Making Career Choices

(1) Know yourself:
- What do you want from a job?
- What are your strengths?
- What interests you?

(2) Explore your options:
- Research different careers, employers and further study opportunities.
- Explore the current job market.
- Identify where you can find out more.

(3) Review and make choices:
- Prioritise your options.
- Assess whether your choices are realistic.
- Find out how to improve your chances.
- Get help weighing up the pros and cons.

(4) Take action:
- Develop a strong CV.
- Find out where to look for jobs and how to apply.
- Prepare for interviews and assessment centres.

(5) Get experience:
- Get a permanent job, internship or work experience; undertake job shadowing; volunteer or take part in extracurricular activities.
- Review this experience against your criteria to see if it matches your aims.

Stage 1: Know yourself:
Before you begin your job search, think about what you really want out of a job and career. Reflecting on your past and current experiences will help you gain an insight into your personality, interests and motivations: this will help you to identify criteria that are important to you in a job.

What are your skills?
- List your past and current experiences, academic studies, achievements and extracurricular activities. Which of these did you enjoy and why? Try to identify the skills you used and developed. You can then link these to jobs which require these particular skills.

What are your beliefs, values and interests?
- Think about what is important to you and how this would relate to your career. For example, if working for an ethical employer is important to you, you should factor this into your job search.

What are you good at?
- Your natural qualities, such as diplomacy or a flair for numbers, could be used to your advantage in a career.
- If you are naturally confident you may prefer a job with lots of people contact whereas if you are more reserved a role focused more on information and tasks might suit you better.

What work culture will suit you?
- Are money and training opportunities high on your list or do you place more value on work variety and flexible working?
- What type and size of employer would you prefer to work for?
Stage 2: Explore your options:

Now that you understand yourself a bit better, you can start to match your profile and job criteria against potential careers. You can start to look for ideas on our website in the Knowledge Bank section, or on websites such as Prospects or TARGETjobs; there are career planning tools available on the latter two sites.

- Identify any recurring themes: are you drawn to certain types of jobs?
- For each option, consider how it meets the criteria you identified in stage 1.
- You might decide that you need to gain further experience or training, perhaps involving a choice between pursuing postgraduate study or looking for opportunities to gain experience.
- Discuss ideas with people who can be objective such as friends, family or Careers Advisers.

Stage 3: Review and make choices:

You now need to start thinking about which ideas are going to be most viable. To prioritise your options, decide which are most likely to satisfy the career criteria you identified in stage 1.

- Don’t get hung up on looking for the ‘perfect job’.
- Is anyone else influencing your decision? Ensure that your choice is not someone else’s.
- If you think your dreams are unattainable, break your goal down into smaller steps.
- Don’t be afraid of making the wrong decision – it’s not for life; people can change careers

Stage 4: Start to take positive action:

Take time to research your industry and employers thoroughly to maximise your chances of writing a strong application. The more prepared you are, the more focused and successful your application is likely to be – and the more likely you are to impress at interview and get the job you want.

- Think about how to market yourself on CVs, cover letters, application forms and at interview; use the support available from Careers.

Stage 5: Gain experience, reflect and review:

Give yourself time to review how your career planning is going at regular times. Always look for ways to develop your knowledge and skills and take time to reflect on your career direction. If you don’t feel like you are making progress, please make an appointment with Careers to discuss your options and plans.

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