



### INTRODUCTION

Although many students have a clear picture of their next steps after University, many others do not. Even if you have studied for a qualification that link to a particular career, you will often still have a range of options to choose from. So how can you ensure that you get the best from your studies at Sheffield, so your future career gets off to a good start?

The aims of this Briefing Sheet are to:

- help you plan ahead for the time when you have completed your course or research
- give you some guidelines on how to get a clearer view of what you want from a career, and how to make decisions about your options
- indicate the ways the Careers Service can help you

This topic is also covered on our webpages at [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/worktypes](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/worktypes) and in our online talk 'Where Do I Start?' at: [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/talks.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/talks.html)

### MAKING CAREER DECISIONS

Everyone makes decisions in different ways and so there is no single best way to plan a career. Indeed for some, the very word 'career' seems inappropriate, suggesting a predictable path stretching far into the future. The reality is that most careers unfold and develop, and for the majority of people completing university, the issue is to make a sensible and appropriate next step. There are ways of approaching career decisions that are more likely to lead to satisfactory outcomes. Your career choices may be influenced by:

- what you are good at, what you enjoy and what you want from your work
- how directly you want to use your degree subject
- the kinds of jobs or further study options open to you
- your personal circumstances, for example your preferred location, qualifications, income requirements and desired work-life balance

You need to understand yourself, find out about the possible options available and try to make a match that meets your priorities. Making a decision is also a learning process. As you find out more about yourself, or about types of work and employers, be prepared to modify some of the assumptions and ideas you had at the outset. Keep alert to the possibility of lucky breaks, random opportunities or sudden inspirations. No-one's career always proceeds along a wholly rational, predictable path. Sometimes the best opportunities arise unexpectedly.

Career decision-making may be difficult because it is secondary to other issues such as relationships, personal difficulties, family factors or how you feel about yourself. If

this is the case, it would be worthwhile talking with a careers adviser before taking the career planning process further.

### CHOICES AFTER GRADUATION

There are a number of broad choices open to you on completion of your course:

- Graduate employment
- Further study, including full-time, part-time and distance learning, for academic or vocational qualifications
- Taking 'time out'
- Temporary work
- Self employment or freelance work
- Voluntary work
- Building up a mixture of part-time employment and other activities

Making the appropriate choice is not always easy but using some of the resources outlined below, will definitely help you in this process.

### UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF

A good starting point is to spend some time considering your values, constraints, skills and prior experience:

- Are there certain values you have which are important to you and which will guide or influence your choice of job or employer?
- Are there fundamental constraints or requirements e.g. location, family factors, which determine the range of things you could consider?
- What assumptions are you making in your choice? For example, are you assuming you have to use your degree subject in your choice of work? Are you assuming you are going into a job rather than taking another course or becoming self-employed? Are your assumptions valid?
- If you had total freedom of choice and could disregard all practical considerations, would you know what you wanted to do? If so, are there aspects of this 'ideal' career that can be achieved?
- What skills and qualities do you possess as a result of your academic study, work experience and extra-curricular activities?

### Resources to help you:

- 'Options with your subject' at [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/options](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/options) contains information and ideas linked to specific degree disciplines (take-away copies are available in the Careers Service).
- The 'Making a Start' booklet from the Careers Service, is a structured way of gaining an insight into your personal preferences and thinking about how these can help identify career ideas. This can be downloaded from

the Careers Service website [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/worktypes/getstarted.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/worktypes/getstarted.html)

- 'Prospects Planner' is an interactive package which helps you make links between your skills and interests and hundreds of graduate occupations. It can be accessed from the Prospects website [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/ppanner](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/ppanner)
- Complete the online skills and personality assessments on Profiling for Success available via the Careers Service website, which help you analyse important factors about yourself. Find out more about Profiling for Success at [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/worktypes/getstarted.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/worktypes/getstarted.html) Once you have used the Type Dynamics Indicator, you can read more about personality type and its effect on careers in our series of 'MBTI' publications.
- The 'Adult Directions' software programme helps you obtain and explore a wide range of job suggestions, and is available in the Careers Service.
- Publications in the Careers Service such as 'Your Degree what Next?' and 'Your PhD What Next?' examine options and decision-making after study or research.

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR OPTIONS

As you develop a better understanding of your personal factors and requirements and how these relate to career options, you are likely to be gaining a broad sense of possible types of work you may want to do. It will be necessary to research these and to look at some other questions such as:

- Is it feasible to move directly to the type of work you want immediately from graduation?
- Is it useful or necessary first to do some postgraduate study, eg a research degree such as a PhD, a taught master's degree or a course of vocational training?
- Might it be necessary to spend some time in voluntary work, or in a temporary job to get some initial experience.

Different careers call for different attributes and in many cases, for particular qualifications and specialised knowledge. They also offer different rewards, both personal and financial.

Researching the types of work open to you is essential to help you assess their suitability for you and understand the typical entry routes.

### Resources to help identify and research types of work:

- **Briefing Sheet 6 'Researching Types of Work'** highlights the range of occupational information available.
- Careers publications and occupational information available in the Careers Service. Information on specific occupations [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations) and industry overviews [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/sectorbs](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/sectorbs) via the Prospects website.
- **Briefing Sheet 12 'Working for Yourself'** provides information on starting up your own business and the help available. Also see Enterprise at Sheffield [www.shef.ac.uk/enterprisezone](http://www.shef.ac.uk/enterprisezone) and the Careers Service's [www.shef.ac.uk/graduatestartup/](http://www.shef.ac.uk/graduatestartup/)
- The Connexions website has an occupational database [www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u](http://www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u)

## EXPANDING OR NARROWING YOUR CHOICES

The first ideas you come up with may be fairly tentative, so explore other similar occupations to see if alternatives are more attractive, or more feasible. At this stage you may not be able to decide which of the possibilities is best. Indeed, there

may be no single 'best' solution, but a number of possibilities that would be perfectly satisfactory. There may be no need to force yourself into making a decision prematurely or one which feels too restrictive. It may be better to progress a number of options in parallel, and see what happens.

However, you may find you have to focus down. You may decide you can only make a certain number of applications. You may have to decide on postgraduate courses, research or other options. This focusing or narrowing down of options will feel more comfortable if you do it by selecting from wider ideas to which you have given some careful consideration.

## MAKING A CHOICE

Bear in mind that you are not seeking the perfect match (even if there is such a thing), but choices which are going to meet your broad objectives. This decision is probably not for life. Though some decisions can have long-term consequences, others enable you to keep options open until you feel more certain. You will learn by doing, and your understanding of yourself and the options you face will develop as you tackle the process. Try not to put off the process.

## IMPLEMENTING YOUR CHOICE

Once you have made some decisions, take some action. Other Briefing Sheets outline in more detail how you can find out about employers, or about courses. They describe how you can track down vacancies, and how you can approach employers. They guide you through the process of making effective applications and achieving success at interviews.

Application forms and interviewers will often be very exacting in the questions they ask about your personal strengths and motivations. Your clarity of understanding about yourself gained through self-assessment and researching careers will stand you in good stead to compete effectively for jobs, work experience, or places on courses.

## HOW THE CAREERS SERVICE CAN HELP YOU

If you are finding it difficult to decide what your next step might be after university, talking over your current thinking with a careers adviser can often be useful. There is an adviser available each day in the Careers Service who can discuss your situation with you, no matter what stage you are at. See **Briefing Sheet 1 'How can the Careers Service help?'**

## IN SUMMARY

- Career decision-making is not a scientific process, but there are structured approaches you can try and key factors you need to be aware of
- The choices you make must come from consideration of your own personal strengths, weaknesses, interests and aspirations
- You must have a realistic understanding not just of yourself but of the options that are available and attractive to you

Career planning and job seeking take time and effort that only you can give. Start as soon as you can so as to give yourself the best chance for your future career.