

# **MAKING A START**

**A Guide to Developing Career Ideas**

UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD – CAREERS SERVICE

[www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students)

# MAKING A START – WHY YOU SHOULD

This workbook offers one approach to developing ideas about your future career. Career choice is not a science, it is a very inexact and personal art and only you can make the decisions that lie ahead but you need somewhere to start from.

This approach rests on the principle that you need to know yourself (your skills, qualities, interests, motivation and personality) to look for work that will exploit your strengths and allow you to develop over time. Of course there are other practical considerations such as your circumstances or location preferences which can have a practical impact on the theoretical possibilities you identify having worked through the activities offered here.

Two important points to bear in mind:

1. Time spent identifying your key strengths is time well spent.
2. Many people make career changes during their working lives, especially in the early years. Your first career move should be a good first step not necessarily a commitment for the next forty years.

This choice isn't a life sentence it's just the start.

Three activities for you to work through:

1. UNDERSTANDING YOUR SKILLS – a skills audit
2. PERSONALITY AT WORK – the Type Dynamics Indicator reveals aspects of your personality and how that might influence your job choice
3. PROSPECTS PLANNER - matches your skills profile to hundreds of graduate occupations generating suggestions for you to research and evaluate. Or use a similar programme, ADULT DIRECTIONS, which includes a broader range of non-graduate jobs in its database

All three activities together should all help you develop greater confidence when making choices but you may benefit from any individual exercise.

# 1: UNDERSTANDING YOUR SKILLS

This exercise has three elements:

1. identify positive experiences
2. analyse them for evidence to develop your 'profile'
3. consolidate what you have learned about yourself.

...and introduces you to the art of gathering and analysing evidence about all you have to offer an employer; very useful later for applications and interviews.

## LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL

Think about positive experiences: you achieved something very satisfying; really enjoyed yourself; felt rewarded; contributed to an event or activity that went well or just knew you'd done a good job or helped someone.

Paid or voluntary work, study, sports, interests, community or family activities can all provide good examples. Jot them down under each heading and try to come up with three examples for each category:

STUDY	
WORK	
INTERESTS	

Choose three or four examples from your list and remind yourself about the circumstances, the action you took and what you achieved. Don't worry about the style or structure too much as you are only doing this to jog your memory. No one else will see what you write so just relax. You might make some notes or brainstorm or prefer to use a structured approach like the 'Party!' example on the next page:

This account shows potential but doesn't really explain what happened:

*A few of us wanted to go to a friend's party 100 miles away. I hired a mini-bus and we had a great time.*

Perhaps the writer was thinking about the good time had by all rather than giving themselves credit for making it happen; try again:

### **Party!**

*My group of friends were invited to go to another friend's party but the venue was about 100 miles away. Everyone wanted to go but when we looked at travel costs it put us off; some of us could afford it but others were broke. I came up with the idea of hiring a mini-bus and splitting the costs equally; everyone thought this might work so I said I'd sort it out and come up with something.*

*I'd spent last summer working with a voluntary organisation and had driven their minibus so I phoned and asked if they'd be prepared to hire it to us at a reduced rate as they knew me. The boss agreed but made me do another test drive! The price was much better than commercial hire firms which I also checked out. I arranged for insurance cover and devised the best route to make sure we could save a bit on petrol.*

*Once I'd established how many people were going I worked out the cost per head which was much cheaper than any alternative. I got everyone to meet at a central point (more petrol saved) and we had a great journey there with lots of laughs. The party was terrific and we all enjoyed catching up with our old friends. On the way back we stopped off for a pub lunch in the sunshine and everyone said what a fabulous weekend it had been. It didn't seem like a lot of organising on my part but it was really good to have made something happen that resulted in everyone enjoying themselves. I liked the responsibility and the sense of adventure (I'd never driven that distance before) – it was really satisfying.*

This is less than 300 words but prompts our organiser to remember in detail the skills and qualities they used and what they achieved.

**Using the 'Party' example go through the Skills and Interests and Motivations lists on the following pages and tick (in the 'Party' column) the attributes you thought our party organiser was demonstrating**

Go back to your own examples and write your account of three or four. Describe what happened; try to identify why you found it rewarding. Remember to include:

- What you were doing or trying to do
- What you did and what you used to help you
- Things you had to consider or problems you had to deal with
- What the outcome was and how you felt about it

It is important to write several accounts because you are going to look for patterns of behaviour in your evidence

## DEVELOPING YOUR PROFILE

Now you have your accounts you need to analyse them against the Skills and Interests and Motivation checklists – just as you did with the Party example. Each time you find ‘evidence’ of any of the areas listed tick it off in the appropriate box. You might want to indicate some as being highly developed or not yet developed enough.

These skills are the same as those you will come across in PROSPECTS PLANNER (Activity 3) so should help you answer the program’s questions with greater clarity and confidence.

Some blanks have been left in case you think of something we have missed. *Leave blank the ‘RATING’ column for now; complete it when you have finished analysing all your accounts.*

SKILLS	Account Number					RATING
	Party	1	2	3	4	
<b>CONFRONTING</b> - Challenging the attitudes, behaviour or actions of others in a face-to-face situation						
<b>CREATIVE THINKING</b> - Tackling problems or developing ideas in an innovative or imaginative way						
<b>DEXTERITY</b> - Using your hands, or equipment, in a precise way						
<b>FLEXIBILITY</b> - Changing or modifying your behaviour in response to the needs, wishes or demands of others.						
<b>LOGICAL THINKING</b> - Tackling problems or developing ideas in a systematic, rational or methodical manner						
<b>NEGOTIATING</b> - Holding discussions with people in order to reach a position of mutual satisfaction and agreement about a contentious topic						
<b>NUMERACY</b> - Understanding and using facts or ideas expressed in numbers, graphs or simple equations.						
<b>ORAL PRESENTATION</b> - Using speech to express ideas, give information, or explanations to individuals, groups or audiences, in a way that is easily understood by others who are unfamiliar with the topic						
<b>ORGANISING</b> - Planning the use of resources and scheduling activities in order to meet an objective						
<b>PERCEIVING</b> - Assessing and understanding the feelings, attitudes or temperament of other people						
<b>QUESTIONING AND LISTENING</b> - Obtaining information from and clarifying the opinions of others by asking appropriate questions						
<b>READING AND COMPREHENSION</b> - Understanding complex information, facts, ideas or instructions which are expressed in written English						
<b>SPATIAL SENSE</b> - Extracting meaning from, understanding and using the information in diagrams or pictures or three dimensional structures						
<b>WRITTEN COMMUNICATION</b> - Producing grammatical, well expressed, easily understood and interesting text about topics that may be unfamiliar to the reader						

## INTERESTS AND MOTIVATION

	Account Number					RATING
	Party	1	2	3	4	
<b>ADVISING PEOPLE</b> - Listening and offering opinions or guidance to people by using expert knowledge						
<b>ALTRUISM</b> - Being involved in work without an emphasis on profit or significant personal gain; contributing to the wider community						
<b>ARTISTIC CREATIVITY</b> - Creating or designing challenging or aesthetically pleasing artefacts						
<b>BEING COMMERCIAL</b> - Using initiative in a commercial context; taking an interest in profit and loss in the public or private sectors; taking responsibility for a business venture.						
<b>FINANCIAL REWARD</b> - The potential for a higher than average graduate salary or other benefits such as profit-sharing and bonuses						
<b>HEALTH AND WELFARE</b> - Directly helping people who are sick, disadvantaged or at risk in some way						
<b>INTELLECTUAL CHALLENGE</b> - Dealing with intellectually difficult problems that require high level understanding and reasoning						
<b>MANAGING INFORMATION</b> - Collecting, organising and disseminating data, facts or figures						
<b>ORGANISING AND MOTIVATING PEOPLE</b> - Managing individuals and working groups; planning, controlling, evaluating and taking responsibility for their work and inspiring them to do well.						
<b>RISK TAKING</b> - Seizing opportunities as they arise without being sure of the outcome. Taking decisions on the basis of incomplete information						
<b>SCIENCE</b> - Observing, monitoring and understanding physical or biological phenomena, processes and systems						
<b>STABILITY AND SECURITY</b> - Having long term security of employment or working in an established stable organisation						
<b>TEAM WORK</b> - Working with others in order to reach a common goal by sharing ideas, decision making and responsibilities						
<b>TRAINING OR EDUCATING PEOPLE</b> - Passing on knowledge or expertise to individuals or groups in formal or informal settings						

Make a note here of anything important that has not been covered; additional skills, interests, motivations or constraints:

**Finally:** go back to your analysis and complete the last, 'RATING', column to reflect whether you wish to rate each factor as Major, Minor or Avoid in a work setting

## REFLECTING AND CONSOLIDATING

Now you have identified positive experiences, reminded yourself about them and analysed them for evidence of your skills, interests and motivation you have done some very useful groundwork. Go through your list (perhaps you can think of other examples that endorse your findings) and answer these questions:

I seem to be strongest on (or you might not be able to say):

Skills	
Interests & Motivation	

These are the skills/interests/motivations I use most or matter to me most:

I don't have a lot of evidence for:

## THINKING ABOUT YOUR FINDINGS ....

- Are there any surprises in your analysis?
- Are you finding you have more to offer than you thought you had?
- Do you enjoy some things rather than others?
- Is there anything you would like to develop further?
- Can you prioritise your preferences – perhaps you enjoyed using some skills or qualities more than others?

Think about your skills, interests and motivation:

I really enjoyed using:

I least enjoyed (or avoided) using:

I would like to work on:

## SO WHAT DO I DO NEXT?

Now you have completed the self audit exercise we hope it has given you a chance to think about yourself in a way that helps you identify and understand some of your strengths.

Employers look for a lot more than a degree certificate so the work you have just done will underpin career choice and provide a foundation for making strong applications asking for evidence of your abilities. However you are much more complex than a mix of these attributes so understanding a little about your personality will help you think about what you want from a job and the styles of working that would be right for you.

### 2: PERSONALITY AT WORK – Know yourself

Through Profiling for Success you can complete an on-line personality assessment; the Type Dynamics Indicator (TDI). The questionnaire is free to University of Sheffield students and will take you about 30 minutes to work through. You receive an instant 12 page report outlining your personality and relating it to work styles indicating your strengths and areas for development. To use the TDI go

to [www.profilingforsuccess.com/main](http://www.profilingforsuccess.com/main) and click on START ASSESSMENT

Call the Careers Service on 2220910 to request the username and password

You might also like to work through the **Values Based Indicator of Motivation**, available in the same programme, to help you identify what matters to you most and whether this could have an impact on your choice of career.

### 3: PROSPECTS PLANNER: Connecting skills and personality to types of work

Prospects Planner (PP) is a vocational guidance program which suggests types of work that match your attributes and meet your needs. You can use PP without any preparation but we hope that working through Activities 1 and 2 will put you in a better position when researching some of PP's suggestions.

Prospects Planner is available on-line at:

[www.prospects.ac.uk/links/pplanner](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/pplanner)

Follow the instructions and bear in mind what you have learned about yourself from working through Understanding Yourself and Personality at Work. We hope PP will help you but there are some things it can't do:

- Tell you what you should do – choosing a job or career is a complex and personal process.
- Come up with a list of 'the Top 10 best graduate jobs' – your list will be individual to you.
- Get you a job – finding vacancies and marketing yourself effectively is the next step.

## WHAT CAN I DO NEXT?

- You can talk to a Careers Adviser at any stage. Your job exploration and career planning activity may raise as many questions as it answers. Speaking to someone who can discuss issues objectively with you can be helpful and reassuring.

- Take a break and reflect on what you have learned. Career planning and job exploration is not a one-off exercise completed in an hour or two. It takes time, energy, reflection and patience.

## MORE HELP...

- University of Sheffield Careers Service  
Website: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students> - general
- Careers Talk on-line: [www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/talks.html](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/talks.html)
- <http://www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/infotree/> - careers resources
- <http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/events/> - for all careers events:
- PROSPECTS web site, <http://www.prospects.ac.uk> especially Explore Types of Jobs from Jobs and Work
- Careers Service Briefing Sheets (available as downloads from our website or paper copies from the Careers Service) especially:
  - Where do I start?
  - Researching Types of Work
  - Job Hunting Strategies
  - Meeting Employers
- AGCAS Sector Briefings give an overview of employment and graduate opportunities in specific careers: [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/sectorbs](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/sectorbs)
- The Careers Service Guide; from the Careers Service
- Occupations files and reference books – at the Careers Service resource listings at: [www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/infotree/](http://www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/infotree/)
- Additional careers guidance and information systems software is available on the PCs in the Careers Service

To make an appointment with an Adviser call at the Careers Service, 388 Glossop Road or 'phone 0114 222 0910.

## Other ways of making a start:

### **If your degree subject is important to you:**

- Get an overview of the choices made by Sheffield graduates from your subject area and the skills gained from your degree from our website page 'Careers with my degree': [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/worktypes/degree.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/worktypes/degree.html)
- Degree specific files (Red files) in the Careers Service provide detailed data on the employment and study destinations of recent graduates from your subject area
- The Prospects Options series uses degree subject as a starting point to suggest work where your degree is either essential or desirable: [www.prospects/links/options](http://www.prospects/links/options)
- Target and Inside Careers magazines cover some vocational subject areas; finance, engineering or law for example – from the Careers Service

## **Inspiration**

Can come from any direction! Do you have any intuitive ideas about work that attracts you? Do you know someone who does a job that sounds interesting? Have you read about or seen on TV work which interests you (remember to separate fact

from fiction)? It does not really matter what ignites the spark; if it interests you then find out more:

- Use the Explore Types of Jobs pages in Prospects: [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations)
- Check for books, files and career magazines covering your area of work: [www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/infotree/](http://www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/infotree/)
- Go to careers events listed in our 'What's On' programme: [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/events/](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/events/)
- Get in touch with people who do that job – arrange an informal chat

### **Just browsing?**

- Check out what's on in our events programme (see above)
- Browse through graduate employment directories like Prospects or Hobson's
- Use careers websites like Prospects: [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)
- Look at vacancy information and research opportunities that attract you
- Interested in an industry or sector? Then find out about the jobs within it: Sector Briefings [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/sectorbs](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/sectorbs) and graduate career magazines like Target or Hobson will help.
- Go to websites of professional bodies or trade organisations connected with activities that interest you.

Whatever your starting point, it will always be helpful to have a sound understanding of what you have to offer so the work you have done through Making a Start will pay off at some point.