



University of  
**Salford**  
MANCHESTER

# CAREER PLANNING: GETTING STARTED

## Career Planning Series

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**ask**



**CAREERS  
AND ENTERPRISE**

## Planning your career

Thinking about what you want to do when you complete your degree can seem overwhelming; it can feel like a big decision, a kind of, 'what am I going to do for the rest of my life' kind of moment. As with most big decisions they become easier if you break things down into some more manageable and achievable steps. Let's look at where you are now. Which of these statements best describes you at this point in time?

- I have no ideas at all
- I thought I knew what I wanted to do when I came to University, but I've completely changed my mind.
- I have a few vague ideas but my friends, family, boy/girlfriend keep are trying to get me to go into a different direction.
- There's too much information out there - I think I know what I want to do then I read something else that gives me fresh ideas
- I know what I want to do but don't know how to get there
- I want someone to tell me what to do.

Which box did you tick?

Let's work through this one step at a time.

### 1. I have no ideas at all

Flipping this around, having no ideas at all (not usually the case in reality) is not a bad place to be. It means that in theory at least, your options are unlimited. In any event the reality is that you are likely to have a better idea about what you don't want than what you do want. So how do you narrow things down a little in order to find out what it is you do want? Here are some ways that you could do this:

#### Understand what makes you tick

This means doing some thinking about what you are looking for from your career:

- Do you want to do work that is personally meaningful to you in some way?
- Do you see yourself fitting into a corporate environment or not?
- What about sales – comfortable with that or not?
- Are you looking for something that will provide a challenge – what kind of challenge?
- Where do you want to work?
- How important is money?
- Do you want to change the world?
- Do you want a job that has the potential for travel?

Here's another one, 'If you could do anything, and there were absolutely no barriers to you doing it, what would you do'? Answering this one might just give you some strong clues as to where your interest and motivation lies.

These might be tricky questions to answer but giving them some thought can begin to provide you with some pointers to where you might fit within the working world.

It can be difficult to do this on your own, so why not make an appointment to see one of our experienced Careers Consultants and get them to ask you the questions? Sitting down with a Careers Consultant might be all you need to become more focused in terms of your career thinking. Appointments can be made online via: <https://myadvantage.salford.ac.uk>

### **Career questionnaires**

Moving on from the 'freeform' approach outlined above, you can make this process a little more structured by using some career questionnaires. These vary in complexity but they can be useful in providing you with some ideas to explore further. Two easily accessible ones are:

- [Prospects Career Planner](#)
- [TARGETjobs Careers Report](#)

Both of these tools are broadly similar, they will look at interests, skills and motivations and, depending on your answers to the questions, will generate a list of suggestions. Some of these suggestions will be a stronger match, others less so, the important point here is that they are simply suggestions. These questionnaires will not tell you what you should do, or what your ideal career will be. What they will do though, is provide you with starting points for further exploration and a little food for thought.

### **Options with your degree**

Another option is to explore what jobs and careers relate to your subject of study. Prospects have a handy [Options with Your Degree](#) section on their website for this. Simply find your subject and start exploring the profiles of the jobs that are listed.

### **Careers fairs or industry insight talks**

Attend careers events such as careers fairs or industry insight talks. These can be useful in that they allow you to speak to people directly about their job and the company they work for. All information that can be useful in helping you to think and narrow down what it is you want to do.

## **2. I have a few vague ideas but...insert your choice of statement here!**

If you already have some ideas, no matter how vague, a positive step would be to find out more.

Here are some useful resources that can help you to become more informed:

### **Job profiles on the Prospects website**

[Prospects - Types of Jobs](#) are a really useful resource and will provide you with a detailed job profile covering what the job involves, usual entry requirements, salary indications, who employs people doing the job and where you can find vacancies. A really useful feature and one that can get missed is the link to 'Related jobs' – useful for broadening your ideas out a little!

In a similar vein but not quite as detailed are the [TARGETjobs](#) profiles.

You can also view videos of people talking about their jobs at [icould.com](#)

### **Talk to people doing the job**

This can be a great way to find out more about a job or career that you are exploring. Generally speaking most people will be happy to talk to you about what they do – the good points and the not so good! Remember the view you get will be theirs and theirs alone, it's up to you how you use the information. If you have family or friends working in the area then this is a good starting place to set this up.

### **Get some experience**

It sounds obvious but actually getting some experience related to the area of work that interests you can be a great way to confirm or dissuade you from pursuing a career in that industry. You can search for part-time jobs, placements, internships and voluntary work through [Advantage](#).

## **3. There's just too much information out there/I know what I want but don't know how to get there**

The internet can be overwhelming in terms of the amount of information that can be accessed. This can make it difficult to focus in on information that is important. It makes sense to narrow your reading down to a small number of credible websites. Prospects and TARGETjobs are good starting points; professional bodies and associations are strong, credible sources of information. There are other sites and links that will provide you with the information you need to know. These can be found on the [Careers Resources](#) section of our website.

#### **4. I want somebody to tell me what to do**

No-one can! Deciding what you want to do after your degree can be a challenge but any decisions that you make are yours and yours alone to make. It is important to recognise that there are a lot of resources and support available to help you. Don't put it off until your final year, make use of the services provided by Careers & Enterprise or through your course and use these to help you make your own decision.

One final word, it's important to understand that the world of work and careers is changing rapidly and becoming much more flexible. The concept of a career is still there in some professional areas but it is becoming the norm that people will, and already do change their careers several times over a working lifetime. The decisions you make now may well influence what you do longer term but this doesn't mean that you will be doing the same thing for the rest of your life.

#### **5. Employability**

You may have come across this word on a number of occasions during your time at university. The concept of employability is high on the agenda in Higher Education at the moment. The reason for this are precisely the changes noted above. The world of work is changing and careers as we know them are likely to develop and be structured differently in the future.

The essence of employability is that through your university experience you will gain knowledge (subject content of your degree) and a set of skills, attitudes and understandings that will enable you to keep learning and developing through a working lifetime.

Developing your employability will also mean that you will be more likely to gain and continue to gain employment in the future. Subject knowledge can and will date but the skills you gain and the capacity for learning will remain.

The kinds of skills and attributes that are commonly mentioned when discussions around employability take place are:

<b>Skills</b>	<b>Attributes</b>
Teamwork	Resilience
Problem solving	Integrity
Organisation	Drive
Negotiation	Energy
Communication	Self- awareness
Planning and organisation	Confidence
Research	Reliability
Innovation	Adaptability

This is not an exhaustive list and you will find that graduate employers will have a shopping list of these skills that they will assess when recruiting graduates. It is important to consider how you might develop these skills through your university experience and more importantly reflect on and identify the activities that have developed them. Not only will this be useful in helping you to understand your mix of skills, it will also help you to understand which settings where you have developed them. This is more useful information that will help you to understand what makes you tick, and in turn will be useful information to input into your career decision making.

Some skills are highly specific in nature and particular to an occupation, e.g. programming skills in Java or C++ within computing or being able to perform x-ray crystallography in the chemical industry. Employability skills/transferable skills on the other hand are the 'softer skills' that enable you to be effective in your day to day working role.

Recruiters will ask for evidence of these skills. Being able to identify when, where and how you developed certain transferable skills and competencies will assist you when thinking about possible career pathways. Each occupation will have specific requirements in terms of knowledge and skills and understanding; what you are good at and what skills you enjoy using will help you to understand how potentially you could meet the criteria and in turn help you to confirm the career decisions you are making.

So, there you have it, a quick guide to getting started with your career planning. The key thing to remember is to break a big question down into more manageable parts. Hopefully, this guide will have helped you to approach this with some confidence and in a more planned way than would otherwise be the case.

Good luck and don't forget that Careers & Enterprise Team can support you every step of the way.

## 6. Useful Websites

### [21 Days to Career Success](#)

Designed and developed by the Salford University Careers and Enterprise Team, this takes you on a career learning journey that can be done in half an hour a day for 21 Days. The primary audience is graduates.

[Prospects](#) - A long established student and graduate careers website - lots of resources including a career planner, job profiles and the section 'what can I do with my degree' – also advertises graduate jobs, both graduate schemes and direct entry positions.

[Targetjobs](#) - Another student/graduate website offering the same range of information as Prospects. The profiles are not as detailed.

[National Careers Service](#) - a comprehensive database of job profile though not aimed at graduates specifically)

[Insidecareers](#) - Concentrates on providing very detailed information around careers such as Accountancy, Management Consultancy, Banking, IT, Patent Attorney and Tax to name a few)

[What Do Graduates Do?](#) - Produced annually, 'What do Graduates do?' tells you what students studying your degree were doing 6 months after graduation. Useful to know and allied to 'options with my subject' on Prospects to give you a picture of the initial careers of new graduates.

<http://www.porot.com> - A guide to career management incorporating some self-assessment tools that could be useful in terms of career choice.

## **7. Suggested Reading (Available in the Library)**

### **Brilliant Graduate Career Handbook - By Judith Done**

A guide for undergraduates to help them consider what to do with their degree once they have graduated. This book has information on how to navigate the labour market, how to keep going when the going gets tough and how to make best use of available opportunities.

### **Dude, Where's My Career? - By Tanya de Grunwald**

A guide for baffled graduates.

### **The Art of Building Windmills - Career Tactics For The 21st Century**

#### **By Dr Peter Hawkins**

A comprehensive book which gives information on how people can take control of and manage their own personal career planning and career development.

### **What Colour Is Your Parachute? - By Richard Nelson Bolles**

A practical manual for job-hunters and career changers. A long-standing guide that is updated annually; an excellent resource.

### **The Graduate Career Guidebook - By Steve Rook**

A practical guide book to finding the best job for you – for any student or graduate.

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