. Explore opportunities

You'll learn about job roles, careers and sectors that interest you. Getting a better view of different opportunities including further study, resources and actions to help you make informed decisions about your career journey. The world of work is rapidly changing, so as your career develops you'll find it useful to come back to this phase.

### 03. Decide what to do

This is the decision-making phase, where you use your knowledge of yourself and the world of work to make decisions about your career goals. You'll also start to plan how you're going to achieve them by putting together an action plan.

### 04. Take action

Taking action can encompass a wide variety of activities and is rarely one distinct phase. However, during this phase, you'll put your plan into action and learn where and how to look for job and work experience opportunities. During this phase you can learn the skills to make effective applications and CVs and build confident interview skills.



## What is Career Readiness?

The OU's Careers and Employability Services has developed an approach called 'career readiness' to make thinking about career development and planning a little simpler. It looks at four key career journey stages that students and alumni might find themselves in:

- **Discover** – if you want to apply your study to changing your life... but don't know how
- **Explore** – if you know what you'd love to do in life, but don't know how to get there or find the wealth of information overwhelming
- **Achieve** – if you're ready to apply for opportunities but are struggling to breakthrough, are worried about interviews or assessment centres, or just want a CV that shines
- **Progress** – if you're not studying for career reasons but still want to put your study to good use in the world, or if you want to track your personal development in a more structured way

We know that circumstances, plans and the labour market are constantly changing, which means there can be regular movement between these different stages. Whatever point you find yourself at, the OU Careers and Employability Services are here to support you.

Here is some further information about each career readiness stage:



Maybe you don't know where to start, are feeling unsure of your future, or perhaps you find yourself stuck in a rut. This is an opportunity to spend time reflecting on what you've got to offer, what you are looking for, and what your options are. The resources in this Career Planning Guide will enable you to consider your skills, values and motivations and how these connect to possible career paths. Understanding yourself will not only help you to identify the right career direction for you but will also impact on how you highlight what you've got to offer on your CV or at an interview setting.

## EXPLORING YOUR FUTURE



You may have some career ideas and want to move them forward but are feeling overwhelmed or unsure how to get there. Once you have ideas about occupations or sectors, it's key to find out as much as you can about what it's like to do that role or work in that area. This will also pay off when the time comes to make applications. You will also find some great advice in the Career Planning Guide on building your experience, and what to think about if starting your own business might be what you want to explore.

## PROGRESSING YOUR FUTURE



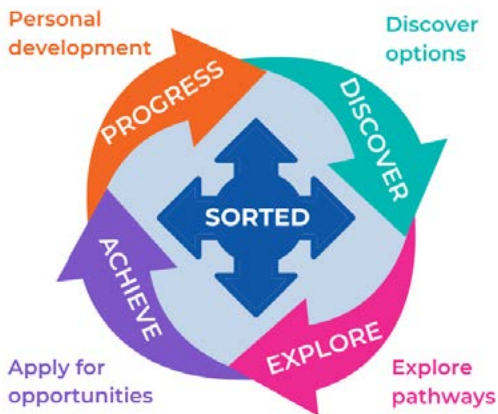
If you are pursuing your current studies out of personal interest after working so hard, you may be keen to see how to progress your personal development. You may feel you've come a long way, but don't have a clear picture of how far. The resources and activities in the Career Planning Guide will support you to consider the options your study might open up for you going forward, including further study, volunteering or community initiatives, and will also help you track and reflect on your own personal development.

## ACHIEVING YOUR FUTURE



If you are ready to, or are already applying for, jobs or further study, you might be struggling with your CV and job applications or be feeling anxious about interviews. Here is the opportunity to access a range of resources and activities that will help your CV, applications and covering letters stand out and make your experience, skills and study work to achieve your career aspirations.

## Sorted



At the present time, you may have a job, further study or other plans confirmed and are not looking to make any changes. If you are feeling your plans are currently sorted, then you might not identify with any of the four stages.

We know that circumstances, plans and the labour market are constantly changing, and if things change, OU Careers and Employability Services is here to support you.

## Introducing Pulse

As a complement to this guide, OU Careers and Employability Services has developed a tool that signposts you to resources tailored to your career readiness stage – Explore, Discover, Progress or Achieve. To check your Career Readiness Pulse, go to [openuniversity.careercentre.me](https://openuniversity.careercentre.me) and click on **'Take Pulse'** tab.

“ I think it is a very helpful programme and helps to make this often daunting and overwhelming area of life more manageable. ”

**OU Student Pulse Tester**



## How to use this guide

You can use this guide either by working through it from start to finish or by using relevant sections as you need them.

### Use Sections 1, 2 and 3 to:

- Take stock of your situation
- Review your career and life goals
- Evaluate your aptitudes, skills, interests, values and personal needs
- Decide what you want to achieve
- Plan how you might achieve it
- Explore different opportunities
- Build your network

### Use Section 4 to:

- Plan a job search strategy
- Understand where and how to source job vacancies
- Complete application forms and create CVs and covering letters
- Prepare for job interviews and assessments used in recruitment

### Use Section 5 to:

- Get advice on equality and diversity issues relating to job search

## Activities

The activities within this guide will help you build a solid foundation of identifying what you want from your career, developing a strategy and taking actions to achieve your goals. You may find some time-consuming and self-reflective, and you may need to return to them as your ideas develop.

Working through the activities could be challenging, but they should also be rewarding. The insights you gain from them may help you understand yourself better and what is important to you in your career and life goals.

Working through the activities will give you scope for quiet reflection. Take your time when completing them. You may find it helpful to ask for comments and opinions from people who know you well, especially if you are finding some activities difficult. Working with other people can give you ideas, support and encouragement, and they can act as a sounding board and suggest different ways of looking at things. Whatever approach you decide on, make sure it's one you're comfortable with.

You may also find it useful to share your findings with the careers team, your appraiser or line manager at work.

In addition to the activities within the guide, if you want to go further with personal and career development planning, Future You is a personal space where you can reflect on your achievements and plan your future.

**FutureYOU** is the OU's personal development planning (PDP) tool, currently being rolled out on qualifications across the University. If it's available for your Qualification, you will find it on your StudyHome site under the '**Succeed**' or '**Plan**' tab. If it's not yet available for your qualification, you may wish to use the Open programme version.

## Remember, you are in the driving seat

This guide focuses on you because, although external factors can change, the most important influence on your career development is you.

If you are looking for a change in your work direction, the clearer you are about your own characteristics, the more precisely you can specify what you want and communicate it to employers.

This guide invites you to recognise your own qualities and abilities, so that you're able to define what you're really looking for in your career.

## Take your time

It's difficult to predict how much time you'll need for this process. Career planning is a recurring process and change is constant. As we make changes and as circumstances change around us, so do our priorities, and what we need and want.



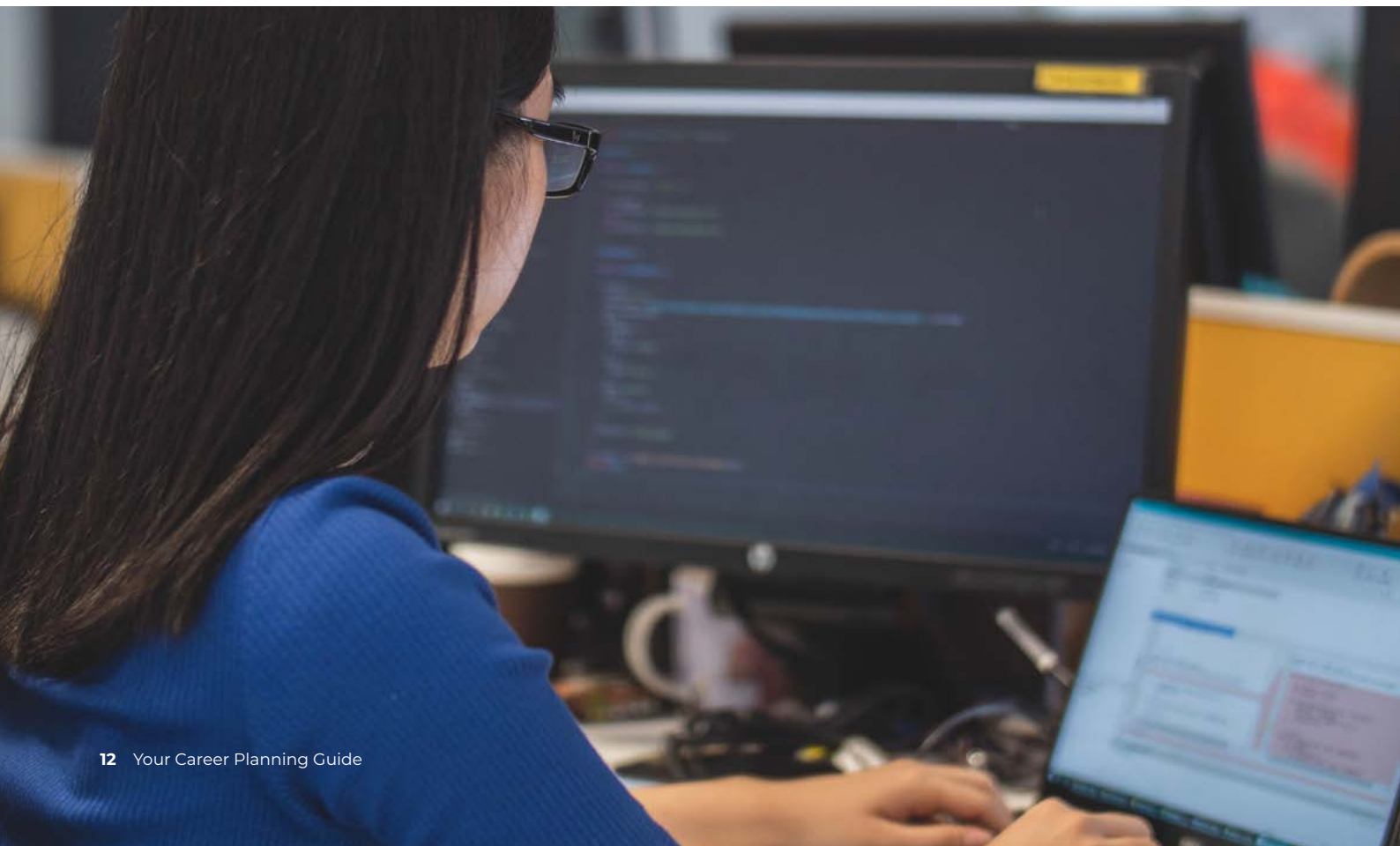
# 01

## Know yourself

<b>1.1</b> What am I like?	<b>14</b>
<b>1.2</b> What work would suit me?	<b>24</b>
<b>1.3</b> What are my employability skills?	<b>32</b>
<b>1.4</b> What do I want from work?	<b>40</b>
<b>1.5</b> Review	<b>47</b>

Remember that everyone has potential that has yet to be developed. Try to keep an open mind when considering future possibilities, and reject them only if, after exploring them, there's good reason to.

You may find that some seemingly unchangeable things can be changed. For example, re-evaluating your finances, geographical location or range of commitments may allow you to free up resources that enable you to learn new skills or take up more enjoyable work.



**This section will help you to develop self-awareness and help you to take a clear view of your career and life. Developing self-awareness sometimes isn't an easy task, as we don't normally stop and think about what drives us and what we are like as a person.**

**You will consider questions like:**

“What am I like?”

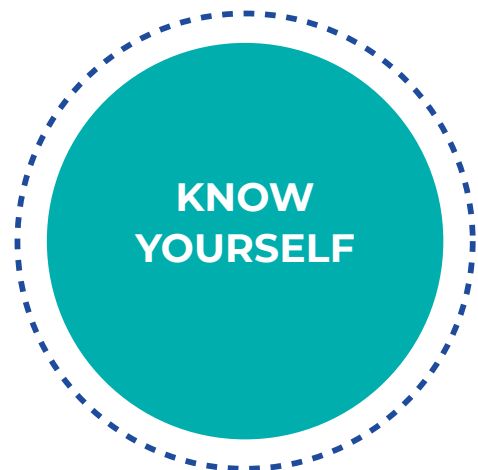
“What am I good at?”

“What am I interested in?”

In this first phase of the career planning process, you'll review your life and experiences and identify the skills and qualities that have grown out of them.

You'll start by looking back on your life: your family background, your education, past jobs and training experience, and leisure activities. You will have gained knowledge and skills from these experiences and learnt how to cope with and respond to different tasks and challenges. This kind of self-awareness lays a good foundation for making decisions about your future.

The activities in this section form the beginning of your career review and will offer different ways of considering what you're like, your skills and what you are interested in.



## 1.1 What am I like?

### Who am I? What were my early influences and decisions?

These activities will help you to develop an overview of your career so far, and to consider how your early history contributed to it.

#### Activity 1.1 Draw a lifeline

In this activity you're going to draw a 'lifeline', to help you reflect on the pattern of your life. You'll be asked to refer back to your lifeline later on.

This activity can help you to gather insights that could influence your future choices, and to discover aspects of yourself that you might want to develop or change.

Note down key events, such as education, marriage, children, starting work, moved country and so on. Put them in the form of a diagram like the one on the right showing high and low points at different times of your life.

The lifeline exercise can result in a lot of emotions coming to the surface as you review your experiences. You may find it useful to talk through any difficult emotions with someone you trust.

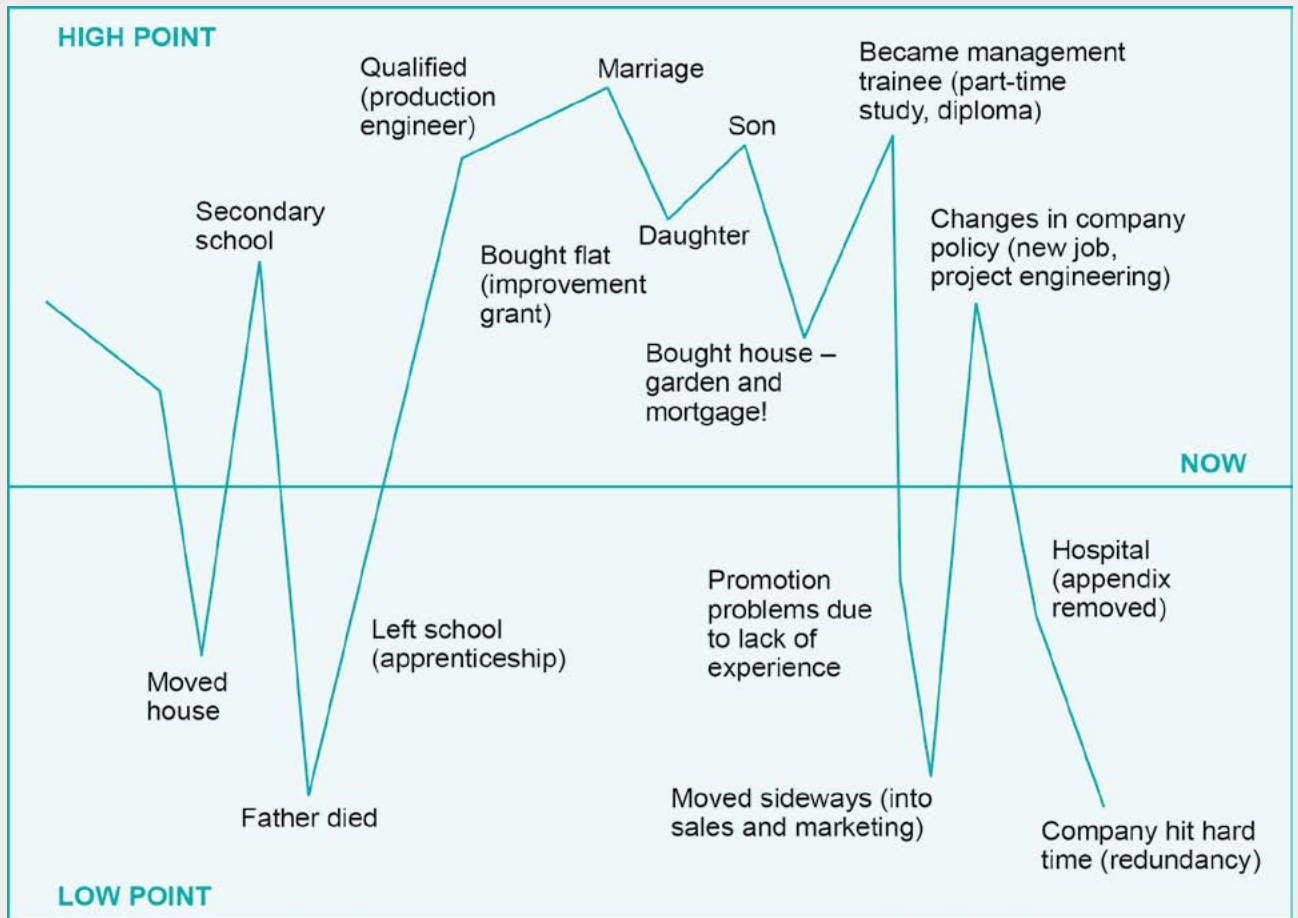
#### Example

When you've drawn a lifeline that records your experiences, reflect on it as a whole. Think about the feelings aroused by each experience and answer these questions, noting any thoughts or ideas that occur to you:

- What does the lifeline say about you and how you've lived your life?

- Are there recognisable themes that have run through your life?
- Is the pattern generally up or down? Is it steady or changeable? What sort of incidents were associated with the highs and lows? Are the highs generally associated with your own choices or actions and the lows with the unexpected or things outside your control?
- Are there some experiences you feel you cope with easily and others that really throw you?
- Are there any lessons to be learnt? For instance, this activity revealed to one person that all her high points were associated with praise from others and her low points with geographical moves. Another noted that all his positive job changes followed disappointments in his private life, and he saw that each disappointment motivated him towards a change and offered opportunities. For a third, it helped them recognise the positive influence and benefit of someone in their life acting as a consistent and unobtrusive mentor.

## Example Lifeline



### What does this mean for me?

Would someone who knows you well have drawn your lifeline differently?

What would that person have said?

You may find it useful to reflect on this with a trusted friend or family member.

### Your Lifeline

## Activity 1.2 Identify your early influences

This activity brings out some of the early themes from your lifeline, concentrating on your childhood and school life. Make notes under the headings below. The activity may take some time, and you might want to return to it later to change or add points.

### 1. Family influences

If applicable, write down any occupational influences on you. For instance, was one of your parents a mechanic or another a teacher?

### 2. What do you remember about your early childhood?

For example, the area and house you lived in, family lifestyle, activities you participated in, experiences you had, what your parents expected of you, your role in the family.

### 3. Schooling

List the schools you went to, the subjects you were good at and enjoyed, how your teachers saw you, how you saw your teachers, school sports or other activities you took part in.

### 4. Teenage years

What activities were you good at or did you enjoy? How did your friends see you? What were you like as a teenager? What ambitions did you have (career or otherwise)?

### 5. Any further education or training

What did you do? How did you choose it? How did you get on? What prompted you to begin studying with the OU?



### **What does this mean for me?**

Spend some time considering what your notes say about you – what you're like, why and how you arrived at where you are today. You may see themes appearing, such as strong aspects of your personality or talents. Maybe you had various abilities but developed one rather than another – a sporting ability rather than artistic talent, perhaps. Looking back, could you have made different choices? Make a note of any insights you've gained through remembering and reflecting.



## What are my main achievements?

The activity in this section can help you to recognise skills and qualities that you may not be aware of. It can be a particularly useful approach if you haven't had much formal experience like paid work – it's sometimes easy to assume that skills gained outside work somehow don't count.

### Activity 1.3 Recognise your main achievements

Looking back at your lifeline (Activity 1.1), note the achievements you are most proud of and what they say about you. Set them out in the table below. They could be work-related or to do with relationships, things you do in your spare time, recently or a long time ago. For example, passing all your exams first time may say that you're an excellent student; passing your driving test on the fifth attempt may say a lot about your staying power and determination.

#### My achievements

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

5

---

#### What they say about me

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

5

---

#### What does this mean for me?

Which of the skills or qualities you've listed could be used in a work situation? The chances are that you've highlighted transferable skills and qualities that would be welcome in many kinds of career roles.

## What do others say about me?

It may be difficult to recognise the skills and qualities that we possess. Sometimes it can be very hard, as we are not used to singing our own praises.

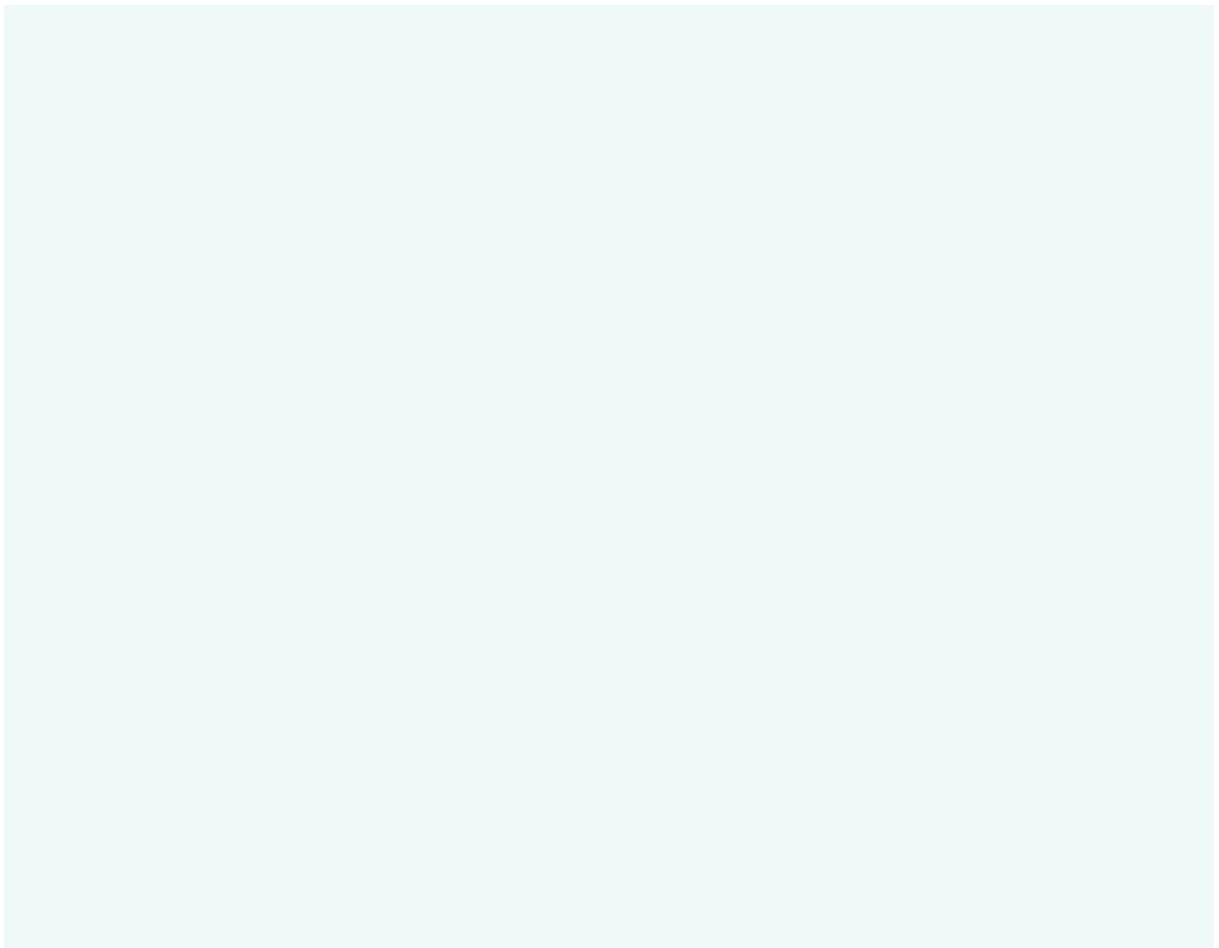
### Activity 1.4 What do others say are your strengths?

Approach a trusted friend or colleague to ask them for feedback about what they see are your strengths and what you do well. If you are in employment or volunteering, you could also look back at appraisals and review documents.

#### **You can ask them:**

- How would you describe me?
- What do you think are my strengths and attributes?
- Make a note of what others say are your strengths.

The activity will help you to see your actions/experiences in a positive light.



## Building self-confidence

Self-confidence refers to our abilities to trust in ourselves. Self-confidence is extremely important in almost every aspect of our lives and impacts on our social relations, achievements, moods and careers.

There are two main aspects which contribute to self-confidence:

1. Self-efficacy – your belief that you can succeed in a given task
2. Self-esteem – confidence in your own worth or abilities

### Activity 1.5 How confident do you seem to others?

This activity will help you to define your levels of self-confidence.

Read the below statements and tick the box if you feel you agree with the statements.

#### How confident do you seem to others?

Confident behaviour	✓	Behaviour associated with low self-confidence	✓
Doing what you believe to be right, even if others mock or criticise you for it.		You have the need to impress people and change your behaviour based on what other people might think.	
Being willing to take risks and go the extra mile to achieve better things. Not waiting for someone else to decide for them. Being proactive rather than waiting for a golden opportunity.		Playing it safe. Staying in your comfort zone, fearing failure and so avoiding taking risks. Wanting someone else to make decisions for you.	
Not being a perfectionist. Admitting your mistakes and learning from them.		Hiding flaws and imperfections. Working hard to cover up mistakes and hoping that you can fix the problem before anyone notices.	
Waiting for others to congratulate you on your accomplishments rather than seeking out praise.		Extolling your own virtues as often as possible to as many people as possible.	
Accepting compliments graciously, e.g. "Thank you, I really worked hard on that. I'm pleased you recognise my efforts."		Dismissing compliments offhandedly, e.g. "Oh that was nothing really, anyone could have done it."	
You are resilient and don't give up easily. You can accept knock-backs and handle negative emotions.		Giving up at the first major hurdle. Taking knock-backs, mistakes and criticism personally.	
You have a strong sense of self-worth. You know that you are not perfect and are aware of your limitations but know you are still worthy of respect.		Feeling worthless and feeling others are better, smarter, more able and more deserving.	

### **What does this mean for me?**

If you've ticked many of the statements in the first column, you have a good level of self-confidence and self-esteem – well done!

Identifying with the statements associated with confident behaviour is great, as it will boost your confidence in career planning tasks such as networking, job interviews and making changes such as integrating into a new work environment. Keep up this positive mindset to help you achieve your goals.

### **Behaviour associated with low confidence. Have a look at how many statements you have ticked.**

**Ticking 1–2 statements:** It can be normal to have one or two statements that relate to low self-confidence. Overall your score may indicate a good level of self-confidence.

**Ticking 3 or more statements:** Having a score of three or more may be dependent on a given situation and how we may be feeling at that point in time. Reframing our thoughts and focusing on the positives and recognising your positive skillsets will all help. Reflection can support learning and development, as it gives us an opportunity to grow as a person.

### **How to build and maintain confidence**

How we feel about ourselves can influence our career plans. Feeling confident about yourself can help build your career confidence and help you make your career ambitions a reality.

If you would like your confidence to grow, listen to our confidence building webinars and try some of the suggested activities:

[help.open.ac.uk/careers-forums](http://help.open.ac.uk/careers-forums)

## What roles do I play in life?

Another way of looking at your skills and qualities is to consider the roles you've played in your life. Each role demands different skills; for example, as a student, you need learning skills, time management, critical thinking and written communication skills.

As a parent, you will have needed to develop a whole host of skills, such as nurturing, delegating, negotiating, budgeting, etc. If you chair meetings at a club, you will have developed assertiveness, diplomacy, organisational and management skills.  
Now complete the table below.

### Activity 1.6 What are your main roles?

As a parent, you may also be a cook, gardener and household manager. You may take part in voluntary work (taking on roles such as counsellor, listener or organiser). You may be an employee (team leader, working group member, project manager). You may find this is a particularly useful exercise if you have little work experience to draw on, as many skills are learnt outside paid work.

#### My main roles

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

5

---

#### What does this mean for me?

You may have been surprised at the number and variety of skills you've listed. Taking time to reflect on your strengths is a good way of focusing on skills you can transfer to the workplace, such as planning and problem solving.

## What have I learnt in my spare time?

What hobbies do you have, or have you had in the past? You may not want to turn your hobby into a career, but your spare-time activities could help you to demonstrate skills and qualities. It is easy to forget that leisure activities can give us as many skills and abilities as those gained through work. For example, if you enjoy DIY, you'll find you have developed not only practical skills but planning and problem-solving skills as well.

### Activity 1.7 Identify your leisure activities and skills

List your leisure activities in the first column and then list the skills you have developed for that activity in the second column.

#### Leisure Activities

#### Skills

## Review

Think about what you've done so far in this section. What have you learnt about yourself? Bringing some of your answers together, what would you now say are your main strengths and weaknesses?

### My main strengths

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

5

---

6

---

They can be skills, abilities, personal characteristics or interests. Remember that strengths can be built on for the future and weaknesses can be reduced by your efforts to address these; they need not be barriers to the future.

### My main weaknesses

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

5

---

6

---

### What does this mean for me?

What are the possibilities in your interests in terms of your career? Have you held positions of responsibility in any of them? Can you see any interests or hobbies that might be helpful to future work plans? For example, although you may not have financial responsibilities at work, you might be treasurer to your local darts team or do the audit for the youth club funds. The skills used in both of these outside of work activities could easily be transferred to the work place.

## 1.2 What work would suit me?

Now that you've spent some time considering the skills and qualities you've developed through your life, it's time to think about work.

### How big a part of my life is work?

Before considering what you want to do in a job, you need to be clear about how important work is to you. This varies from person to person and can change throughout your life. You might be highly ambitious, even a workaholic, or you might avoid positions that regularly eat into your leisure time. You

may have found yourself in a post that takes over and leaves little time for family life and may prefer something that can give you a better work–life balance. The next activity can help you to think about this. If you don't have much experience of paid work, think about your approach to other activities or projects you take part in.





## Activity 1.8 Evaluate your work–life balance

### Rate each of the following statements

**Use this scale – try to avoid choosing option 3 unless you feel this is the only appropriate response:**

- 5 Always true
  - 4 Usually true
  - 3 Neither true nor untrue
  - 2 Usually untrue
  - 1 Always untrue
1. I always aim high in my work
  2. My ambition isn't necessarily to get to the top
  3. I set myself difficult goals to achieve
  4. I don't like to let work disturb my life outside of work
  5. I want to do well at whatever I'm doing
  6. Being a success in life isn't too important to me
  7. I like being seen as dedicated to my job
  8. I don't like to aim too high
  9. Work always comes before pleasure
  10. People wouldn't describe me as very ambitious

### Add up your scores

From the odd-numbered questions  
From the even-numbered questions

Take the 'even' score away from the 'odd' score (even if it produces a minus score)

### What did you score?

**If you have a plus (+) score,** the higher your score, the stronger your ambition. If you scored +20, for example, you would always put work first and aim high in your achievements. You might even be seen as a 'workaholic'!

**If you have a minus (-) score,** you don't see work as the most important aspect of your life. At the lower end of the scale, for example, if you scored -20, you would put your life outside of work before work, have little concern about getting on in your career, and might be seen as 'laid back'.

If you have a more central score, you keep a balance between work and leisure. You have some concerns about doing well and making progress, but you don't let work rule your life.

### What does this mean for me?

Think about the way you scored in this activity. How does this feel? Is your situation right for you or would you like to change this aspect of your life?

## What work experience have I had?

Most people would agree that work experience is very important when considering future roles, but it's easy to take yourself for granted and not recognise the wide range and high level of skills and abilities you have. Many will be transferable skills that you can use in other situations.

You will have learnt a huge amount through work (whether paid or voluntary) by noticing how you feel about different tasks and how you respond to work situations, or how well you perform particular activities compared to other people. You may also have learnt from others, either through formal appraisals, or from being mentored or from other informal comments and reactions.

The next activity helps you to explore your experience and will be useful when you're applying for jobs.

### Activity 1.9 List your job history

#### **On the page opposite, list the jobs you've had, with dates.**

If you have limited or no experience of paid employment, make a list of unpaid or voluntary experience, for example, helping readers at school, delivering 'Meals on Wheels', fundraising for a charity or involvement in a conservation project.

For each job, note how it came about. Did you apply formally through an advert, or did you make a speculative approach to a company? Did you volunteer or were you encouraged into it? If you had some choice, what factors seemed important in deciding to take it up?

For each job, note the range of tasks or activities you had to do.

Did you have to deal with any difficulties?

Which tasks or activities did you find most appealing, enjoyable or rewarding, and why?

What were your particular achievements?

How did you get on with the other people?

What was your style of working?

Were you known for particular things?

What were you most proud of?

What were the things you disliked or found frustrating?

## **Job history**

### **What does this mean for me?**

Look back at what you've written. Do you see any patterns emerging? Can you see any particular strengths or areas of difficulty? Do you enjoy some things more than others? Do others turn to you for help with particular things?

## What different roles do I take on at work or elsewhere?

This activity should help you to become aware of the skills and experience you've developed through the typical roles you play at work. If work hasn't been a major part of your life, apply this to whatever activity has taken up a lot of your time.

Some work roles and areas of competence are listed below. Work through each role in the list. Does it sound like you? If it comes to you easily, put a tick beside it; if it isn't a usual role for you, cross it out. If you're not sure or if it's only partly true, leave it blank.

### Activity 1.10 Identify work roles and areas of competence

<b>Initiate</b>	<b>Solve</b>	<b>Persuade</b>
<b>Implement</b>	<b>Decide</b>	<b>Measure</b>
<b>Monitor</b>	<b>Liaise</b>	<b>Supervise</b>
<b>Maintain</b>	<b>Coordinate</b>	<b>Choose</b>
<b>Improve</b>	<b>Explore</b>	<b>Guide</b>
<b>Control</b>	<b>Investigate</b>	<b>Make</b>
<b>Allocate</b>	<b>Link</b>	<b>Train</b>
<b>Select</b>	<b>Sell</b>	<b>Evaluate</b>
<b>Develop</b>	<b>Plan</b>	<b>Problem-solve</b>
<b>Create</b>	<b>Teach</b>	<b>Analyse</b>
<b>Enhance</b>	<b>Communicate</b>	<b>Research</b>
<b>Delegate</b>	<b>Harmonise</b>	
<b>Seek</b>	<b>Check</b>	
<b>Organise</b>	<b>Campaign</b>	

### What does this mean for me?

Look at the roles you've ticked. Circle any that describe you particularly. Can you think of any specific activities or actions at work or in non-work activities that show that they describe you? What evidence can you give to prove them? How do you feel about them? Which do you most enjoy carrying out? You'll find this list useful when you come to preparing a CV, completing an application form or attending an interview. Note that all the words describe positive qualities.

## What sort of person am I to work with?

Your personality affects how you approach your workplace and the way you respond to situations. Again, think more generally about your life if your workplace experiences are limited.

### Activity 1.11 Recognise your style of working

Work through the following descriptions, deciding how you compare with other people. Try to use the full range of ratings from 5 (much more so than most other people) to 1 (much less so than most other people), circling your position on the scale.

<b>Plan ahead and keep to it (approach)</b>	<b>Average</b>				
<b>Stickler for detail or accuracy (approach)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Easy mixer, socially confident (social)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Pessimistic (drives)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Energetic (drives)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Solitary (social)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Like lots of change and variety (approach)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Very much affected by events or people (drives)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Go my own way, act independently (social)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>More practical than theoretical (approach)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Determined (drives)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Sympathetic, caring for others (social)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Always like to win, come in top (drives)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Like persuading, negotiating (social)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Tend to worry, get anxious (drives)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Like deadlines and timetables (approach)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Usually take a leading role (social)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Good with complex ideas or data (approach)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Demonstrative, show feelings (drives)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Happy to be in charge of others (social)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Prefer traditional courses of action (approach)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Equable, not easily upset (drives)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Tend to influence people (social)</b>	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Ambitious to get on at all costs (drives)</b>	5	4	3	2	1

## Activity 1.11 Recognise your style of working (continued)

Now look over your ratings. You can group them into those to do with relating to people and social situations (social), to do with your approach to work tasks (approach), and to do with your drives and emotions (drives). Where did you score the most highly? Or did you score evenly across the three categories?

For instance, some people are at ease giving a presentation while others find it very nerve-racking. If you think about your colleagues, you'll be aware how they differ from each other. While one is reserved, another is very chatty and communicative; one is a stickler for detail, while another is not too concerned about fine accuracy.

There's no right or wrong personality, but you do need to take your own traits into account. A work situation that suits a very sociable person won't suit someone who much prefers to work alone. The better you know yourself, the more opportunities you create for finding a situation that will suit you.

### What am I good at as far as work is concerned?

This should help you to think about your aptitudes – what you can do and how well you can do it.

- Some people have a creative imagination, others a photographic memory, others are skilful with statistics.
- Some people have been taught or have learnt particular skills for themselves – competence in a computer language, for example.
- Others have specialist knowledge, such as accounting standards or employment law.

It's important for you to know what you are good at, as it affects the work or the parts of a job that you can perform best and is of interest to employers. There's generally some connection between what we can do well and what we enjoy doing, but it's not a necessary connection. You can be good at something without particularly enjoying it. You should also remember that you'll go on developing as you cope with different demands, as you learn through your own study, by going on training courses, by trial and error, by observing others, by reading, and so on.

You can learn about your aptitudes from other people's comments, through taking psychometric tests or from how well you think you cope with different tasks.

### What does this mean for me?

What have you learnt about your typical way of operating? What kind of work situation do you think would likely suit you?

### Activity 1.12 List your work achievements and skills

Look back at your list of achievements and what they say about you. Now list some of your work/voluntary/domestic achievements, projects you've tackled successfully, initiatives you've put into practice, etc. Then think about the knowledge and abilities you needed to apply in order to achieve the result. Perhaps you had to learn a new technique, or perhaps you used or developed a skill you already had.

#### What I achieved

1	_____
2	_____
3	_____
4	_____
5	_____

#### Knowledge/abilities used

1	_____
2	_____
3	_____
4	_____
5	_____

#### What does this mean for me?

Examine and reflect on what you have put under the headings. You might discover that your strengths are grouped in some areas rather than others. It's useful to know this, as it enables you to recognise the talents you have and also to see whether there are gaps you want to work on. It's also useful as evidence when you are writing your CV or attending an interview.

#### Review

As you may be discovering, it's helpful to reflect on your past as you approach a decision that will significantly affect your life. Consider your answers so far. You may have begun to gain more insights into, or realisations about, your own nature. These might be to do with your skills and abilities or your attitudes, ambitions, needs and values. You may have learnt more about your personality, temperament or way of dealing with the world. What have you learnt?

## 1.3 What are my employability skills?

### Activity 1.13 Audit your skills

This is a longer activity than many in this guide, so set aside time to read it through carefully and be methodical in your answers.

The following activity is designed to help you do a skills audit. You need to think about the skills you have gained through your working, home and social life, as well as those you are developing and enhancing through your Open University studies. The activity will help you to assess your skills in more detail. The activity is grouped into skills which are of particular importance to employers, often referred to as 'employability' or 'transferable skills'.

If you are unfamiliar with the language used in recruitment, doing this exercise will help you to start looking at your skills in the way that employers expect and to use the language that you will need to use in job applications.

Many people, especially those who may be returning to work after a break, feel that they are lacking in skills or that the skills they have are rusty. It may be that you have gaps in your skills and undertaking this exercise will help you to identify those so that you can think about how to plug the gap.

For example, think about your Open University studies. It is likely that you have developed or enhanced your

written communication skills, so you will have a good level of skill in points 8, 9, 10 and 12. You will certainly have evidence that you can read efficiently, point 6, and depending on any tutorial participation, you may have enhanced your verbal skills.

A way of improving and demonstrating your skill of dealing with people could involve tutorials and forums.

You are certainly using the skills of thinking and analysis, even if it is just points 5, 9 and 10.

In the technical/practical section, you will be using IT software and equipment. In creative/innovative skills, you may be writing with imagination or creativity, and/or seeing new possibilities or openings.

Your studies will also give you evidence of skills in virtually every point made in the administrative/organisational section. You will need to rate how well you can do these. So, be as honest as you can, both in admitting where you lack skills, as well as in acknowledging your competence, but don't underestimate what you are capable of.



Consider how well you can carry out each one in comparison with other people. Try to use the full range of ratings.

**Rate each of the following statements**

**Use this scale –**

**try to avoid choosing 3 if you can:**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>6</b> Very high, outstanding performance               | <b>3</b> Reasonable level, just acceptable skills |
| <b>5</b> High level, reliably perform better than average | <b>2</b> Very basic level, not usually adequate   |
| <b>4</b> Good level, generally able to do it quite well   | <b>1</b> No significant level of skills           |

Communication	Rating
<b>1.</b> Listening, taking in what others say and checking your understanding of the information	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>2.</b> Clear verbal expression, ability to convey information without confusion. Fluent speech, words flowing easily	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>3.</b> Drawing people out, to encourage them to speak	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>4.</b> Commanding an audience, giving a presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>5.</b> Using the telephone effectively: few misunderstandings	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>6.</b> Reading efficiently: readily taking in written information	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>7.</b> Writing effectively, matching style to purpose	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>8.</b> Structuring reports and other written communications logically; using a wide vocabulary accurately and appropriately	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>9.</b> Speaking clearly and adapting communication style to the audience	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>10.</b> Spelling and grammar	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Total score</b> _____	

## Dealing with people

## Rating

1. Listening, taking in what others say and checking your understanding of the information
2. Showing sensitivity to the feelings and needs of others; taking account of this in dealing with them
3. Getting on with a variety of people and building up working relationships
4. Instructing, teaching or coaching others
5. Delegating and managing others
6. Leading a work group, chairing a meeting
7. Encouraging, motivating, getting the best out of others
8. Counselling: helping with personal problems
9. Negotiating: mediating, dealing with conflict
10. Interviewing, assessing or appraising
11. Persuading, encouraging, changing others' views
12. Consulting and building agreements
13. Acting assertively (not aggressively)

Total score \_\_\_\_\_

## Financial activities

## Rating

1. Understanding book-keeping
2. Preparing a budget
3. Using a spreadsheet
4. Understanding VAT and taxation
5. Producing a cash-flow forecast
6. Producing annual accounts
7. Carrying out a cost-benefit analysis
8. Interpreting management accounts
9. Working knowledge of volume and expenditure-related variances
10. Operating PAYE
11. Understanding types, uses and sources of loan finance
12. Operating costing system

Total score \_\_\_\_\_

## Thinking and analysis

## Rating

1. Using project management tools, e.g. critical path analysis
2. Using statistics
3. Logical thinking, working out implications
4. Applying critical ability in recognising potential weakness or problems
5. Making logical use of facts or information
6. Using mental arithmetic, estimating orders or probability
7. Flow-charting
8. Rational decision making
9. Carrying out analysis and evaluation
10. Researching and gathering information
11. Carrying out mathematical operations
12. Carrying out stock or inventory controls

Total score \_\_\_\_\_

## Technical/practical

## Rating

1. Competence in using tools and technical equipment
2. Understanding data-processing equipment
3. Applying craft or technical ability
4. Aptitude for diagnosing mechanical or electrical faults
5. Constructing or assembling materials or equipment
6. Understanding current technical developments
7. Using laboratory equipment
8. Dealing with tangible, practical problems
9. Using manual dexterity, hand-eye coordination
10. Understanding physical sciences
11. Understanding engineering
12. Maintaining or repairing complex equipment

Total score \_\_\_\_\_

## Creative/innovative

## Rating

1. Generating alternative solutions to problems
2. Creating original ideas
3. Improvising or adapting for other purposes
4. Designing new things, systems, layouts, events or courses
5. Being insightful, intuitive or imaginative
6. Developing others' products or ideas
7. Writing with imagination or creativity
8. Seeing new possibilities or openings
9. Appreciating new or unconventional aspects
10. Visualising: imagining how something will look
11. Working creatively with shapes, colours, sounds and patterns
12. Innovating and improving procedures in your own field

**Total score** \_\_\_\_\_

## Administrative/organisational

1. Managing your time
2. Planning systematically
3. Operating procedures precisely
4. Making things run like clockwork
5. Handling in-trays efficiently
6. Meeting deadlines
7. Producing clear operational structures
8. Developing resources to achieve objectives
9. Organising working time
10. Monitoring procedures and progress
11. Making detailed plans of action
12. Having a well-organised work space, filing system or recording procedures

**Total score** \_\_\_\_\_

## Summarise your skills

Now add up all your total scores. Look at the skills you scored most highly in and those you most enjoy. Write them in this space:

- |                               |                          |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Communication                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Dealing with people           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Financial activities          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Thinking and analysis         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Technical/practical           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Creative/Innovative           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Administrative/organisational | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Total score \_\_\_\_\_

### Circle the skills that you'd most like to use in the future.

Now look through the original ratings to see whether there are skills you're not yet very competent in, but would like to develop. List those here:

### What does this mean for me?

What does this activity tell you? Are there any surprises or does it confirm your expectations? Either way, you can use the information when you come to consider alternatives. Remember that skills can always be developed simply by using them more, and that the wider the range of skills you have, the greater the variety of job options open to you. Recognising the skills you have to offer is key in being able to market yourself successfully to an employer.

## Evidencing your skills

Now that you have identified your skill strengths, it can be helpful to think about what evidence you can give to support those skills. On an application form, you are often asked to give an example of a time when you effectively used a particular skill. In a CV, if you claim to have a skill, you are expected to be able to give evidence to that effect. Competency-based questions are regularly used in graduate recruitment processes. Employers identify the skills and abilities (competencies) that are vital for working in their organisation, and they use these as selection criteria for choosing new recruits.

To measure your suitability, recruiters will ask questions where you will need to draw on examples from your life so far to demonstrate times when you have employed particular competencies. The logic is simple: your past ability to use a skill is a good indicator of your potential to be successful in the future. When thinking about evidence, it can help to think of using a variety of sources, including your studies, work, voluntary work or life in general.

In order to structure the information you give in a clear and succinct way, you can use the STAR method. STAR stands for:

- **Situation:** what was the situation and when did it take place?
- **Task:** what task was it, and what was the objective?
- **Action:** what action did you take to achieve this?
- **Results:** what happened as a result of your action?

You may have more than one example to consider. Try to choose the one that:

- Is relevant and describes the skill being asked for
- Demonstrates action and is something you did, as opposed to what you learnt, or what you might do in a hypothetical situation
- Is personalised by stating what you did, as opposed to saying what other people did or what happened
- Has a positive outcome
- Is appropriate and gives you something you can talk comfortably about if asked for more detail
- Is specific – if the question asks for an example, then you should describe only one.

**Here are two examples:**

**1. Administrative/organisational:**

Whilst acting as a marketing manager for my local hockey club, I organised a successful recruitment drive: printing flyers, arranging volunteers to distribute these and putting in place free trial sessions to welcome potential members. Membership increased by 20 per cent.

**2. Communication:**

I lead seminars for junior members of staff in my workplace. It is essential that I listen carefully to establish their current knowledge and only intervene when necessary to encourage them to consider other areas. My performance in the first seminar led to an increased workload to improve the next set of seminars.

Whilst competency-based questions focus on what you can do, strengths-based questions focus on what you like doing; these are also being used now by graduate employers (see Section 4).



## 1.4 What do I want from work?

Now that you have thought about who and where you are and the skills you have, the next step is to recognise what you are satisfied and dissatisfied with.

### Activity 1.14 Evaluate your work tasks

Rate the values below in terms of their importance to you. Try to use the full range of scores.

**4** Very important **3** Important **2** Less important **1** Not important

Making decisions, independent action	<b>Autonomy</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Change or variety in tasks, people, places	<b>Variety</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scope to learn, study, think, analyse	<b>Intellectual</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Making friendly contacts with others	<b>Social</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Large income, expensive possessions	<b>Economic</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Expressing ethical code or religious beliefs	<b>Spiritual</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Using talents, developing skills	<b>Using abilities</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being part of an important organisation	<b>Commitment</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having lots of stimulus, excitement, thrills	<b>Excitement</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having influence or power over others	<b>Authority</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enjoying or making beautiful designs or things	<b>Aesthetic</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting promotion, career progression	<b>Advancement</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helping or caring for others	<b>Altruism</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Concern for surroundings or location	<b>Comfort</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being original, developing new ideas	<b>Creativity</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Activity, keeping moving, handling things	<b>Physical</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Taking risks; business and trading	<b>Commercial</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Does this make clear your reasons for wanting to work? Does it suggest the kind of work you like to do or the type of organisation you feel most suited to working for?

Clearly, some kinds of work have more to do with ALTRUISM and others with ECONOMIC or CREATIVE values. In the same way, a manufacturing company, a charity, a newspaper office, a local authority, a financial institution and so on will each have a different 'feel' as a place to work. Try to think through which would suit you best.



## How well does my present (or last) job meet my wants and needs?

### Activity 1.15 Rate your current (or last) job

To complete your examination of job satisfaction or dissatisfaction, consider the following.

**Circle the level that applies to your present or most recent job.**

**Money:** Clearly, inadequate income causes many problems and dissatisfactions.

**Too little   About right   Too much**

**Opportunity for control:** Simple, repetitive, closely controlled work is generally far from satisfying, but on the other hand, having a high level of responsibility (being a managing director, for example) can be stressful.

**Too little   About right   Too much**

**Opportunity to use skills:** Most of us enjoy using and developing our skills and competence. But having very high-level, complicated demands repeatedly made on us can be stressful.

**Too little   About right   Too much**

**Goals:** People function best when there are demands to be met, targets to be achieved, challenges to rise to. We all have our own preferred level of demand.

**Too little   About right   Too much**

**Variety:** Individuals differ in the amount of variety they prefer, but it's stimulating to have some change and variation in the work environment.

**Too little   About right   Too much**

**Clear boundaries:** A work situation where boundaries aren't clear can cause uncertainty and conflict. Equally, being in a tightly defined job can feel restricting.

**Too little   About right   Too much**

**Social contact:** Everyone's need for contact is different, but most of us get satisfaction from being with others, chatting over coffee or working in a team.

**Too little   About right   Too much**

**Respect:** Most of us like to be thought well of and respected by others. For work satisfaction it's important to feel that there's some match between your contribution and the position you hold.

**Too little   About right   Too much**

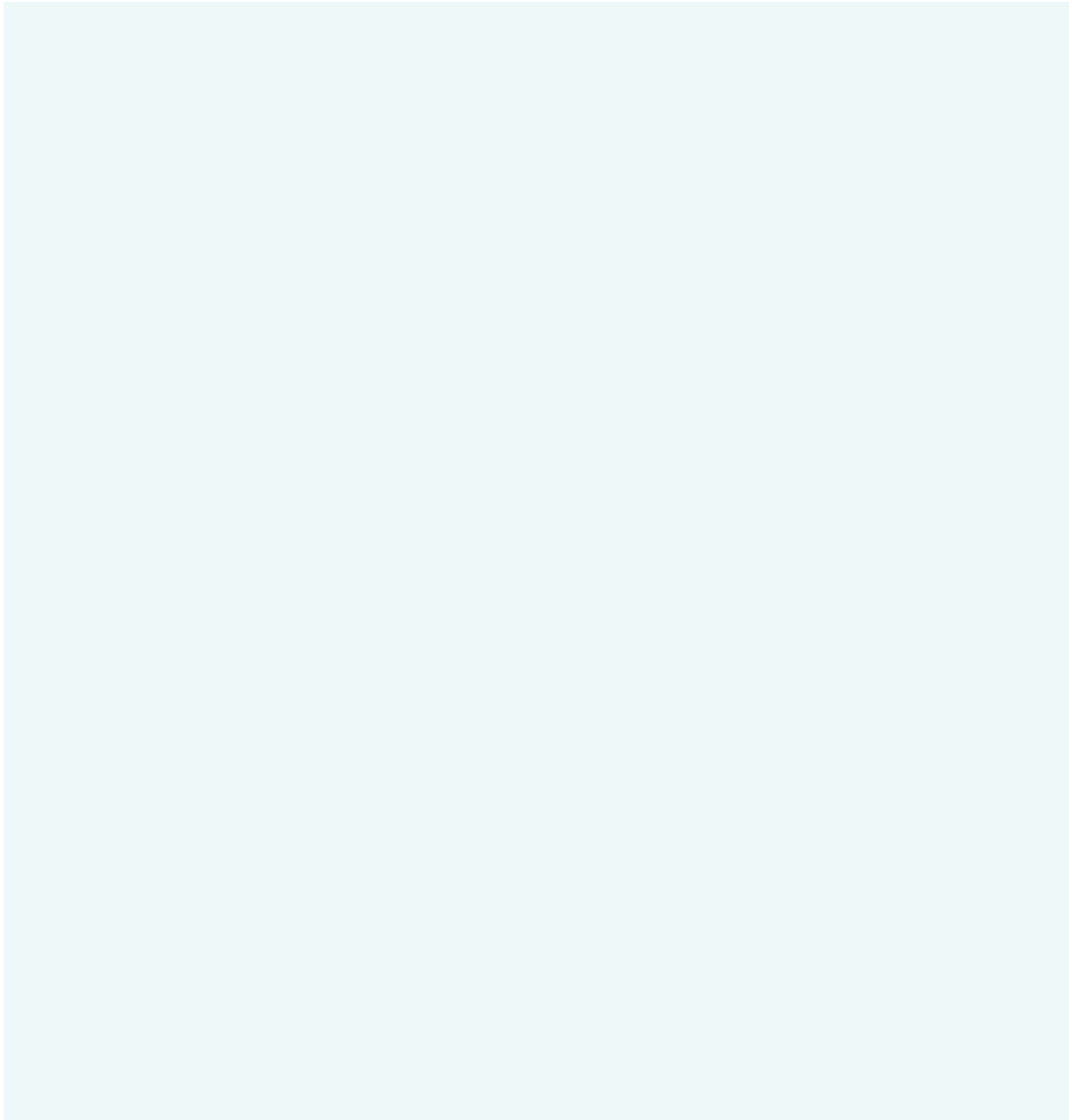
### What does this mean for me?

Which of these are the most important to you? Answering this question may clarify sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in a potential, current or your most recent job. It may begin to suggest either the kind of work you'd like to do or the kind of organisation you'd like to work for. This can be helpful in supporting the question of whether a change of employer/organisation may be what you're looking for, or a change of job role/new career direction. Note any ideas that occur to you.

## Activity 1.16 Review how you feel about your current job and skills match

### Review

You've now considered the reasons why you work (other than financial necessity) and which things you most enjoy doing. If your occupation is to 'feel right', it's important that it should be fulfilling, agree with your beliefs in general and allow you to express your personality. Any significant mismatch is likely to leave you feeling dissatisfied, stressed or becoming cynical about your job. Take time to reflect on the results of the activities in this section, perhaps discuss them with a confidant and, if necessary, modify them. Note your thoughts here.



## What kind of work would I like to do?

To help you decide on the kind of work you would like to do, you also need to consider your interests. Interests are to do with the things you find most appealing or enjoyable.

### Activity 1.17 Rate the work you'd like to do

Look through these kinds of work and consider whether you would like to carry each one out. You may have had direct experience of some of them. Try to imagine whether you'd like doing the others or not. It's not a question of your ability or qualifications, but only of your own preferences. Assume that you could do the activity if you wanted to.

Tick **'Yes'**, **'Not sure'** or **'No'** according to how you feel about each activity.

	Yes	Not sure	No
1. Supervise staff dealing with correspondence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Design a staff appraisal scheme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Monitor quality control activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Keep up to date with computing developments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Put budgeting procedures into practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Develop a marketing plan for a new service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Keep abreast of scientific developments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Write information booklets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Supervise process control staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Organise renewal of insurance cover	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Plan staff training schemes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Forecast drawing office work schedules	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Find new areas for computer applications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Keep abreast of money market changes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Negotiate prices with suppliers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Plan research and development (R & D)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Handle public relations issues (PR)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Revise road delivery schedules	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Activity 1.17 Rate the work you'd like to do (continued)

	Yes	Not sure	No
19. Plan introduction of new clerical procedures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Interview job applicants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Organise installation of an internal telephone system	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Instruct computer users on procedures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Coordinate work of audit staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. Brief sales staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. Design new technical equipment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. Collect and collate information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Supervise warehouse staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. Report on legal matters affecting the organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. Set up a staff grievance procedure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. Plan equipment maintenance schedules	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. Review data processing installations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. Monitor productivity of operations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33. Analyse effectiveness of advertising	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34. Organise scientific research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35. Design publicity leaflets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
36. Monitor productivity of operations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
37. Implement new administrative procedures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
38. Investigate staff turnover problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
39. Monitor laboratory testing services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
40. Write computer documentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
41. Brief colleagues on effects of taxation changes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
42. Report on sales performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
43. Produce design specifications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
44. Manage external relations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
45. Supervise a building maintenance programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Activity 1.17 Rate the work you'd like to do (continued)

	Yes	Not sure	No
46. Take minutes of meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
47. Prepare a staff handbook	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
48. Carry out an energy usage audit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
49. Deal with computing problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
50. Prepare financial reports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
51. Review a product range and pricing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
52. Develop and improve mechanical or electronic equipment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
53. Edit a newsletter or magazine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
54. Improve plant layout to increase productivity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Scoring

Give **4** points for each 'Yes' response

Give **2** points for each 'Not sure' response

Give **0** points for each 'No' response

**Now add up the scores for the groups of questions shown here:**

	Total
<b>Group A</b> Questions 1, 10, 19, 28, 37, 46	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Group B</b> Questions 2, 11, 20, 29, 38, 47	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Group C</b> Questions 3, 12, 21, 30, 39, 48	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Group D</b> Questions 4, 13, 22, 31, 40, 49	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Group E</b> Questions 5, 14, 23, 32, 41, 50	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Group F</b> Questions 6, 15, 24, 33, 42, 51	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Group G</b> Questions 7, 16, 25, 34, 43, 52	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Group H</b> Questions 8, 17, 26, 35, 44, 53	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Group I</b> Questions 9, 18, 27, 36, 45, 54	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Activity 1.17 Rate the work you'd like to do (continued)

### What your scores mean

Your scores relate to different kinds of work activity:

	Score
<b>A</b> Administrative/legal/secretarial e.g. charity officer, health service manager	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>B</b> Personnel/training/education e.g. primary teacher, recruitment manager	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>C</b> Technical support e.g. quality assurance manager, laboratory technician	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>D</b> Data processing e.g. IT consultant, database administrator	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>E</b> Accounting/finance e.g. management accountant, tax inspector	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>F</b> Marketing/sales/purchasing e.g. retail buyer, sales manager	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>G</b> Scientific/engineering/research and design e.g. electronics engineer, architect	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>H</b> Information/communication e.g. librarian, interpreter	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>I</b> Operational/production/distribution e.g. transport planner, production manager	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Write in your total score for each group

The result may be no surprise. It might be that you work or have worked in your highest-scoring area and enjoyed it. If so, this is a reassuring confirmation and suggests that you should consider continuing in that or related work, even if in a different kind of organisation. Alternatively, the pattern may suggest a move to a different area of work.

The list of interests we've considered in this activity reflects common graduate and managerial areas of work. It doesn't include artistic, creative, craft and natural environment areas, nor those that depend on performance skills such as acting, dancing, playing a musical instrument. If you have interests outside this 'managerial scheme', do take account of them in considering your future. Before carrying on, you might find it helpful to look again at the section on the roles you play in your life and any possibilities you noted there.

## 1.5 Review

Now read through the results of your work so far and reflect on the notes you have made. You should by now have a much clearer picture about:

- Your aptitudes
- Your skills and interests
- Your achievements and experience
- Your values.

**Activity 1.18** Now complete the summary chart below

### What am I good at?

Write down the aptitudes that you'd most like to use in work.

### What are my main work values?

Write down the values you'd like to fulfil.

### What would I like to do?

Write down the occupations or job areas you'd like to work in.

## Summary chart (continued)

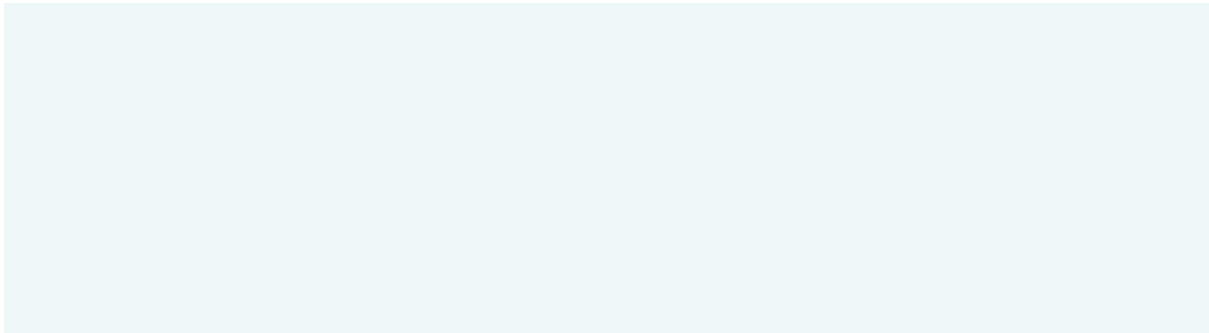
### How would I like to work with people? What kind of environment?

Write down the kind of contact you'd like to have with people (working mainly independently or as part of a team, having lots of customer contact, helping others in a caring or supporting role), and the kind of work environment you'd like.



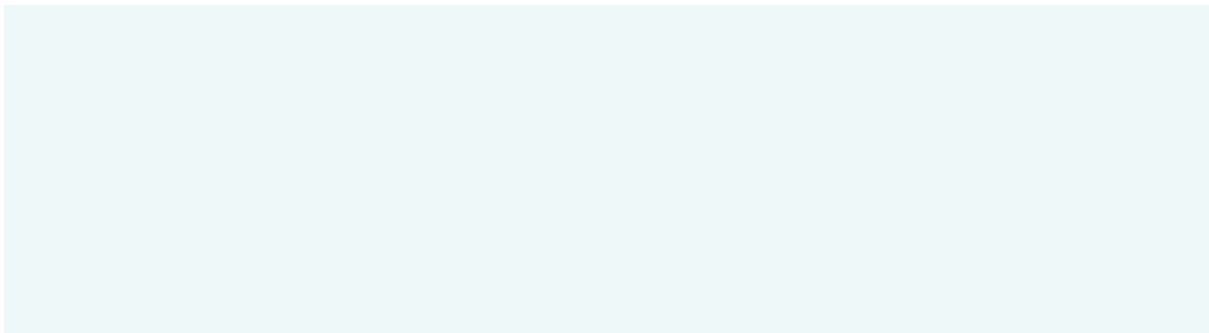
### What other aspects are important to me?

Write down any other factors that are important to you, such as location, travel, organisational structure, etc.



### What changes would I like to make?

Write down some changes you would like to make to help in your job searching.

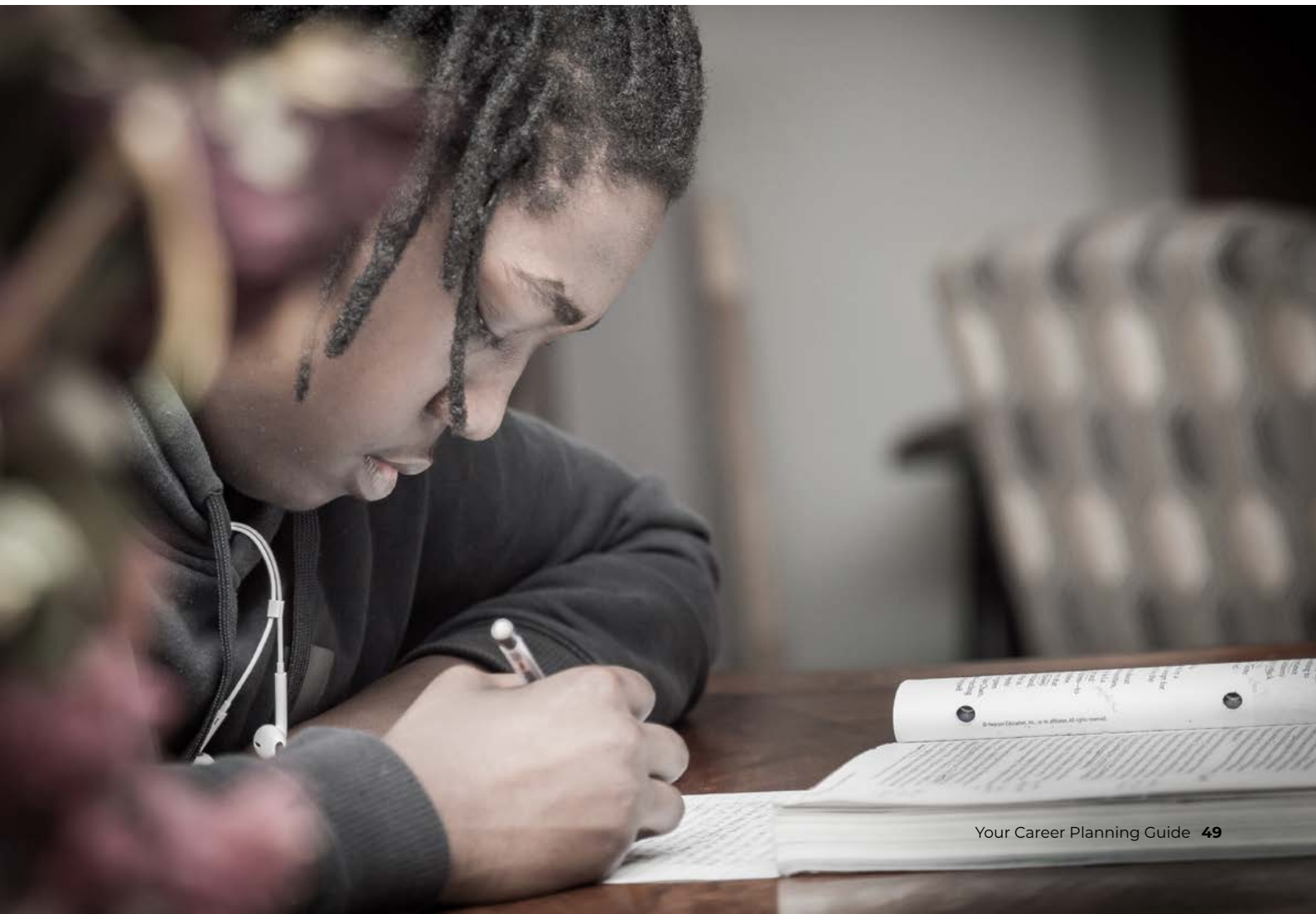




# 02

## Exploring possibilities

<b>2.1</b>	Planning your strategy	<b>50</b>
<b>2.2</b>	Graduate-level jobs	<b>54</b>
<b>2.3</b>	Self-employment	<b>55</b>
<b>2.4</b>	Postgraduate study	<b>56</b>
<b>2.5</b>	Finding information about jobs, careers and the labour market	<b>57</b>
<b>2.6</b>	Careers related to my qualification	<b>61</b>
<b>2.7</b>	Professional bodies and associations	<b>61</b>
<b>2.8</b>	Newspapers	<b>62</b>
<b>2.9</b>	Networking	<b>62</b>
<b>2.10</b>	Social media	<b>67</b>
<b>2.11</b>	Work experience	<b>69</b>



## 2.1 Planning your strategy

Learning about the wide range of opportunities that are available to you is an important element in your career development. It can help you recognise how your interests fit with the plethora of opportunities. If you're thinking of changing your career or facing redundancy, this is an opportunity to take time out and reflect on why you want to change and to explore different career options.

There actually isn't one 'perfect job', as research shows that the average worker will experience six different jobs during their life. To highlight this, for those OU students studying for career motivation, over 40 per cent are studying to change their careers, which shows the fluidity of our career journeys. Therefore, identifying a career direction rather than a job role can give you a greater element of flexibility in your career plans.

### Are you career-adaptable?

The career adaptability theory argues that the labour market is changing all the time, and you may experience many situations where you need to change or adapt your career plans and make successful transitions. The next activity will help you assess how career-adaptable you are.

This section will help you to broaden your horizons and look at different ways to research opportunities so that you can understand and assess your options.

### You may have started this process already by:

- Understanding roles based on personal experience
- Taking advice and listening to suggestions from friends and family
- Undertaking an internet search.

Although the above is a good start, ideas and thoughts can be restricted and based on limited sources. There needs to be a way to check how realistic our expectations of roles are. It is best to have a strategic approach to this activity where you are open to ideas.

There are four dimensions (the 4 Cs) to career adaptability which can demonstrate your readiness, skills, confidence and resources to make successful career changes and transitions. How career-adaptable are you?

## Activity 2.1 Are you career-adaptable?

**Rate your confidence levels on the qualities in the scale below**  
(from 1 not very confident to 5 very confident)

Dimension	Question	What does this mean?	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Concern</b>	<b>Do I have a future?</b>	• You're actively thinking about your future self	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You're preparing for your future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You understand the decision you make today could affect your future choices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You're aware of the career and vocational choices you need to make	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You're planning your career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You're actively engaging with your career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Control</b>	<b>Who owns my future?</b>	• You remain positive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You make your own decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You take responsibility for your actions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You act in accordance with your values and principles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You can rely on yourself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You do what is right for you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Curiosity</b>	<b>What will I do?</b>	• You explore your opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You look for opportunities to grow as a person	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You investigate options before making a choice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You observe different ways of doing things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You probe deeply into the questions you have	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You're curious about new opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Activity 2.1 Continued

Dimension	Question	What does this mean?	1	2	3	4	5
Confidence	Can I do it?	• You perform tasks efficiently	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You take care to do things well	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You enjoy learning new skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You work to your full potential	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You can overcome obstacles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		• You can solve problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Higher scores are a good indicator for career success. However, if you are not feeling as confident as you would like, we have a free online course to help you develop your career resilience search on OpenLearn: [www.open.edu/openlearn](http://www.open.edu/openlearn).

## A typical strategy

It is easy to be overwhelmed by the amount of research you need to do on possible opportunities. Remember that people learn in different ways; some are drawn to talking to people, others like facts and figures, and some find 'networking' second nature. Each method can offer insights and a chance to learn. So, it's important to:

- Research and consider all sources of information

- Consider all the opportunities open to you: public, private and voluntary sectors
- Consider labour market information, sectors that are emerging, jobs that are in decline or in demand
- Consider your network and who can help you
- Get a general view before you start to draw up a shortlist.

### Exploring possibilities using your OU studies

Are you an OU student studying for the pure pleasure of learning a subject and seeing what doors the qualification can open? Could you be studying to complete a career change and move to pastures new? Or you have plans to progress in your current role?

## Activity 2.2 Reflecting on your studies

You may be halfway through your studies or have just graduated. Whatever stage you are at, use this activity to take a moment and reflect on your studies. Sometimes reflection on your studies – the things you enjoy, modules you want to know more about and things you don't like – can help you decide on your future direction. You may want to have a copy of your module materials on hand to help you in this task.

**Describe the elements of your studies that inspire you.**

**What key words would you use to describe your studies?**

**Are there any aspects that you didn't like?**

### **What does this mean for me?**

This activity can help you reflect on how your interests have grown or developed. What topics did you recognise that you have a passion for, and has this helped shape new ideas? Your responses can help you explore possibilities for the future. For example, if research and writing reports were strengths, then you may want to consider further study or job roles that incorporate these skills.

## 2.2 Graduate-level jobs

You may have heard of the term ‘graduate job’ before, and it can be confusing if you don’t know what it means. This term refers to job roles where an essential entry requirement is a degree qualification. As the world of work changes, more and more job roles require a higher-level qualification, for example, you will now need a nursing degree to become a nurse.

One of the main reasons employers find graduates attractive is that they often possess qualities and skills such as flexibility, analytical skills and the capability to learn new skills, among others.

### Graduate training schemes

Studying for a degree builds up many transferable skills, and employers recognise the value this can bring to their organisation. A great way to kick-start your career is with graduate training schemes. These opportunities are often structured programmes that offer candidates a paid job role and training. The role can expose you to different areas of the business and larger companies can offer the opportunity to work abroad.

Opportunities can be in varying sectors and areas of business. For example, graduate schemes are available in human resources, management, finance, engineering, retail, accounting, IT and more.

You can apply for these schemes if you are interested in using and developing your transferable skills. Many graduate schemes are open to any degree discipline.

For further information on where to look for graduate schemes see Section 4.

“ We welcome career changers who completed their degree some years ago and have some work experience. The Fast Stream welcomes diversity, as life and work experience will enrich the Civil Service. ”

**Head of Marketing & Diversity,  
Civil Service Fast Stream**

## 2.3 Self-employment

Do you have a business idea or love the thought of being your own boss? If so, self-employment is an option to consider.

There can be lots to think about when starting up your own business – from generating ideas to securing finance and researching the market. Firstly, think about what you are like as a person – do you have attributes such as self-motivation and do you thrive on uncertainty? Review your answers in Section 1 of this guide.

If you're not comfortable in this type of environment or style of working, this option may not suit you. You'll need to weigh up the pros and cons carefully.

Find out more at [help.open.ac.uk/self-employment](https://help.open.ac.uk/self-employment)

### Entrepreneurship

As defined by the Cambridge dictionary, entrepreneurship is a skill in spotting opportunities to start a new business. As entrepreneurs are opportunists, it's common for them to own businesses across several different industries and trades, noticing a gap in any market, not just one specifically.

There can be lots to consider when starting a new business.

Find out more at [help.open.ac.uk/what-is-an-entrepreneur](https://help.open.ac.uk/what-is-an-entrepreneur)



## 2.4 Postgraduate study

There are many types of postgraduate courses, such as Master's and research degrees or PhDs, for you to consider as part of your career journey. Study may be offered on a full-time, part-time or distance-learning basis. It's important to pick the right one for you.

Postgraduate qualifications	Examples and features
<b>Postgraduate (Certificate, Diploma or Masters)</b>	<p>Postgraduate Certificates are usually around 4 months full time and you can progress from this to a Diploma or Masters</p> <p>Postgraduate Diplomas last around 9 months full time and you can progress this to a Masters</p> <p>Taught Masters (MA, MSc, MBA, MEng) are usually between 1 and 2 years and normally involves a dissertation or project</p>
<b>Research Masters – MRes</b>	<p>Research Masters, which focuses on independent research, usually around 60% of the course</p>
<p><b>Doctorates – PhDs/DPhils, integrated PhDs, professional doctorates</b></p> <p><b>Professional doctorates – combine professional skills with academic knowledge</b></p> <p><b>New Route PhDs – combine taught courses and practical experience alongside advanced research</b></p>	<p>Focused on independent research resulting in a doctoral thesis (extended research project in a specialist topic)</p> <p>They are most commonly taken after a Masters and usually take around 4 years to complete, but may take longer</p>
<b>Conversion courses</b>	<p>Intensive postgraduate programmes for those who have studied other undergraduate subjects and who want to 'convert' to another subject/career; varied in length, for example, Psychology or Law</p>
<b>Vocational qualifications</b>	<p>Usually relates to a specific sector or role, e.g., teaching, social work qualifications</p>

There are many reasons why you may consider further study for your career. You may think that it will improve your employment prospects, or you want to explore academia and need a postgraduate qualification. Whatever your reasons, here are some tips:

- Research how further studies can help you develop your career.
- Research and learn about the different further-study options.
- Attend postgraduate open days.
- Speak to university admissions teams to discuss entry requirements and what they expect.
- Explore funding options.
- Speak to your tutors about further study.



## 2.5 Finding information about jobs, careers and the labour market

Information is an essential tool in researching opportunities available to you. Find out as much as you can about job roles within your chosen career/employment sector. The more you're aware of the opportunities open to you, the more you'll understand your options and how each possibility can help your career, and in turn, the better the choices you will be able to make.

- Personal contacts can be invaluable: tutors, fellow students, alumni, friends and family.
- Follow up this information by talking to the OU careers team and people in the job areas that interest you.
- Recognise the main sources of information about careers and jobs.
- Use online careers information sites, relevant journals, professional bodies (including their regional or national representatives) and graduate careers websites (such as TARGETjobs).
- Set up a file of job information: sample advertisements, job descriptions and person specifications, useful company and sector contacts, details of salary bands, useful articles, press releases, etc.

You can search [DiscoverUni](#) or Prospects [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) for information on graduate destinations. A recent Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) report shows that 80% of respondents were in employment or unpaid work, including 11% who were engaged in both employment and further study.

## Graduate outcomes

GO is an annual social survey in the UK and captures the perspectives and current status of graduates. All graduates are surveyed 15 months after they finish their studies. The survey aims to gain insight into the student experience from a learning and employment perspective.

Search the HESA site [www.graduateoutcomes.ac.uk](http://www.graduateoutcomes.ac.uk) for more information.

The above information sources can give you confidence on what OU studies can help you achieve. It can also stimulate thoughts and ideas about your own career path.



# WORLD OF WORK IN THE 2030s

What will the world of work look like in the not-so-distant future? When making career plans, it is really useful to think about the labour market, the skills that are in demand, and the sectors where growth is expected. Understanding changing economic circumstances can help you to clarify your career options and make realistic goals. Take a look at our snapshot of labour market projections in the 2030's.

## LABOUR MARKET PROJECTIONS

### DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

Over the next decade the number of economically active people aged 65 and over is projected to increase by one third. Workplaces will become more multi-generational.



### CARE SECTOR

Demand for workers in the healthcare and STEM occupations may grow more than before the pandemic, reflecting increased attention to health as populations age.



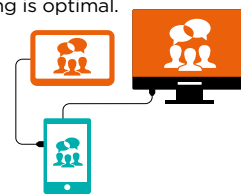
### BUSINESS & OTHER SERVICES



Is expected to see a strong growth in both high and low skilled roles due to investment in the sector and technology development.

### FUTURE OF WORK

83% of workers in a study said a hybrid model of working is optimal.



### REPLACEMENT DEMAND



People leaving the labour market (e.g. through retirement) means that job openings will still exist across all sectors & industries

### QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS DEMAND

An increased need for people to hold higher level qualifications is projected to grow. In addition, among the skills in most demand are social work and care giving and software development skills.



Source: The Future of Work: Jobs and skills in 2030: UK Commission for Employment and skills  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/303334/er84-the-future-of-work-evidence-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/303334/er84-the-future-of-work-evidence-report.pdf)  
Source: UK skills taxonomy <https://data-viz.nesta.org.uk/skills-taxonomy/index.html>  
Accenture – The future of work  
[https://www.accenture.com/\\_acnmedia/PDF-155/Accenture-Future-Of-Work-Global-Report.pdf#zoom=40](https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/PDF-155/Accenture-Future-Of-Work-Global-Report.pdf#zoom=40)  
Indeed: <https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/fastest-growing-industries>

## Labour market information and sector reports

If you are finding it difficult to think of specific job roles, then explore more broadly by looking at job sectors. Job 'sectors' or 'industries' comprise various job roles that relate to each other in some way. For example, the 'IT', 'creative', 'healthcare' and 'science' industries. This information can give you a past, current and future view of the labour market.

A recent GO survey (2021) highlighted that UK respondents entered the following industries: Health (21%), Education (18%) and Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities (12%).

See what the world of work will be like in the 2030s (see fig 2.1).

Insights can unearth potential trends and possibilities for the future, emerging sectors, roles, skills gaps, sector challenges and wider governmental changes. Although we can never predict the future, indications can help us plan and make informed decisions.

To find out more about job sectors and industries go to [help.open.ac.uk/do-your-research-for-when-youre-applying-for-jobs](https://help.open.ac.uk/do-your-research-for-when-youre-applying-for-jobs)

Here you can access Abintegro industry reports and try a labour market interactive tool on the OpenLearn platform.

Search Prospects: [www.prospects.ac.uk](https://www.prospects.ac.uk) for labour market information.

## What sort of organisation would suit you?

You need to consider what type of opportunity might be right for you and think about the pros and cons of working for an SME, a large company or working in the third sector. Here are some of the differences between them:

SMEs (Small and medium sized enterprises)	Large companies (With over 250 employees)	Third Sector (Charitable/Not-for-profit)
Fastest growing sector of UK economy	Easily identifiable opportunities	Focus on ethical work
Local	National	Mainly local
Early responsibility	Small cog in big wheel	No typical working day
No formal induction	Structured training programme	Can be a very small organisation
Less red tape and bureaucracy	Formal structures embedded	Less bureaucracy
Lower starting salary	Perks and higher starting salary	Typically a lower starting salary

## 2.6 Careers related to my qualification

Another way to explore your options is to think about how your studies can open doors to careers. Many students ask this question, and it can be a good starting point, especially if you are looking to make use of your degree. Roles can be directly or loosely related to your subject. You can start your research so you understand more about roles, demands and organisations.

Find information on careers related to your qualification by searching Prospects ([www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)) or access your StudyHome.

## 2.7 Professional bodies and associations

There are many professional associations available that span various sectors and professions. But what are these? Professional bodies perform varying functions, primarily providing an oversight of the knowledge, skills, conduct and practices of that profession or occupation.

Individual members sign up to the organisation. For some careers, it is a legal requirement to join a professional body to be able to practise in that profession.

- **Psychology:** The British Psychological Society
- **Law:** The Law Society

- **IT:** British Computing Society
- **Engineering:** e.g. Institution of Engineering Designers (IED), Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET)
- **Physics:** The Institute of Physics (IoP)

### There are many benefits for joining:

- They can provide careers support, and some have dedicated careers sections on their websites where you can learn about career roles.
- They provide an excellent opportunity to network with professionals within the sector and the chance to connect with like-minded individuals.
- You may be able to access publications, journals and learn of the latest news.
- Membership shows a level of commitment to your chosen career.
- You can include membership in your CV.

Find a comprehensive list of professional bodies on the Directory of British Associations website [www.directoryoftheprofessions.co.uk](http://www.directoryoftheprofessions.co.uk).

In Ireland, search for professional bodies at [www.postgrad.ie](http://www.postgrad.ie).

## 2.8 Newspapers

A great way to drum up career ideas is to look at online newspapers. The larger daily papers (*The Times*, *The Independent*, *The Irish Times*, *The Irish News*, *The Herald*, *The National*, *Herald Scotland*, *The Leader*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Belfast Telegraph*, *The Cambrian News*) all have a dedicated section on their website for job vacancies. This is an excellent source of information to search for roles in an ever-changing market, as job titles can change and there can be many nuances. An approach to take in your research is to search for roles by your interests. For example, you could type in broader search terms in the search engines: 'children', 'young people' or 'law' and see what roles come up. This is a great way of learning of different job roles and especially exploring the labour market at a granular level.

## 2.9 Networking

Many consider networking as a separate work-related activity, but in actual fact we do this in every aspect of our life. For example, have you ever used Facebook? Made friends through a course or via meet up groups? Maybe you have joined a club or group? If you answer yes to any of these activities, then you are a networker.

'Networking' is the systematic use of personal contacts to:

- Gather information about an industry or company
- Discover new and hidden jobs, especially in particular companies
- Learn about a company's work culture
- Get an introduction to a key decision maker in a company
- Develop further contacts to expand your network.

### **How do you build your network?**

Your primary contacts are people who know you directly, such as friends, relatives, fellow students, tutors or people you've met through leisure interests, voluntary work or casual part-time jobs. Even if these people can't help you themselves, they may be able to put you in touch with someone who can (these are known as 'secondary contacts'). These secondary contacts can act as a bridge between you and the decision makers in the companies you are interested in, or they may lead to other secondary sources.

It can be easy to think networking is about finding a job, and this is certainly one possibility. The key benefit of having people in your network is that they can become your publicity agents, give advice and support as well as become your information sources. Remember, there can also be an element of 'giving', i.e. if you know of information or contacts that would be useful for those you know, then pass this information on and make introductions so that you are a 'connector' too.

Here is an example of one person's creative mind map of contacts based on what they know about their contacts' careers.

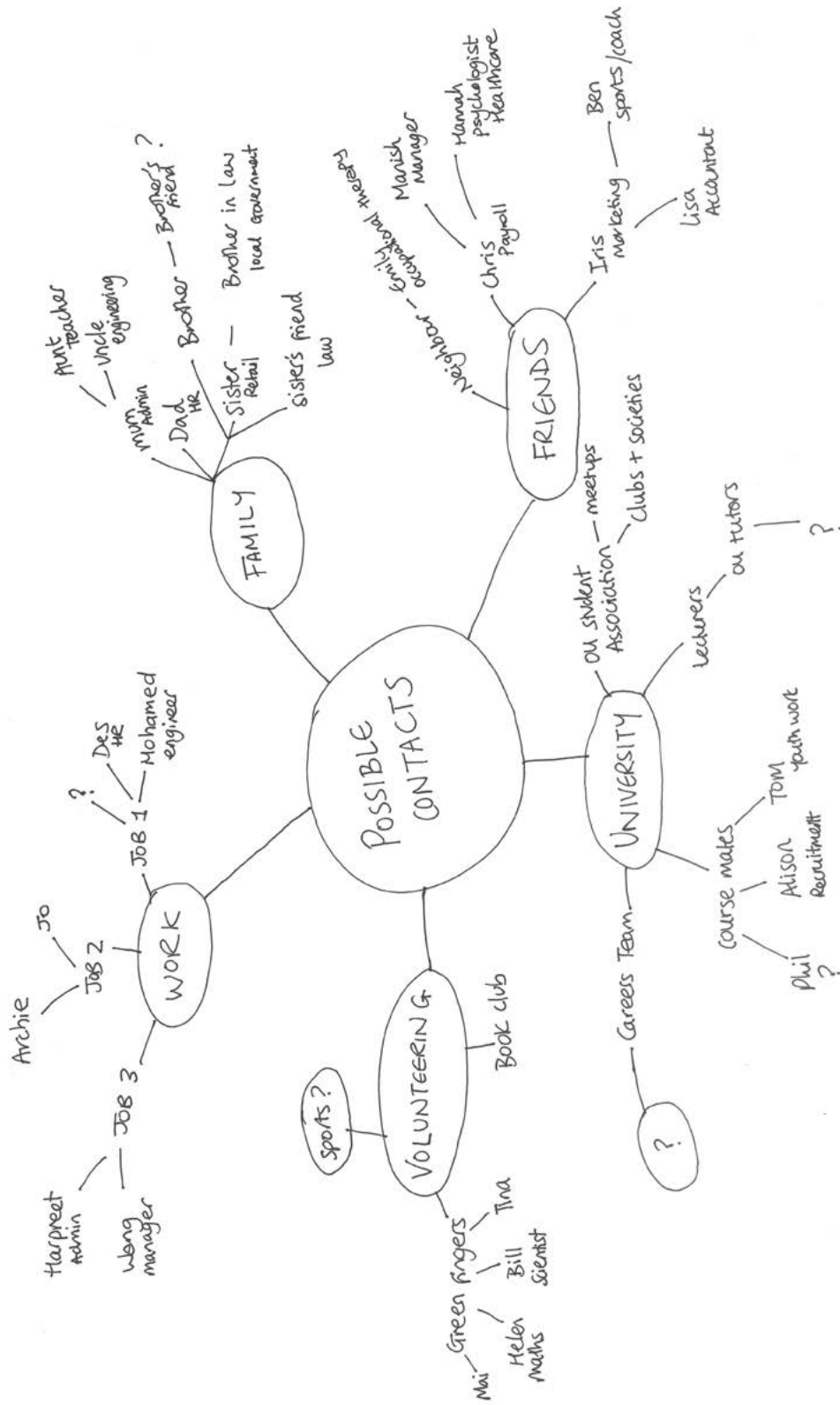


Figure 2.2 Mind map of careers

## Who's in your network?

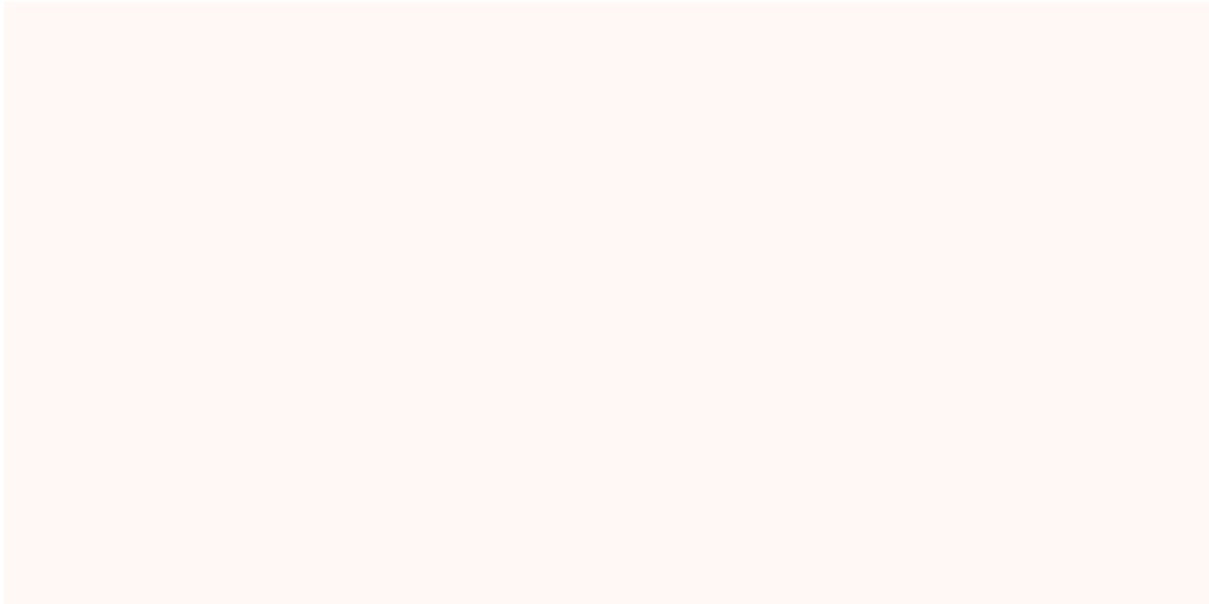
### Activity 2.3

Draw up a list of everyone who might be able to help you in your search for work: friends, family, former colleagues, tutors, any business contacts you have, all of whom are potential sources of information or advice. Think about what they can do for you. This could include:

- Keeping you informed about a sector that they work in
- Providing advice on your strategy and approach, the impression you make on social media networking
- Introducing you to others, for example, by joining their social media networks
- Providing recommendations or references for you.

Make a list in the space below, spider diagram or mind map of your contacts and record ways in which you feel they could support you.

Start to prioritise who would be the best contacts for what, and what would be the best approach and when.



If you are thinking of progressing your career, use your current contacts, human resource department (e.g. mentoring schemes), make the most of your appraisals and consider approaching key decision makers for advice and work shadowing.



## Extending your network

Because it is not just 'who you know' but also 'who they know', it's worth investing time to extend your network. By this point, you may have been wondering about LinkedIn. You will look at this later in this section.

Remember, it takes time to build up your network as it's an ongoing activity. You need to be patient and take a long-term approach. It is like watering flowers and watching them flourish.

## Building up a network

Keep a record of your contacts and any discussions you may have. This can help you keep tabs on where you are, which need follow-up, and most importantly, it can stop you getting confused over important details.

## Approaching your contacts

First, decide how you will approach your contacts. Several methods are possible, but you need to decide which is right for you, which are appropriate for your area of work and which might be most effective:

- By phone
- By letter
- Job fairs, conferences, training courses
- Social media e.g. LinkedIn

## Planning: before you make contact

### Who are you going to contact?

Which organisations have the sort of position that attracts you?

Research and contact a 'named' person rather than a department. You are more likely to receive a response if you contact the right person.

### What is the purpose?

Be clear on what help you're seeking.

Think about how your contact can help you – information, advice, inspiration, insights.

### Would you like a meeting? In person or by phone?

How much time are you asking for?

Time and place for a meeting if you're meeting in person.

Be prepared to fit in with their availability.

### What if I don't hear back?

Persevere – even if you don't receive a response first time round. Ensure you follow up your initial contact.

Make sure that you have done your research thoroughly, using published sources, before you talk to your contacts. They will respect you more and be more prepared to help if they have evidence of your professional approach.

## Nervous networker?

Perhaps you feel uncomfortable about networking in this fashion. Unease usually arises from the misconception that using contacts means asking people for jobs. In fact, what you're doing is making the most of them as sources of advice, information and ideas. Most people will be only too glad to share their knowledge and help, or to refer you to someone else who can. Getting the approach right is important.

## Making an approach in person

Making an approach in person can be an opportunity to test your interview skills and make a good and lasting impression.

## Conducting information interviewing

The previous sections highlighted the value of careers information, but often richer and deeper insights can come from talking to professionals working within the sector you are interested in. For a productive meeting, you need a carefully planned agenda. Think about what will be helpful to you and your career. It may help to think about what you are hoping to learn.

Here are some questions you might ask:

### Introduction

Include *open* questions such as:

- Tell me about how you came to join your employer?

- What do you do on a day-to-day basis?
- What are you working on at the moment?

### Trends

- What is happening in your business area right now?
- What do you think will happen to this sector in the future – which are your areas of growth?

### Information

- Where can I find out more about the sector?
- What are the most challenging and rewarding aspects of your role?
- Who else can help me to learn more?

### Advice

- If you were me, what would you do now?

The above are some potential questions. For the conversation to flow there will be an element of adapting your questions and following lines which are of interest to you and the professional.

## Follow-up actions

Ensure you thank the individual for their time and help. Even though the aim of these conversations is to build knowledge and understanding, it could lead to the possibility of employment or volunteering for a short-term project.

## 2.10 Social media

You can use social media such as Twitter and Facebook as a way of researching companies and opportunities. One of the benefits can include real-time updates from companies and information on live job vacancies.

### Facebook

Although traditionally considered more of a personal social media platform, Facebook allows companies to have an online presence. This is great for researching companies and sectors. Following companies online can help you to research the job market, accumulate evidence and acquire insider information that you might not find elsewhere. Also, many graduate schemes use Facebook as a way of showcasing frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the selection process; cultivating queries from interested students; and as place to offer insights, advice and encouragement.

### Professional networking sites

Professional networking websites such as LinkedIn can also be useful tools for networking and researching companies. These offer a great way of gathering real-time careers information and insights from professionals, as job profiles can quickly become out of date.

### LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a professional networking site which allows you to research and invite professionals to connect with you, join groups to follow conversations and discussions, follow companies and search for live vacancies. However, building a group of connections related to your future career aims and establishing meaningful interactions may take time.

Create an account early on in your OU studies to help you research the career paths of alumni, to learn about companies and engage in group discussions to enhance your career prospects.

LinkedIn allows you to connect with people, companies and groups on both a national and a global scale.

### Begin by adding your profile

Have a look at how other people project their online presence to see what works and what to avoid. A helpful tip to create your LinkedIn profile is to lift content from your CV.

- Add a **headline**. This is your way of telling people what makes you unique, and helps you stand out from the crowd.
- Add a **professional looking photograph**. If you have a photograph, you are seven times more likely to be found on LinkedIn.

- Your **profile** (called 'About' on LinkedIn) should not be too long, 1–3 paragraphs will be enough. Your 'About' section should be factual and most are written in the first person, although it is acceptable to write it in the third person.
- You can embed multimedia, e.g. videos, documents, and links. This could be a good way to show off your portfolio for some jobs. (But be aware you may need to copyright ideas you share for your own protection.)
- You can endorse and recommend others and they can do the same for you. It could be helpful to get some good recommendations from people who know the quality of your work and your professionalism.
- Engage in some of the groups you have joined by asking questions or joining discussions.
- Keep your profile up to date.
- Separate your personal from your professional profiles on social media. Adjust your privacy settings, so that you are promoting the image you want people to see.

## Your connections

- LinkedIn allows you to connect with people to build a network. This network is made of several degrees of separation.
- People that you are directly connected with are your first-degree connections; individuals connected to your connections are considered second-degree connections, and so forth.

As you can see, there is potential to reach out to these individuals by way of introductions and requesting to connect.

## How does this help you and your career?

### Learn about career roles and paths

- Find out and learn about career paths in the sectors that interest you (what is the individual's current role and what previous roles did they undertake? How did they get where they are today? Do they have any certificates or training?)
- Examples of job titles
- Who is this professional connected to?
- What is their skill set?

### Learn about companies and groups to follow

- Which companies hire these professionals?
- What types of companies are they following?
- Learn which groups they are members of.

### Who to connect with?

1. Previous colleagues and managers from any paid work, work experience and voluntary work  
**Tip:** Type in the search engine the name of the company to see if it brings up your previous colleagues.
2. Current and previous classmates and tutors.
3. Previous OU students (alumni).
4. Professionals that are working within your career sector of interest.

### Follow LinkedIn company pages

- Search for companies of interest in the search engine.
- Use company pages to learn more from the 'about us' or 'home' sections – this includes information about the business, what they do, their speciality, and links to their website.
- Follow companies for instant updates.

- By subscribing to updates in your news feed you can learn about recent news, stories and company updates, new job opportunities and more.

The OU Career Network (TOUCAN) [www.linkedin.com/groups/3871260/](http://www.linkedin.com/groups/3871260/) is a LinkedIn group run by the Careers and Employability Services.

The Open University Students Association is a large and diverse community with events, groups and support. Search their website ([www.oustudents.com](http://www.oustudents.com)) for further opportunities to connect with fellow OU students.

## 2.11 Work experience

Employers are increasingly offering students and graduates different types of work experience opportunities. To help you understand the types on offer, use Table 2.1:

**Table 2.1 Types of work experience opportunities**

Types	Paid/unpaid	Description
<b>Internships</b>	Paid/unpaid	An internship is a temporary position with an employer, allowing you to gain on-the-job training. Can be full-time, part-time or virtual.
<b>Work placements</b>	Paid/unpaid	A period of work experience that is part of your study.
<b>Work shadowing</b>	Paid as part of your role/unpaid	Observing someone at an organisation to understand the nature of their role and responsibilities.
<b>Volunteering</b>	Unpaid	Undertaking voluntary work can help you increase your experience of employment. They're usually carried out in your own time.
<b>Work projects</b>	Paid	A specific set of assessed activities carried out on the employer's premises.
<b>Freelance work</b>	Paid	This could include paid work, side projects or anything that shows your skills.
<b>Insight programmes and open days</b>	Unpaid	Involves a range of activities such as work shadowing, networking and presentations with the option to meet and question subject matter experts (SMEs).
<b>Secondments</b>	Paid	Temporary paid work which is in a different area from that in which you are already working.
<b>Working abroad</b>	Paid	A good way to develop language skills, communication skills and other work-based skills.

Having a go and ‘trying and testing’ roles is an excellent way to learn through experience. Insight gained can vary from:

- Learning more about the role and responsibilities
- A chance to build and develop transferable skills
- Learning about the work culture and realisms of a role
- Learning about your own likes, dislikes or what you don’t want in a career
- Enhancing your CV.

Find out more at

[help.open.ac.uk/work-experience](http://help.open.ac.uk/work-experience)

### **Paid opportunities**

Another way to learn about opportunities, job sectors and also an excellent way to get your ‘foot in the door’ is to look for paid employment. This may be difficult for those students already in work, but project work or portfolio working could be an option. If you are looking to change your career, you could consider applying for ‘junior’ or ‘assistant’ positions to develop your sector knowledge ‘on the job’.

Types of roles to consider are:

- Temporary roles
- Junior positions
- Portfolio working
- Freelancing
- Project work.

### **Internships**

An internship is a time-limited work experience placement which gives students and graduates a chance to

enhance their employability and career prospects. Graduate internships may be full or part-time and can last between a few weeks and a few months.

Many internships are paid. To find further information on employment rights and pay entitlement for interns, go to:

[www.gov.uk/employment-rights-for-interns](http://www.gov.uk/employment-rights-for-interns).

### **Voluntary work**

Voluntary work can be a fantastic way of getting experience and building networks, as well as showing commitment to an area you are interested in. Voluntary work can be flexible and some organisations offer online opportunities.

Find out more at

[help.open.ac.uk/voluntary-work](http://help.open.ac.uk/voluntary-work)

### **To make the most of the experience, think about the following:**

- Is there a sector or client group you would like to work with?
- Are you looking to develop new skills or build on existing ones?

### **What to do after the work experience opportunity**

- Ask for feedback after completing your placement.
- Thank the organisation and mentor for the opportunity.
- Reflect on your roles, activities and projects.
- Note down any outcomes and results.
- Update your CV with your work experience details.

# 03

## Making decisions and taking action

<b>3.1</b> Making decisions about your career	<b>73</b>
<b>3.2</b> Goals, restrictions and resources	<b>74</b>
<b>3.3</b> Plan of action	<b>79</b>

Hopefully by now you have a better understanding of yourself and will have explored possibilities for your career. You will now want to make decisions and create an action plan. This section will help you to consider different decision-making styles.

### Decision-making approaches

The **evaluative decision maker** goes through a process of self-reflection and learns from insight. For example, learning from feedback from a job interview. This can eventually lead to improved self-awareness and shape long-term career goals.

The **strategic decision maker** tends to have a more analytical style. They weigh up the pros and cons of a situation to reach a fixed solution. The strategic thinker believes that they construct their own career path and sets plans for achieving their goal.

The **intuitive decision maker** often acts on their 'gut feeling' or instinct. This decision style focuses on our unconscious reactions. These can be based on physical aspects or our feelings.

The **aspirational decision maker** looks for and grasps opportunities as they arise. While their career path may seem less clear and structured, they are able to cope with uncertainty and make the most of situations.

As you can see, there are several models of decision making, and each style has its advantages and disadvantages. Good decision making is a combination of both logic and rational thought and instinct. Using a mix of different approaches can help you make better decisions, whereas relying on one style can mean that you miss important factors.

You can find out more about different decision-making models using the guide on our website [help.open.ac.uk/career-decision-making](http://help.open.ac.uk/career-decision-making).



## 3.1 Making decisions about your career

Deciding whether to stay in your role, look for a new opportunity or take a completely different path in your career can feel daunting.

You might be worried about not knowing enough about the options open to you, feel that there's too much information to weigh up, or be worried about the consequences of making the wrong choice.

Important decisions can be broken down into a series of smaller ones to make the process feel more manageable. Going back to basics can help you to be clear and positive about what you want moving forward.

You have most likely made many major decisions already over the years regarding your career, such as starting a new role, building up new knowledge or skills through study or training, or taking action after being made redundant. Making your next big career decision begins with reflecting on how you've approached your career so far.

Key questions to ask yourself are:

- How have I previously approached a new career decision?
- What happened with that decision, did it work out well for me?
- What can I take forward and apply to my future decisions?
- What would I do differently if I need to make the same decision again?

## 3.2 Goals, restrictions and resources

In this next section, you will look at your goals and then examine the restrictions and resources that may affect how you reach them.

### Goals

#### What is a goal?

- Goals are what you want to get out of life.
- You may use other words to describe your goals: results, outcomes, aims or ambitions.
- Unlike dreams, hopes, fantasies and wishes, goals are specific, and you can expect the outcome to arrive.
- Whether short- or long-term, goals should be realistic but challenging.
- Remember: your goals may change over time.

#### Activity 3.1 What are your goals?

Write them down here. You may not yet have fully identified your goals but put what you can here and add to it later.



## Restrictions and resources

We are all affected by our own restrictions and resources. Sometimes the same thing is both a restriction and a resource. For example, if you are buying a house with a mortgage, it is both a liability and an asset.

Some students may see different factors as concerns or barriers to achieving their goals. For example, do you feel your age is a barrier to changing your career? Or you may think you will be unable to get a specific job you want if you have a disability? Or you have responsibilities that may limit how far you can commute?



### Activity 3.2 What are your possible restrictions and resources?

Think about your restrictions – the things you need to take into account or that may be problems. Then think about your resources – the things, people and attitudes that could help you. Write them down on the chart.

--	--

### Balance helpful resources against restrictions

Look back to the restrictions and resources you listed. You probably noted some factors that will help you in the direction you want to take and others that you need to find a way round. You now need to consider each of your goals in terms of all the resources that could be helpful or cause restrictions.

### Activity 3.3 Balance resources and restrictions for your own goal

Look first at the example below. It was produced by someone who wanted to apply for promotion.

Each restriction is set against a helping resource, giving a balanced picture of the situation.

#### Example: Goal – Promotion

Restrictions	Resources
Colleagues' reactions	Line manager's support
Limited mobility	Personal ambition/determined
Little experience of managing people	Prepared to take responsibility
No experience of managing budgets	Project management experience

#### Now balance resources and restrictions for your own goal(s)

Which of the goals you've listed in Activity 3.1 are the most important? Underline them.

#### Make the most of resources

Look at the resources you listed. What actions would help you to make the most of them?

#### Minimise restrictions

Now look at the restrictions you listed. What actions would help you to reduce their effects?

You've now listed actions you can take towards your goals, but there's more to do.

### Activity 3.3 Continued

#### Now balance resources and restrictions for your own goal(s)

List the resources that can help you to carry out each step. Look at the example. 'No experience of managing budgets' was listed as a problem.

Actions	Resources
Attend course on finance for non-managers	Internal training courses
Attend outside course in the evenings	Local college has course
Find out about the budget process	Line manager's support  Support from friend experienced in this area

Now do this for each of the actions you listed.

#### Actions

#### Resources

---

---

---

---

#### Actions

#### Resources

---

---

---

---

#### Actions

#### Resources

---

---

---

### 3.3 Plan of action

The next stage is to bring everything together into a detailed plan of action. This means taking a few different steps:

- Setting out your goals (long-, medium- and short-term).
- Deciding which actions you need to take.
- Identifying your restrictions and resources.
- Working out a realistic timescale to achieve each step.

If you monitor your progress by checking your plan from time to time, you can identify what you have achieved, and then revise your targets, if necessary. And of course, if you change your mind about your end goal, then you can go back to your original plan to make the necessary adjustments.

# SETTING GOALS

Setting goals is a good way to turn your thoughts and ideas into reality. Sometimes it's easy to get stuck at the 'I wish' or 'What if' stage, and we can all struggle with making things happen. You can tackle this by making clear, specific goals. Just the simple act of putting something in writing can make you feel more committed to achieving it.

A helpful way to make goals is to use the mnemonic SMART. It stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound. Using SMART encourages you to be specific about your goals. It also helps you to be realistic and to work within a clear time-frame.

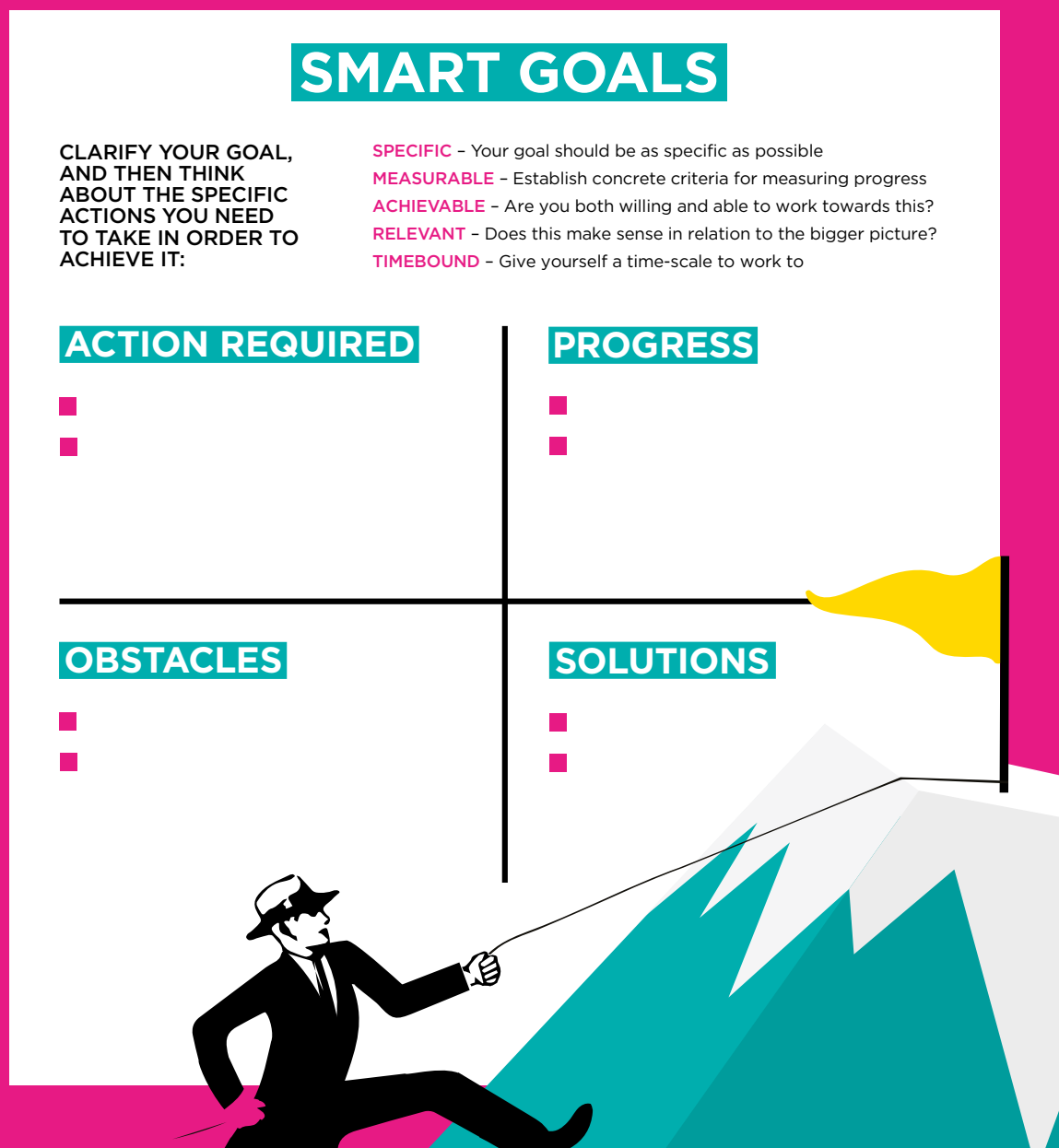


Figure 3.1 Setting goals



## **You should consider five factors when drawing up your action plan:**

- 1.** What you need to do
- 2.** How you are going to take action
- 3.** Resources that could help you, for example, finance, information, friends
- 4.** Timescales you will set to achieve your targets
- 5.** How you'll know when you have achieved your goal(s).

One way to approach this is to break each activity down into small steps and keep it manageable. Action plans work best when they are **SMART**:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable
- **R**ealistic
- **T**imebound

Using a structure like this helps you to break down bigger tasks into smaller, more manageable ones so that you stay in control and have the confidence to manage them.

## **Backward action planning**

This approach, as the title suggests, is about planning in reverse. Your starting position is your 'end goal' and you work backwards by looking at the steps you took to get there. By starting at the end and looking back, you can mentally prepare yourself for success, work out milestones you need to reach, and identify where in your plan you have to be particularly proactive or energetic.

**For example, if your end goal is to enrol for a Masters degree next year, then you might plan these small steps to help you achieve your overall goal:**

**Small step 1:** Research and apply for postgraduate funding.

**Small step 2:** Write personal statement for application.

**Small step 3:** Attend open days at several universities.

**Small step 4:** Speak to admissions team about entry requirements.

**Small step 5:** Research universities and course offerings.

**Small step 6:** Speak to your OU tutor about further study options.

## Back-up plan

You should always try to have a back-up plan. So, keep an eye on your progress and adapt your plan, if necessary. At this stage, you may find it helpful to read through the work you've done so far in this section, and perhaps discuss your plans with a trusted friend or with the careers team. (See Section 6.)

To generate ideas for your back-up plan, use KudosAD available on the careers website [help.open.ac.uk/identify-careers](https://help.open.ac.uk/identify-careers) to find careers suited to your interests, skills and values. Alternatively, use the Prospects Career Planner [www.prospects.ac.uk/planner](https://www.prospects.ac.uk/planner)

### Review

Celebrate small successes as you plan and develop your career to help you maintain a positive mindset.

If you don't manage to meet your initial goals, it's a good idea to reassess. Ask yourself, 'Is it realistic?' If not, think about ways to revise it. To achieve what you want, it might be necessary to go through several stages. You might need to gain further experience or qualifications, gather information or get access to a particular resource.

You may have to cope with setbacks and frustrations, but you are setting out on a potentially exciting journey, taking the first steps towards a new or resumed working life, with all its potential for improvement and advancement.

Set aside time to review your goals and see how you are progressing. Put a note in your diary or ask someone to remind you.

## Action plans

To help you with your planning, here's a template for your action plan and an example to help you put into practice the advice covered in this section. Remember: You might want to complete action plans for several goals. Once you have done this, you are ready to start taking action.

### Activity 3.4 Showing a worked example of an action plan

Look at the worked example below, then fill in your own plan on the following page.

My long-term goal	Short- and medium-term goals to achieving long-term goal	Actions required	Constraints	Resources – who or what can help me?	Target date for actions
To become a journalist	Postgraduate course in journalism	Find out about courses	Difficulty of funding	Explore postgraduate loans, grants and bursaries	Next week
		Apply early		Investigate letting flat for year of the course	By the end of the month
	Gain relevant voluntary/paid experience	Write to local newspapers	Afraid of rejection	Friend will provide support and encouragement	Within two months
		Write freelance articles and submit			
	Take an evening class in shorthand or journalism software	Find out where classes are offered locally	Cost? Motivation to complete?	Check if special arrangements are possible for payment e.g. weekly	Tomorrow
				Find someone else keen to do it	

### Activity 3.4 Your action plan

My long-term goal	Short- and medium-term goals to achieving long-term goal	Actions required	Constraints	Resources – who or what can help me?	Target date for actions

Another way of organising your action plan is working backwards from your main goal and identifying the smaller steps to help you get there.

**Activity 3.5** Create a backward action plan

Think of a previous goal you achieved and reflect on the actions you took to achieve this goal.

**What was your goal? Was it SMART?**

**Work backwards: What smaller steps did you take to get there?  
What did you need to do, by when, with what resources?**

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity 3.5** Create a backward action plan (continued)

**Now try this for a new goal**

**What is your goal? Define and describe it. Is it SMART?**



**Work backwards: What smaller steps will you take to get there?**

**What do you need to do, by when, with what resources?**

**1**

---

**2**

---

**3**

---

**4**

---

**5**

---

# 04

## Getting the job

<b>4.1</b>	Planning your job search strategy	<b>88</b>
<b>4.2</b>	Advertised vacancies	<b>91</b>
<b>4.3</b>	Creative job searching	<b>94</b>
<b>4.4</b>	Matching yourself to the job requirements	<b>97</b>
<b>4.5</b>	Application forms	<b>103</b>
<b>4.6</b>	CVs	<b>105</b>
<b>4.7</b>	Covering letters	<b>124</b>
<b>4.8</b>	Interviews	<b>131</b>
<b>4.9</b>	Assessment centres	<b>141</b>
<b>4.10</b>	Review your job search progress	<b>149</b>



## 4.1 Planning your job search strategy

### Start early in your study journey

According to the *Planning for success: Graduates' career planning and its effect on graduate outcomes* report by the Department for Education, three factors which were most important in guiding graduates to a positive outcome (employment or further study) were:

- Undertaking paid work whilst studying or immediately after
- Focusing job searches on graduate-level jobs and making most applications whilst studying
- Having a career plan on completing university study.

These factors indicate the benefits of planning as early as possible in your study journey.

Having a plan for job hunting is likely to give you the best chance of success of securing the job you want. Think about it like approaching a project and plan your strategy.

### What could your job search strategy include?

The end goal of your job search of course will be to get a job, but your goal should be more detailed than that.

**Visualisation** can be a powerful way of 'feeling' your way around a job idea. Imagine you've already secured that dream job; think about where you are, the kinds of tasks you might be doing, and who you are with. How does all this feel? Work through the day in your mind and imagine yourself doing it. Look at job profiles such as those at Prospects [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) to help to identify the responsibilities and skills used in different job roles.

**Research** is an essential tool in job hunting, which includes activities such as:

- Looking at a wide range of opportunities available to you
- Using a range of resources and services to support your job search
- Building up a bank of background information about companies, jobs and developments in sectors you're interested in



- Getting a general view before you start to draw up a shortlist; even before you're ready to actively apply for jobs, browsing vacancies on a regular basis will help you identify *themes* in terms of what employers are asking for
- Building a picture of how, where and when graduate programmes/schemes recruit their candidates
- Understanding recruitment methods used by different sectors, employers and for different roles
- Creating or revising your CV
- Reviewing your social media presence
- Setting schedules for your job searching activities
- Getting support from individuals or organisations who can help.

### As you get ready to apply for jobs

In a competitive job market, it's important to understand the needs of employers and what they want from you when you apply. These requirements are usually expressed in terms of skills, attributes and experience. Employers typically look for students and graduates who can demonstrate potential to:

- Manage and organise resources
- Make decisions
- Persuade and influence
- Manage change
- Meet challenges and overcome obstacles

- Show commercial awareness
- Develop their interpersonal skills
- Use analytical and problem-solving skills
- Show a proactive approach to self-development.

During your OU studies, you will continue to develop your skills and professional behaviours which build on your prior experience. Some that are vital for career change and progression may be by-products of your studies – for example resilience and adaptability

These skills and behaviours can be developed also through work, volunteering, hobbies or other parts of your life.

The key to success is:

- Understanding what these attributes are and how you are developing them
- Identifying which of your examples are most suitable for the job you are going for
- Being able to articulate your strengths on an application form, CV and at interview.

“What I did find was (and many OU graduates find this too) the fact that I had done my degree with the OU counted for a lot. Potential employers could see that I'd had life experiences alongside my degree studies. I found that I could answer the interview question: 'Can you deal with a heavy workload and meet deadlines?' by saying that I had got all my assignments in on time while simultaneously bringing up a family – it showed commitment.”

**OU graduate**

“Be proud of being an OU graduate. The time management, self-drive and prioritisation it takes to manage your own learning is something to be incredibly proud of.”

**Graduate Programme Manager,  
The Co-operative Group**



## 4.2 Advertised vacancies

### The OU's Careers and Employability Services

If you are an OU student or have completed your studies within the last 3 years, you can access OpportunityHub [help.open.ac.uk/opportunityhub](https://help.open.ac.uk/opportunityhub) for job vacancies, work experience opportunities and more.

### Online job boards and job search engine sites

There are hundreds of job boards, some general and some specific to sectors or types of roles. Some sites integrate many different job sites into one. The best sites are those that allow you to filter your search by the type of job, job titles relevant to your interests, your location, and other criteria, such as part-time work or home-based roles.

For volume of opportunities, there are online job boards, such as Totaljobs and Indeed which allow you to search through many job boards, company career sites, associations, and other sources of job postings.

Search graduate vacancy specialists such as Prospects, TARGETjobs, Milkround and Gradcracker for graduate schemes, internships and work experience placements.

### Employers' own websites

If you have specific companies in mind, then explore and apply directly through their own sites. For larger organisations, you may be able to search for 'graduate opportunities', 'early careers' or 'experienced hires', depending on your circumstances.

**Tip:** Follow these organisations on your LinkedIn and social media platforms.

### Recruitment agencies

Recruitment agencies match candidates to vacancies to help companies directly fill their roles. They're mostly online, but some can still be found on the high street.

You can search sites such as Agency Central [www.agencycentral.co.uk](http://www.agencycentral.co.uk) for a list of recruitment agencies. Think about which agencies will best benefit you and your career. Developing relationships with two or three, particularly in your location or with your specific sector specialism, could be time well spent.

There are also agencies and charitable organisations dedicated to promoting vacancies to people across diversity groups (see Section 5).

## Professional associations

From the British Psychological Society, to the Institution of Environmental Sciences, many professional associations and institutions advertise sector vacancies. Paid membership also offers enhanced services such as access to network events, training and specialist careers advice. Search [www.directoryoftheprofessions.co.uk](http://www.directoryoftheprofessions.co.uk) for relevant associations for your career.

## Executive search firms

Executive search firms tend to be used by companies looking to fill roles at a senior level or/and which need highly specialist skills. Their job is to find you, so the best way to engage with these services is to be actively engaging with organisations and individuals in your field/industry. For example, speaking at industry events or conferences, having articles published or being quoted in relevant articles will all increase your visibility.

## Social media

You can directly search and apply for jobs on professional networking sites such as LinkedIn [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com) and other social media platforms.

Following companies of interest to you can also help you to research the job market and get insider information that you might not find elsewhere. For example, many graduate schemes use social media as a way of showcasing frequently asked questions about the selection process, cultivating queries from interested students and as a place to offer insights and advice.

## Newspapers and journals

From national daily newspapers to local papers and trade journals, the traditional news media is still a useful source of vacancies. Make a note of their advertising patterns; you will find that most of the newspapers advertise certain sectors or roles on particular days of the week.

Find local and national newspapers at [www.thepaperboy.com/uk](http://www.thepaperboy.com/uk)

## Careers fairs

Attending careers fairs gives you the opportunity to meet employers and potential recruiters. You will be able to access insights and information on the organisation and potentially gain tips on when they are recruiting and what they look for in the recruitment process. It also gives you an opportunity to build your network of contacts for both now and in the future. Online careers fairs offer the chance to meet employers remotely. For more tips on getting the most from careers fairs, see [help.open.ac.uk/networking#fairs-events](https://help.open.ac.uk/networking#fairs-events).

## International job search

If you're looking for jobs outside the UK, explore international vacancy sources at [help.open.ac.uk/international-job-search-resources](https://help.open.ac.uk/international-job-search-resources).

## A word of caution: beware of job scams

Unfortunately, not all advertised jobs are legitimate, and you will need to be wary of opportunities that look too good to be true. Look out for the following red flags:

- Do the contact details look appropriate for the organisation? Are they using personal or random email addresses?
- Is the advert badly written?
- Is the salary realistic for the role?
- Are they asking YOU for money?
- Are they asking for personal details, such as your bank details or driver's licence information?
- Did they offer you a job as soon as you sent your CV?

## 4.3 Creative job searching

Over recent years there has been an unprecedented change in organisations, which has transformed work and career possibilities. There are some key drivers for change in the wider world of work – globalisation, new technologies, competitiveness, and demographic change amongst them; some of these may have already affected you, others may do so in the future. What we do in work, and how we work, is ever-changing.

This level of change is increasing the need to take control of and self-manage your career and be creative in your approach when looking for opportunities. Be open as to where and how you look for work.

### Finding hidden jobs

It is estimated that up to seven out of ten jobs are ‘hidden’, meaning they are never formally advertised, yet employers still want to fill them. Smaller companies may not advertise due to the high costs involved. How do you access this hidden job market? Networking can help you find opportunities that you may not otherwise hear about.

### Using social media

Social and professional networking websites such as LinkedIn and Facebook are useful tools for finding new network contacts. It’s worth taking

time to explore which social media platforms are useful to your career and sector, for example, Instagram and Pinterest could be better for the more creative industries.

You can invite other members to join your network, giving you access to their contacts’ profiles and can quickly build links to other members’ profiles – a great way to make connections with potential employers.

You can join groups on platforms like LinkedIn to gain access to organisations and individuals who can help you. It can be a good idea initially to reach out to those that you already have something in common with – for example, other OU students or alumni.

Other LinkedIn features that can help you are:

- **On the ‘Jobs’ tab: ‘Job alert’ feature** to be updated with vacancies relevant to your interests.
- **Search and follow companies:** Follow companies to learn about their career opportunities and keep up to date with live vacancies.
- **Update your job preferences:** Receive tailored job opportunity suggestions on your LinkedIn jobs page, update your preferences and tailor the location, industry, etc.

One of the advantages of social media is that it can remove some of the challenges you may face if you have low confidence when in large groups of people, if you suffer from anxiety or have a disability which makes physically attending events difficult for you.

Read **Section 2.9 Networking** to see how networking can help your career and job search.

### Make speculative approaches for jobs

This approach gives you the initiative. You decide which organisations, sectors and jobs to target, extending the potential opportunities open to you beyond just applying for advertised vacancies.

Simply put, a speculative application is about getting in touch with an organisation to ask whether they have a suitable job for you, despite the fact that they aren't advertising a particular vacancy at that time. There's always the risk that you may not get direct results, and it's perhaps the fear of this that puts some people off. But it's also a strategy that puts you more in charge of your job search and can pay off in several ways: even if you have no luck with one particular employer, you may be referred or recommended to another. Use these opportunities to get more information about the job market. Each employer you see is a potential new contact. Each rejection may be one step nearer to the job you want. Remember, every 'no' brings you closer to a 'yes'!

“ I began my job search by following the 10 to 15 companies I really wanted to work for. ”

OU Student

## Searching for SMEs to approach **Tailor your approach**

Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can be more open to speculative applications, as they will normally have more flexible recruitment methods. SMEs make up over 99.9% of the UK's private sector companies, and so represent a clear target for job opportunities.

Look for local enterprises in:

- The local press or business directories  
Science parks [www.ukspa.org.uk](http://www.ukspa.org.uk).
- Local chambers of commerce  
[www.britishchambers.org.uk](http://www.britishchambers.org.uk).
- Professional bodies and associations  
[www.directoryoftheprofessions.co.uk](http://www.directoryoftheprofessions.co.uk).
- Startup companies  
[www.startups.co.uk](http://www.startups.co.uk).

### Search for larger organisations

Directories such as *The Times Top 100 Graduate Employers* and *The Guardian's UK 300* are useful for sourcing larger national and multinational employers. Explore their websites first to check whether or not they consider speculative applications; many are open to this from 'experienced hires' and their website and social media can tell you more about other formal introductions to these companies, such as insight days, work placements and internships.

Each approach must be tailored to the organisation and sector, and this will take time to prepare. Use all your information sources and network contacts to select a core of companies you'd like to work for and focus on those.

Research what the company does, the type of roles it recruits, its customers or clients, where it operates, its ethos and values, and any current news about it. Related or recent job adverts and descriptions available online for the company can also help you to tailor your approach.

Be clear on what you have to offer: why should an employer choose to meet you? What can you bring to the company that other applicants can't?

### Follow-up actions

Give a potential employer up to two weeks to get back to you. If they don't get back to you within that time frame (or advise you they do not have anything at that time), try replying to ask if there are any other opportunities to get to know the company better, or ask for more advice on how they recruit and when vacancies are likely to come up.



## 4.4 Matching yourself to the job requirements

Once you've analysed a job advertisement and decided to make an application, it's time to delve deeper into the detail. Whether you're applying for the job using an application or a CV and covering letter, you'll need to show how you meet the requirements (or competencies) of the job. These show what you can do and what you know.

Most employers will provide detailed guidance to support your application, such as a detailed job description and a person specification which outlines the key skills, experience, qualifications and qualities they're looking for, often referred to as 'competencies' in the context of job applications.

Within the person specification, competencies or requirements are usually flagged as 'essential' or 'desirable'. You'll be aiming to cover all 'essential' requirements and as many 'desirable' requirements as possible. Don't be put off applying just because you don't have all the essential requirements. You might, for example, suggest that you are able to gain the skill/competence within a short time frame.

Look at the following example. The key competencies/requirements are listed, and the second column shows how a candidate is planning to provide evidence of meeting these. You'll see the 'evidence' is taken from different areas of their lives – their studies, work, voluntary experience, etc:

## Vacancy: Fundraiser for Scottish Wildlife Preservation Society

### Key experience requirements

### My evidence

#### Numeracy

e.g. Treasurer of Residents' Association:

- Draw up budget bids or plans within agreed guidelines and procedures for submission to internal and external bodies.
- Responsible for assessing potential expenditure in terms of value for money and taking appropriate action to ensure this is achieved.

#### Keyboard skills

- Self-taught packages in order to produce a dissertation for my degree.
- Worked in Windows-based environment for numerous holiday jobs – secretarial role.

#### Marketing knowledge

- Temporary job (with full induction and training) over two summer holidays as a market research interviewer.
- Marketing module completed as part of my degree studies (12 months) identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably.

#### Ability to work on own

e.g. From recent employment, current part-time study:

- As a part-time student I have worked within a thirty-two week study calendar and managed a weekly workload of reading, assignments, tutorials and revision alongside a part-time job and voluntary work.
- I have worked unsupervised as a treasurer for a local Residents' Association for two years and have always met deadlines for reports.

#### Interest in wildlife

e.g. Active member of RSPB:

- I have organised several meetings between the RSPB and the local branch of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England to look at the decline of the blue tit in Cheshire and preventive measures.
- I am a regional fundraiser for BTCV and the PDSA.
- I work alternate Sundays at the local animal hospital as a volunteer.
- I am an avid reader and subscriber of *The Warbler* and make regular contributions to this national magazine.

#### Presentation skills

- I have used PowerPoint and Canva to present information on the decline of local bird populations to a community group and to councillors.
- I have also organised and facilitated presentations to local schools and governors using a variety of media.

Figure 4.1 Role requirements for a fundraiser vacancy

### Activity 4.1 Matching yourself to a person specification

Begin by looking at a person specification or detailed job description for a position that interests you. If you don't have a specific vacancy in mind at this stage, you might want to look at the job profiles on the prospects.ac.uk website to 'work up' an example.

Ask yourself:

- Does it match my personality, values, interests, needs?
- What are the key competencies – skills, qualities, knowledge, other attributes?
- Can I produce evidence of these?

In the box below, note down in the left-hand column the key characteristics and requirements of your selected vacancy. In the right-hand column, try to produce evidence of your suitability against each point:

**Person specification: key requirements or competencies**      **My evidence:**

Person specification: key requirements or competencies	My evidence:

Person specification: key requirements or competencies	My evidence:

“For our application form we would recommend spending three to four hours on research and completion. Without a good one, you will never progress to the next stage.”

**UK Graduate Recruitment Manager, Logica & OU Student**

This will provide you with the basis of information and a structure for making your application, so it's worth taking the time to plan this stage:

## Use the STAR method

A useful way to present your competencies in applications (or at interview) is to use the STAR method to give a scenario of where you've used a skill before:

- **Situation** – What was the situation and when did it take place?
- **Task** – What task was it, and what was the objective?
- **Action** – What action did you take to achieve this?
- **Results** – What happened as a result of your action?

You may also want to add on a follow up to this: if you had acted differently, what could the outcome have been? What did you learn from this?

“Keep your examples specific, recent and relevant. We want to hear how you have used skills and behaviours in a positive way so that we can see how you would apply them in the workplace.”

**Graduate Programme Manager,  
The Co-operative Group**

Here's a hypothetical example of the STAR technique in action:

### The scenario

Customer Service Agents need to be able to show resilience and handle difficult situations with calmness and confidence. Think of an occasion where you were involved in a difficult, confrontational situation with friends, family, colleagues or members of the public.

### Situation and Task

#### What was the situation and why was it difficult to handle?

I was working as a Receptionist at a leisure centre. I had to deal with a member who was not happy with one of the centre's rules. This rule did not allow children under 10 years to swim without an adult. Yet she wanted to leave her 7-year-old son with us to swim while she went shopping. It was difficult because she became angry when I did not want to sell her a swimming ticket for her son.

### Action and Result

#### What did you do to address the situation and what was the outcome?

I clearly explained the rule regarding children under 10 years requiring adult supervision in the pool. I explained that this rule was there to ensure children's safety, as the centre did not have the facilities to be able to look after young children swimming without an adult or insurance to cover this.

I did suggest that she could leave her son in the centre's supervised play area, and that she could go swimming with her son once she returned. The woman calmed down and agreed to leave her son in the play area.

### **Follow-up**

**If you had acted differently, what could the outcome have been?**

**What did you learn from this?**

If I had not explained the reason behind the rule, or offered her an alternative, the woman would probably have felt that the centre was unreasonable and not customer-friendly. She might have cancelled her membership. She might also have asked to speak to the centre manager. She would no doubt have done so if I had been impatient with her or changed my tone and become rude.

“The best way that mature students can demonstrate the skills and life experience that they have is within the competency-based questions and within any questions about work experience. And I have to encourage mature students to be extremely positive and to sell the benefits of those skills and that life experience to employers because it's a significant advantage over other candidates.”

**Rebecca Fielding,  
Gradconsult**

## Activity 4.2 Using the STAR method

Have a go at the STAR technique yourself, using the example of handling a challenging situation.

### **Situation** and **Task**

**What was the situation and why was it difficult to handle?**



### **Action** and **Result**

**What did you do to address the situation and what was the outcome?**



### **Follow-up (optional)**

**If you had acted differently, what could the outcome have been?**

**What did you learn from this?**



## 4.5 Application forms

The purpose of an application form is to get an interview; your aim is to convince the employer that you're worth interviewing. Employers often receive a lot of applications, and it can take less than two minutes for them to decide whether to read further or not, so it is crucial that you sell yourself effectively.

### Preparing to complete the application form

#### **Read and follow the instructions carefully**

Follow any instructions carefully about how to complete the form, what to include in your application and deadline dates. If you're asked to submit an application form, don't send a CV instead.

#### **Find out as much as you can about the role and organisation**

Review the job description and person specification. Research the organisation to find out their core business, history, values and ethos. Visit their website and social media channels and talk to your network.

#### **Arrange your referees and references**

Get your referees' agreement before giving their names and keep them well briefed so that they can write supportive references. The form might ask for specific types of referee – work-related, academic or personal, for example.

You can also request a reference from the OU: [help.open.ac.uk/reference](https://help.open.ac.uk/reference). Bear in mind, this can take some time.

### Completing the application form

#### **Make it easy for potential employers to read your application**

Layout can help to make text easier to read: use bullet points to present lists, use bold headings to clarify your points and write concisely. The ability to write succinctly is evidence of your written communication skills.

### Supporting or personal statements

Application forms usually include a section asking for further information to support your application or to provide details and evidence of how you meet the person specification.

These are usually presented as a blank sheet. Follow the instructions given which will normally ask you to include:

- How you meet the person specification. Explain the skills, achievements, personal qualities and experience you have that match the person specification (see Section 4.3).
- Why you want the job.
- Why you want to work for that employer.

## How to write your supporting or personal statement

- Write in continuous prose, broken up by small paragraphs. Avoid just copying/pasting sections of your CV.
- Use the person specification's 'essential' and 'desirable' criteria to inform the content of your statement. If you're limited by word count, address the 'essential' criteria first.
- Use evidence and examples to back up your statements.

“My best advice for people completing a personal statement is to be honest about who you are and your absolute strengths and key talents. So, think about those things that you really can offer an employer that are different, that are exceptional, that are real strengths and talents and combine those together as a statement.”

**Rebecca Fielding,**  
Gradconsult

## Allow time for final checks:

- Check you've completed all sections of the form. If a question doesn't apply to you, write 'N/A' or 'Not applicable' to show that you haven't overlooked it.
- Be sure you've answered all the elements of any multi-part question (e.g. 'What are your spare-time activities, what do you contribute and what do you get out of them?').
- Check your spelling and grammar. If you find areas like grammar, spelling or other aspects of writing challenging, perhaps because of dyslexia, another specific learning difficulty, or simply because they are not strengths of yours, ask a friend, family member or trusted colleague to check for you.
- Does the supporting or personal statement flow naturally and read like it conveys your personality? Make final tweaks if needed to hone this. Again, a trusted friend or colleague could lend a view on this.
- Keep a copy of your application so that you can easily review what you've written if you're invited to interview. It may also help you in making future applications.



## Personal statements for further study

If you are thinking about studying further, then you will almost certainly be required to write some form of personal statement as part of your application for postgraduate study. A strong and persuasive statement needs careful preparation. The questions you will need to address include:

- Why do you wish to undertake this particular course of study or research?
- Why have you chosen to apply to this particular institution?
- How does this study option fit into your longer-term career or life plans?
- What is the relevance of any previous study, with the OU and elsewhere?
- What other related experience can you offer?
- What personal skills and qualities do you possess?

Search [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) for further tips and examples of personal statements for postgraduate applications.

## 4.6 CVs

Your CV is an essential tool when job seeking and is used to sell your skills, expertise and experience to prospective employers. It should stand out in a crowded job market and should highlight why you're the best person for the job.

Like an application form, a CV is primarily intended to secure an interview. With a volume of CVs to read, recruiters may only take a few seconds to assess if it's worth reading on – so it's important that you make your CV relevant, concise and targeted.

Focus on developing a core CV but be prepared to tailor this for each vacancy you apply for, as you'll want to show why your skills set makes you the right match for each specific job. You can make it even more bespoke with a supporting covering letter.

### What to include in your CV

Your CV is uniquely yours in style, content and layout, but there will be core information and sections common to most:

- Contact details
- Career aim or personal profile
- Key skills and attributes
- Education and qualifications
- Career history or experience
- Training
- Interests.

You may want to include details of referees (people who can be contacted to provide a work or personal reference for you), however, this is optional at this stage, as a recruiter assumes you'll be able to provide these later in the process.

Some people include an 'additional information' section towards the end of their CV – here it is useful to include additions which could be helpful for the employer to know (e.g. having a driving licence or belonging to a professional body), but only include what is relevant to the role you are applying for.

### Contact details

Include your name, phone and email contact. You also have the option to include your location or full address.

Use your name as the title of the document, placed in the centre or to the left, and in larger bold font, instead of titling the document 'Curriculum Vitae'.

It may sound obvious, but make sure that your email address promotes a professional impression. If it doesn't (you may mainly use it for social purposes), create a new email address just for job applications. If you include a link to your social media profile, for example, on LinkedIn, again make sure this is professional and provides added value to your CV.

**Don't include** on your CV details such as your date of birth, nationality, gender, religion or marital status. The Equality Act 2010 prevents employers basing any decisions in recruitment on these factors. Many employers are now adopting 'blind recruitment' practices, where these personal details and other factors which might identify age, specific schools/universities or locations for example, are taken out for selectors to lessen the risk of bias.

### Career aim or personal profile

Although optional, a career aim or personal profile section can be particularly effective to summarise and introduce your CV and its purpose.

**Try to avoid generalised clichés** such as 'I am a good team player'; it's important in your profile to stand out.

Tips for developing a profile:

- Aim for your profile to be no more than 100 words and begin with a headline sentence summing up your key experience and current career plan. This can be challenging, but it can really focus your mind on what you're able to offer an employer and it's worth taking time to perfect this.
- Follow your headline sentence with one or two sentences that highlight what particular experience or skills you have that are most relevant to the job you are applying for and provide evidence. Adapt your profile for each vacancy you apply for.

Profiles can either be written in:

- The first person – for example, “I am an Open degree student with five years’ experience in retail, seeking the opportunity to change the direction of my career towards advertising...”, or
- The third person without pronouns – for example, “Highly dependable Health and Social Care graduate, looking for a leadership role in adult social care...”.

Writing in the third person using pronouns, such as 'he', 'she' or your name, is best avoided, as it can sound as if someone else has written your profile for you and is rather distant in its tone. Removing all personal pronouns in your CV keeps it business-focused and frees up space to write about the skills that really matter.

### **Key skills and attributes**

Highlighting key skills and other attributes on your CV is a good way to tailor your application for the role you’re applying for. A bullet point structure can be useful here.

This section (and/or covering letter) gives you the opportunity to include the skills and other attributes you’ve developed through being an OU student.

“Each job is different, so ensure either you have a couple of different CVs which highlight different skills, or align your CV to each job individually.”

**Recruitment Consultant,  
Henderson Scott**

## Education and qualifications

Present your study experience and qualifications in the way that is most relevant to the role you are applying for and that highlights them:

- Listing education in reverse chronological order (i.e. your most recent education/qualifications first) is probably the most common way to present education. If the job requires a degree or other specific qualification, it's best to start with that. You don't have to include dates of your education or qualifications if you prefer not to. Include what you are studying/have studied in your Open University course; this should include your qualification title as a minimum (e.g. BSc (Hons) in Natural Sciences) and may also include specific modules, level and any results. Including specific modules is particularly useful for Open qualifications to help an employer understand the content and any specialism from your qualification.
- Provide brief details of secondary/high school and college education (if applicable) – condense the information to dates, names and towns/cities, and qualifications that are most relevant to the job role – for example, '4 A–C grade GCSEs including English Language'.
- If you're offering professional qualifications, list the qualification and the awarding institution (e.g. NVQ Level 3 in Health & Safety – City and

Guilds). For some people, their professional qualifications are the most relevant, and this may be the main focus of your education and qualifications section.

- If your qualifications were awarded overseas and you're applying for positions in the UK, provide the UK equivalent so that the employer understands what level you've reached.

## Career history or experience

Your aim here is to help an employer understand what you can do as a result of your work experience and your achievements. Include start and end dates as well as job title(s) and optionally a (very brief) description of the nature of the employer's business if it's not obvious from the company title.

For more recent jobs, say during the last ten years, give more detail about particular responsibilities, projects, assignments and results achieved, preferably in quantitative terms. Focus on outcomes and achievements over a brief descriptive narrative. What does the employer want to know about what you can do/have achieved?

Voluntary work could be included in this section, in 'interests' or a dedicated 'volunteering' section, depending on its extent and relevance to the role.

There are different opinions about whether you set your experience out in forward or reverse chronological order. Much depends on the nature and

relevance of your previous employment to the job you're applying for. Some possible sequences are:

- Put your present or **most recent** job at the head of the list, with appropriate detail; then the rest of the employment history in backward or forward chronological order.
- Start with the **most relevant** work experience, even if it's not the most recent, then work backwards or forwards chronologically.
- If you've had a series of short-term jobs and want to abbreviate the list, you could present these as 'From 2014–2016 I worked in various temporary positions in the catering industry', for example. Group your experience under skill-themed headings
- Group your experience under skill-themed headings.

“Mention 3 points of your day-to-day activity, 3 key achievements and 3 things you enjoy about your role, e.g. 'I really enjoy daily client interaction' as opposed to 'I have to communicate with clients on a daily basis'.”

**Recruitment Consultant,  
Henderson Scott**

As your career develops, you may not need to list all your job roles and responsibilities. Keep the length of your CV and its relevance as concise as possible by summarising these roles and responsibilities in a sentence or two.

Whichever approach you use, make sure it's clear and that the way you present starting and leaving dates is consistent.

Lots of people have 'gaps' in their work history for a whole variety of reasons – bringing up a family, caring responsibilities, health problems, serving a prison sentence, redundancy, dedicating time to study, and more. Approached positively, this shouldn't be an issue.

## Training

You don't need to provide an exhaustive list of all the formal or informal training you've ever done, just those with particular relevance to the job role and generally within the last five years. Alternatively, you can combine your professional qualifications within the 'education' section, which can demonstrate continuous professional development (CPD).

You might also want to include an 'Additional skills' section towards the end of your CV (e.g. 'driving licence' or 'currently First Aid at Work certified'). But take care not to use this as an opportunity to just include everything else you haven't already; only include what is relevant to the job role or employer.

Membership of a professional body or association can also be included here, and it's good to add your level of membership such as 'student' or 'associate' member.

## Interests

This is optional and could be a separate section or combined with another section. It can show that you have a well-rounded life and don't live for work alone. Your hobbies may have given you opportunities to tackle roles and develop skills that you haven't had scope to in other areas of work or life.

“Don't say 'I went travelling/volunteering'; paint a picture of how you engaged with people and projects on your travels and link it back to how it has improved you.”

**Recruitment Consultant,  
Henderson Scott**

## Tips for CVs

- Make it targeted to the job you're applying for, and not too long (ideally up to two pages/sides of A4).
- Use an 'easy-to-read' font and size; modern sans serif fonts such as Arial and Calibri in size 11 or 12 for main text tend to work well on CVs. Use the same font type throughout.

- Be consistent in how you present the information (e.g. chronological order) and in your layout. Have headings in the same style, for example, bold. Use bullet points to make reading easier.
- Don't cram the page; space makes text easier to read and more attractive.
- Put the most important information on the first page and as near the top as possible. The employer may not take the time to read on if there's nothing of interest to begin with.
- Get other people's views on your draft and ensure the final version is proofread carefully – preferably by someone else.

“At Enterprise we are also interested to hear about your extra-curricular activities, awards and interests. It gives us an insight into what you like to do outside work and education and helps us form interview questions.”

**HR Director, Europe,  
Enterprise Rent-a-Car**

## CV formats and examples

There's no single recommended way to style your CV, but three of the most common formats are:

- A chronological (or traditional) CV
- A skills-based (or functional) CV

- A hybrid CV (combining elements of the chronological and skills-based formats).

Each of these has particular features which can be useful for different situations:

Table 4.1 Different CV formats

CV format	Key features	Good if you ...
Chronological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional format</li> <li>• Lists your details, under appropriate headings, normally starting with the most recent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Have experience and skills that closely relate to the job you're applying for</li> <li>✓ Want to emphasise career progression</li> <li>✓ Have had mainly continuous employment with limited gaps</li> </ul>
Skills-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasises your skills, qualities and other attributes rather than your employment history</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Are changing career and want to show employers how transferable skills gained in other types of employment will be relevant</li> <li>✓ Are just starting out in your career, enabling you to draw on experience and skills from education and other areas of life, not just employment</li> <li>✓ Have gaps in your employment history because dates are not as prominent</li> <li>✓ Have had a series of short-term paid or voluntary roles; this format enables you to group together related skills and achievements gained from these</li> <li>✓ Want to draw attention away from specific locations in which you have studied or gained experience, for example, if you have served a prison sentence</li> </ul>
Hybrid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A mix of elements from chronological and skills-based CVs</li> <li>• Uses the more conventional order of the former but with more emphasis on achievements rather than responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Want to draw attention to specific skills or achievements that would help you stand out as a candidate</li> <li>✓ Want to draw attention away from specific locations in which you have studied or gained experience, for example, if you have served a prison sentence</li> </ul>

# Example CVs

## Chronological CV

Here's an example of a chronological CV for Daniel, an MBA graduate looking for a role to progress his career:

### Daniel Rossi

Tel: 01234 123456 email: [d.rossi@smartmail.com](mailto:d.rossi@smartmail.com) LinkedIn: <https://linkedin.com/in/daniel-rossi/>

#### Personal Profile

NOTE: Profile summarises career aims in a way that is tailored to the job application.

A highly motivated CIMA professional with in-depth knowledge of financial and management information systems. Key strengths include commercial and business awareness, strategic analysis, analytical thinking and a logical approach to work.

Successful completion of a Masters in Business Administration, and now seeking an opportunity to take on greater management responsibilities and challenge within a company finance function.

#### Professional Qualifications

<b>2015–2018</b>	<b>Masters in Business Administration (MBA),</b> The Open University	
	Modules included: Managing performance and change Financial strategy Business operations: delivering value	

NOTE: Demonstrates value of OU study by citing projects that have a direct bearing on work activities.

<b>2011–2013</b>	<b>Professional Diploma in Management,</b> The Open University	
	Projects included: Analysis of change strategy within current company Review of accounting systems, including proposals for future developments	
<b>2008–2010</b>	<b>Professional Qualification,</b> CIMA	

#### Career History

<b>2014–Present</b>	<b>Deputy Finance Manager</b> Ace Holdings, Portsmouth	
---------------------	--	--

NOTE: Each entry specifies how candidate's contribution added value to the organisation.

- Planned and co-ordinated computerisation of the management accounts system, which required high-level organisational skills and the ability to think strategically to deal with complex challenges as the project progressed.
- Trained staff in the use of the new system, providing concise and effective guidelines and designed a training plan. Ensured full staff engagement through involvement at all levels.
- Reduced the cost of supplies by 11% in 2020/21 and was able to make savings by thinking creatively and identifying alternative methods of purchasing goods.
- Strengthened and simplified the reporting of financial information; each team was given greater responsibility for reporting on their own accounts which led to greater transparency.
- Researched a detailed marketing study leading to a refocused annual marketing plan.
- Negotiated a £2m loan for a major construction project, which required research to present the case. Represented the company in negotiations throughout the bidding process, including at panel interviews.
- Handled credit analyses and made credit recommendations.



**2010–2014 Management Accountant**

**S Finance, Poole**

- Prepared regular financial statements and accounts, such as profit and loss accounts
- Analysed company performance
- Monitored spending, costs and budgets
- Interviewed clients
- Supervised an office of nine staff

**2008–2010 Accounts Technician**

**S Finance, Poole**

- Assisted with ledger accounts and budget preparation
- Prepared statements showing income and expenditure
- Processed expenses claims

**NOTE:** This entry briefly summarises previous employment history that is less relevant.

Career started as a Trainee Accounts Clerk with S Finance, learning the job and assisting with ledger accounts. Quickly promoted to Accounts Clerk and began working towards professional qualifications.

**Additional skills and experience**

**NOTE:** This section highlights the employability skills developed through study, work and even leisure interests.

- IT skills: use Microsoft Office and SAGE financial management software on a daily basis to write documents, prepare presentations, store and manipulate data and produce financial reports.
- Part-time study of the courses described above required self-discipline, time-management skills and determination. Developed a much broader awareness and understanding of company systems and functions as a result of study.
- Keen member of a local amateur dramatics society, acting as Stage Manager for the last four years, and providing an additional arena to further develop organisational and people-management skills.
- Currently Treasurer to primary school PTA.
- Language skills including conversational Spanish and French.
- Full clean driving licence.

## Skills-based CV

Here's an example of a skills-based CV for Elizabeth, a psychology student looking to return to work after a career break:

### ELIZABETH PAGE

Tel: 07777991811  
email: [epage@profmail.com](mailto:epage@profmail.com)  
[www.linkedin.com/elizabeth-page](http://www.linkedin.com/elizabeth-page)

#### PERSONAL PROFILE

NOTE: Profile summarises how candidate's career aims align with the job she is applying for.

As a degree student specialising in psychology with The Open University, I am seeking a challenging and fulfilling post supporting disadvantaged young people. Having studied alongside volunteering, I have a proven willingness to learn and an excellent work ethic. My enthusiasm, energy and adaptability has allowed me to work successfully as a volunteer with young people and build good working relationships. I particularly enjoy helping and motivating others to achieve their potential through education and employment.

#### KEY SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES

NOTE: Candidate is able to emphasise her full range of skills through a skills-based CV. Bullet points are useful as they are more succinct and can be scanned quickly by the reader.

##### Strong communication skills

- A track record of engaging young people, with a sensitive but assertive approach, to support their personal development.
- Assisting people with their practical needs and adapting to their specific challenges, through a patient-led approach.
- Responsible for ensuring support sessions are not only fun but include learning development.

##### Effective time-management and planning skills

- Enabling me to study successfully for my degree whilst volunteering and running a busy home.
- Ensuring that module assignments are completed on time and allowing me to attend residential schools without compromising family needs.

##### Excellent organisational skills

- Responsible for co-ordinating and organising outings and activities at The Umbrella Children's Home.
- Negotiating and liaising with staff and external organisations to meet needs in support plans.
- Supervision of volunteers at the New Horizon Project.

## EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS

2020– Present **BSc (Hons) Open**, The Open University

Specialising in psychology, with modules to date including:

- Childhood studies and child psychology
- Investigating psychology
- Counselling: exploring fear and sadness

1991–1993 **7 Standard Grades incl English and Maths**, Edinburgh High School

## EXPERIENCE

NOTE: Provides evidence of working with others in a variety of contexts – both through paid employment and voluntary work.

2019– Present **Volunteer Care Assistant** The Umbrella Children's Home, Edinburgh  
Supporting teenagers with additional needs in a residential children's home. Organising events and outings for the residents to support personal development.

2015–2019 **Career break – raising a family**

NOTE: The candidate specifies the reason for her career break, and by using a skills-based CV, she highlights the skills gained from her range of experiences throughout the CV.

2010–2015 **Nursing Auxiliary** Linarth General Hospital, Edinburgh  
Assisting nurses to feed, wash and dress adult patients, making beds, and serving meals. Professional training courses enabled me to develop a strong foundation of knowledge around approaches to care.

2009–2010 **Volunteer Support Worker** New Horizon Project, Edinburgh  
Providing information to people in the 16-25 age range on specialist services (e.g. drugs and housing). Supervising new volunteers to the centre. Liaising with local organisations in order to maintain up-to-date information.

1993–2010 **Administrative Assistant** Menzies Solicitors, Falkirk

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Internal training as part of volunteer roles including safeguarding, care plan management, welfare systems and basic drug awareness
- Computer literate, knowledge of Windows 10, Microsoft Office and IT databases
- Current DBS
- Extensive knowledge of, and interest in, sport
- Clean driving licence and valid minibus licence

## CV for career change

Here is an example of a CV from Samantha, seeking a career change. Samantha has a disability and there is an accompanying example covering letter in Section 4.7 where she uses the opportunity to explain this in relation to her ability to do the role.

<b>Samantha Williams</b> 51, Park Street, Edgbaston, XY31 5XX Tel: 04231 987234 email: s.williams@nomail.co.uk		
<b>Personal profile</b> I am a hard-working and dependable business undergraduate with extensive experience in administration, sales and customer service. This has enabled me to develop excellent interpersonal skills and an ability to think on my feet. My experience to date has now given me the confidence and experience to embark on a career in marketing.		
<b>Qualifications</b>		
<b>2019–Present</b>	BA (Hons) in Business Management (Marketing): <i>Introduction to business studies; Design thinking: creativity for the 21st century; Understanding customers</i> The Open University	
<b>2006</b>	NVQ level 3 in Business Administration Springfield Training, Birmingham	
<b>2005</b>	6 GCSEs at grade A–C including English, Maths and I.T. All Saints High School, Birmingham	
<b>Employment experience</b>		
<b>August 2016–Present</b>	<b>Secretary/PA to Sales Manager</b>	<b>New Look Fashion</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Providing secretarial and administrative support to the Sales Manager</li><li>• Arranging meetings, diary management, dealing with appointment requests</li><li>• Updating records using computer database and spreadsheet software</li><li>• Liaising with other managers, suppliers and clients, etc</li><li>• Writing reports and briefing papers and making presentations</li></ul>	
<b>May 2008–August 2016</b>	<b>Senior Sales Assistant</b>	<b>New Look Fashion</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Responsible for driving sales</li><li>• Supervising a small sales team</li><li>• Ensuring good customer service</li><li>• Building relationships with suppliers</li><li>• Implementing agreed promotional activities</li></ul>	
<b>July 2005–May 2008</b>	<b>Modern Apprentice (Retail Work)</b>	<b>Dixons</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dealing with customer enquiries and sales</li><li>• Stock control including checking deliveries</li><li>• Customer services including handling complaints</li><li>• Promoting certain products under the guidance of management</li><li>• Maintaining displays and visual standards within the store</li></ul>	
<b>Additional information</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Affiliate Professional member of The Chartered Institute of Marketing</li><li>• I have a full, clean driving licence</li><li>• I am actively involved with three children's charities for which I have arranged fundraising activities</li></ul>	
<b>References</b> Available on request		



## Hybrid CV

Here are examples of 'before' and 'after' CVs with advice provided from a Careers Consultant, for a student who served a criminal sentence, using a hybrid format:

### Example CV if you have a criminal record: 'Before' version including feedback from a Careers Consultant

#### Name: Andrew Bailey

Address: 100 No Road,  
Chatham,  
XY18 6AA  
Tel: 07123 456789  
Email: a.bailey@nowhere.com

*You don't need to put the words 'name' and 'address' on your CV.*

*The address can go on one line rather than across 3 or 4 lines. If your CV is light on content elsewhere, then you need to develop a skills section, rather than filling space with your personal details.*

*Put this section in the centre rather than having it on the left.*

#### Personal Profile

I am a hard-working, motivated and responsible person who is **seeking\*** to build on the experience I have gained working in a gym for the last 18 months. I am interested in undertaking further training to help me to start a career as a Personal Trainer.

*\* Make sure you check for basic spelling errors – especially in your Personal Profile. It is the first item an employer will read after your name and personal details and mistakes do not make a good impression.*

*If you have achieved something significant in the last year of which you are especially proud, record it here under a section called 'Recent Achievement'. It will focus the attention of the employer.*

*A 'Skills Profile' could be added here to enable a potential employer to see if your skills and competencies match with available opportunities.*

*If you are an OU student, then make sure it features on the first page of your CV.*

#### Qualifications

Various courses from the **2009 - 2012**  
Open University:

- E112 Introduction to Sport, Fitness and Management – 60 credits
- E113 Working and Learning in Sport and Fitness – 60 credits
- E217 Sport and Conditioning Science into Practice – 60 points
- EXF224 Making your Exercise Instruction Count – 60 credits

NVQ Level 2 Gym Instructor **2012**

NVQ Level 1 & 2 Warehouse and Storage (Day Release) **2001 – 2003**  
In-Train Ltd, Leicester

2 GCSE passes (grades A-C) in Design Technology **2001** and ICT

St. Gregory's Comprehensive School, Sittingbourne

*Notice that in this section the dates have been placed on the right-hand side whereas in the next section they are on the left. Be consistent in your layout and make it easy to read in order to make more impact.*

*Listing OU modules is useful here, but you don't need to put the codes in or the credits.*

## Work Experience

May 2014 – Present

Assisted in Blogg's Gym. I helped take classes and maintained equipment, as well as keeping records.

*Put Employment and Work Experience together in one section.*

*The layout of this could be better. Need to bullet point duties, so they are clearer. You completed this while in a Cat D prison and you are right not to put that, it is the experience which is important.*

*Did you gain any other experience in prison? If so, it is worth adding this.*

## Employment

Aug. 2011 – May 2014 Serving my sentence at HMP Coldingley

*A CV is your chance to highlight your strengths. NACRO (charity offering resettlement advice), says:*

*You should not include any information about your criminal record on your CV. If you have gaps in your employment history which are due to time in prison and you are not asked directly to write about your criminal record in your application, you could explain these gaps by stating that you were 'unavailable for work' at a certain period in time.*

*Remember: if you are not asked for a criminal record declaration directly, then there is no need for you to disclose this information at this stage. But you must be prepared to answer fully and honestly if you are asked, at interview, to explain what you mean by 'unavailable for work'.*

*Highlight what you did during this time e.g. OU student, orderly work or other courses you have taken.*

2001 – June 2009

**Warehouse Assistant**

Wilson's Wholesale, Maidstone

Main duties involved taking delivery of goods and supplies and storing the goods. I moved stock ready for dispatch using a forklift truck. My duties also involved picking and packing orders and keeping records of stock. I also drove the delivery vans.

*Again, the layout is not used in the best way. Use of bullet points here allows the reader to quickly scan this section rather than have to read it all.*

## Additional Information:

- I am a qualified Fork Lift Truck Operator (NTPC Level2)
- I have a current First Aid Certificate
- I have a full, clean driving licence

*Use proper bullet points here.*

## Activities and Interests:

I enjoy cycling and motocross. I am a local community volunteer for 10 hours per week.

## References:

Available on request.

*Not necessary on a CV. Most employers only take references after interview.*

## Example CV if you have a criminal record: 'After' the feedback has been implemented

### Andrew Bailey

100 No Road, Chatham, XY18 6AA

07123 456789

a.bailey@nowhere.com

#### Personal Profile

I am a hard-working, motivated and responsible person who is seeking to build on the experience I have gained as part of the personal training team at Blogg's Gym. I am interested in undertaking further training to help me to start a career as a Personal Trainer.

I am studying towards a degree in Sports, Fitness and Coaching with The Open University. I also have a relevant NVQ Level 2 qualification.

#### Recent Achievement

In September I took part in The Great South Run in Portsmouth. I trained for the event for 8 months and raised over £1,100 in sponsorship for Crisis – the national charity for homeless young people.

#### Skills Profile

- Experience in setting realistic short and long term goals with clients
- Delivered education programme about healthy lifestyles
- Motivated clients with disabilities/ health issues in following programmes safely and effectively
- Measured clients' progress: measuring heart rate and body fat levels
- Knowledge of Microsoft Office applications, including Word, Excel, and PowerPoint
- Ability to manage my own time and workload – I have worked and studied at the same time
- Self-motivation and commitment to own learning and development

#### Qualifications

**2016 – present**

***The Open University***

Working towards a degree in Sports & Fitness

Modules completed:

- Introduction to sport, fitness and management
- Working and learning in sport and fitness
- Sport and conditioning science into practice
- Making your exercise instruction certificate count

**2015**

***Register of Exercise Professionals***

Level 2 Instructor (Gym)

**2001 – 2003**

***In-Train Ltd, Maidstone***

NVQ Level 1 & 2 Warehouse and Storage (Day Release)

**2001**

***St. Gregory's Comprehensive School, Sittingbourne***

2 GCSE passes (grades A-C) in Design Technology and ICT



## **Employment & Work Experience**

**May 2016 – Present** *Assistant Personal Trainer* **Blogg's Gym, Chatham**

- Assisting in delivery of range of exercise classes
- One-to-one support for clients
- Assisting in induction programme for new clients
- Ensuring equipment functional and clean
- Administrative duties

**Aug 2011 – May 2016** Experience gained:

- Open University student
- Gym assistant
- Initiated and ran 5-a-side football competition
- Listener (Samaritans)
- Assistant in delivering adult literacy classes

**2007 – 2011** *Warehouse Assistant* **Wilson's Wholesale, Maidstone**

Main Duties:

- Taking delivery of goods and supplies
- Storing goods
- Moving stock using a forklift truck
- Picking and packing orders
- Loading goods for dispatch
- Keeping records of stock
- Driving delivery vehicles

### **Additional information**

- I am a qualified Fork Lift Truck Operator (NTPC Level 2)
- I have a current First Aid Certificate
- I have a full, clean driving licence

### **Activities and interests**

I enjoy cycling, running and play for my local football team. I am a local community volunteer for 5 hours per week.

## Other CV formats

Whilst chronological, skills-based and hybrid versions suit most applications, there is scope for variations, for example, for some different sectors or roles.

### Technical CV

These are mostly needed for IT roles. The technical CV provides a format for you to highlight specific technical skills and interests relevant to the industry, for example, programming languages, systems and platforms. You can use this format to describe your soft and other employability skills that employers are looking for. You can see an example of a technical CV by searching at [www.targetjobs.co.uk](http://www.targetjobs.co.uk).

### Creative industries CV

With the expansion of the digital and creative industries over recent years, CV formats have become more imaginative in these sectors. A highly creative CV format can be suitable for some roles in creative and artistic sectors such as marketing, design or journalism, where it could help you stand out from the crowd. This type of CV can demonstrate your design skills and creativity in such a way that a potential employer can immediately see what you can do. Infographics are a popular tool for taking large amounts of information and presenting them in a visually engaging way.

Consider creating an online portfolio which showcases what you can do and provide a link to this from your CV.

Find out more at [help.open.ac.uk/create-a-professional-portfolio-for-when-you-are-applying-for-jobs](http://help.open.ac.uk/create-a-professional-portfolio-for-when-you-are-applying-for-jobs).

However creatively you plan to present your CV, remember that employers will still need to see at a glance that you have the criteria they're looking for. Presentation must be balanced with the essential requirement of providing relevant evidence targeted to the role and the employer.

### Video CV

Whilst these are more popular in customer-facing and creative roles, a video CV could get you noticed by employers in any sector. It's not a test of your Oscar-winning directorial skills but it can be effective in showing employers more of your personality and how you communicate. They can help to spotlight your creativity and personality and you can demonstrate particular skills, such as public speaking, communication and digital skills.

## Academic CV

Academic CVs are different from other styles of CV, as they are often longer than two sides of A4, containing detailed information about your research and other relevant experience. They are used mostly if you are applying for an academic role in higher education or a research environment.

### You should include:

- Your contact details
- Your education and qualifications, starting with your PhD and working backwards
- The title of your PhD, a short summary of your research and the names of your supervisors
- A detailed list of publications, presentations, posters and conferences attended
- Any experience you have of teaching, supervision or training
- Any funding received, including awards and scholarships
- Membership of relevant societies
- Areas of research interest
- Any specialist or technical skills
- Three named referees – usually including at least two academic referees.

## If you already have a CV

- Review it and ask yourself whether it presents the information you want in the way you want it to be seen. What could you change to develop it?
- Look at the format examples – which would best suit your situation and the types of role you are applying for?

The **Abintegro CV360 tool** can analyse your CV, looking for common mistakes used by Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) in recruitment. It will also provide you with detailed feedback and suggestions for how to improve your CV.

## If you haven't started a CV

- Start drawing together core information which you could include in the different sections of your CV
- What format do you think would work well for you?

The **Abintegro CV Builder tool** will help you to develop a CV from scratch by guiding you through what content needs to be added, in what section and why, so you become familiar with what employers are looking for in a CV

CV360 and CV Builder can be accessed by OU students and recent graduates via [help.open.ac.uk/creating-and-reviewing-your-cv-with-abintegro](https://help.open.ac.uk/creating-and-reviewing-your-cv-with-abintegro).

Whether starting or developing a CV, make sure that you've:

- Analysed the requirements of the job
- Highlighted the skills and attributes most relevant to the job
- Provided examples of how you can demonstrate these.

## Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)

Many organisations which deal with high-volume recruitment may use an Applicant Tracking System (ATS). This is an automated system which initially sifts applications, looking for the most pertinent information for the job. You should always be honest when stating your experience and credentials, but there are some tips to keep in mind when aiming to get your CV through this initial stage:

- If you know the ATS system the company is using, do a Google search to find out more about it and how it works. Try to include in your CV exact keywords or phrases that are used in the job posting. Look at the words, language and phrases the employer uses on their website, particularly around its values and culture. You may wish to use some of these in your application if relevant.
- It's safer to stick with a Word document rather than a pdf and clean and straightforward formatting is preferred – such as traditional bullet points.
- Human touches are still important: a covering letter or email could still bring you to the attention of a recruiter, even if your CV wasn't part of the ATS search results.

“ I found the Careers Consultant very helpful with ideas to tweak my CV so that it was clearer about my personal skills rather than just work history. ”

OU Student

## 4.7 Covering letters

A covering letter accompanies a CV or application form, and may be a traditional letter format or email. It introduces your application and draws attention to the main factors that make you suitable for the job.

Think about your covering letter like a trailer to a film; it should offer the highlights and entice the reader to want to look further into your application. Pay careful attention to any advice that's provided from an employer for what to specifically include in a covering letter; in some cases, you might be asked to provide a lot more detail in the letter, for example, demonstrating how you meet the criteria in the person specification for the job role.

Always include a covering letter as part of an application unless the employer specifically tells you not to. If it's not technically possible to upload a letter as part of an online webform, aim to include the information in an additional text box or email that accompanies the form.

## Drafting your letter

- Aim to keep it brief – usually not more than one page – unless the employer is specifically asking for more detailed content.
- Aim to address your letter to an individual by name where possible. If you're not provided with a name and are unable to source this, you could address it to a job title or team – for example, 'Dear Finance Director' or 'Dear Customer Services Team'.
- You can use your covering letter to give additional information, such as requesting any reasonable adjustments you will need for an interview if you have a disability or health condition. This is optional and there is further advice and example letters in Section 5 of this guide.
- Take care with the usual protocols of professional letter writing, with care and attention to spelling, punctuation and grammar, and when writing to a named individual, end with 'Yours sincerely'. If you do have to resort to starting your letter with a job title or team, end with 'Yours faithfully'.

## Covering letters for advertised jobs

This is your chance to promote yourself to the employer and emphasise why your application is worth reading. Use it to show your enthusiasm and suitability for the job and draw attention to the strengths you've included in your CV or application form.

### Structure it to include:

- **What** you're applying for. You should normally include the job title and reference number (if applicable) as given in the advert in the introductory paragraph or as a bold heading after the salutation.
- **Why** you're applying. Say what it is about the job that interests you.
- **Why** you want to work for that organisation in particular.

Within this structure, you should be highlighting the key skills, attributes and experience you are offering which relate most closely to the person specification for the job you are applying for.

## Covering letters for speculative approaches

Accompanied by your CV, a speculative application letter should include:

- **Why** you're making an approach and why you want to work for that organisation in particular. Show your knowledge and interest from research you've carried out.
- The **type of work or job role** you're looking for.
- **Why** you're suitable. Emphasise the skills you have which are relevant to the organisation and direct them to your enclosed CV for more detail. Reviewing the person specifications or job descriptions of recently advertised vacancies with the same organisation (or with similar companies) can help guide you towards the most relevant skills, experience and qualities to highlight.

You may want to offer another option in your letter or as part of your follow-up; for example, if they have no vacancies at the moment, when do they anticipate future vacancies? If you'd be interested in work experience or shadowing, say so.

## Example covering letters

### Covering letter for a speculative application

Here's an example from Joginder, making a speculative application, and who is looking to develop his career within the same sector

	Joginder Singh 123 Warwick Road Kenilworth Warwickshire CV8 1EJ 01926 850973
Mr George Black Export Sales Director Blank Distribution Company 5 Blank Street Royal Leamington Spa Warwickshire CV35 8EE [Date]	
Dear Mr Black,	
I am writing to enquire if you have any current vacancies in your company for a Senior Export Sales Manager.	
I've been following your company with interest for some time on LinkedIn and note that you received a recent export award from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. With my knowledge of the sector, your growth into component sales in the Far East has been something few companies have successfully achieved in the last five years.	
Having had over ten years' experience in export sales, including experience of exporting electronic, and computer-based control equipment, I am seeking a new challenge that will build on this experience.	
Some of my key achievements to date have been:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Locating new lines of products and developing international sales streams.</li><li>• Selecting and working with local distributors throughout the world.</li><li>• Increasing sales by 26 per cent in one year when the pound was at its highest exchange rate.</li><li>• Consolidating my experience through a Business Management degree with The Open University, with an Innovation and Enterprise specialism.</li></ul>	
Although primarily the reason for my contact is that I would like to work for your company, your advice and suggestions would also be helpful and influential in helping me research my options to develop my career.	
I enclose a copy of my CV and thank you in advance for your consideration. I very much look forward to hearing from you.	
Yours sincerely, Joginder Singh	

## Covering letter for an advertised position

Here's an example from Peter, applying for an advertised position, and seeking a career change:

	Peter Evans 11 Wood Lane York North Yorkshire QQ1 3ZZ
Imani Jackson Recruiting Manager The Environment Agency Midtown MDT 8XX	
[Date]	
<b>Vacancy for Graduate Trainee Consultant – Countryside and Environment (ref: 1.2b)</b>	
Dear Imani,	
I would like to apply for the Graduate Trainee Consultant position advertised on OpportunityHub (The Open University). I enclose my CV for your consideration.	
The opportunity to work for The Environment Agency appeals to me because of the innovative nature of the organisation and its explicit commitment to protecting and improving the environment. I see the potential of this training programme offering the opportunity to experience a range of functions which correlate directly with my specific interest in countryside management and my broader interest in the diverse project work undertaken by The Environment Agency.	
I am particularly interested in the sustainability of habitats and the environment and this is an area that I've gained practical experience in and one which relates very closely to my academic studies. I have been involved for 8 years in a local project which protects natural habitats through the planting of trees and supports floodplain management. I spent an additional 4 weeks as a conservation volunteer on a sea turtle preservation project in Greece.	
With a work background in the IT sector, I am looking to change the direction of my career at this stage, having built this practical experience and recently graduated with a BSc (Hons) in Environmental Sciences from The Open University.	
My wider experience in the IT sector, allied to my extracurricular interests, have enabled me to develop strong interpersonal skills, to communicate effectively, to solve problems and to make sound decisions which are data-informed. These skills have become particularly evident in my voluntary work for the York Conservation Society.	
I would welcome the opportunity to tell you more about my enthusiasm for this field of work and the attributes I am able to bring to this role. Thank you for your time and consideration and I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.	
Yours sincerely,	
Peter Evans	



## Covering letter for work experience

Here's an example from Meredith, starting out in her career, and seeking work experience:

Meredith Diaz  
78 Aston Street  
Coventry  
ZX42 6XY  
07321 496284

Mrs A Sherman  
Partner  
Sherman & Wilkes  
3 Royal Street  
Coventry  
ZX38 5PS

[Date]

Dear Mrs Sherman,

I am writing to you to enquire about the availability of work experience at your legal practice in the near future.

I am due to complete my Bachelor of Laws (Honours) (LLB) with The Open University in the next two years and am looking to enhance my experience by gaining a short work placement (one or two weeks) during the summer period (June–August).

In the longer term, my ambition is to train as a solicitor.

I am interested in the aspects of legal work which Sherman & Wilkes can offer, particularly probate and conveyancing and the range of clients with whom you deal. I feel that a short placement with your firm would provide me with an excellent insight into these areas of work. As a Chambers UK and Legal 500 ranked firm, I'd regard the opportunity to learn from the experience and skill of your team, hugely valuable.

I feel that my previous work experience has equipped me with relevant insights and skills which will be useful to me in a legal career. I completed a short placement with a local solicitor last year which gave me exposure to the structure of work and training, and what cases and transactions involve. Prior to this, I took a vacation role in the Social Services department of a local authority, where I prepared case files and was able to shadow client interviews to gain insights into their personal circumstances and needs. I would be keen in my next placement to shadow lawyers, sit in on client meetings, and gain a better understanding of the skills and qualities your firm values.

I have enclosed my CV, which I hope will be of interest to you and would welcome the opportunity to speak to you further about this.

I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Yours sincerely,  
Meredith Diaz



## What to do if you're not getting interviews

If you are not getting selected for interviews, don't be disheartened as it can often take a number of applications to get to this stage. Take stock and consider various steps to improve your chances:

- Review your CV or application form. Were they sufficiently tailored to the specific job? Do they promote you in the best way?
- Ask others to give you feedback on your applications. Request a careers consultation, share with friends or trusted colleagues and talk to your network.
- Are you applying for the right vacancies at this stage? Are there any additional skills or experience that could strengthen your application? Are there entry-level positions that could help you get into the sector in the meantime?
- Review your job-hunting strategy. Are you using a variety of different methods and sources to search for jobs? Could you diversify your approach?

## 4.8 Interviews

Interviews remain the most common method of filling vacancies. There are different formats and methods used to interview, which can include:

- **Face-to-face** with one or two interviewers:
- **Video and online interviews:** increasingly used as a way of emulating the face-to-face/in-person interview experience, but allowing to meet at distance. Some employers ask applicants to complete a pre-recorded video before a live interview is offered.
- **Telephone interviews:** These may take place as part of initial application screening or as a formal interview.
- **Panel interviews:** You will meet several interviewers in one interview, with each taking a part in the process. This could take place in person or online.

Interviewers want you to do yourself justice. They're hoping that you'll be an excellent candidate and that their time spent interviewing will be worthwhile. Here are some tips to help you achieve that:

- If you need to request reasonable adjustments for the interview, due to a disability or health condition, for example, contact the employer to discuss your needs if you haven't had the opportunity to present your thoughts already in an application form or CV/covering letter (see Section 5).
- When faced with a panel of interviewers, you should address the majority of your response to the interviewer who has asked you a question, whilst ensuring that you still have some eye contact with the rest of the panel.

- A few seconds' silence in an interview can seem an eternity, but don't be panicked into responding too quickly. Fill a thinking gap with comments such as 'That's an interesting question, I need a moment or two to think about it'.
- When asked for your questions, aim to elicit answers that could genuinely add to your knowledge about the role or company and help you decide whether the position is right for you.

“

From a careers advice perspective, employers have always said to me that they always like to interview an OU graduate because anyone who can achieve an OU qualification is a certain kind of person.

”

**BA Open Graduate**

## Interview preparation checklist

Here's a checklist you might find useful for your next interview

<p><b>1.</b> Read any guidance provided by the employer about what to expect and advice on how to prepare. Discuss with the employer any adjustments you may need to the interview process.</p>	
<p><b>2.</b> Research the job and employer thoroughly beforehand. Use a range of resources to find out about the employer and, if you can, find out something about the people interviewing you, e.g. search LinkedIn.</p>	
<p><b>3.</b> Review the guidance on the interview process and its format if provided. For example, which video conferencing platform will they use (Zoom, Skype, MS Teams)? Is it a one-to-one interview, panel or group interview? Will the interview questions have a particular emphasis on assessing competencies or strengths?</p>	
<p><b>4.</b> Review your CV or your application. What are your unique selling points? Some of the interview questions are likely to focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your achievements</li> <li>• Your motives for applying</li> <li>• Your likely contribution to the role.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>5.</b> Review the person specification – list the competencies they're looking for and collect as much evidence as you can to demonstrate these. Think about when you have demonstrated your abilities, e.g. successful projects; successful interactions with other people; convincing a difficult audience; analysing a large amount of information, etc. Don't just think about job-related examples – you may have excellent evidence from your studies, hobbies, care responsibilities or other areas of your life.</p>	
<p><b>6.</b> What are your weak points and what do you feel uncomfortable talking about? Practise reciting your answers out loud, record yourself and listen back to build your confidence.</p>	
<p><b>7.</b> Prepare some questions that you would like to ask. Having questions prepared shows your interest in and keenness to develop within the organisation e.g. 'How is performance and development assessed?' 'How is the job likely to develop over the next two years?'</p>	
<p><b>8.</b> Practise your interview skills: use the Interview360 tool, or role-play with a partner.</p>	
<p><b>9.</b> Build-in preparation time for practical things for online interviews like timings, check internet connection, check video camera and audio settings, check your environment, consider what to wear, have a note pad.</p>	
<p><b>10.</b> Always seek feedback on your interview; reflect on your experience, evaluate your performance and incorporate the learning into your next interview.</p>	

“Take evidence of your achievements to the interview in a personal portfolio. This will really help you to stand out from the crowd and will aid your preparation for the interview by reflecting on your greatest achievements to date.

”

**Graduate Programme  
Manager, The Co-operative Group**

Undertaking a mock interview can help you feel more confident and well-prepared. More employers are using video interviews as part of their recruitment process, so this offers the perfect opportunity to practice and improve your remote interview technique.

Abintegro's Interview360 takes you through a mock video interview so you can practice. It uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology to give you in-depth insight into how you act, look and interact throughout your interview, from your speech frequency and eye movement, to smile frequency and filler words.

**Interview360** is available to registered OU students and recent graduates at [help.open.ac.uk/preparing-for-a-job-interview](https://help.open.ac.uk/preparing-for-a-job-interview).

## Tackling interview nerves

Even the most confident people can feel anxious at the prospect of a job interview; it's completely normal to feel this way, but anticipating how you will feel gives you the opportunity to prepare in practical ways.

Being mindful can help you when faced with a job interview. Mindfulness is when we are truly in the present, being aware and in the here and now, and being fully engaged. It can particularly help with stress-management, focus, confidence and enhancing performance.

As we're all unique, we'll all have different approaches, but some ideas are included below.

Try these mindfulness techniques as you prepare for your next interview and see if you notice a difference:

- Start off with a positive mindset by reminding yourself that the reason you are there is that the employer saw things they liked about you in your application.
- Take time to breathe and find a sense of calm before your interview starts. Focusing on breathing brings oxygen to your brain, allowing your cognitive abilities to function properly. During the interview, you can silently 'tap' yourself on your knee to stay focused. If you feel your mind racing, mentally pause and 'tap'. Collect yourself and return to the moment.

- The preparation you've done in advance will help you create a checklist to focus your attention in advance, so you arrive being clear about what's important to you.
- Rather than aiming to impress the interviewer, focus on building a respectful and genuine rapport with them. Reframe any negative thoughts creeping in to align with how you would speak to a friend or close colleague.

## Answering different types of question

You need to be prepared to adapt your responses to different kinds of questions:

**Specific questions** invite factual replies – for example, “What skills have you developed from your work or study experience?”

Here, you need to:

- Highlight skills such as communication, collaborative working, project work, research, time management and meeting targets
- Emphasise how you see these skills being transferred to a work setting.

These types of questions may also have more of a technical emphasis, e.g. “What problems did you encounter in the early stages of planning a project?”

**Open questions** encourage expansive replies incorporating both facts and attitudes or feelings, e.g. “Tell me about the three years you spent studying with The Open University”, or “How would you describe yourself?”

**Hypothetical questions** help assess quality of thought, e.g. “What if the policy changed to carrying more freight by rail?” In reply, be methodical, state assumptions you're making, and say where you'd need more information, e.g. “Would this just be in the UK or the whole of Europe?” There is usually no right or wrong answer – the interviewer is looking for logical, clear thinking.

**Competency-based questions** look to explore your skills, qualities and competencies relating to the job. The basic ethos of a competency-based question is that if you can demonstrate you did something in the past, you can do it in the future. These questions would normally ask for an example of a situation in which you've taken action to aim for a positive outcome, and your reflections on what you have learnt. Here are some examples:

- Tell us about a time when you were part of a team and there was a difference of opinion. What happened and what did you do? What was the outcome?
- Describe a setback in your life and say what you did to overcome it. What lessons did you learn from this?
- Describe a time when you demonstrated creativity in solving a difficult problem.

These open-ended questions about your achievements or setbacks have no right or wrong answers.

Aim to keep your answers brief and concise. You could structure your answer using CARA, a variation on the STAR method (see Activity 4.2), with suggested proportions of time to divide your answer:

- **C**ontext (20%): set the scene
- **A**ction (50%): what you did or the skills used
- **R**esult (20%): the outcome
- **A**fter (10%): what you learnt from the experience.

You don't have to limit yourself to just work scenarios – you can use examples from your studies, social activities or hobbies too.

**Strength-based questions:** these types of questions focus on what you enjoy doing, rather than what you can do already. Strength-based interviewing is based on positive psychology; the theory is that, by identifying your strengths and matching them to the role, you'll be happier in your work, perform better, learn quicker and are more likely to stay there.

Here are some examples of strength-based interview questions:

- What types of tasks energise you?
- Do you most like starting tasks or finishing them?
- What did you find easiest to learn when studying?
- Do you prefer getting to grips with the big picture or focusing on the finer details?

- What does a successful day look like to you?
- How have you made your achievements happen?
- What tasks are always left on your to-do list at the end of the day/week?
- How do you feel about deadlines?
- Have you ever done something differently the second time around?

Again, strength questions don't have a right or wrong answer – answer honestly, because if you don't, you might be giving the interviewer a false impression of what you are like. Being honest should also reflect in your body language.

Like other types of questions, use examples to back up your answers.



“They also threw in test questions. They take one of your stated positives and then ask whether you are weak in the opposite. So my talk about liking new challenges sparked the question if I was easily bored. And I answered doing the same every day would bore me rigid. Turns out they really like the frank answers and the fact that you don't wiggle out of these.”

OU Student

**Technical questions:** designed to assess specialist knowledge and skills, most commonly used for engineering, science and IT roles. Technical questions could be included in a general interview or be the focus of a separate interview. Some questions might focus less on technical knowledge, more on how you think. Such questions are looking to assess your problem-solving or your numerical reasoning abilities.

### Some tips for preparing for these include:

- Refresh your knowledge about relevant technical areas and brush up on all the fundamentals. You might also want to reread your notes from any parts of your course that you feel will be relevant to the role.
- You might find it useful to practise, ideally with someone with technical knowledge in the same area as the job to which you're applying. Get them to ask you a couple of likely questions.
- Keep in mind that it's not all about providing the right factual answer; explaining your reasoning behind it is just as important.

### Example interview questions

Here are some example interview questions. You're bound to come up against some of these in one form or another during any interview.

#### Q What are your strengths?

**A** You'll have become aware of these through your self-analysis and preparing your initial application. Focus on two or three that relate directly to the person specification and draw on examples of how you demonstrate these.

**Similar question:** *How would someone who knows you well describe you (a friend, manager, etc.)?*

**Q Tell me about yourself**

**A** Keep your answer short (2 to 3 minutes). This question needs practice. Remember it's not simply about your factual history, so don't give too much detail; this is your chance to provide an overview and at the same time to throw in leads that you hope the interviewer will take up.

**Q What are your weaknesses?**

**A** Most strengths taken to the extreme become weaknesses. Either choose one that isn't particularly significant to your performance in the job role, or pair one with something that can be turned from a weakness into a strength (e.g. taking time to consider your approach to a task demonstrating conscientiousness) to end on a positive note. You could explain how you had a weakness (e.g. time management) but have taken action to overcome it. Use positive phrases like 'learning a valuable lesson' rather than 'making a mistake'.

**Similar questions:** How do you respond to criticism? What do you find challenging about working in a team?

**Q Why should you be appointed rather than another candidate?**

**A** This is an invitation to list your main strengths. Try to restrict yourself to three or four, as too long a list may confuse the interviewer. Draw attention to the possibilities of bringing in skills or experience that the company would benefit from, and a fresh perspective. You could also provide evidence of being a quick learner.

**Q Having worked for one company for so long, do you anticipate any challenges adapting to a new environment?**

**A** Make it clear that you understand the importance of the concept of culture by mentioning the internal diversity of companies and organisations you've had contact with. Describe how you've adapted to different subcultures you've encountered by performing different roles or tasks in your career.

**Q What led you to change your career direction at this stage?**

**A** There could be many professional and personal reasons for this, not least of all the experience of studying. Focus on the many positive features of your experience and the transferability of the skills and knowledge you've gained along the way. Add a balanced, well-reasoned argument for your choice of this new kind of work.

**Q How do you develop yourself and stay up to date?**

**A** Quote examples of your own recent learning, through studying, at work or in your leisure time. Relate what or how you've learnt to the job you are applying for.

**Q How would you describe your management style?**

**A** Have a well-thought-out answer ready. You might start by briefly describing how your style has developed as you've gained experience. Concentrate on flexibility, your variations in style according to different people and different tasks. Then relate your answer to the job you're applying for.

**Q Why do you want to work for us?**

**A** Your research will pay off here. Be genuine with your motives. An example answer could be:

"I have used your software for a long time now and engaged with the innovation and developments over the years. I also appreciate your dedication to education, providing your customers with free demos to learn how to use your products effectively. I would love to be a part of this innovative team and use my skills to continue the groundbreaking work you are doing here."

**Q What are your ambitions?**

**A** Concentrate on your desire to do the job well and to develop your skills and confidence. Make clear statements about your willingness to shoulder responsibility and say that you would consider career progression within the company at an appropriate time.

**Similar question:** *Where do you see yourself in three or five years?*

**Q Under what circumstances did you leave your last employer?**

**A** Keep your reply short and don't touch on any conflict or bitterness if there is any. But do be as honest as you can. There could be any number of reasons: "I've got a real desire to develop my skills by moving to a more demanding job"; "I'm leaving my current job to move into a different industry. As you can see, I left on good terms with my former employer as they are one of my references"; "I really enjoyed my work but unfortunately my team's roles were made redundant under a restructure. While I worked there, I was learning how to make short videos for marketing purposes. I was trained to use video editing software and recording equipment. I realised how much I enjoy this work, so that's why I've applied for the video marketing position with your company."

**Q If you had complete freedom of a choice of jobs and employers, what would you choose?**

**A** Relate what's most important about work for you – your values or the nature of work you carry out and the way you approach it. Aim to relate this to a concrete example of what you feel this employer and role offers to meet your needs.

**Q What things do you feel make an application from an OU graduate stand out to an employer?**

**A** One major factor is the fact that someone has been able to balance study and work or other commitments at the same time. The level of motivation required is impressive and demonstrates ambition and a desire to self-improve. This question also offers the opportunity to reiterate other key attributes you have that fit closely with the core requirements of the job.

**Similar questions:** *Why do you think you'll be successful in this job? What can you do for us that other applicants can't?*

“Time management, hard work and commitment are probably the three main attributes that I have developed through studying with the OU.”

**OU Student**

## After the interview

Straight after the interview, reflect on the experience and record what you can remember (how you felt, the questions and your answers, etc). What went well? Did you find a particular question difficult? Could you have given different examples? Is there anything different you might do at another interview?

### If you didn't get the job

- Do always request feedback – by telephone, email or letter, at the employer's convenience.
- Do try to not take it personally. It's not a criticism of you; it is simply that in this particular instance you have been unsuccessful. If you were invited to interview it means that the recruiters believed you could do the job; interviewing is expensive and employers won't waste time interviewing someone they feel is not suitable for the role in question.
- Reflect on the notes you made immediately after the interview – how can you turn this learning into actions to make you more successful next time?

## 4.9 Assessment centres

Employers are increasing their use of additional tools to assess applicants.

The assessment centre approach has been defined as ‘the use of any selection device, in any combination, beyond the interview’. It can include situational activities, group discussions, in-tray exercises, psychometric tests and additional interviews. Some activities take place in person and some are delivered wholly online.

If you are asked to take part in assessment centre activities, here are some general guidelines:

- Don't be intimidated. All the other candidates will be nervous too. Because assessment centres are more thorough, they are fairer to you.
- The company is looking to assess a range of competencies. Each competency will be assessed at least twice, so you will not be limited to just one opportunity to demonstrate a particular skill.
- Decisions are made by drawing on all the evidence; not performing as well in one or two elements won't automatically mean you won't be successful.
- Different assessors are involved so that there is a more objective view of your skills.

- Try to focus on your own performance rather than that of others and don't assume that the loudest voice will win; the ability to listen and support others is also highly valued.
- Assessment centres sometimes have the advantage that they give you longer to judge the organisation and the people within it.

“ Treat the assessment centre as a two-way process: use it as a chance to find out more about the company. Have some questions prepared before you go – the interviewer will usually give you the chance to ask them, and it looks quite poor if you don't seem to want to know anything more about the company. ”

**UK Graduate Recruitment  
Manager, Logica**

Get yourself ready, both mentally and physically:

- Your invitation may include a programme of events. Study it carefully, paying attention to any special instructions. You might be asked to prepare something in advance, or bring your own equipment, for example.
- If you have a disability or health condition and need adjustments, discuss it with the selector in advance.
- Make sure that you know exactly what you're required to do. Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Assume that you'll be closely observed the whole time.

## Psychometric tests

Psychometric tests are structured pencil and paper or computer exercises, often in the form of multiple-choice questions. They're designed to assess your reasoning abilities, or how you respond to different situations. The tests are developed and tested to ensure that they're fair to everyone who takes them. Your results are usually compared with how others have done on past tests. The tests are used in a variety of ways, depending on the organisation:

- As a selection exercise before an interview
- To accompany an interview
- As part of a number of selection exercises at an assessment centre.

## There are two main kinds of psychometric test:

- **Aptitude, cognitive, ability or intelligence tests:** These aim to assess your capabilities in tests of reasoning: that is, the level and nature of your thinking skills (typically, verbal, numerical and perceptual skills).
- **Personality questionnaires:** These gather information about how and why you do things in your own particular way. They look at how you react or behave in different situations, and your preferences and attitudes. Unlike aptitude tests, they have no right or wrong answers. The selectors aren't looking for a rigidly 'typical' personality, although certain characteristics will be more or less appropriate for the job (e.g. for sales personnel, independence, social confidence and persuasiveness would be considered important characteristics). Honesty is the best policy in approaching these questionnaires.

If you're anxious about psychometric tests, getting in some practice will probably make you feel more confident. You will find links to practice tests at [help.open.ac.uk/psychometric-and-online-tests](https://help.open.ac.uk/psychometric-and-online-tests).

## Online games

Gamification, or games-based assessments, are used by some employers as a way to gain insight into your personality and thinking processes.

You don't need any specific prior gaming experience as it's a way of assessing individuals from all backgrounds. Gamification can be fun and engaging, and as you can't be certain what skill or quality the employer is assessing, it's important to play the game naturally rather than trying to second guess what the employer is looking for. Be yourself, there's no strategy needed.

## Emotional intelligence assessments

Emotional intelligence (also known as Emotional Quotient, or EQ) relates to your understanding of your own emotions and those of others.

Questions are asked that make you think about yourself and how you approach and deal with specific scenarios. Here are some examples:

- What has been your proudest moment in your career?
- Describe a stressful situation in work and how you resolved this?
- What makes you laugh?
- Have you ever noticed someone at work having a bad day? How did you know? What did you do?
- How do you build a rapport with your colleagues?

Sometimes the questions can catch you off guard, so repeat the question out loud to allow yourself some time to contemplate your answer if you need to. Some additional tips for approaching these questions are:

- Be honest and open in your reply
- Use positive language wherever possible
- A punchy but informative answer is preferable.

## Written exercises

Typically, you could be given a lot of written data and asked to write a report, outline a proposal or draft a letter. A suitable structure for your answer is likely to be:

- A redefinition of the problem (by drawing out the key issues).
- Setting out the main options, with their pros and cons.
- Recommending an option, with your reasons (is it practicable, and how?).

If you're faced with a written exercise:

- Follow the instructions with care. Like examination candidates, applicants who fail selection tests often do so because they don't answer the question.
- What's usually wanted is a business report, not an essay. Make liberal use of subheadings and bullet points to make your answer easy to read.
- Don't spend so much time thinking and planning that you haven't got time to write the report.
- Don't rework chunks of the brief. The marker will be looking for original thought.
- Make assumptions explicit, and if more information might be needed, say what it is.
- If asked to do so, come to a conclusion or recommendation, with reasoning to support your choice.

## Presentations

Presentations can help to demonstrate logical thinking, communication skills, and persuasiveness. Sometimes you're told the topic before the day, sometimes during the assessment centre process, but you're always given time to prepare. You may need to make your presentation just to the selectors, or sometimes to the other candidates as well. There could be questions afterwards.

If you're not confident with presentations, think about keeping it simple. Remember the rubric:

- Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em (have a clear message: say in one or two sentences what you are going to cover before explaining your ideas).
- Tell 'em (have clear sections or themes, ensuring your argument has a logical structure).
- Tell 'em what you've told 'em (recap and give a clear conclusion – this might include making specific recommendations and resources that could help deliver them).

Whatever the instructions, see it as a task in which you have to convince or persuade others. Talk directly to them. Make your delivery lively and try to avoid reading from a prepared script. How you say it is as important as what you say.

Keep a careful eye on the time: don't overrun but make good use of the time you have. If you've been asked to prepare in advance, practise so that you've got the timing right. It can be a good idea to build in a little time for questions from the interviewers.

## Group exercises

This would typically involve a small group of candidates discussing one or more topics, with the selectors acting as observers. Very often you'll be set a task as a group or given a case study to look at. Role play could also be



involved. The observers will be making notes about the quality of your contribution (logic, verbal expression, relationship with other participants). Here are some general tips for performing well in group exercises:

- Be clear about the aims of the exercise: keep the group focused on the task.
- Make an early contribution, but not necessarily the first.
- Listen to, and be supportive of, the other candidates.
- Be co-operative; remember that getting the best out of others is a skill in itself.
- Mentally 'stand back' occasionally and evaluate what's happening. Intervene if there's a loss of direction or conflict between the other participants.
- Keep a careful eye on the time. If you have to reach a decision within 30 minutes, remind the group if necessary.
- You might want to discuss your strategy and interpretation of the group discussion at a follow-on interview if one is suggested.

## In-tray exercises

In-tray exercises are also known as inbox or e-tray exercises (if being done online), and simulate the administrative aspects of a job. You may be asked to respond quickly (in timed conditions) to a number of typical questions or issues that may crop up in a job and say what you would do and how you would prioritise tasks. These are usually set in an unrealistic scenario that prevents you from talking to other people in the organisation (e.g. colleagues are ill, abroad, it's a Saturday afternoon). Your qualities most likely to be assessed are analysis, organisation, decision making, judgement, and your ability to communicate clearly.

- Read the instructions carefully and plan your time accordingly, making a rough plan of your approach.
- Look for links within an in-tray, and between in-trays if there's more than one. Signal in your comments that you've spotted these links.
- Remain balanced in your judgement and give reasons for your decisions.
- Treat the whole exercise like real life, with appropriate levels of formality and informality in your responses.
- Don't be discouraged. Most candidates find these tests tough.

“ It can be difficult, but try to relax and enjoy the day. Employers want to see what sort of person you are, what skills you can offer now, and what you have the potential to do in the future. Don't try to put on an act for the day – you will never be able to keep it up for a whole career. Surround yourself with positive people before you go – if they are reminding you about what a great asset you will be to the company, you will feel more positive about your chances and this will come across on the day.

”

**UK Graduate Recruitment  
Manager, Logica**

## Technical assessments

A technical assessment is an opportunity for a prospective employer to put your technical (and sometimes specialist) skills to the test and to determine that you meet the required level of practical knowledge needed to carry out the job.

Most of the technical questions will relate directly to the job role, so you may be able to gauge what kind of questions you could be asked from the job description or person specification. Questions asked usually relate to:

- Understanding the technical work required to be completed day-to-day in the role you're applying for
- Knowledge about the company's technical activities
- Any work completed as part of a qualification you have that relates to the job
- Actual technical problems that you would be likely to encounter if you were working in the role.

It can be hard to predict what specific questions might be asked, but the following tips can help you to prepare:

- Familiarise yourself with the job description and person specification, paying particular attention to the essential skills asked for in the job.

- Write down some tasks or projects that fit the essential skills part of the role, so that they are fresh in your mind if you need to draw from these examples.
- Polish up on any skills you haven't used for a while.
- Be ready to solve problems. If you don't know the answer to the problem being posed to you, show initiative and discuss steps you might take to begin to find the solution.
- Keep your answers simple. Break them down into small chunks if required and avoid using unnecessary jargon.

Further advice on attending recruitment assessment centres is available at [help.open.ac.uk/recruitment-assessment-centres](http://help.open.ac.uk/recruitment-assessment-centres).

## Asking for reasonable adjustments if you have disabilities

If you have a disability, you can request adjustments to help you complete assessment centre activities. Here are some adjustments to consider:

### Asperger's and the autistic spectrum

- Will a private room and personal invigilator help? If so, let the employer know.
- Will you feel more comfortable if the recruiters are briefed? If so, let the employer know.

### Chronic pain

- Will you need a supportive chair?
- Will you need breaks?

### Mental health

- Would you prefer individual assessment?
- Would you like time allowed for breaks if the need arises?

### Visual impairments

#### Written tests

- Would enhanced lighting help you?
- Which of these would be right for you?
  - Large-print version of question and answer sheets
  - Question and answer sheets scanned into computer, so you can read from an adjusted computer screen
  - Braille version
  - Audio version
  - Someone reading the questions and writing down your answers (known as amanuensis).

All these have time implications, so both parties will need to allow more time.

### **Online tests**

- Ask for alternative formats for the following:
  - charts and graphs
  - tables
  - video images.
- Document format compatible with screen reader.
- Web pages still navigable when enlarged.
- Font sizes able to be changed.
- Strong colour contrast.

Time-restricted answers may mean you need longer.

## **Hearing impairments**

### **Written tests**

- You may need little or no adjustment for written tests.
- You may need an interpreter who can sign if you can't lip read.
- Good written instructions don't always suffice, so if this doesn't work for you – say.
- If you can't speak fluently, ask for a pen and paper to write down any questions you may have about the administration of the test and for an administrator to write down your replies.

- If you were deaf from birth, remind the employer that your first language is BSL and English is your second language.

### **Group testing**

- Ensure you have a clear view of the administrator.
- Have an interpreter next to you if you need one.
- Group exercises, role plays, etc. can often be problematic. If you feel you'll have trouble identifying who is speaking and what is being said, etc., tell the employer beforehand.

### **Online tests**

- Ensure transcripts will be available for any audio content.
- If your first language is BSL, you may need more time to absorb instructions.

## **Motor impairments**

### **Written tests**

- Don't be afraid to ask for the access and equipment you need.
- Will you need room for a wheelchair or other mobility aid or adjustments to heights/angles of tables, chairs, etc?
- If you need specialised equipment/computer programs, you'll need a power supply and web access, etc.
- If you find turning pages difficult, you may have a device to help with this – take it with you and let the employer know.

- Multiple choice – if you can't make a small circle to show a correct answer, ask to give your answers in another format, e.g. computer, or tell a scribe who will write for you.
- If fatigue is an issue, ask for time adjustments to be made.

### **Online tests**

You may wish to consider asking if the following will be part of the online test and discuss this with the employer:

- Will there be time-restricted answers, as you may need longer?
- Will it include websites which have no keyboard options for mouse use?

## **Dyslexia**

### **Written tests**

- If you find it easier to follow instructions verbally rather than in writing, tell the employer.
- If you need more time, ask beforehand.

### **Online tests**

- Will there be time-restricted answers, as you may need longer?
- Will you be able to use a screen reader?

## **Speech impairment**

You may not feel comfortable with asking questions about test administration in front of a group. If so, ask the employer to ask you on a one-to-one basis.

## **4.10 Review your job search progress**

You may get the first job you apply for – if so, many congratulations!

But most of us will need to make a number of applications, sometimes a significant amount, before securing that job. Often in life, opportunities, like buses, all come along at the same time; you may find that two or three openings will come your way after a period of getting no responses at all.

Keep records of all the contacts and applications you make. Set up folders to keep organised for follow-up and to review progress. Any previous applications and feedback received can, of course, also provide the basis for further applications.

### Activity 4.3 Reflect on your job searching

It's time now to reflect on how your job search is going:

- What seems to be working well?
- What's not going so well?
- Have you had any feedback from applications you've made?
- What changes could you make to your approach?

Write down your notes in the space below:



# 05

## Equality and diversity issues

<b>5.1</b> Equality and diversity legislation	<b>152</b>
<b>5.2</b> Disability and health issues	<b>154</b>
<b>5.3</b> Age	<b>162</b>
<b>5.4</b> Gender	<b>165</b>
<b>5.5</b> Race	<b>171</b>
<b>5.6</b> Religion or belief	<b>173</b>
<b>5.7</b> LGBTQ+	<b>174</b>
<b>5.8</b> Criminal convictions	<b>176</b>



## 5.1 Equality and diversity legislation

The UK's Equality Act [www.gov.uk/discrimination-your-rights](http://www.gov.uk/discrimination-your-rights) protects against discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the basis of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

This list of protected characteristics is correct as of April 2022.

### What is discrimination?

#### **Discrimination includes:**

- Direct discrimination – treating a person with a protected characteristic worse than someone else.
- Indirect discrimination – putting in place a rule or way of doing things that has a worse impact on someone with a protected characteristic than someone without one when this cannot be objectively justified.
- Failing to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities.

### What is harassment?

Harassment is unwanted conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity or that is hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive to someone with a protected characteristic or in a way that is sexual in nature.

### What is victimisation?

Victimisation is treating someone unfavourably because they have taken (or might have taken) action under the Equality Act or are supporting somebody who is doing so.

The law also protects people from being discriminated against:

- By someone who wrongly perceives them to have one of the protected characteristics, for example, a disability.
- Because they are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic – this includes someone who is caring for a person with a disability.

The same principles of career planning and job seeking apply to everyone, regardless of their background. In this section, we will highlight some of additional challenges that some students and graduates may face.



## Your rights

Many employers have well-developed equal opportunities policies that help them recruit a diverse workforce but it's helpful to be aware that your employment rights often concern four main areas (see figure 5.1)

**Recruitment  
and selection**

**Training and  
promotion**

**Salary  
and benefits**

**Termination of  
employment,  
redundancy  
and retirement**

## Further support

- The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC, [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)), is the leading agency working to eliminate discrimination in the UK.
- In Northern Ireland, you can find out more from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, [www.equalityni.org](http://www.equalityni.org).
- Information for jobseekers on how to challenge unfair discrimination in the workplace is available on TARGETjobs, [www.targetjobs.co.uk](http://www.targetjobs.co.uk).
- Business in the Community, [www.bitc.org.uk](http://www.bitc.org.uk), is a group of companies committed to improving their positive impact on society.
- The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk), offers guidance and support.

Figure 5.1 Employment rights

## 5.2 Disability and health issues

If you have a disability or health issue, the key is to focus on your ability – who you are, your interests, values and skills. As a starting point, explore career areas which are relevant to your interests and skills and then consider the next steps outlined.

### Disability-related rights

Under the Equality Act, you are protected if you have ‘a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities’. This includes sensory impairments, learning disabilities and mental health issues, as well as physical disabilities and medical conditions. This also covers people who have recurring or progressive conditions.

You don't have to register as a disabled person or even consider yourself disabled to be protected.

For a fuller definition of how the Act defines disability, search the UK government site, [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

### Discrimination

The Equality Act prevents discrimination against people with disabilities in all aspects of employment, including:

- Recruitment
- Selection
- Promotion
- Training
- Redundancy.

Some job roles are exempt from the Equality Act 2010.

### Reasonable adjustments

Employers are also required to make reasonable adjustments in the workplace, working practices and job descriptions. For example, employers may have to adjust the premises, buy equipment or alter working hours.

It is important to understand that employers would have to take into account how effective the adjustments are in reducing disadvantages and whether they have the necessary finances. Larger employers may be able to cover this cost; smaller organisations may not and Access to Work may be helpful – see below. However, employers must show they have looked into the costs and explored funding options that may be available from other sources.

## **Reasonable adjustments in the recruitment process**

Reasonable adjustments are there to level the playing field and ensure the candidate has neither an advantage nor a disadvantage. The purpose of adjustments is also to help the candidate to perform to the best of their ability. Once an adjustment has been made, the employer can assess the candidate on an equal basis with their peers. For these adjustments to be effective you should:

- 1.** Inform the employer about your disability or health issues
- 2.** Provide the information the employer requires

- 3.** Be open and honest
- 4.** Not be afraid to ask for exactly what you require
- 5.** Make yourself available for assessment
- 6.** Provide timely feedback on effectiveness of adjustment
- 7.** Help the employer to understand your needs.

The employer has a responsibility to:

- 1.** Provide you with the opportunity to inform them about your disability or health issue
- 2.** Engage in conversation
- 3.** Be realistic about what is achievable
- 4.** Implement adjustments effectively and efficiently
- 5.** Invite you to review adjustments if you wish to
- 6.** Conduct a standard interview.

It's important to remember that you share only the information that is relevant to your request for adjustments. This information should be treated with confidence.

Some of the adjustments you can ask for are:

- Physical access
- Use of specific technology
- A change to the format of the interview
- Use of an interpreter
- Additional time
- An orientation visit prior to interview
- Transport, e.g. taxis
- Quieter space in the office
- Flexible working hours.

The Open University has partnered with disability consulting organisation EmployAbility to deliver a series of webinars to support students and alumni with disabilities or health conditions in the recruitment process [help.open.ac.uk/careers-forums](http://help.open.ac.uk/careers-forums). Follow the webinars link and then scroll down to Equality and Diversity.

### **Access to Work**

If the help you need at work is not covered by an employer making reasonable adjustments, you may be able to get help from Access to Work. This support can include a grant which can pay for:

- Special equipment, adaptations or support worker services to help you do things like answer the phone or get to meetings
- Help getting to and from work.

This support available will most probably depend on the size of the company and its finances. However, if the support is for an employee with mental health issues, then support is free to both the employee and employer, regardless of company size.

Search the UK government site [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) for more information about Access to Work.

For support in Northern Ireland, go to [www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk) and search 'Access to Work'.

### **Should you tell a prospective employer about your disability/health issue?**

It can feel difficult to know whether or not to tell an employer about your disability/health issue, and to know when and how this information should be given. This decision is a personal one, and you do not have to tell an employer. Not saying anything may mean you face less discrimination, but it also takes away some of the obligations the employer has to you, such as providing reasonable adjustments.

Reasons for not declaring:

- You may be concerned about being rejected automatically or facing discrimination.
- You may feel that having a disability does not affect your ability to do the job you have applied for.

The benefits of being open about your disability include:

- You can demonstrate your full potential and be yourself.
- The employer can offer you the adjustments/support you need.
- You establish an open and honest working relationship from the start.
- You can draw on your disability to answer interview questions to give evidence of your skills or personal strengths and achievements.

If you do not declare your disability during the application process and feel you have been treated unfairly, it may be possible for the employer to say they did not know and could not have been expected to make reasonable adjustments for you.

You may make different decisions for different job vacancies, depending on the job role and employer.

## **When and how to tell employers about your disability or health issue**

### **On your CV?**

It is not necessary to mention your disability on your CV, and there are several reasons you might not want to do so. You may feel the employer will see your disability as the most important thing on your CV, or make assumptions about you on the basis of your disability. There may not be room on your CV to

explain your disability sufficiently, nor highlight the range of positive adjustments that could be made.

### **In a covering letter?**

You may feel there is space to do this in a covering letter, particularly if information in your CV suggests you have a disability, e.g. you attended the Royal Blind School. A covering letter is there to exhibit the relevant skills you have for the job, although you can highlight available adjustments and funding for these through Access to Work.

**An example covering letter explaining a physical disability is shown here:**

Samantha Williams

127A Lark Street

Balsall Heath

Birmingham

B12 7NJ

[Date]

Target Advertising

2 Broad Street

Birmingham

B1 5BB

Dear Mrs Bailey

I am responding to your advert in the Birmingham Evening Mail for a Trainee Advertising Executive. As you will see from my CV, I am about to complete a BA (Hons) in Business with The Open University and I have extensive customer service and sales experience from working with some national employers.

I also have strong administrative and IT skills, having worked as a Secretary to the Manager of a clothing manufacturing company.

As a result of contracting meningitis when I was a child, I have limited use of my right leg, which affects my mobility. I am able to walk unaided and have significant experience of shop work, spending all day on my feet, but I am not able to climb stairs quickly or easily. This is the only limitation arising from my mobility impairment. I spent my teenage years coming to terms with my disability and developing my own ways of coping and solving problems. I believe that this attitude has helped me to develop a positive approach to life, which I have been able to bring to my various job roles.

I am an active and outgoing person who enjoys travel as well as keep fit activities such as swimming and Pilates. I also have a full driving licence. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have on my general fitness. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Yours sincerely,

Samantha Williams

Personal statements in application forms present similar considerations.

### **During assessment centre or interviews**

You may need to tell an employer in advance if you are attending an assessment centre, as you may need adjustments for some of the tasks. Again, the need is clear to tell an employer in a straightforward way and be able to identify the adjustments you will need.

Many people feel more comfortable telling an employer during interview and find it helpful to have prepared what they are going to say beforehand. You can refer to your disability to show skills you have developed and challenges you have overcome.

### **After you've received a job offer**

Some people choose to wait to tell an employer after they have been offered the job. This could be a challenge if you need adjustments for an interview or assessment centre. If that consideration isn't applicable, this may be an option you wish to consider.

### **Telling employers about your disability with confidence**

You can approach this by using an 'openness statement', which was devised by the MyPlus Student Club. This allows you have full control over the information you share and manage how it is perceived by others. You can describe your disability or health issue in a positive way, focusing on your strengths, your coping strategies and your determination to succeed. Focus on what you can do, not what you can't.

In constructing your openness statement:

- Identify the appropriate adjustments you may need
- Think through the implications if these needs are not met.

Here are some examples of openness statements:

---

<b>Condition</b>	I am a wheelchair user.
------------------	-------------------------

---

<b>Implication</b>	As I'm unable to walk, I need to use a wheelchair at all times.
--------------------	---

---

<b>Requirements</b>	I require wider access for my wheelchair, a toilet designed for disabled access, as well as a disabled or allocated parking space.
---------------------	--

---

<b>Condition</b>	I have an anxiety disorder.
------------------	-----------------------------

---

<b>Implication</b>	I'm very nervous and anxious, particularly in new situations.
--------------------	---

---

<b>Requirements</b>	It would be useful for me to have an orientation visit prior to my interview, a schedule of the day's events and for people to be aware beforehand that I may be more anxious than others.
---------------------	--

<b>Condition:</b>	I have dyslexia and dyspraxia.
<b>Implication</b>	I have weak short-term memory and I am unable to write comprehensive notes while I am listening.
<b>Requirements</b>	I need handouts in advance and facilities to be able to record conversations. I will also require additional time.

### Activity 5.1 Prepare your own openness statement

Complete the table to describe your own situation

**Condition**

**Implication**

**Requirements**

To learn more about how the MyPlus Student Club can support you, go to [www.myplusstudentsclub.com](http://www.myplusstudentsclub.com).



## Looking for jobs and work experience opportunities

In addition to the usual job vacancy services (see Section 4 Getting the job), there are various organisations that can help you look for work and support you in the application process.

Look for organisations which display the Disability Confident symbol.

This means:

- The employer is committed to employing disabled people.
- You'll be guaranteed an interview if you meet the basic conditions for the job.



**disability**  
confident

Figure 5.2 Disability confident symbol

## If you're out of work

Your Jobcentre Plus work coach will be able to tell you about programmes and grants to help you get back into work.

## Fitness to practise and suitability checks for some career sectors

There are some careers which require further checks on your suitability for jobs in those sectors. These are usually called 'fitness to practise' or 'suitability checks', which means an individual has the skills, knowledge, health and character to do their job safely and effectively.

Career sectors include:

- Social work
- Nursing
- Law
- Teaching
- Medicine

For some professions, such as nursing, you will need to be on a professional register. This registration shows the public that their professionals are fit to practise with nationally recognised standards set by law.

If you think your plans may be affected by these requirements, you can get in touch with the careers team who will be able to support you.

## Further help and support

The OU Students Association has a group for students with disabilities where you can share your experiences. Search [www.oustudents.com](http://www.oustudents.com) for more information.

## 5.3 Age

Many OU graduates have changed direction and started new careers later in life, including some in their 50s and beyond. As a more experienced student, you are likely to have evidence of successfully balancing and prioritising your work, life and studies, and are demonstrating that you can continue to learn and adjust to new settings. Studying with the OU also emphasises your commitment and motivation to yourself and your career development, as well as your ability to work independently.

### Age-related rights

Age is another protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010. This means that you are protected against discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the grounds of your age.

Employers can only treat people differently on the grounds of age if there is a genuine occupational requirement (GOR); however, this is likely to apply only in very limited circumstances. Since April 2011, the default retirement age (DRA) has been phased out. This means employers can no longer force an employee to retire at 65.

### Reframe how you think about your age

'The ABC of cognition' will help you to help you reframe your thoughts and beliefs about an event in terms of your age. Think about a time when you believe your age affected the outcome of a job interview or other event. Consider alternative, more helpful perspectives on the activating event. What could an alternative belief be? What different consequence would this have had for you, and others?

**Example of using the ABC of cognition**

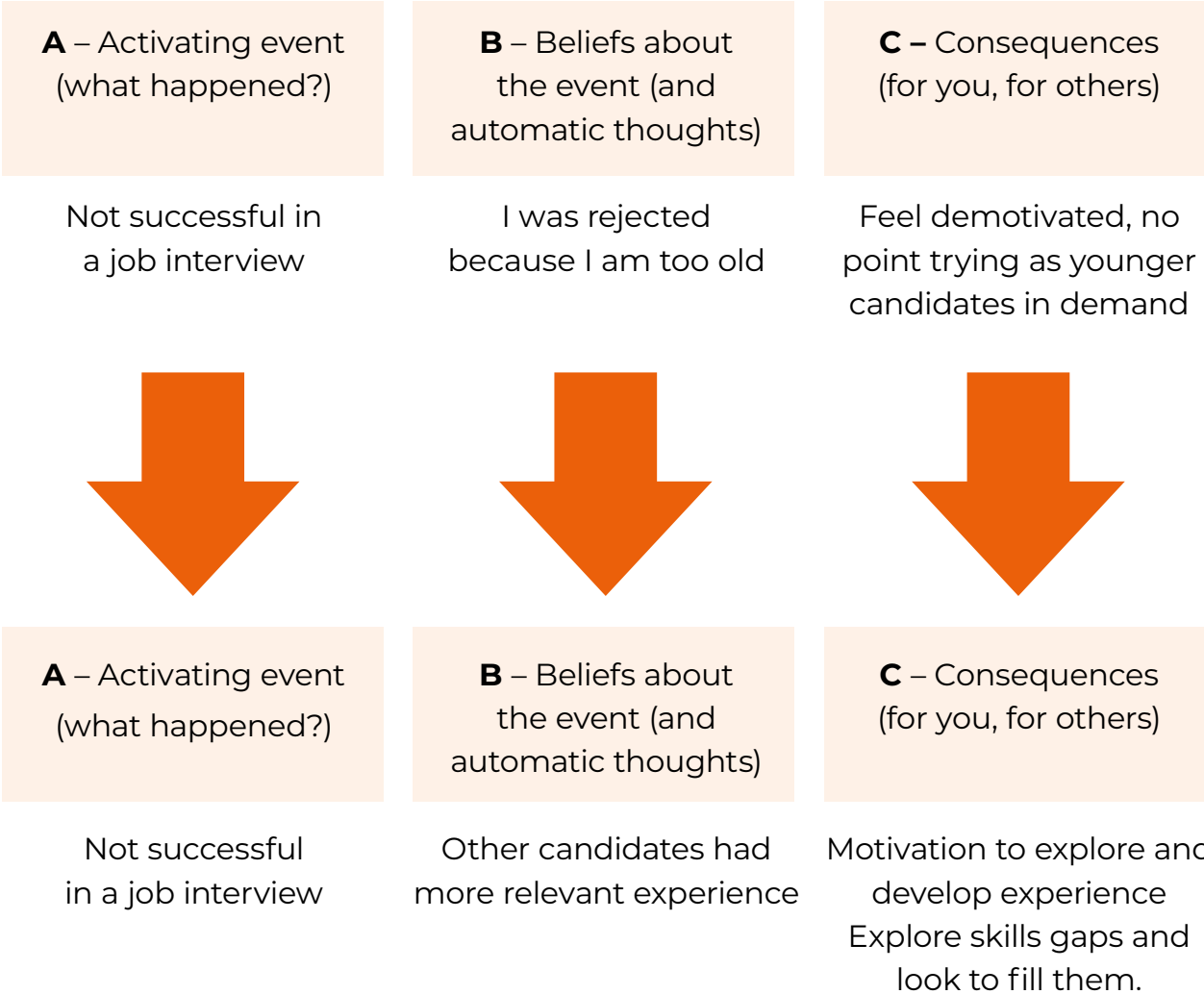
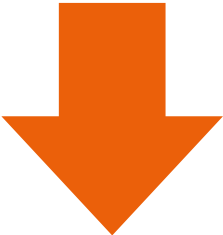
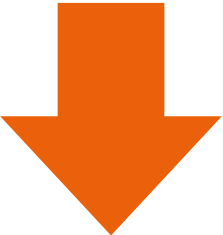
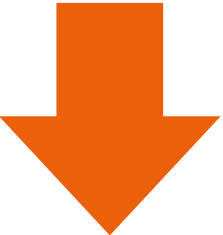


Figure 5.3 Example of using the ABC of cognition

**Activity 5.2** Using the ABC of cognition to reframe your thoughts about your age

Now complete all three columns below by considering A, B and C.

<b>A</b> – Activating event (what happened?)	<b>B</b> – Beliefs about the event (and automatic thoughts)	<b>C</b> – Consequences (for you, for others)
		
<b>A</b> – Activating event (what happened?)	<b>B</b> – Beliefs about the event (and automatic thoughts)	<b>C</b> – Consequences (for you, for others)

## Build your confidence

This is a good point to review your career so far and think about the skills and experience you have gained in your career. It may be useful for you to complete or review the activities in Section 1 of this guide, identifying the jobs and activities you have been involved in over the last 15 years and the skills you have developed.

## Marketing yourself

Imagine you were buying a car and the sales pitch was “This model is very basic and has some flaws but it’s fine when it gets going”.

You wouldn’t be interested. It’s the same when we approach employers or apply for jobs. We need to be talking about our positive strengths and what we can do for the employer right from the start, rather than drawing attention to any issues or problems we are concerned about.

## Give your CV a makeover

Make sure your CV is tailored to all jobs you apply for and remember you don’t need to include your date of birth (see Section 4 Getting the job).

## Develop new skills

You may feel you have genuine gaps in your knowledge or skills. Are there ways that you can gain these new skills and knowledge? Try a free online course at OpenLearn [www.open.edu/openlearn](http://www.open.edu/openlearn) or FutureLearn [www.futurelearn.com](http://www.futurelearn.com).

## 5.4 Gender

There are many business reasons for companies wanting a diverse and gender-balanced workforce, with a range of evidence to show the benefit to businesses; however, you might still be concerned about the gender pay gap, unconscious bias in recruitment, or need flexible working due to care responsibilities.

“Better workforce productivity, Better choice of skilled workers, Better customer experience, Improved financial performance.”

**Why gender diversity makes business sense, WISE, June 2018**

## Gender-related rights

The Equality Act 2010 prohibits sex discrimination against individuals in a range of areas including employment and education. This means you cannot be treated unfairly because of your sex.

It gives an individual a right to the same contractual pay and benefits as a person of the opposite sex in the same employment where the man and the woman are doing:

- Like work
- Work rated as equivalent under an analytical job evaluation study
- Work that is proved to be of equal value.

To be exempt from the Act in terms of recruitment, the gender of the worker has to be considered a genuine occupational requirement (GOR). This is likely to apply in only very limited circumstances.

### Direct sex discrimination

This is where someone is treated less favourably than a person of the opposite sex in comparable circumstances because of their sex. For instance, one type of direct sex discrimination is treating a woman adversely because she is pregnant, another is a nightclub offering free entry to women but charges men to get in.

### Indirect sex discrimination

This is where a condition or practice is applied to both sexes, but it adversely affects a considerably larger proportion of one sex than the other. For instance,

an unnecessary requirement to work full-time might be unlawful indirect discrimination against women.

### Victimisation

Victimisation occurs when a person is treated less favourably because they have complained about sex discrimination or supported someone else who has.

## How to help yourself in the job market

There are a few things you can do to help your job search and application process:

### Research and network

- Research organisations and companies to find out more about policies and initiatives in your chosen field.
- Search for local 'women in business' networking groups. These events can support you to find out about opportunities and courses. You'll also be able to develop your confidence and practise your networking skills.
- Find out if there are employee networks for gender equality in your workplace.
- If there is an employee network, look into whether you could arrange a mentoring or coaching session.
- Research companies you are interested in to identify whether they have any positive action recruitment initiatives relating to gender. Find out the type of projects or networks that might be available in these companies.

- Search the Prince's Responsible Business Network [www.bitc.org.uk](http://www.bitc.org.uk) for a list of "The Times Top 50 Employers for Women".
- Look for campaigns such as the WISE Campaign [www.wisecampaign.org.uk](http://www.wisecampaign.org.uk) and get involved.

## Enhance your confidence

According to a 2019 report led by Kings College London on the theme of women's progression in the workplace, a lack of confidence in their abilities in the job market and in the workplace were cited. Activity 5.3 can help you to build your confidence in speaking up and networking.

### Activity 5.3 Practice your 'elevator pitch'

Imagine you are in a lift with the manager of a company you would love to work for. You have until you reach the top floor (30 seconds) to make an impression.

#### What would you say?

##### Start with:

- Your name
- Where you work
- What you can do for them
- How they can reach you
- Ask a question

##### Here are a couple of examples:

Hi, I'm Helen Jones  
 I work in the marketing department at Smiths Company.  
 I particularly enjoy working on social media projects and I'm interested in moving into internal communications.  
 I'd love to get in touch to talk about it, can I give you my card?

Hi, I'm Helen Jones  
 I'm studying an Open degree at the OU and love the social science and history modules.  
 I'm hoping to get an internship I can do alongside my studies – does your organisation offer any placements and where would they be advertised?

### Activity 5.3 Practice your 'elevator pitch' Continued

Practise your elevator pitch in front of mirror, or with family and friends. The more you Practise and hear the words out loud, the easier it will become. Write some ideas down below:



## Find support with practical issues

Maintaining a work–life balance, returning to employment after a career break, juggling caring responsibilities, organising childcare, needing to work part-time? These are all factors that might be concerning you while you are completing your studies and looking for employment.



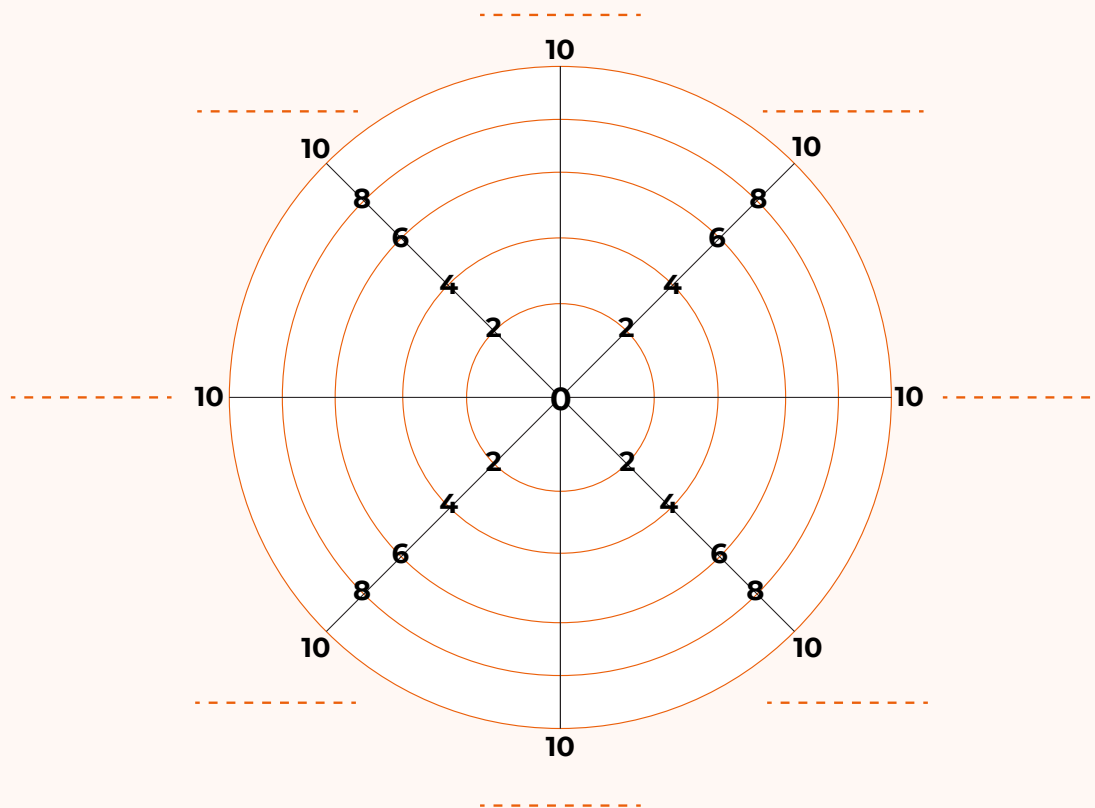
### Activity 5.4 Balance your wheel of life

This activity can help you to identify what work–life balance means to you, and what you can do to achieve it. The balance will be different for everyone; what is important is for you to clarify your priorities, the time you have available and how you want to allocate that time.

Think about all the different parts of your life. This could be being a parent, caring for elderly parents or another family member, spending time with a partner, your social life, hobbies, work, learning, volunteering or fitness activities. Write down your activities or roles around the edge of the wheel

of life template, then mark on the scale between 0 and 10 how much time you spend on each activity in a typical week.

You can then join up the dots to see how balanced your wheel looks. The aim isn't to have all aspects at a 10 around the edge: you might decide that being a parent should have the same or more importance as work, and your social life should have less. It's up to you. Take a moment to look at where you would want your balance to be and what actions you could take to change things.



## Returning to work

Returning to the labour market after a career break can be difficult, especially if you have spent a long time away. The activities in Section 1 Know yourself of this guide will help you reflect on your skills and review your career ideas.

## 5.5 Race

The 2017 [McGregor-Smith Review into Race in the Workplace \(gov.uk\)](#) found that if Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) talent is fully utilised, the economy could receive a £24 bn boost each year. Every person, regardless of their ethnicity or background, should be able to fulfil their potential at work.

### Race-related rights

The Equality Act 2010 protects against discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the grounds of race. This covers race, colour, nationality (including citizenship), and national or ethnic origin. There can be circumstances when being treated differently due to race is lawful, for example, if there is a genuine occupational requirement such as recruiting a support worker for a domestic violence service supporting people of South Asian origin.

The Equality Act identifies three main types of racial discrimination:

- Direct racial discrimination
- Indirect racial discrimination
- Victimisation.

### Direct racial discrimination

Direct racial discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably on racial grounds than others in similar circumstances. If you think this has happened to you, and you want to prove it, it will help if you can give an example of someone from a different racial group who, in similar circumstances, has been treated more favourably than you. Racist abuse and harassment are also forms of direct discrimination.

### Indirect racial discrimination

Indirect racial discrimination occurs when a person from a particular racial group is less likely to be able to comply with a requirement or condition that applies to everyone but which cannot be justified.

## Victimisation

Victimisation has a specific legal meaning in the Equality Act. This happens when a person is treated less favourably because they have complained about racial discrimination or supported someone else who has.

If you think you have been discriminated against on racial grounds, you have the right under the Equality Act to take your complaint before an employment tribunal. There are strict time limits for filing your case at an employment tribunal or court; in general, you have three months to file an employment case.

If you are thinking of bringing a case of racial discrimination, you can get advice and support from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), or other organisations such as trade unions, racial equality councils, law centres, Citizens Advice and other advice agencies.

## Looking for work

Some employers are taking positive action or running initiatives with staff and HR departments to increase the diversity of their workforce. When identifying employers to approach and looking for vacancies, you might want to consider the following:

- Search for Best Employers list and Race Equality Awards on Business in the Community (see [www.bitc.org.uk/race](http://www.bitc.org.uk/race)).
- Find out if a prospective employer has a diversity network, an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer and Equality and Diversity policy.

- Check how current employees review their workplaces at [www.glassdoor.co.uk](http://www.glassdoor.co.uk) or get the inside buzz at [www.targetjobs.co.uk](http://www.targetjobs.co.uk).
- Search specialist recruitment sites such as [www.ethnicjobsite.co.uk](http://www.ethnicjobsite.co.uk) or [www.asianjobsite.co.uk](http://www.asianjobsite.co.uk).

You may also want to look into mentoring schemes and other development programmes:

- The National Mentoring Consortium [www.nmc-online.co.uk/](http://www.nmc-online.co.uk/) runs a six-month programme for undergraduates to help them prepare for work.
- The Windsor Fellowship [www.windsor-fellowship.org](http://www.windsor-fellowship.org) offers skills development programmes to undergraduates and graduates from minority ethnic groups.

## 5.6 Religion or belief

The Equality Act 2010 provides protection against discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the grounds of religious or philosophical belief and includes discrimination because of a lack of religion or belief.

This means it is unlawful to discriminate against anyone on the grounds of their religion or belief or lack of one. There are exemptions for religious institutions, but they need to be able to show that a particular religion or belief is a requirement, and this is likely to be justifiable only for particular roles (for example, for ministers or priests, but not for administrators, managers or technicians). There are also some occupational requirements that may require particular dress codes, but employers should have alternatives to allow for particular religious observance.

Many organisations are now taking proactive measures to promote flexible and integrated working through staff development and training to promote inclusion and raise awareness. The following are examples of good practice you may want to look for in a prospective employer:

- Facilities for prayer or contemplation.
- Catering for different dietary requirements.

- Leave policies that allow for people to take leave at times of festivals/ pilgrimages related to different religions – not just that they can request leave, but that there is an expectation for managers to grant permission.
- Awareness and promotion of dates and times to avoid scheduling meetings and work activities which coincide with practices relating to different religions.
- Dress codes that accommodate different requirements and preferences.
- Dignity at work or bullying and harassment policies that make explicit that inappropriate behaviour related to religion or belief is unacceptable.

You may find it helpful to discuss some of these issues with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer (if the organisation has one). Alternatively, approach your Human Resources team.

### **Do you have to disclose your religion or belief when applying for a job?**

You don't have to tell an employer or prospective employer about your religion or belief. Disclosure is a personal decision that will be influenced by many different factors, and you may want some reassurance before you apply or accept a job. It is unlikely that you'll be asked about your religion or belief on an application form or at interview unless it is a genuine occupational requirement. However, you may be asked to complete a form for equal opportunity monitoring purposes.

## 5.7 LGBTQ+

“Our research shows that lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGBTQ+) people who feel able to bring their whole selves to work have increased energy, better performance and stronger relationships with their peers. Being inclusive doesn't just make sense for LGBT employees, it makes perfect business sense for organisations too.”

**Stonewall Starting  
Out Careers Guide**

The Equality Act 2010 says you must not be discriminated against because:

- You are heterosexual, gay, lesbian or bisexual
- Have undergone gender reassignment
- Someone thinks you have a particular sexual orientation (this is known as discrimination by perception)
- You are connected to someone who has a particular sexual orientation (this is known as discrimination by association).

The treatment could be a one-off action or as a result of a rule or policy based on sexual orientation. It doesn't have to be intentional to be unlawful.

### **Direct discrimination**

Direct discrimination is when someone treats you worse than another person in a similar situation because of your sexual orientation. For example, at a job interview a woman makes a reference to her girlfriend. The employer decides not to offer her the job, even though she is the best candidate they have interviewed.

### **Indirect discrimination**

Indirect discrimination happens when an organisation has a particular policy or way of working that applies to everyone, but which puts people of your sexual orientation at a disadvantage.

Indirect discrimination can be permitted if the organisation or employer is able to show that there is a good reason for the policy – search for objective justification at [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com) for more information.

### **Harassment**

Harassment in the workplace occurs when someone makes you feel humiliated, offended or degraded. For example, colleagues keep greeting a male worker by the feminine version of his name although he has asked them to use his proper name. The colleagues say this is just banter but the worker is upset and offended by it.

Harassment can never be justified. However, if an organisation or employer can show it did everything it could to prevent people who work for it from behaving like that, you will not be able to make a claim for harassment against it, although you could make a claim against the harasser.

## Victimisation

Victimisation occurs, for example, when you are treated badly because you have made a complaint of sexual orientation related discrimination under the Equality Act. It can also occur if you are supporting someone who has made such a complaint. For example, a gay worker complains that he has been 'outed' by his manager against his wishes and his employer sacks him.

A difference in treatment may be lawful if:

- Belonging to a particular sexual orientation is essential for a job. This is called an 'occupational requirement'. For example, an employer wants to recruit an advice worker who has experience of coming out for a young persons' LGBTQ+ helpline. The employer can specify that applicants must be lesbian or gay.
- An organisation is taking positive action to encourage or develop gay, lesbian or bisexual people to participate in a role or activity.
- The treatment by an employer or organisation falls within one of the exceptions that permits people to be

treated differently based on their sexual orientation. For example, a charity can provide a benefit only to lesbians and gay men in certain circumstances.

- A religious or belief organisation is excluding persons of a particular sexual orientation from its membership or participation in its activities, or its provision of goods, facilities and services. This only applies to organisations whose purpose is to practise, promote or teach a religion or belief, and whose sole or main purpose is not commercial. The restrictions they impose must be necessary either to comply with the doctrine of the organisation, or to avoid conflict with the 'strongly held religious convictions' of the religion's followers.

## Looking for work

In addition to the usual job vacancy services, you will find it helpful to search for LGBTQ+ inclusive employers.

- The Starting Out guide at Stonewall [www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk) is a good place to start.
- Search for job vacancies at Proud Employers [www.proudemployers.org.uk](http://www.proudemployers.org.uk).
- Look into Ally programmes in your workplace – search 'Ally' at [www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk).

## Should you disclose your sexual orientation at work or during recruitment?

You have no legal obligation to do so. It is entirely a personal choice. You may find it helpful to read through the diversity sections of a prospective employer's website to be well informed about how positive they are, to help you make your decision.

## Gender reassignment

Equality law provides protection against discrimination on the grounds of gender reassignment in recruitment, employment or training. This is a protected characteristic under the Act, and it protects people at any stage of having their sex reassigned.

To have your gender recognised, apply for a Gender Recognition Certificate at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

## If you have a criminal record

If you are required to have a criminal record check by the Disclosure and Barring Service or Disclosure Scotland as part of a recruitment process, you can request a confidential check so that your previous name/gender isn't disclosed to an employer.

## Do you have to tell your employer or prospective employers?

You do not need to disclose your gender reassignment to an employer either at the recruitment stage or at work. However, the Equality and Human Rights Commission recommends you tell your employer at some stage during your transition so that they can offer you any workplace support you might need. But ultimately, it's your choice.

## 5.8 Criminal convictions

You may have some concerns about how a criminal conviction can affect your career plans and job seeking. Some of your concerns may include:

- What impact a criminal conviction will have on your career ideas.
- What impact a criminal conviction will have on your gaining and keeping employment.
- Whether you need to declare any convictions.
- When and how to disclose a criminal conviction to prospective employers.

Your planning and strategy will depend on whether the conviction is spent and the career you're interested in.



## Your rights

If you have accepted a police caution, reprimand, final warning or been found guilty in court, then you probably have a criminal record as far as employment is concerned.

Under the 1974 Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (ROA), most convictions become 'spent', or forgotten, after a certain amount of time. This period of time is determined by the sentence or disposal given, rather than by the type of offence. It is illegal for an employer to refuse to employ you or to dismiss you on the grounds of a spent conviction, for a job covered by this Act, but there are exceptions (see below). It is also illegal for anybody to reveal information about your conviction after the end of the rehabilitation period.

It is important to understand the details of the conviction and any conditions that may have been placed on the sentence. A conviction can have a number of rehabilitation periods attached, but the longest period applies.

## To check if you have a record

You can request a copy of your police records through a 'subject access request' from the police. There will be a fee for this request.

- For a subject access request in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Jersey and the Isle of Man, go to the Criminal Records Office web site: [www.acro.police.uk](http://www.acro.police.uk).

- For a subject access request in Scotland, go to [www.mygov.scot/police-record](http://www.mygov.scot/police-record).

## To check if your conviction is spent

The ROA gives people with criminal convictions or cautions the legal right not to disclose them when applying for most jobs and most courses. To check whether your conviction is spent, use the Unlock Disclosure Calculator at [www.disclosurecalculator.org.uk](http://www.disclosurecalculator.org.uk).

## Types of criminal record checks (DBS)

An employer may request a criminal record check as part of their recruitment process. These checks are processed by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). This is usually called a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

Most jobs and careers are covered by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, which means that employers would need just a basic criminal record check. However, there are some sectors and jobs that require a standard or an enhanced check.

A basic check will disclose unspent criminal records with dates, court, offence and sentence information.

Standard and enhanced checks will disclose all convictions and cautions held on the Police National Computer (PNC). The information will not distinguish between convictions which are spent and those which are unspent. Enhanced checks may also disclose police intelligence, if it is deemed relevant.

## 'Fitness to practise' and 'suitability checks' for some career sectors

Some careers require further checks on your suitability for jobs. These are usually called 'fitness to practise' or 'suitability checks', which means an individual has the skills, knowledge, health and character to do their job safely and effectively.

Career sectors include:

- Social work
- Nursing
- Law
- Teaching
- Medicine.

To practise in some professions, you need to be on a professional register. This registration shows the public that their professionals are fit to practise with nationally recognised standards set by law.

If you think your plans may be affected by these requirements, do get in touch with us, as we can help.

## Should you disclose a criminal conviction when applying for jobs?

Although you legally don't have to disclose your conviction unless you're asked, it's sometimes not as simple as that. Technically, you won't have done anything wrong by not disclosing if you're not asked, but ultimately, it can be hard to challenge an employer who later finds out, particularly if you've only recently started the job, as you have very few legal rights.

## When to disclose a criminal record

Generally, it's best to disclose at the earliest stage required (i.e. when you get asked). Your first step should be to understand the employer's process as best as you can, so you can make an informed decision. Check their application form or recruitment policy – does it say anything about if or when they ask about criminal records?

If an employer indicates that they will be carrying out a formal criminal record check, they should ask you to disclose before they do the check, but not all do. In this situation, it's best that you disclose before the formal disclosure is carried out.

Many employers have a 'tick box' on their application form. Some people prefer to 'tick no' and disclose at a later stage when they believe they'll get a chance to explain. This has the downside of effectively 'lying' to the employer on the application form. It's also unlikely to be a sensible step for people on licence, on probation or those who are barred.

## How to disclose a criminal record

Before applying for jobs, gather evidence about how you have moved on from the offence. As an OU student or graduate, you will have demonstrated many skills such as self-motivation and discipline. You may also have had opportunities to develop other skills.

There are opportunities to gain experience in any category of prison. Making the most of these opportunities will provide evidence for a future employer that you have moved on in life. Examples of such opportunities include orderly roles, buddying and mentoring. Talk to the prison's education team for more help.

Volunteering can be a great starting point, whether you are in the community or in prison. It shows you have earned trust and responsibility and offers convincing evidence that you have moved on. It can also help you to develop new skills which can be useful when changing your career.

## Prepare a disclosure statement

Write down the details of your criminal record. This might be sent with your application if they ask a question about convictions, or you could use it when disclosing in person.

Make sure that you relate it to the job that you're applying for. Provide details of:

- When you committed the offence
- The number of offences you've committed
- How relevant the offences are
- How serious they were
- Your circumstances at the time of the offences
- How you've taken responsibility
- How your life is different now
- Why you no longer believe you're a risk.

## Disclosing in applications, CVs and covering letters

Many jobs ask for an application form or CV and a covering letter. It is your choice whether you decide to disclose at this stage, or you may prefer to do this during an interview, for example. If you have gaps due to time in prison, you could provide details of any roles you had in prison or details of any qualifications you completed during that time. There is an example of a CV for a student with a criminal record included within Section 4 of this guide.

If you do wish to disclose to an employer in an accompanying covering letter, an example is provided on the following page.

## Here's an example of a covering letter disclosing a criminal record

78 Orchard Road

Leicester

LE18 6AA

8 January 2021

Mr J Burton Regional Manager

Shelter

Cross Street

Leicester

LE22 8CC

Dear Mr Burton,

I would like to apply for the position of part-time Administrative Assistant in Leicester, which I have seen advertised on the Shelter website. I am pleased to enclose a copy of my CV for your attention.

I have gained my administrative skills through a number of work placements in the voluntary sector over the past two years. I have experience of scheduling meetings, preparing agendas and producing documents for committees. I also have first-hand knowledge of updating information on websites and preparing marketing copy. My record on punctuality and work attendance is also very good. In my two years with the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) I have only lost two days through sickness.

However, I wish to disclose to you that I have a criminal record for theft and served six months in prison between August 2018 and February 2019. I would like to say that this was a period of my life of which I am not proud and which I now feel I have put firmly behind me. I made mistakes from which I have learnt valuable lessons. The personal circumstances under which I committed these thefts are also very much in the past, and I feel that my life is now much more stable.

During my sentence I took advantage of the prison education service and decided to enrol on an Open University course in Social Sciences. This is one of the most positive decisions I have ever made, and I am now studying my third module with the OU. I realise the importance of education and my goal is now to complete my degree. I think that this shows my current level of motivation and desire to improve myself.

I have chosen to disclose my conviction as I believe that it is best to be honest with any potential future employer. I know that I have turned things around in my life and for the first time I have clear aims and objectives.

As my application makes clear, I have a good, recent work record and hope you will judge me on this rather than past events. I am, of course, prepared to discuss any of these matters at interview.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Fletcher

## Disclosing at interviews

Many people feel most comfortable disclosing face-to-face. Whether at interview or a later stage, it is helpful to have thought about and planned what you will say beforehand. There are advantages about disclosing at interview, as the employers will see you as a person, however, this can take a lot of confidence.

If you have not had a chance to disclose a criminal conviction during the application process, it will be in your interest to take the lead to reduce the chances of a job offer being withdrawn.

## Thinking about self-employment

Self-employment is an option considered by some people with convictions. Aside from the usual considerations that everybody starting a business must take into account, if you have a criminal record there might be a few hurdles to overcome on your way to self-employment, such as getting business-related insurance, opening a bank account and taking business contracts.

You may also have some challenges in financing your venture. There are a few organisations that may be able to help, for example, Fredericks, [www.fredericksfoundation.org](http://www.fredericksfoundation.org) is a Responsible Finance Provider that provides loans to people who may be

excluded from mainstream credit sources and who want to set up a new business or maintain or expand an existing business.

## Further study options if you are in prison

You may wish to progress to postgraduate study following your undergraduate degree.

### Postgraduate study with the OU

The OU is keen to support and encourage our students in secure environments to progress to postgraduate study, however, facilitating and delivering postgraduate modules in a secure environment can present obstacles. Online materials, online tuition, independent academic research and in some cases, collaborative work, can present challenges. This means that some modules may not be accessible to you until you are released/discharged or in open conditions with Release on Temporary Licence agreed.

If you are considering postgraduate study and would like further advice and guidance on your options, get in touch via your OU co-ordinator. Please note, it can take some time for the process from start to finish, so submit your expression of interest form at least three months before the final enrolment deadline for the module.

## Postgraduate study elsewhere

The University and College Admissions Service (UCAS) is a centralised application system for undergraduate courses, but not all universities use it for postgraduate studies, and you can only find out each university's admission policy by contacting them and asking for a hard copy prospectus if you are in prison or looking online if you are living in the community. In 2018, UCAS removed the requirement for all students to declare whether they have any relevant unspent criminal convictions. Only students who apply for certain courses – for example, those that involve work with children and vulnerable adults, such as medicine, teaching or social work – will be asked to declare whether they have any criminal convictions, including spent convictions. This question will only appear if you're applying for one of these courses.

## Further resources

- Nacro, [www.nacro.org.uk](http://www.nacro.org.uk), provides support on a range of different topics.
- Unlock, [www.unlock.org.uk](http://www.unlock.org.uk), offers support for people with convictions who are facing stigma and obstacles because of their criminal record, often long after they have served their sentence.
- Disclosure and barring service for England and Wales, [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service).
- The Hardman Directory available at [www.hardmantrust.org.uk](http://www.hardmantrust.org.uk) lists funding for individual prisoners and ex-prisoners. Every prison library should have a copy.
- The OU's support for students in secure environments [www.open.ac.uk/secure-environments](http://www.open.ac.uk/secure-environments).

# 06

## Further support and resources

We hope you have found this guide useful. This final section provides you with further sources of help in your career search and planning, to supplement the guidance already given.

### The OU's Careers and Employability Services

Wherever you are in your OU journey and whatever your background, the Open University Careers and Employability Services can help you navigate your future. You have access to a wide range of online tools, resources, workshops, events, and one-to-one guidance from the start of your studies and for up to three years after.

#### Careers website

The Careers and Employability section on the Help Centre [www.open.ac.uk/careers](http://www.open.ac.uk/careers) provides advice on many aspects of planning and developing your career, from applying for and finding jobs to work experience opportunities. You can also

access a wide variety of online tools and resources to help create and review your CV, practise for an interview, discover where your OU study might take you and explore career pathways.

#### OpportunityHub

OpportunityHub is the online platform for connecting you with employers and advertises the latest job vacancies and work experience opportunities. It's also where you book onto employer events, careers workshops and consultations.

You can:

- Search hundreds of opportunities
- Customise your search for your preferred industries, roles, and locations
- Follow your favourite employers.

Sign in to OpportunityHub at: [help.open.ac.uk/opportunityhub](http://help.open.ac.uk/opportunityhub).

## Employer events

Employers are keen to meet you, as they know OU students and graduates have key skills, not only from their OU studies, but from life and work experiences too. A great way you can meet employers is by joining a live employer session or careers fair. These allow you to connect directly with employers, find out what they're offering and what they're looking for, as well as access a catalogue of resources from employers. Look out for live events on the 'Events' section on OpportunityHub.

## Interactive CV and interview tools

If you're ready to start applying for roles, we can help you present your OU qualification and unique skills in ways that make employers take notice. Start by using the interactive Abintegro tools with built-in Artificial Intelligence. Create a winning CV with CV Builder, then check and perfect it with CV360, which you can find at [help.open.ac.uk/cvs-an-overview](https://help.open.ac.uk/cvs-an-overview).

Then practise your online and face-to-face interview techniques and build your confidence with Interview360 at [help.open.ac.uk/job-interviews-an-overview](https://help.open.ac.uk/job-interviews-an-overview).

## Careers consultations

If you're a current student or have studied with us in the last three years, you can request a consultation with a member of the careers team. A consultation can take place either by email, telephone or video call, at an agreed, convenient time. Request a consultation at [help.open.ac.uk/careers-consultation](https://help.open.ac.uk/careers-consultation).

If you have a disability, long-term health condition or additional requirements which make it difficult to access any of our services, we will take reasonable steps to accommodate your needs, such as providing information in alternative formats.

## Webinars and forums

Our webinars and forums cover a range of careers topics and give you a chance to hear from and interact with careers consultants, employers and other specialists. Sign up for live workshops, webinars and forums through OpportunityHub and access a range of recorded webinars, audio recordings, forums and other resources at [help.open.ac.uk/careers-forums](https://help.open.ac.uk/careers-forums).

## Careers stories

Find the latest career news and events on [www.open.ac.uk/blogs/careers](https://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/careers).



## Social media

Follow us on social media to keep up to date with our latest careers news, events and resources:

### Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/OpenUniCareers](http://www.facebook.com/OpenUniCareers)

### Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/OpenUniCareers>

### LinkedIn:

[www.linkedin.com/groups/3871260](http://www.linkedin.com/groups/3871260)

## Other sources of help

For additional careers advice and guidance in the UK nations and Ireland, and for support beyond three years after study, look at the websites below. Keep in mind that the extent of advice and guidance provided varies and there may be charges for some services.

### UK

[www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)

### England

[nationalcareers.service.gov.uk](http://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk)

### Northern Ireland

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/  
campaigns/careers](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/careers)

### Republic of Ireland

[www.gradireland.com](http://www.gradireland.com)

### Scotland

[www.myworldofwork.co.uk](http://www.myworldofwork.co.uk)

### Wales

[www.careerswales.com](http://www.careerswales.com)

## Our service standards

This guide has been produced by the OU's Careers and Employability Services (CES). The service operates to the requirements of relevant professional bodies and quality assurance frameworks for careers education, information advice and guidance (CEIAG). These include the Code of Practice of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS), The Open University's Equal Opportunities Policy and the Quality Assurance Agency's Code for CEIAG. Our service holds the Matrix international quality standard certification as part of The Open University's Academic Services provision. Search the Help Centre for our Statement of Service: [help.open.ac.uk](http://help.open.ac.uk).

## Acknowledgements and thanks

Thanks to Jennifer Nisbet who wrote the publications Career and life planning workbook and Job search guide, on which the original guide was based.

Our thanks go also to Chandni Bhana, David Foulkes, Marcia Goddard, Cathy Lovell, Fiona Munday, Jackie Pickles, and Amy Saxton for their content and work on the guide, and to Johnny Englishby and Louise Kane at Open Media and Informal Learning (Learner and Discovery Services) for their design, editing and production work.

While every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this book is up to date at the time of going to press, it may change during the life of this publication.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or utilised in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without written permission from the publisher or a licence from the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd.

Details of such licences (for reprographic reproduction) may be obtained from the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS ([website www.cla.co.uk](http://www.cla.co.uk)).

Open University materials may also be made available in electronic formats for use by students of the University. All rights, including copyright and related rights and database rights, in electronic materials and their contents are owned by or licensed to The Open University, or otherwise used by The Open University as permitted by applicable law.

In using electronic materials and their contents you agree that your use will be solely for the purposes of following an Open University course of study or otherwise as licensed by The Open University or its assigns.

Except as permitted above you undertake not to copy, store in any medium (including electronic storage or use in a website), distribute, transmit or retransmit, broadcast, modify or show in public such electronic materials in whole or in part without the prior written consent of The Open University or in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Produced by Academic Services

Copyright © 2022 The Open University

Printed in the United Kingdom by Severnprint Ltd

CIRCE code: **CPG22**

**SUP047662**



The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (number RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (number SC 038302).



