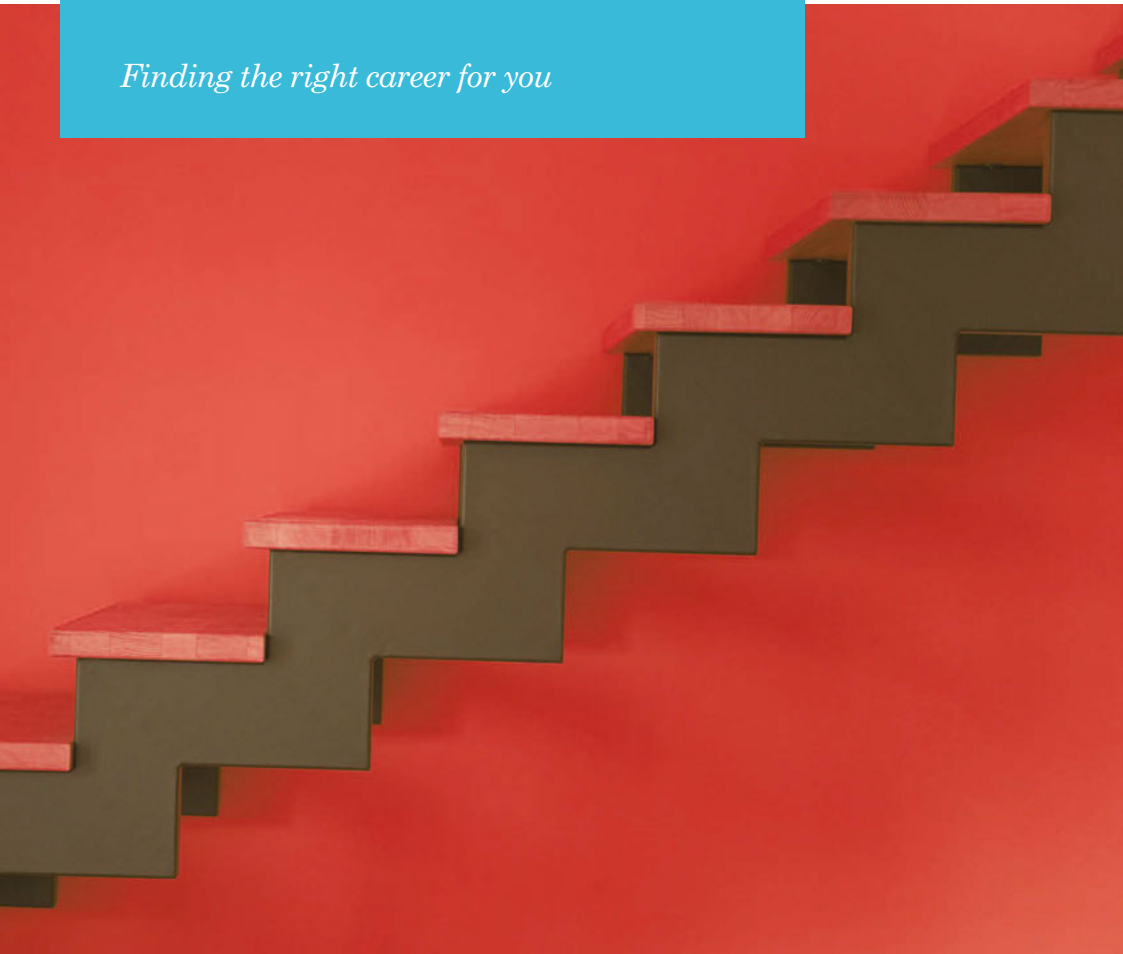


CHOOSING A CAREER

Finding the right career for you





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INTRODUCTION

Reading this booklet will not help you to make an immediate career decision! Choosing a career is a process, not an event: it takes time and thought.

What this booklet aims to do is to help you make a start in this process by outlining the different stages of making career choices, the issues that students should think about during this process and some resources (online, in print and through careers advisers) that will help you to find out more about yourself and about your options.

Look on this booklet as an introduction and use the resources it suggests to follow up and find out more. After you have done this, you

may want some personal advice and guidance based on your own individual needs and interests. Careers advisers are available at all stages of your studies to provide this: see page 22.

What is a career?

A career is more than just a job!

The word 'career' used to be associated with paid employment in a single occupation or job. Today, we recognise that a career is made up of many stages: it could include further study, time out (including for parenthood or other caring responsibilities as well as gap years), volunteering, part-time work or self-employment. An individual is likely to undergo many changes, voluntary or otherwise, in their work, work status and employer during the course of their career.

“20% of roles in this company didn't exist when I joined, and 30% of this year's graduate recruits will move into roles which didn't exist a year ago”

(head of HR at a digital communications agency)

The changing and uncertain nature of careers means that you are not choosing a “job for life”: your first job role after university is just a step on a path where you will have to be prepared to take new directions and decisions on a regular basis.

To manage these changes positively, you need to be prepared to keep learning throughout your life and take an active role in building your career. The following principles of career planning, created by Canadian career development specialists, provide a useful guide to help you understand the implications of this changing world of work:

1 Change is constant

We change constantly and so does the world around us – including the working world. Most people now encounter many jobs, in different occupations, organisations and industry sectors during their lifelong career journey, so adaptability and resilience are important skills to master. Every change, good or bad, brings new opportunities. Those who are most aware of change, in themselves and the world around them, are able to make proactive choices and benefit from change – rather than resist or complain about it.



2 Learning is lifelong

When change is constant, learning needs to be ongoing. Learning does not end when you graduate: opportunities to learn, formally or informally, are everywhere!

3 Focus on the journey

Life is a journey. Identifying your goals and purpose gives direction. However, don't get too fixed on a single destination: this lack of flexibility can prevent you from adapting to the changes, challenges and opportunities that are happening right now.

4 Access your allies

You do not take your journey through life alone. Friends, relatives, teachers, neighbours and colleagues can all be willing and helpful allies in helping you take the next steps on this journey. See page 20 for more about accessing these allies and using your networks.

5 Follow your heart

It's important to work at something that makes you feel happy and productive. As things around you change, knowing and believing in yourself – your values, interests and dreams – will help to hold you on course. Your vision for the future gives you the energy to go after what you want. That vision may change over time, but if you stay in touch with yourself, you'll be able to see where you want to go.

Where to start

The following four-stage model is commonly used in career planning:

Self-awareness. Understanding yourself – your interests, values, skills, aptitudes, ability, personality traits, goals, aspirations and what really motivates and drives you – is the most vital part of making career choices. Nobody else can tell you what to do because nobody else knows you as well as you do yourself! The following pages give suggestions for how you can increase your self-awareness and gain a greater understanding of your interests, values and other things that are important to you.

Opportunity awareness. What career choices are available now, and may be available in the future, in the industries and professions in which you are interested, experienced or qualified? It can also involve understanding in what sectors or what geographical areas there are skills shortages and/or how political, social and economic developments may impact positively or negatively on your career opportunities.

Decision making. Once you have completed the above two steps, you can bring them together to help make decisions. It is likely, though, that you will need to find out more about the various opportunities to make sure that they are the right ones for you. While no one can make your career decisions for you, drawing on other people's professional knowledge, reputation and skills when planning your career can be invaluable. Getting work experience, working with a mentor or seeking one-to-one careers advice are all ways that can help you through the decision process.

Taking action. This could include developing greater employability skills; taking additional learning or qualifications; finding potential employers; perfecting your CV, application and interview technique; applying for internships, placements, graduate jobs or further study.

The rest of this booklet will look at each of these stages in more detail.

SELF-AWARENESS

Your interests

Most people will say “I want to do a job that interests me”. Your interests have already influenced many of your life choices to date: your degree subject; choosing which university to attend; work experience you have undertaken; how you spend your spare time; where you have spent your holidays. They may have been responsible for friends you have made and helped you to develop your skills. These interests will probably have a similar influence on your career.

For some people, an interest is so important that it is the main influence on their career choice. A gifted athlete, for example, may be able to use their interest and ability to succeed in a sporting career. Many more people will be content to play their sport at a recreational level, but will still take this interest into account when selecting a career or an employer. Some may enter sports-related careers, in leisure management, sports administration or promotion, retailing sports goods or teaching PE. Others will seek out careers in different fields that offer similar opportunities for physical activity, teamwork, competition or challenge.



Or they may simply choose between employers on the basis of the company sports facilities.

It is important to weigh these interests against other factors once you get to the opportunity awareness stage. Many other people are likely to share a passion for areas such as sport, music, fashion, politics, computer games or television, making these careers incredibly competitive to get into.

You need to find out what the work really involves, develop skills that will give you an edge when applying and gain experience – which is often unpaid.

“Interests” in career planning, though, go beyond the interest that you have in your degree subject or leisure activities. The word is also used to refer to work-related interests and ways of working.

Your values

What are your values?

Your values are those things in your life that you consider to be important and that give you motivation. In relation to work, values are what give purpose to a job in the eyes of the individual who does it. The effort, commitment and motivation that a person brings to a job is usually in direct proportion to the values that they perceive in it.

Examples of work-related values could include:

- **Independence:** working autonomously with no or little supervision
 - **Helping others:** either individuals or groups or both
 - **Prestige:** having respect and high standing in others' eyes
 - **Job security:** a strong likelihood of staying in that job as long as you wish to
 - **Collaboration:** working with others
 - **Helping Society:** contributing to the betterment of the world
 - **Achievement:** doing work where you can see tangible results
 - **Recognition:** receiving credit for achievements
 - **Material benefits:** salary, bonuses, pension schemes and other employee benefits
 - **Relevance:** a job where your educational background (maybe your degree subject itself), skills and experience are important
- **Leadership:** taking responsibility for supervising/managing others
 - **Creativity:** using your initiative and developing own ideas
 - **Variety:** doing different activities
 - **Challenge:** performing tasks that are difficult
 - **Risk-taking:** taking actions and decisions that involve potential danger
 - **Work-life balance:** having adequate time to pursue interests outside work
 - **Influence:** having the ability to affect people's opinions and ideas
 - **Advancement:** having a clear career path and promotion structure

Think about how important each value on this list is to you. Some careers instantly call to mind a particular set of values:

- An Army officer, for example, is likely to cite leadership, variety and risk-taking as the main attractions of this career, but collaboration, job security, recognition and prestige may also be significant factors.
- An aid worker in a developing country will probably give helping others as their chief priority, perhaps along with independence, collaboration, and risk-taking while dismissing values such as material benefits, job security and advancement as irrelevant to his or her career choice.

But in many other cases, a single career field can offer scope for satisfying many different values. For example:

- A chartered accountant working in a large private practice may value his prestige, material benefits and security
- One who has left the same firm to set up her own practice may enjoy the independence and risk-taking ...
- While a third, who has taken a post as in-house accountant with a national charity may gain his main satisfaction from knowing that his work is helping society ...
- But all of them may equally value the variety, responsibility, people contact and intellectual challenge of their day-to-day work.

Your values are likely to play a key role in your career choice and to be the main factor in deciding on a career, or a career path within a particular field of employment. Research into 'happiness and values' suggests that our happiness is related to how we are able to identify and utilise these values in life.

SELF-AWARENESS (CONT)

Your personality

Your interests and values are two of the factors that make you an individual and will influence your career choice. What other aspects of your personality need to be considered?

Understanding your personality can help you think about how you prefer to approach problems, plan your time and relate to people. You can also get an insight into the working environments that will best suit you and the types of work that might be most rewarding.

Some characteristics are applicable to many careers. Resilience, for example, can be equally valuable to the police officer, the television producer, the investment banker or anybody whose daily journey to work involves the Northern Line! Being sensitive to others is not just for counsellors and social workers but can help anybody to get on with their colleagues.

These personal characteristics may have a strong influence on your choice of career. Anybody who feels that terms like “outgoing” and “assertive” are the complete opposite of their personality is unlikely to be happy, for example, in sales or arguing a case in a law court, but may find their niche in an information or research focused role.

Consider how well each of these characteristics describes you on a scale of 1 (very closely) to 4 (not at all)

Assertive	Outgoing	Sensitive to others
Confident	Imaginative	Warm
Reliable	Energetic	Decisive
Methodical	Competitive	Independent
Consistent	Cheerful	Objective
Tactful	Reserved	Adaptable
Organised	Cautious	Adventurous
Resilient	Relaxed	Persistent

You may think that certain personal styles, such as being reserved and cautious might be seen as negative, but being cautious is a valuable quality in financial jobs and crucial for many medical occupations (imagine the brain surgeon who isn't careful!). Similarly, being reserved may be linked to powers of concentration and attention to detail which may be important in scientific and computing fields.

Before relating your personal style to careers, though, you need to make sure that you understand what a particular career demands. If you are methodical, cautious and reliable you could certainly do well as an accountant – but at the same time, you need to be adaptable, persistent and confident to deal with the range of clients you are likely to encounter.

Although personality is a complex attribute, there is one aspect known as personal preference that has been studied thoroughly and which has proven relevance to the career decision making process.

The theory of personal preference is based on the idea that we seem to be born with preferred ways to obtain our energy, take in information, reach decisions and deal with the outside world. These preferences lead to the definition of 16 different personality types each of which is characterised by preferred behaviour patterns. These can influence many of the choices that we make in life – not least our choice of career.

There are many personality questionnaires that can help you to discover and understanding your personality type, how it affects your behaviour and interests and how it relates to career choice. The best-known assessment tool is the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which looks at your preferred ways of interacting with others, taking in information, making decisions and working.

It is based on four sets of preferences, relating to how you prefer to:

- direct your energy (Extraversion-Introversion)
- process information (Sensing-INTuition)
- make decisions (Thinking-Feeling)
- organise your life (Judging-Perceiving)

By completing the MBTI you end up with one of sixteen four-letter codes that summarises your personality type. You can try a self-assessment exercise based on the MBTI at www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp

Once you have gained an insight into your personality type, the following sites may be helpful in relating it to careers.

- www.personalitypage.com/careers.html
- www.16personalities.com/
- www.personalitytype.com



CONTINUED OVERLEAF

SELF-AWARENESS (CONT)



Graduate attributes

Here at Kent we aim to equip you with the seven graduate attributes that top employers are looking for. Graduate attributes are qualities you will develop through your time at Kent. Essentially, through Curricular and Co-Curricular activity (Sports, Societies, Volunteering, paid employment) you will gain skills, which will result in the development of particular Graduate Attributes. To be a top graduate you need both desirable attributes and relevant skills.

The graduate attributes are

- Confidence
- Creativity and innovation
- Critical reflection
- Global/cultural awareness

- Integrity and accountability
- Intellectual curiosity
- Resilience

You can find out more about graduate attributes here www.kent.ac.uk/student/employability/grad-goals.html

Personal circumstances

As well as your interests, values, personality and skills there may be external factors – some beyond your control – that you need to take into account when making career choices:

- Do you have personal commitments that make it essential for you to stay in Kent? Or do you just have a strong preference for staying in the area?

- Does the above apply to another part of the UK?
- Do you have a disability that you feel may affect your choice of career, or employers' perception of you? www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/targetedinformation.html?tab=students-with-disabilities
- Are you an international student? See www.kent.ac.uk/ces/publications/InternationalStudents18.pdf for advice on your options
- Many major employers ask for a high UCAS points score or a 2.1 degree. Will your academic background affect the career areas or employers that you can consider?
- Are your financial circumstances important in making career decisions?

- Do you have family or caring responsibilities?
- Do you need to take a partner's career choices into account?
- Are you happy to study for further qualifications (maybe part-time while you are working full-time) or do you never want to take an exam again?

Further resources

My Prospects Career Planner

www.prospects.ac.uk/myprospects_planner_login.htm is a powerful program to help you choose a career by helping you to identify your skills, motivations and interests. Based on your answers to the questions asked you will get a list of occupations that are good matches with your profile and an explanation of the reasons why. You can then find out more about these occupations including job descriptions, work conditions, entry requirements (including the skills required), salary, training and case studies.

Target Careers Report

<http://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-report> A career planning tool which aims to help you get started on your job hunt. You'll work through some simple, interactive questionnaires that assess your career strengths, personality and abilities and, based on your responses, you'll get a list of jobs that may suit you.



Careers Explorer

None of these programs can tell you your perfect job! They simply take your responses and compare them with ratings for a variety of jobs to produce a list of possible matches. Although there are no right or wrong answers, if you do not answer the questions honestly, the program may produce job suggestions which are not appropriate for you so do think about your responses.

As you will see from the descriptions above, these programs do not just help you to analyse your skills, interests and values but also show you how these relate to graduate job areas. This brings us on to the next stage in career planning: opportunity awareness.



SELF-AWARENESS (CONT)

Graduate attributes quiz

The attributes and associated skills listed below are the one most often looked for by graduate employers. To assess your own attributes and associated skills rate each item 1-3, where 1 = strong, 2 = competent, 3 = needs improvement

Attribute	Associated Skills	Rate Yourself
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Advocacy • Leadership • Problem-solving • Decision-making • Assertiveness 	
Creativity and innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial awareness • Problem solving • Adaptability • Persuasion and negotiation • Digital literacy • Entrepreneurial skills 	
Critical reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career management • Reflection/self-awareness • Problem solving • Planning and organising • Research/critical thinking • Action planning 	
Global and cultural awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Research/critical thinking • Networking • IT/digital literacy • Team working • Learning a new language 	

Attribute	Associated Skills	Rate Yourself
Integrity and accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection/self-awareness • Leadership • Project management • Time management • Influencing • Decision making • Reliability 	
Intellectual curiosity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking • Research/critical thinking • Analysis and evaluation of evidence • Problem solving • IT/digital literacy 	
Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team work • Problem solving • Project management • Assertiveness • Adaptability • Career management 	

OPPORTUNITY AWARENESS

Once you have looked at all aspects of yourself – your interests, values, personality, skills and personal circumstance, you can start to relate these to careers and jobs. The career programs mentioned on the previous page can help you through this process.

Many students start the process of choosing a career by first looking at their opportunities: careers advisers are often asked questions such as “What do graduates in my subject go on to?” or “What job areas have the most vacancies for graduates?”

However, the answers may not always be helpful to you when your individual preferences and circumstances are taken into account:

“What do graduates in my subject go on to?”

Careers advisers often give the not-very-helpful answer “All kinds of things” to this question – because it is true! Why are you beginning your career planning from this point? Is it because using your degree is important to you? Did you choose your degree with a particular career in mind? Is your degree subject in demand in the job market? Are you uncertain what else you are good at beyond studying?

- Our **“What Can I Do with my Degree?”** pages at www.kent.ac.uk/careers/degreein.htm will give ideas for careers where you may be able to use your degree directly, or where employers are particularly interested in graduates in your subject. You will also find information about careers entered by past Kent graduates in your subject.
- The **“I want to work in”** pages at www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/workin also offer a range of ideas on how to use your degree, with links to profiles of jobs where your degree may be relevant.

Be aware, though, that many careers are open to graduates in any subject and you can start a career in different areas of business, finance and the public sector straight from university.

The graduate job market: where are the jobs?

Starting your career planning by asking where the most job opportunities are is not helpful if these do not reflect your interests, values and personality.

Advertised job vacancies are only part of the picture: many jobs in popular areas or smaller organisations are never advertised and are filled through word of mouth or speculative approaches.





What is a “graduate job”?

Most graduates will be aiming at a ‘graduate job’ – but what exactly is it?

- You may be thinking of a ‘graduate training scheme’: Many of the jobs above will fall into this category: they are typically offered by larger employers in business, finance, IT, law, technology, engineering and the public sector. Graduate training schemes are popular and competitive but are not the only way to start your career: on average, only a quarter of graduates will join these schemes each year.
- You may want to enter a ‘traditional’ profession, such as teaching or law.
- You may want a job where you can make use of your degree subject directly, such as economist, psychologist, architect or research scientist.
- You may just want a job that requires a degree for entry and recognises the effort that you have put into achieving one over the last three or four years! This is a highly achievable ambition: although the number of graduates has risen over the last ten years, so has the demand for the skills and experience that they can offer.

Before making career decisions based on your opportunities, it is important to research careers and find out what they really involve. Popular images of careers are often stereotyped and inaccurate: for example, accountants need good people skills and marketing demands strong numeracy skills. The resources listed on page 19 will help you get behind the glossy or geeky images of different careers and find out what they really involve.

OPPORTUNITY AWARENESS (CONT)

Postgraduate study

Around 20% of UK graduates go into further study immediately after their first degree. Many others will do so at a later stage. These are some of the most frequently-given reasons for doing postgraduate study:

For interest in the subject

This is essential for any postgraduate academic study, especially in humanities and social sciences. Even if future employers do not view your degree as particularly relevant, they will respect the enthusiasm and determination that has carried you through an additional year of study, often with no funding, as well as the skills you have gained through your studies.

To help your career

For some careers, further academic or professional qualifications are essential or an advantage. The resources on page 19 will help you to find out whether this is the case for the career areas that interest you.

Because your tutor recommended it

This can be flattering – but it is your decision, not your tutor's, so look at all the issues involved carefully.



To keep on being a student

For some students, the idea of leaving education is quite daunting. Postgraduate study is a way of spending a further year doing what they know and are good at. But remember that life as a postgraduate can be quite different from that of an undergraduate.

To put off making a career decision

This is probably the worst reason of all. It won't put off your career decision all that long – to have the best chance of getting into many graduate jobs you need to start making applications a full year before starting work.

To avoid the panic that comes to many postgraduates when they complete their studies, have even higher debts to pay off and still no idea what they want to do, make sure you use your postgraduate year to get down to making career choices and improving your employability skills and experience.

Postgraduate study is a stage in your career: it is not an alternative to a career! Think about how a postgraduate degree may fit into your longer-term career plans, look at the careers entered by past graduates from the courses you are interested in and discuss your options with a careers adviser.

For more information on the pros and cons of postgraduate study see our Postgraduate Study pages: www.kent.ac.uk/ces/postgrad-study.html and the Prospects website: www.prospects.ac.uk/postgraduate-study/masters-degrees/should-i-do-a-masters

Self-employment

The number of self-employed people in the UK has grown rapidly over the last five years.

You may think that many years of experience are needed to become self-employed but a significant number of new graduates also take up this option.

Self-employed graduates are not just business people and entrepreneurs: the sectors that these graduates were working in included art and design, sports and fitness, media, journalism and IT. More than half of graduates working as artists, and more than three-quarters of those working as musicians, were self-employed or freelance.

In areas such as the performing arts, art and design, and media production self-employment is usually a necessity, if not for the whole length of a career then at least for some part of it, especially in the early stages.

Self-employment is likely to appeal to graduates whose values include independence, creativity and risk-taking; those whose values lean more towards advancement, job security and collaboration will probably be more reluctant to take up this option. However, many graduates feel more confident about working for themselves once they have developed experience, skills and knowledge through working as an employee.

Skills required to be self-employed include networking, communication and commercial awareness. These skills have to be combined with personal qualities such as persistence, motivation, resilience and commitment.

If starting your career on a self-employed basis appeals to you, there are many opportunities at Kent to develop the skills and experience that you will need. For full details of all these schemes, see www.kent.ac.uk/enterprise/students

For more information on self-employment as an option for graduates, see:

www.prospects.ac.uk/self_employment.htm



OPPORTUNITY AWARENESS (CONT)

Time out

'Taking a year out' needs to be carefully planned. It can be highly beneficial if you use it to gain further experience, improve your confidence and skills and add to your CV. This can be done through temporary jobs, casual work, travel, volunteering or a combination of all these.

Without planning, though, you run the risk of spending a year stuck in an unchallenging job (or series of jobs), gaining little in the way of skills, experience or satisfaction. The resources listed below will help you to avoid this trap, but first ask yourself a few questions:

Why do you want to take time out?

- To earn some money to pay off your debts?
- To travel?
- To decide on a career?
- To gain some relevant work experience?
- A bit of all the above?

What can you do?

Almost anything! But these are some of the most popular options:

- Join an organised project
- Find your own job or internship
- Travel independently, working as you go
- Follow a course to improve your skills or develop an interest



What will future employers think?

"Most recruiters look favourably upon people who have taken gap years, if they are able to draw on their experiences and show an employer how they might make them more effective in the role they are applying for" (Association of Graduate Recruiters).

"When looking for jobs I found it very easy to handle the questions on employers' application forms as I had gained so many skills from my gap year teaching English in China: teamworking, initiative, problem-solving and leadership to name just a few".

A lot will depend on what you have done during a gap year and how you present it. If you have spent a year backpacking around the world, your applications should show how you planned and organised the trip; how you dealt with any problems you met along the way, how you funded it and what you learned from the experience, rather than just listing all the exotic countries you visited.

Employers, though, are usually even more impressed if you have gained some rather more structured experience, through paid work or through volunteering, during a gap year. For further information and ideas about how you can do this, see www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/workin/voluntarywork.html and www.prospects.ac.uk/gap_year.htm

CAREER EXPLORATION

Researching careers

Career research is a very important part of your career planning. It will help you to explore possible career pathways, get behind the superficial popular impression of a career and identify any potential issues (eg qualifications, experience, skills and personal qualities) that you may need to consider as you pursue your goals. The earlier that you can identify these issues the more prepared you will be to tackle them and improve your chances of success.

The kinds of things that are useful to know are:

- What does the job really involve?
- What skills and qualifications do employers look for?
- Do I need to do further study or training?
- How can I get some relevant work experience?
- Are job vacancies advertised, and if so where?

You can get answers to most of these questions through the job profiles/job descriptions on the Prospects and Target careers websites, which between them cover several hundred different graduate jobs:

- www.prospects.ac.uk/types_of_jobs.htm
- <http://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/job-descriptions>



Our “I Want to Work In” web pages www.kent.ac.uk/careers/workin.htm aim to give a brief overview of around a hundred career areas, from Accountancy to Youth and Community Work, with general advice and links to key employers, professional bodies, recruitment agencies and vacancy sources.

Networking

Talking to people, or networking, can be a key tool in your career research and decision-making. Most people enjoy helping others, and talking about their jobs. Networking involves using your contacts to meet people who can give you information about the job in which you are interested or refer you to people they know who work in that occupation.

You may feel that, at the moment, you have no contacts who are likely to be able to help you begin networking. But just start to think about all the people you do know – friends, relatives, lecturers, past and present employers – and all the people they might know. Remember the “six degrees of separation” theory that any two individuals are linked by an average of six acquaintances.

As a Kent student, you also have a network of alumni and friends of the University! The Kent Mentoring Scheme www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/mentoring.html is an online mentoring/networking tool for Kent students and graduates to meet, support one another and help each other get ahead.

CAREER EXPLORATION (CONT)

Kent alumni could help you by talking about their work and their experiences, offering advice on getting into certain industries or even work experience.

Social media is another valuable tool in creating and developing networks. If you follow and interact with professionals in your area of interest via LinkedIn, Twitter and even Facebook you will be able to find out what is going on in this area, demonstrate your interest and motivation, showcase your skills and keep up to date with job opportunities. Blogs are another useful source of information and, if you set up your own blog, this is an excellent way to get yourself known and show what you can do.

It goes without saying that career-focused networking via social media must be done professionally and in a very different way from your day-to-day interactions with your friends. Our pages on using social media in jobhunting give further information and advice.

www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/findajob.html?tab=using-social-media

See our Creative Careers Search booklet and web page at www.kent.ac.uk/ces/publications.html for more information and advice on effective networking.

Work experience

Work experience can be anything from a day's work-shadowing to a placement year. It can include volunteering, part-time work, internships, holiday jobs and campus roles such as student ambassador. Any work experience can be valuable in helping you to assess whether a role or a sector is one you would want to work in as a long-term career and to narrow down your career options.

Finding out what is not right for you is just as valuable as discovering what is suitable; if it turns out that the role is not a good fit for you, then it's better to find out on a short placement than after you have started a full-time job.

Work experience will help you to become more realistic and informed about future career choices. You may also realise which sort of activities you value, what working environment is most comfortable for you, how you work in teams and how you respond to colleagues. Any work experience – even a part-time casual job – can help you to learn about yourself and the world of work.

It is a useful exercise to reflect on any work experience that you have had: what you learned and what else you gained from it:

- What skills did I use?
- What motivated or demotivated me about the work?
- What did I find most/least interesting?
- Did the organisation and work fit with my values?
- Did I enjoy the work? If so, why? If not, why not?
- What was the culture of the organisation like?
- What makes the organisation different from its competitors?
- What did I learn about the organisation as a whole, its clients/customers and the role of more senior staff?
- What would I have done differently if I had been in charge?

Finding work experience

- Our **job hunting pages** www.kent.ac.uk/ces/advice.html
- Our **work experience web pages** www.kent.ac.uk/ces/work-experience.html outline different types of work experience and link to many employers and work experience job sites
- **Work and Opportunities Fund** www.kent.ac.uk/ces/funding.html

DECISION MAKING AND TAKING ACTION

The final stage in choosing a career is to bring everything that you have learned about yourself and your opportunities together. There are many opportunities open to graduates and it can take time to find your way through them all and begin your job search in earnest.

This booklet, and the online resources and career choice computer programs referred to, are good starting points, but it's a good idea to talk over these issues with a qualified human being! For further help with your decision making, you can make an appointment to speak to a careers adviser.

A careers adviser will not tell you what career you 'should do' – this is your decision! Some of the things they can do include:

- Listen to you and understand what is important to you
- Help you explore your options and consider the pros and cons
- Help you identify your skills and interests
- Offer advice on how to research your options further including careers, postgraduate study and gap year options
- Give tips on how to search and apply for jobs and perform well at interviews/assessment centres.

Careers guidance interviews are totally confidential and are available to Kent students at all stages of their studies and for up to three years after you graduate. For further information, and details of how to book an appointment, see www.kent.ac.uk/ces/advice.html

Action planning

Action planning is a process which will help you to focus your ideas and to decide what steps you need to take to achieve particular goals that you may have. It is a statement of what you want to achieve over a given period of time and can be very effective in helping you to develop and plan your career. Breaking down your long term aspirations into shorter realistic goals makes the process less daunting and will help you to manage the process.

It involves:

- Identifying your objectives
- Setting SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Specific)
- Identifying the steps needed to achieve your goals
- Prioritising your tasks effectively
- Meeting deadlines
- Having a contingency plan

Example action plan

Overall objective: To decide whether publishing would be a good career option for me.

Steps I need to take:

- Gain work experience in a publishing company during summer vacation (Specific, Measurable and Relevant)
- Research publishing companies that offer summer internships (Attainable) using the following schedule (Time-Specific):
 - January: use the links from the CES "I Want to Work In Publishing" pages to find links to employers.
 - February: draw up a list of companies to research; produce a CV targeted on publishing.
 - March onwards: make applications for summer internships

Review your progress regularly and be prepared to switch to your contingency plan if necessary. For example, if you cannot find more than a few companies offering summer internships you may broaden your goals to include making speculative applications or looking for work-shadowing opportunities.



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