

GET A
HEAD
START

Guide to...

Career Direction

bathspa.ac.uk/careers

Contents

Introduction	3
What is a career?	3
How do I choose a career?	4
PART 1: Understanding yourself	5
Summary: A personal framework for career choice	11
PART 2: Opportunity awareness	13
Making decisions	15
Taking action	16
The 'chance' factor	16
Further support from Bath Spa Careers	16

Introduction

Choosing a career can seem overwhelming, so you are not alone if this is how you feel.

There is no 'crystal ball' to tell you your 'perfect' career. In fact it's likely there are a number of careers that suit you. Career planning may seem daunting, can be time consuming and require perseverance. It is important to give yourself the time to undertake career research, ideally over the duration of your degree studies, so that you plan ahead and are in control of making informed choices about your career direction. This guide helps you through the steps you can take to make informed career choices.

You will also find some reflection questions to ask yourself as you work through the guide and you are encouraged to start a 'mind map' or get your thoughts on paper when considering them.

What is a Career?

A 'career' can mean different things to different people. The 'traditional' view of a career was to make a career choice and stick with that career for working life, typically undertaking one job role at a time. This often involved a clear job title, progression route, and commitment to an employer for a long period of time.

In the 21st Century, however, choosing your career doesn't have to be a one-off choice as people can and do change careers during their working life. There has been a rise in the proportion of people in 'portfolio careers' (combining more than one different paid activity at the same time). The practice of portfolio working is particularly common in the creative industries.

In addition, there has also been an increase in the number of people who are self-employed. For some, self-employment offers the opportunity to make a success of something they are passionate about and have the autonomy to decide how they work and how their business develops.

Whilst traditional careers, with a clear progression route, still exist, there is likely to be increasing diversity in what a career will look like for the majority of people in future years. As the world of work constantly changes, rather than think of your career choice as a big daunting decision that you need to stick with for the rest of your working life, it might be helpful to ask yourself 'what is my next career step?' or 'what do I want to be doing in the next 5 years?'

If your current thoughts about your career reflect an interest in self-employment or freelancing you may find the '**Guide to Self-Employment**' and '**Guide to Freelancing**' useful.

REFLECT

**What does a 'career' mean to you?
How might you see yourself working in the future?**

How do I choose a career?



Understanding yourself

In the absence of a 'crystal ball', the first stage of career planning is to spend time really understanding yourself. You know yourself better than anyone! Really understanding yourself involves thinking about your **skills** (what you are good at), your **motivations and values** (what drives you and what is important to you), your **personality** (what type of person you are) and your **interests** (what you enjoy).

Opportunity awareness

Understanding what types of opportunities exist is essential to career research. Be mindful, however, that new opportunities arise all the time, particularly with changes in economic development and technology. For example, Social Media Managers, App Developers, and Drone Operators didn't exist 10 years ago.

Make decisions

We all need to make decisions during our lives. Sometimes decision making can seem quite daunting, but if you've spent time understanding yourself and researching opportunities then you should be more confident in making informed decisions.

Taking action

At some point you *must* take action to be able to move forward with your career choice. You are the only person who can establish and progress your career, so be confident in taking positive steps to help you move forward.

PART 1: Understanding Yourself

This section will look at ways in which you can begin to reflect on yourself and in particular your **skills, values / motivations, personality and interests**.

a) Your skills and motivations

Your skills, as well as your values/motivations, are important when considering your career choice. Your skills are those things that you are good at. Some skills may come naturally and some may be learned. Your values and motivations also help you to establish what is important to you in a career.

If you are working in a career that uses your skill strength and is a good fit with your values and motivations then you are more likely to enjoy and thrive in your role. We all want to be in a career that we enjoy!

REFLECT

What do you currently feel are your strongest skills? What would friends and family say about what you are good at? Are there things that you feel are really important to you in a career? Can you answer the question 'I want a career that...'? Try to get some of your initial thoughts on paper.

This guide contains two activities to help you assess your skills and your motivations/desires. These are:

- Skills and Values Audit (resource within this guide)
- Prospects Career Planner (online tool)

Skills and Values Audit

There are two self-assessments on the following pages. The first one is about your personal **skills**, and the second is about your personal **values / motivations**. Their purpose is to get you to think and reflect on how your **skills** and **values** might contribute towards making career decisions.

Some of these things may change over time. For example, with increased experiences you are likely to develop new skills as your career develops and your values may also change depending on your life circumstances. The aim of the audits is to see the overall pattern of your priorities and strengths. It is this overall pattern that you can use to assess future careers and opportunities.

Skills Audit: For each of the following statements, give a rating of your personal skill /competence level, 1-4;

1 = not skilled 2 = basic 3 = capable 4= very good

Skills	What this means in practical terms	Rate 1-4
Written communication	The ability to write concisely and convey meaning in a manner appropriate to different readers	
Verbal communication	The ability to verbally express ideas and/or provide information	
Problem solving	Devising and then using an appropriate method/rule/technique or logic to solve a problem	

Leadership	The ability to organize, motivate others and lead teams	
Creative thinking	Being original & inventive in order to solve problems, generate or produce ideas	
Creativity and practical skills	The ability to make and produce objects and/or develop new concepts	
Numeracy	Ability to understand and interpret facts and ideas expressed in figures and non-verbal data	
Team working	Working confidently with others to achieve a common goal	
Language skills	Understanding and being proficient in another language (which could include the ability to communicate in sign language)	
Judgement	Giving consideration to the potential impact upon other elements before deciding on the wisest course of action to be taken	
IT	An interest in the programming and operation of computers	
	Ability to use a variety of IT packages to create, maintain and edit documents (including MS Office)	
	Able to use a range of social media platforms to network with individuals and groups and to promote oneself	
Negotiating	Agreeing a course of action that is both appropriate and beneficial to those involved	
Persuading	Being able to challenge the attitudes and points of view of others in a logical non-judgmental way that people can understand	
Decision making	Taking responsibility for what needs to be done and setting achievable goals, often within a set time-frame	
Time management	The ability to organise your work, prioritise what needs to be done when and meet deadlines	
Project management	Responsibility for the whole or part of a programme of work	
Ability to meet targets and deadlines	Comfortable when faced with different tasks with different deadlines	
Interpersonal Skills	Having 'people skills' or the ability to adapt communication and social skills to individuals or groups	
Empathy	The understanding of another person's situation, emotional feelings and motives	
Research Skills	The ability to explore ideas or concepts and find information	
Analytical and critical thinking skills	Ability to think logically to analyse a situation, task or information and assess different perspectives to find the best way forward	
Entrepreneurial Skills	Ability to generate new and innovative ideas	
Ability to work independently	Ability to complete tasks without the need to be prompted or micro-managed	
Flexibility / Adaptability	Ability to adapt to changes in priorities and workloads	

Values/Motivation Audit: For each of the following items, give a rating of its personal importance to you 1-4:

1 = not important 2 = mildly important 3 = quite important 4 = very important

Value/motivation	What this means in practical terms	Rate 1 - 4
Organisation Type and Culture		
Work environment/ orientation	Working in an organisation without an emphasis on profit or significant personal gain, i.e. charity, public sector or social enterprise	
	Working for an organisation experiencing business growth i.e. the excitement/ satisfaction of financial business success	
	Working for a start-up company (newly and fast-growing business)	
Typical Day or Week		
Certainty	Knowing what my role and responsibilities are each day/week	
Change & Variety	Wide variety in my work tasks	
	Wide variety in my working environment	
Structure	Predictable pattern to my day	
	Clear management structure	
	Some repetition of work tasks	
Working with others / working alone	Co-operation with other people	
	Significant contact with others - sharing ideas, decision making and responsibilities	
	Time to concentrate without a lot of interruptions	
	Some time to work alone each day	
Content of work		
Self-direction / Autonomy	Able to set own targets	
	Being given clear tasks and targets by others	
	Freedom to choose how I do my work	
Responsibility	Opportunities to be responsible for an overall project rather than tasks within project	
	Opportunities to be responsible for a team	
Affiliation	Content of work where team working is essential	
Innovation	Helping others to look at things in a new way	

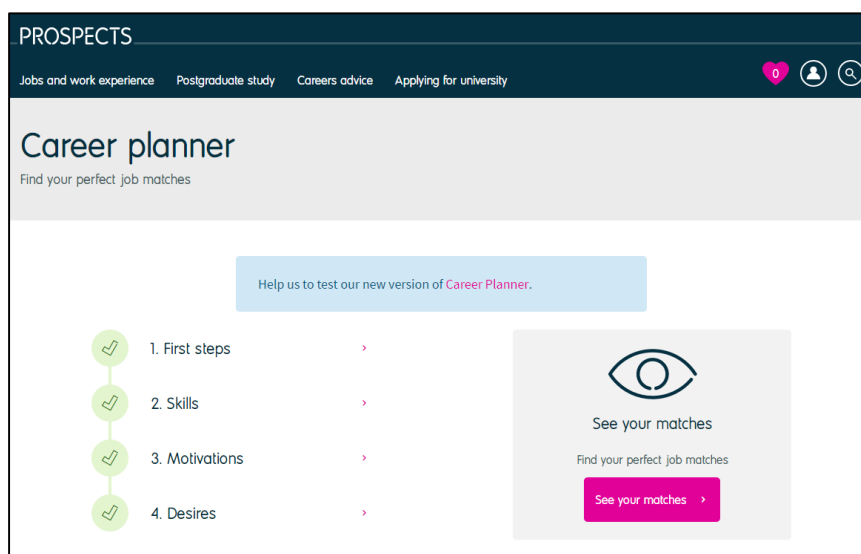
Aesthetics	Creating things that have beauty or technical elegance	
Intellectual challenge	Dealing with intellectually difficult problems that require high level understanding and reasoning	
	Working on challenging problems for sustained periods of time	
What motivates you?		
Influence	Changing the actions or opinions of others	
	Having an impact in my role – on individuals or organisations	
Results	Responsibility for achieving my own results	
Recognition	A role that's a recognisable profession (e.g. professional body)	
Adventure/risk	Seizing opportunities as they arise without being sure of the outcome	
	Making decisions on the basis of incomplete information	
	Enjoy challenge and excitement	
Innovation	Thinking creatively, coming up with new ideas and trying new ways of working	
	Pioneering, pushing for change	
Rewards	A clear progression structure and opportunity for a higher salary by moving up the 'career ladder'	
	Working for an organisation with clear appraisal and reward scheme based on performance	
	Good benefits package e.g. holidays/pensions	
Integrity/Altruism	Promoting truth and justice	
	Contributing towards society and helping people	
Achievement and Recognition	Sense of personal accomplishment, feeling productive	
	Opportunity to stand out as a high achiever i.e. compete to exceed targets and receive visible recognition for this	
	Status, prestige and visible success, in terms of job title/ position	

REFLECT

Now that you have completed the audits, what statements did you score most highly (i.e. gave them a score of 4)? What are your first thoughts about these? How important is it to you to be doing a job role that involves using your top skills and values? Do you recognise these skills and values in previous role (paid or volunteer) that you've previously had?

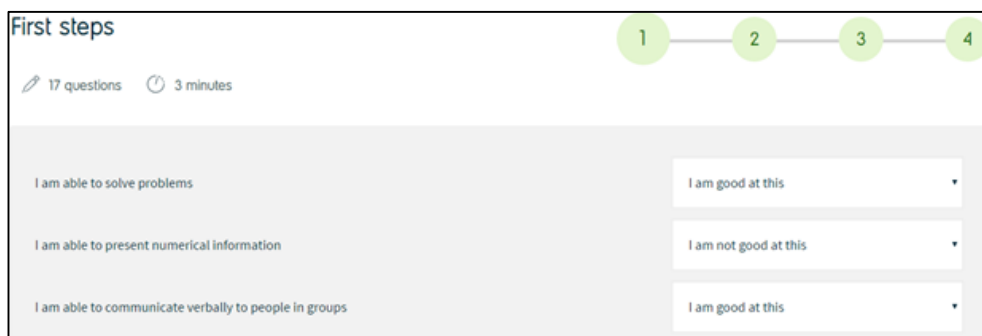
Prospects: Career Planner

Prospects is a national careers website specifically for those at university level. The website contains a *free* questionnaire tool called the Prospects Career Planner that assesses skills, motivations and desires. It takes about 15 minutes to complete and generates your career matches. Access the tool here: <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/planner>. Once you've created an account you can see the start page;



Important: Online career tools focus on algorithms, making career suggestions based on your responses.


There are four main sections: First Steps; Skills; Motivations; and Desires, to be completed in order. For each section, you will be presented with a list of statements with a drop-down box with an answer scale. Click on the answer that you feel most matches your response to the statement. Be mindful there are no right or wrong answers. Don't rush the assessment, but don't take too long answering each question as sometimes your initial response is often the one that is the best match.



When you have completed all four sections, click on: '**save and view your matches**'.

This will open a new page for you to view the careers that have been matched to you, based on how you have answered the questions. You will be shown the top 10 matches but can click to see the 'next 10 matches' at the bottom of the screen. Each match will show you the percentage by which it is a good match to your responses to the questions. You can click on the 'View Job Profile' link on each role to read more about the responsibilities that career involves, the skills needed and the route into it.


Career Planner



Change your matches

Tell us more to improve your job matches

Edit your questions >




Change your matches

Tell us more to improve your job matches

Edit your questions >

Try our new version of Career Planner and improve your job matches.

Your top matches



91%

JOB PROFILE

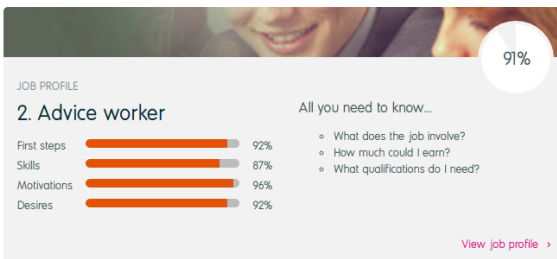
1. Public librarian

All you need to know...

- What does the job involve?
- How much could I earn?
- What qualifications do I need?

First steps	<div style="width: 94%;"><div style="width: 94%;"></div></div>	94%
Skills	<div style="width: 88%;"><div style="width: 88%;"></div></div>	88%
Motivations	<div style="width: 96%;"><div style="width: 96%;"></div></div>	96%
Desires	<div style="width: 87%;"><div style="width: 87%;"></div></div>	87%

[View job profile >](#)



91%

JOB PROFILE

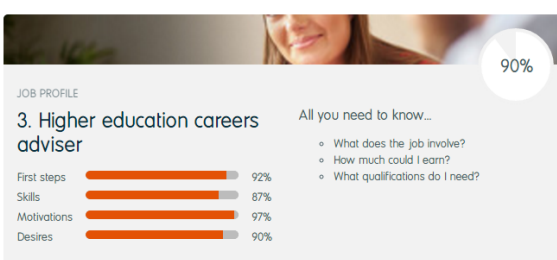
2. Advice worker

All you need to know...

- What does the job involve?
- How much could I earn?
- What qualifications do I need?

First steps	<div style="width: 92%;"><div style="width: 92%;"></div></div>	92%
Skills	<div style="width: 87%;"><div style="width: 87%;"></div></div>	87%
Motivations	<div style="width: 96%;"><div style="width: 96%;"></div></div>	96%
Desires	<div style="width: 92%;"><div style="width: 92%;"></div></div>	92%

[View job profile >](#)



90%

JOB PROFILE

3. Higher education careers adviser

All you need to know...

- What does the job involve?
- How much could I earn?
- What qualifications do I need?

First steps	<div style="width: 92%;"><div style="width: 92%;"></div></div>	92%
Skills	<div style="width: 87%;"><div style="width: 87%;"></div></div>	87%
Motivations	<div style="width: 97%;"><div style="width: 97%;"></div></div>	97%
Desires	<div style="width: 90%;"><div style="width: 90%;"></div></div>	90%

[View job profile >](#)

REFLECT

How interested are you in these roles? Do you notice a theme between the types of roles (e.g. they might be roles that involve helping others)?

Important: The Prospects database includes over 400 career roles, but this is by no means exhaustive.

Other online tool alternatives include: Prospects Jobs Match (<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/job-match>), which identifies a type of 'job group' most suited to you, and the National Careers Service Skills Health Check: <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/skills-health-check/home> designed to assess your skills, interests and motivations.

b) Your personality

We all have individual personalities and that's what makes us who we are! Not all careers will suit all people, so as well as understanding what you are good at (your skills) and what's important to you in a career (your values/motivations) it can be beneficial to think about the type of person you are.

REFLECT

You know yourself better than anyone, so how might you describe yourself? How would family and friends describe you as a person?

If you are struggling to reflect on the type of person you are, then you may like to explore a free online personality tool. 16 Personalities is an American website with a free online personality test based on the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a well-known and commonly used personality test reflecting the work of psychologist Carl Jung. Go to: <https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test>.

c) Your interests

Your interests can contribute to your motivation in a particular career or type of organisation. For example, you may have a genuine interest in the theatre and want to explore theatre sector roles. It's likely you will have also chosen your degree subject based on your interests, so do think about whether you want to make use of your degree subject in a future career (although remember 70% of graduate opportunities require a degree so don't think your degree subject is necessarily limiting your career options!).

REFLECT

What are your interests? Do you want to make use of your degree subject in a future role? If you don't feel you have any prominent interests, think about what you do in your spare time and what you notice or are drawn to in the world around you.

Summary: A Personal Framework for Career Choice

The following template pulls together all the criteria for what might interest you in a career based on your **skills, motivations / desires, personality and interests**.

TABLE 1: Choose 5 of the items on which you rated yourself as most skillful (i.e. 4) from the Skills Audit (resource within this guide).	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

	TABLE 2: Choose 5 of the items which you rated of highest importance to you (i.e. 4) from the Values / Motivations Audit (resource within this guide).
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

	TABLE 3: From thinking about your personality, write down 5 key phrases or words that you feel best reflect you (either based on self-reflection, asking friends or family or using the personality assessment).
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

	TABLE 4: Use this table to write down <i>up to</i> 5 areas of interest.
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

	TABLE 5: From the Prospects Career Planner results write down up to 5 job roles that are of most interest to you (based on any of the roles within your Prospects results list).
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
<i>Also write down any other careers you have considered (all ideas are valid):</i>	

REFLECT

Your 'Personal Framework for Career Choice' is identifying your criteria for career decisions. Use your criteria listed in Tables 1-4 to compare with the career roles in Table 5. How well matched is each career to your criteria?

PART 2: Opportunity Awareness

The next stage is to start researching and gathering information about different careers. This stage is perhaps the most time consuming, so it is important to make sure you dedicate time to career research. It is important to stress that although there are many resources available to you, there is not a 'magic list' of all the career opportunities that exist in the world.

There are many approaches to career research – all of which have value, so consider using a variety of approaches to help you with your future decision making. The following approaches broadly fall into two categories: **desk research** and **active research**.



Desk (Online) Research

The best starting point is to research the careers you identified in Table 5 of your 'Personal Framework for Career Choice'. You may also want to explore different career industries or careers that are most closely aligned to your degree subject. The more you research, the more you will become aware of other careers. Don't discount a career based on the job title, spend time finding out more about what it actually means.

When reviewing different careers, not only do you need to be sure that a career will suit your skills, values/motivations, personality and interests but you need to be realistic about the demand for the role and how you would get into it. When reviewing careers, the following factors are important to consider:

Labour Market: Is there a demand for the career you want to do? Research the 'job market', 'growth forecast' or 'labour market' of a particular career.

Routes Into: What are the routes into the career you are considering? Do you need additional qualifications, work experience or need to develop contacts to get your foot in the door?

Location: Where do you want to live? Whilst many careers may not be restricted by location, some careers may be location dependent.

The following resources enable you to read up-to-date information about different careers and industries:

- <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles> - Prospects (search by industry or A-Z by jobs)
- <https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/job-descriptions> - Target Jobs (search by industry or by an A-Z jobs list)
- <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/advice/planning/jobfamily/Pages/default.aspx> - National Careers Service (search by industry or A-Z by jobs)
- <http://icould.com/watch-career-videos/> - iCould (Job Profile Careers Videos)
- Sector Skills Council (SSCs) - these are employer-led organisations that oversee a particular industry. For a full list of SSCs: <http://fiss.org/sector-skills-council-body/directory-of-sscs/>. Some SSCs have their own careers pages with information about types of roles within that sector.

National

- Prospects - <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/job-sectors>
- Target Jobs - <https://targetjobs.co.uk/career-sectors>
- http://www.centralcareershub.co.uk/careerometer/?mc_cid=ab1125f898&mc_eid=6119351bf2 – Central Careers Hub (allows you to compare typical working hours and salary for different careers)
- <http://www.cipd.co.uk/research/labour-market-outlook.aspx#> - CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) produce quarterly Labour Market Outlook reports.

Graduate Trends

- http://www.hecsu.ac.uk/publications_and_resources.htm - (Higher Education Careers Services Unit) provides graduate market trends reports

Professional Associations – some professional associations also have their own careers pages. For example the British Psychological Society careers pages provide information on a range of psychology related careers (<https://careers.bps.org.uk/>).

Your degree – the following careers resources help with identifying roles that are most closely aligned to your degree subject:

- Prospects - <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/what-can-i-do-with-my-degree>
- Target Jobs - <https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/degree-subjects-your-options>

Using social media – follow organisations and professional associations that interest you via LinkedIn and/or Twitter to keep up-to-date with industry news.

Using job websites – reviewing currently advertised roles helps you to understand what employers are typically looking for in terms of skills, qualifications and experience for a range of roles. See the '**Guide to Finding Graduate Jobs and Opportunities**' for a full list of relevant job websites.

REFLECT

When undertaking desk research have your 'Personal Framework for Career Choice' available to refer to, so you can cross reference what you read online with your criteria for choosing a career. Are you able to narrow down your options to a smaller number of careers to investigate further?

Active Research

Desk research won't tell you everything you need to know about a career. Taking your research to the next level involves networking with people who work in the career that interests you and undertaking work experience, where possible. This is your 'reality check'!

Talk to people

Talking to others gives you a much clearer idea about the reality of that career and challenge any preconceived ideas you might have. Our '**Bath Spa Careers Guide to Networking**' gives you some useful hints and tips when networking with others. Identify people to talk to by:

- Asking family and friends if they know of someone who works in that career
- Talking to employers at careers fairs, on campus presentations or speakers on your course
- Seeking advice from academic staff who may have worked in a particular career
- Speaking to professional associations who may be able to put you in touch with members
- Using social media to connect directly with people

Gain Experience

Not only will work experience help you to really understand what it means to work in a particular career or type of industry, gaining work experience will show a future employer that you are committed, help you stand out from other candidates and, for some careers, be essential to get you your first graduate role. See our '**Guide to How to Find a Placement**' and '**Guide to Volunteering**'. Check out this innovative approach to career direction where one graduate approached their career decision making by gaining experience in 25 careers – see <https://www.25before25.co.uk/about> and <https://www.25before25.co.uk/careers>. Don't forget, work experience can be gained through volunteering; paid employment (including part-time jobs); and internships and work placements.

REFLECT

Whilst undertaking career research make sure you continually evaluate your thoughts. What did you learn from talking to people? How has your work experience helped give you a greater understanding of a career?

Making Decisions

Now is the time to start making decisions about which career you want to focus on. If this feels daunting, don't think of it as a quest for your 'perfect' career as there are probably a number of careers that would suit you. This stage is really about making a decision about your next career step.

If you do want to focus on one career at a time, however, then you do need to make a choice between options. To help with your decisions:

1. **Talking through ideas with someone** – book a Careers Appointment and/or speak to family/friends
2. **Revisit your research** – explore your current career ideas in more depth, which may involve undertaking additional work experience and further networking
3. **Using decision tools** - using decision tools can help you weigh up the pros and cons for each career that you have a genuine interest in pursuing.

Decision Tools

Pros and Cons List – helps you to reflect on the positives and negatives when trying to make a decision. Pros and cons lists work well, particularly when you have a choice between two things. For example, you might feel equally interested in pursuing a career as a teacher or a social worker. A weighted pros and cons list also helps you to attach value to each pro and each con. A useful worksheet can be found at: http://www.decisionskills.com/uploads/5/1/6/0/5160560/worksheet_weighted_pros_and_cons.pdf

Taking Action

You are responsible for making your career work for you. This stage is about taking positive steps to achieve your career choice. You know what you want to do, but how are you going to get there?

There might be a number of steps you need to take, which could include, for example:

- Undertaking further qualifications (e.g. postgraduate study)
- Developing your contacts and networks (in person and via social media)
- Developing your social media presence and/or portfolio (particularly for creative industries)
- Applying for an internship or securing some work experience
- Making an application to a graduate scheme
- Searching and applying for paid jobs

Important: You will need to be proactive in identifying *all* the ways in which you can give yourself the best possible chance to get into your chosen career. Be prepared that sometimes it can take time building the professional experience to get the career role you want, but if you have determination and drive and seek out and respond to opportunities you are more likely to be successful in achieving your career goals.

The 'Chance' Factor

Although this guide aims to help you feel more focused about your career direction and help you make decisions and take action, it is important to *always* be open-minded to new opportunities. We can't predict what will happen in our future lives and, for some people, chance opportunities may take their career in a whole new interesting direction!

Further Support from Bath Spa Careers

If you would like further support from Bath Spa Careers & Employability go to bathspa.ac.uk/careers to see the ways in which you can access our service, including workshops and events, appointments and to access our extensive range of resources.

You can also contact Careers Reception on 01225 875525 or at careers@bathspa.ac.uk.

Please note that Bath Spa Careers does not endorse particular organisations.

(This guide was last updated in Summer 2019).

GET A HEAD START

We're here to help you get a great start to your career. We're open all year round, so come and visit us in the Careers Space, book an appointment, or get in touch.

Careers Space, SL.G04
Steward's Lodge

careers@bathspa.ac.uk
01225 875525

www.bathspa.ac.uk/careers

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