

Choosing what's next after graduation

Whether you are a final year student, have just started university or are doing postgraduate study, take some time to think about your next step and how to make it happen.

Getting started

A single career for life is rare, so don't feel that you will be tied to any decisions you make now. See your next step as a chance to develop the skills, experience and contacts that could lead to your next opportunity.

There are probably a number of different job roles that you would enjoy, so don't put yourself under pressure to find that one perfect match. Keep an open mind, as you could discover potential jobs roles and employers that you'd not considered before.

There's not one correct way to approach career decisions. How far ahead you want to look will depend on your personality. Some people need a defined plan and goal, others are content to take more exploratory steps and see where they lead.

Knowing what's out there

Find out as much as you can about different career sectors. What skills or qualifications do they look for? What is the working culture like?

You can get some basic information about different industries and job roles from websites like

- www.prospects.ac.uk
- <https://targetjobs.co.uk>

They also provide links to more information, including vacancies.

Browse job sites such as JobOnline for vacancies that sound interesting. Look at the details given, and the requirements. Is this kind of job something to explore further?

Attending employer events is a great way to ask questions about what it is really like to work in a particular job or organisation. Prepare for them in advance, thinking about what you want to find out and also what you want to say to prospective employers about yourself.

LinkedIn is really useful for finding out what other graduates from your course have gone on to do. Make connections with alumni, ask questions, buy them a coffee and chat about their work. Or is there someone you already know who has an interesting-sounding job? What is it about that job which appeals to you? Can you find out more?

Twitter can be another valuable tool for building networks, asking questions and keeping up to date with developments in the industry. See our Networking and LinkedIn titles for further information.

Consider online career matching tools like Prospects Planner: www.prospects.ac.uk/planner. Even if you aren't convinced by the results, they can be useful for generating ideas and helping you think about why they weren't right for you.

Another way to explore careers is to hear from people working in them. Browse case study videos on websites like: www.careerplayer.com/graduate-jobs or <https://icould.com>. Think about the following questions while you watch. What sparks an interest? What makes you think 'NO WAY'? Why do you have these responses?

Use your research to help you narrow down your options

Giving things a try

Don't underestimate the value of getting involved in opportunities outside of your degree, from work experience to volunteering or being active in a society. These activities are a great way to enhance your skills. For example, part time work will help you develop time management skills as you organise your work and study. In fact there are few jobs which do not involve communication, teamwork and negotiating skills, not to mention commercial awareness and understanding of the workplace. Involving yourself in additional activities also demonstrates a proactive mindset.

Use examples from a range of experiences to provide evidence of your competencies at application and interview. The important thing is to present whatever you have done in a way that highlights the skills the employer is looking for.

Be prepared to seize opportunities that present themselves - you can gain valuable skills and experience from almost anything. Even better if you seek out experiences that will build skills and insight directly relevant to the sector/s which interest you.

Thinking about your values and interests

Work out your personal priorities: are you the suited, booted corporate type? Creative and alternative, wanting a quirky environment? Passionate about making a difference, and need to be with like-minded people?

Reflect on your strengths: what kind of tasks energise you? What tasks are you capable of doing, but tend always to postpone? Look for jobs which involve more of the former than the latter, but remember all jobs will have some less enjoyable aspects.

From all your exploration, shortlist two or three jobs or general career areas to discuss with a careers consultant. Book that appointment!

Final words of advice

Be curious

Keep an open mind and keep asking questions. Take an interest in what other people do and how they got there. Be open to new ideas - an ideal role could be something you have never heard of before.

Be flexible

Be aware of placing unnecessary limitations on your choices. If you rule too many things out in the search for perfection, don't be surprised if you're left with no options at all. Be open to trying things you've never tried before. Don't be reckless, but don't feel you have to play it completely safe either. Many people can look back on their career and detect a logical progression they could not foresee when they took each individual job.

Be persistent (and positive)

The reality is we will all face rejection from employers at some point or try a job that we discover isn't our ideal. The important thing is to learn from the experience and use it to help you make your next decision. Many people find that what they thought would be their ideal job, is actually not for them at all.

Be adaptable

When trying to get into a competitive sector think about a next step that has some that will help you move in the right direction. It could be working for an organisation that really interests you, even if the role isn't perfect. It could be a role that appeals to you but within an organisation that would not be your first choice.

Either can be an important stepping stone towards finding an option that's right for you.