

Make a list of all your transferable and specialist skills, with examples of when you've demonstrated each. An honest assessment of your skills, values and interests will prove useful when narrowing down your options in the next step.

Consider where you are now, where you want to be and how you're going to get there. If choosing a career has left you feeling lost, start by asking yourself the following questions:

- What am I good at?
- What are my interests, motivations and values?
- What did I most enjoy at university?
- What kind of lifestyle do I want?
- What do I want from my career?
- What is important to me?

By the end of this step, you'll have identified the sort of jobs that will suit you, but won't yet have enough information to make a decision on which to pursue.

2. Explore career ideas

This is all about researching the job market and career paths of interest to you and narrowing down your options.

Consider what your ideal job sector would be, and discover its key trends by researching the local, national and global jobs market. This will help you to discover more potential career paths, and understand which roles are expanding or declining.

There are three main job sectors. These are:

- **Private** - sole traders, partnerships and limited companies
- **Public** - local and national governments, plus their agencies and chartered bodies
- **Not-for-profit** - often referred to as the third sector, or the charity and voluntary work sector.

Compile a shortlist of around five to ten jobs, before considering the advantages and disadvantages of each in terms of:

- career development
- employment outlook
- entry requirements
- job description
- related jobs
- salary and conditions
- training.

You must also consider which size of employer best suits your personality and work ethic. Are you more suited to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), large companies or self-employment?

This is the perfect time to consider work experience and internships, work shadowing and volunteering opportunities. They'll help you gain an insight into the areas you're interested in before committing yourself to a certain career path.

3. Make a decision

Now you're ready to start making decisions. Combine what you've learned about yourself with what you've discovered about your options and the job market.

From your shortlist of options, decide which occupation interests you the most and select one or two alternatives to fall back on if you're not able to pursue your first choice.

To help make a decision, ask yourself the following questions:

- Will I enjoy doing the job every day?
- Does it meet most of my preferences?
- Do I have the right skills?
- Does the company fit with my values?
- Are there any location/financial/skills limitations that I need to take into account?
- Is the job realistic in terms of salary?

If you're struggling to reach a conclusion, there are a number of exercises you can try to aid the decision-making process. Listing the pros and cons of a particular job or career is often useful, as is completing a personal SWOT analysis:

- **Strengths** - what skills, traits, certifications and connections would you bring to the role that nobody else could? What makes you unique?
- **Weaknesses** - what areas could you improve on? Do you lack any skills holding you back from excelling in the role you'd like to pursue?
- **Opportunities** - is your industry growing? Could you take advantage of your competitors' mistakes or gaps in the market?
- **Threats** - could your weaknesses slow your progression at work? Is there anything else that may stand in the way of your development, such as changes in technology?

Keep in mind that you'll probably be suited to more than one career and today's jobseekers usually change career direction more than once in their working life. The key to being employable is having the ability to adapt and learn new skills.

4. Set achievable goals

The last step of the career planning process requires you to take action.

Your career plan should outline how you'll get to where you want to be, what actions are needed and when, and separated into your short-, medium- and long-term goals. Constantly review your progress, especially after each short-term goal is reached.

You must also establish a backup career development plan, in case your situation changes. Map several alternative paths to your long-term goal, considering how you'll overcome the types of problems you might encounter - training requirements, for example - at each individual step.

Your first short-term goal may involve improving your CV and cover letter. Other short- or medium-term targets could include undertaking relevant internships, gaining volunteer experience or visiting careers fairs.

Finally, don't forget that career planning is a continuous process. Revisit and review your aims and objectives throughout your career, and don't feel constrained by the goals you've set - the structure of a career plan should help you clearly map out the route to trying something new.