

# OpenLearn Works



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## How did I get here?



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# Introduction



How well do you really know yourself? This block will help you to develop your self-awareness and take stock of your life by helping you to review your experiences and identify what you have learned from them. Your past has shaped you through your family background, education and training, and work and leisure activities. You've gained knowledge and skills from your experiences – probably more than you think – and will have developed characteristics and capabilities that help you to cope with difficult situations and to respond to different challenges.

The activities that follow ask you to think about a series of questions to help you to review your current situation. They offer different ways of considering what you're like and what you can do. At intervals you'll be asked to note down your responses. The questions are as follows:

- Who am I?
- What roles do I play in life?
- What learning experiences have I had?
- What are my main achievements?
- What are my helping and hindering factors?
- What are my strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?

Doing these activities should give you a more realistic idea about what you know, what you can do, and what you are good at. In other words, you will learn more about your capabilities – your ability to do something. Capabilities are made up of your skills, knowledge, personal characteristics and attitudes. Hopefully, the things you learn about yourself will increase your confidence, as most people find that they have a lot more to

offer than they originally thought. At this stage, focus on what you know and what you can do, rather than thinking about the knowledge and skills you lack. Remember that you may have potential in various areas that has not yet been developed for one reason or another. Here's Lynne Johnson introducing this block:

Video content is not available in this format.

## Learning Outcomes

By completing this block and the associated quiz, you will:

- reflect on where you are now and where you would like to be.

## 1 Who am I?

Activities 1 and 2 will help you to develop an overview of your life so far, and to consider how your early history contributed to it.

### Activity 1

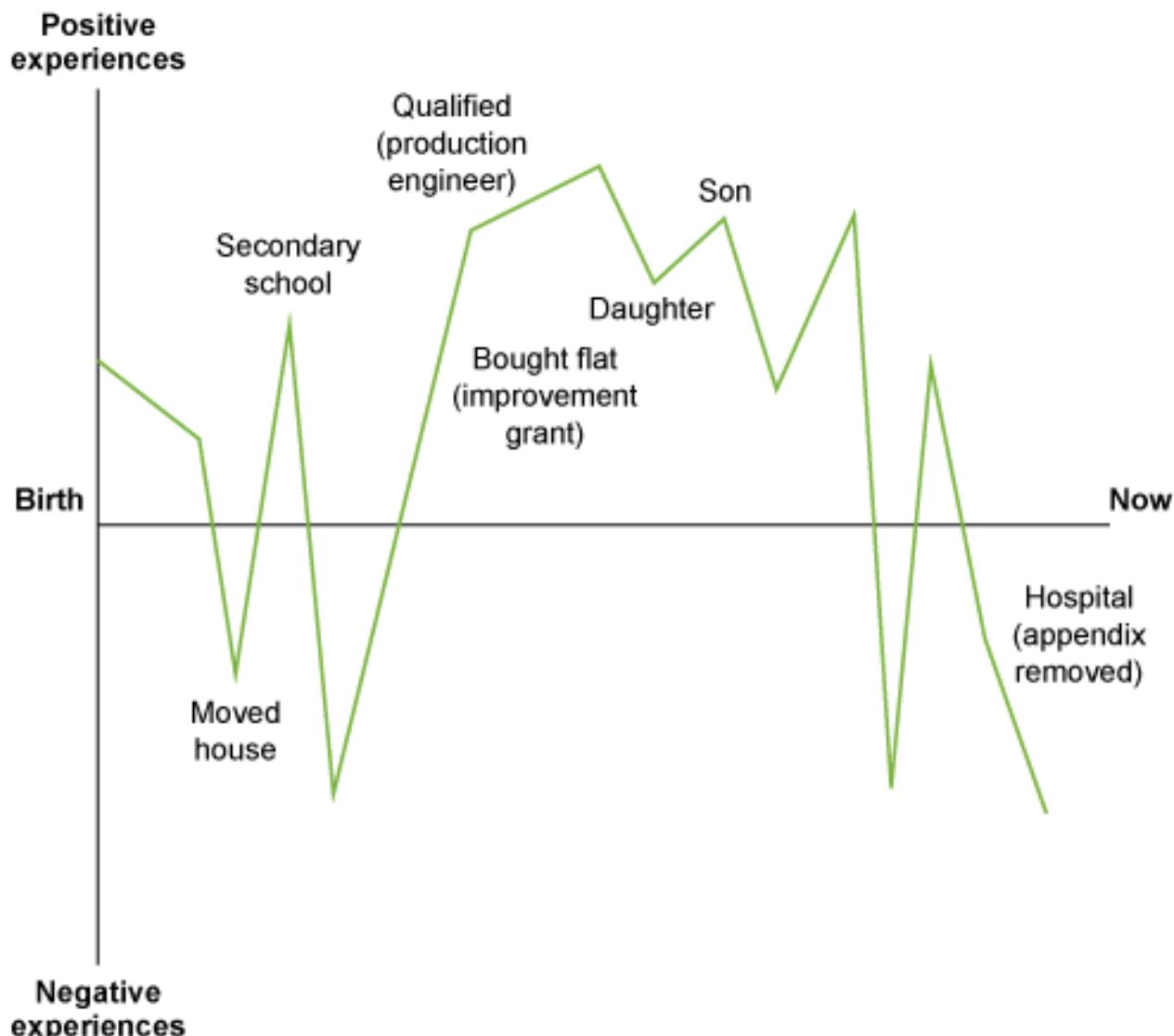
Allow about 20 minutes

#### Part 1

In this activity you're going to use the template for this activity in the resource pack to draw a 'lifeline'. This lifeline can help you to:

- think about the pattern of your life
- gather insights that can influence your future choices
- discover aspects of yourself that you might want to develop or change.

Using Figure 1 as a guide, note down key life events such as education, work, interests, marriage, children and so on, to show the high and low points at different times of your life.



**Figure 1** An example of a lifeline

For some people, the lifeline exercise can result in a lot of emotions coming to the surface as you review your experiences. You may find it useful to talk through any difficult feelings that arise with someone you trust.

## Part 2

When you've drawn a lifeline that reflects your key experiences, think about the feelings aroused by each experience and then answer these questions, noting down any thoughts or ideas that occur to you:

- What does the lifeline say about you and how you've lived your life?
- Are there recognisable themes that have run through your life?
- Is the pattern generally up or down? Is it steady or changeable? What sorts of incident were associated with the highs and lows?
- Are the highs generally associated with your own choices and the lows with the unexpected? Are there some experiences you cope with easily and others that really throw you?
- Are there any lessons to be learned?

For example, this activity revealed to one person that all her high points were associated with praise from others and her low points with geographical moves. Another noted that all his positive job changes followed disappointments in his private life, and he saw that each disappointment motivated him towards a change and offered opportunities. A third recognised someone else as consistently acting as a mentor. Would someone who knows you well have drawn your lifeline differently? It might be an interesting exercise to ask at least one other person to draw your lifeline to compare their view with yours.

*Provide your answer...*

## Activity 2

Allow about 20 minutes

### Part 1

This activity seeks to spark some more detailed memories from your childhood and teenage years. Make notes in response to the prompts given below. The activity may make you want to amend or add to your lifeline, as you consider your experiences in more depth.

- 1 **Family influences:** if applicable, say something about any occupational influences on you. For instance, was one of your parents a mechanic or another a teacher?
- 2 **Early childhood:** what do you remember about your early childhood? For example, the area and house you lived in, family lifestyle, activities you participated in, experiences you had, what your parents expected of you, your role in the family.
- 3 **Schooling:** list the schools you went to, with dates, the subjects you were good at and enjoyed, how you got on with other children, how your teachers saw you, how you saw your teachers, and any school sports or activities you took part in.
- 4 **Teenage years:** what activities were you good at or did you enjoy? How did your friends see you? What were you like as a teenager? What did you want to be?
- 5 **Any further education or training:** what did you do? How did you choose it? How did you get on?

*Provide your answer...*

### Part 2

Now spend some time considering what your notes say about you – what you're like, and why, and how you arrived at where you are today. You may see themes appearing, such as strong aspects of your personality or particular talents and interests. Maybe you had various abilities but developed one rather than another – sporting ability rather than artistic talent, perhaps. Looking back, could you have made different choices? Make a note of any insights you've gained.

*Provide your answer...*

You've now completed Section 1 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 2 What roles do I play in life?



Another way of identifying your capabilities is to consider the roles that you've played in your life. Imagine yourself as an actor in your own life, like a character in a movie. You probably play a lot of different roles. You might have roles as a parent, employee, friend or student, and each role you play demands different things of you.

For example, if you have previously been a student, you would have needed the skills of learning, time management and communicating in writing. Perhaps you enjoy DIY? If so, you have developed not only practical skills but also learned how to plan and organise as well. If you are a parent, you are likely to have developed a whole range of skills including budgeting, time management, organising, cooking, negotiating, dealing with admin, etc. If you chair meetings of a club, you will have developed your ability to deal with a variety of people, provide leadership and communicate effectively.

### Case study: Tom's roles in life

Look at Tom's list below. It shows some of the roles he plays and what these roles demand of him.

- 1 **Student representative:** attending meetings to give the views of my class to teachers and lecturers, communicating with people on the same course as me.
- 2 **Volunteer at Samaritans' helpline:** listening to people talk about their worries, planning my shifts to fit with other team members and my family.
- 3 **Head gardener:** teaching summer students the basics, operating machinery, planning seasonal jobs so they are shared out across the team.
- 4 **Son:** driving my elderly mother to see her friends, using the internet to do online shopping with her.
- 5 **Treasurer of pub darts team:** taking and banking membership fees, paying expenses, and giving reports.

Obviously, there are many more capabilities that could have been included here, but hopefully these will spark ideas about your own roles in life in this next activity.

### Activity 3

Allow about 30 minutes

#### Part 1

This activity will help you to identify the roles you have played in your life so far and provide you with an idea of the capabilities you have developed. First, note down the roles you have played most frequently and one or two key activities associated with them.

*Provide your answer...*

#### Comment

Your list might have a combination of roles – some to do with family or friends, others related to work you have done, or to hobbies or interests. Equally, your list might also include roles that you feel have been ‘given’ to you by others that you would prefer not to play. For example, are you expected to be the ‘organiser’ in your group of friends, even if you do not always feel like doing that? Note, though, that if you are nominated for a role by others, it may be because they view you as being good at it.

#### Part 2

Now that you’ve identified your different roles and thought about the types of activity that you need to perform, consider which roles you find most satisfying and the ones you feel that you perform well. Use the following questions to trigger your thoughts and record any answers.

- Are you surprised by the range of things you do and take for granted?
- Were you able to identify the kinds of activities you carry out in each of these roles?
- Did they begin to suggest any knowledge, skills and characteristics that might be associated with performing different kinds of role?
- Were you surprised at which roles you enjoyed and those you did not, and which you felt you performed well in, or not?

### 3 What learning experiences have I had?

- Which roles might you want to continue and which, if any, might you want to stop playing?

*Provide your answer...*

You've now completed Section 2 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 3 What learning experiences have I had?

Most people would agree that work experience is very important when considering future career directions, but it's easy to take yourself for granted and not recognise the wide range of capabilities that you have developed throughout your life. For example, what hobbies do you have or have you had in the past? Not everyone can turn their hobby into a career – although a growing number of people are doing just that – but the activities you do in your spare time could help you to demonstrate capabilities that can be useful in the workplace.

Skills in verbal and written communication, numeracy, information technology, time management and fluency in a foreign language are all examples of skills (and you can probably think of many more) that can be developed through leisure activities or formal and informal study and then used in the workplace. These are usually called 'transferable skills' and are often acquired through experience. You don't necessarily need to have a formal qualification, just some evidence to demonstrate that you have them.

You will have learned a huge amount through your work (paid or unpaid), leisure and study experiences by noticing how you feel about different tasks, or how well you perform particular activities compared to other people. You may also have learned from others, either through formal appraisal and assessment or from informal comments and reactions.

The next activity helps you to focus on your work and non-work experience, and will be useful when writing a CV and preparing for interviews.

### Activity 4

Allow about 45 minutes

#### Part 1

- 1 List the jobs you've had, with dates. If you have limited or no experience of paid employment, make a similar list of unpaid or voluntary experience for example, helping readers at school, delivering 'Meals on Wheels', fund-raising for a charity or involvement in a conservation project. You can also use formal or informal study experiences and hobbies in this activity.

## 4 What are my main achievements?

- 2 For each job, note how it came about. Did you volunteer or were you directed into it? If you had some choice, what factors seemed important in deciding to take it up?
- 3 For each job, note the range of tasks or what you had to do.
- 4 Did you have to deal with any difficulties?
- 5 Which tasks or activities did you find most and least appealing, enjoyable, or rewarding? Why?
- 6 What did you (and others) view as your strengths and weaknesses?
- 7 What were your particular achievements and successes?
- 8 What did you view as failures, or things that you could have done better?
- 9 How did you get on with the other people?
- 10 What was your style of working?
- 11 Were you known for particular things?
- 12 What were you most proud of?

Provide your answer...

## Part 2

Look back at what you've written. Can you see particular pattern of strengths or weaknesses? Do you enjoy some things more than others? Do others turn to you for help with particular things? Can you identify particular capabilities? Do you recognise any specific skills, knowledge, personal characteristics and attitudes? Note down anything that you think is particularly important.

Provide your answer...

You've now completed Section 3 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 4 What are my main achievements?

In Activity 4 you were asked to note down your particular achievements – things that you view as personal successes. These could be work-related, to do with relationships or things you do in your spare time. For example, passing all your exams first time may say that you're an excellent student; whereas passing your driving test on the fifth attempt may say a lot about your staying power and determination. Remember, this is about what you view as being a success, because you are best placed to understand your personal circumstances and the obstacles that you have had to overcome to reach a certain goal.

## Activity 5

Allow about 20 minutes

Looking back at the lifeline you created in Activity 1, the roles you've played and the experiences you've had, go to the template for this activity in the resource pack and note down the achievements you're most proud of. Then think about the knowledge and abilities you applied in order to achieve what you did. Perhaps you had to learn a new technique, or used or developed a skill you already had?

Table 1 is an example of a filled-in table.

**Table 1 An example of your achievements and what they say about you**

What I achieved	Skills, knowledge, personal characteristics and attitudes used/required
Passed my driving test	Had to demonstrate that my driving skills met the required standard. Had to be confident in my ability to remain calm under pressure. Had to pass a test of my knowledge of the Highway Code.
Became a qualified youth football coach	Had to learn coaching skills (theory and practical). Have to be able to communicate with young people and their parents effectively. Gained a first aid qualification. Have to promote a positive attitude among team members and lead by example.
Parenthood	Had to learn about what babies and toddlers need to keep them happy and healthy. Developed knowledge about good nutrition for youngsters and how to handle common childhood illnesses. Needed to become more organised when planning outings, etc.
Raised £6000 for cancer charity by organising a charity auction	Had to arrange a venue. Promoted event and sold tickets. Had to use my network of family and friends to obtain items for the auction. Had to provide catering and entertainment for the evening. Had to manage the budget so that the event produced the target donation required. Used basic IT skills (Word, Excel and the internet) to organise the various aspects of the event. Had to be very motivated and determined to make a success of the event and demonstrate good interpersonal skills to persuade people to become involved in helping me out.
Got a place at college	Made redundant from dead-end job and decided I needed to change my career direction. Got some careers information, advice and guidance from the job centre, my local library, and careers service. Decided I wanted to be involved in the sports and leisure industry, and to make a career of it. Learned that I would need some qualifications to get in at the right level, so researched relevant courses locally and applied. Had to attend an interview and persuade the interviewer that I was really committed to the course (my youth football coaching experience helped me here). Needed to show confidence in my ability to do the course and demonstrate good communications skills during the application and interview process.

Which of the skills or qualities you've listed could be used in a work situation? The chances are that you've highlighted some 'transferable skills' (such as administrative/organisational and communication skills) and qualities that would be useful in many kinds of work.

## How do I provide evidence of my achievements?

Now that you have identified your capabilities it would be useful to think about what evidence you can give in support of these. On an application form you are often asked to give an example of a time when you effectively used a particular skill or to demonstrate knowledge in a particular area. If you claim to have certain capabilities, you are expected to provide supporting evidence.

When thinking about evidence it can help to think of using a variety of sources, including your studies, work (paid or unpaid) and hobbies. In order to structure what you write in an application form, you could use the STAR method (**S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ctions, **R**esult).

### Activity 6

Allow about 20 minutes

Here are two examples, using a couple of the achievements identified in Table 1, showing how you could use the STAR method if you were asked about your administrative/organisational and communication skills when applying for a job:

- **Administrative/organisational:** While involved in raising money for a cancer charity (**situation**), I organised a successful charity auction (**task**): hiring the venue, creating a schedule for the event, securing donations for the auction from friends, family and local businesses, and managing the budget and ticket sales (**actions**). The event raised more than £6000 against a target of £5000 (**result**).
- **Communication:** In my role as youth football coach (**situation**), I have to communicate effectively with different groups of people; players, parents and officials (**task**). It is essential that I am clear with the players about what is expected of them in terms of tactics and behaviour before, during and after the game. I also have to deal sensitively with arguments that sometimes break out among parents in the heat of the moment and calm down situations. I communicate with officials in a professional way and make sure that they are treated with respect (**actions**). My effective communications skills mean that games are played in the right spirit and the fact that my team won the fair play trophy last season provides evidence of that (**result**).

Now it's your turn. Look back at your list of achievements and associated capabilities. Think about how you could present your achievements in an application form or at an interview using the STAR method if you were asked to present evidence of a transferable skills such as effective communication. Write a paragraph using the examples given above as a model.

Remember that recognising and providing evidence of the capabilities you have to offer is key in being able to market yourself to an employer.

*Provide your answer...*

You've now completed Section 4 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 5 What are my helping and hindering factors?

As a result of all the work that you have done so far in Block 1, you should now have a good idea about your capabilities, the roles you play and your likes and dislikes. If not, take a step back and review the evidence that you have collected so far. Think again about what you know, what you can do and what you enjoy doing or are good at.

The next step is to put the information that you have gathered so far together with what is happening in your life now. You can make a start on this by making a list of positive and negative factors that may either help or hinder your plans. The next activity will give you further advice and guidance on how to do this.

### Activity 7

Allow about 15 minutes

Make a list of the good and bad points about your home and work situations. We're not asking you to make judgements here, just to note as many points as you can under the headings of 'Positive' and 'Negative' for both home and work.

It's up to you to decide which points to include, and whether they are positive or negative. For example, I used to work with someone who lived 30 miles away from work, while I lived within walking distance. He refused to live nearer because he hated the idea of work being on the doorstep, while I hated the idea of spending so much of my day sitting in traffic. Neither of us could understand the other's decision, so something that would be a positive for me was a negative for him and vice versa.

If you already have some idea of what you want to do in the future, this can help you to decide whether or not the factors you identify are positive or negative in relation to your plans. However, even if you don't have a clear idea of what you want to do, just thinking about and listing factors that seem important to you in your work or home life can help you to understand what may help or hinder as you plan for the future.

#### Positive

*Provide your answer...*

#### Negative

*Provide your answer...*

You've now completed Section 5 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

## 6 What are my strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?

So far in Block 1 you have gathered together information about yourself and your capabilities. You have been encouraged to think about your strengths and weaknesses, and considered the helpful and hindering factors in your domestic and work situation that may provide you with opportunities or pose threats to your future plans. You can summarise and analyse this information using a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2 An example of a SWOT analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses
Good interpersonal skills	Try to do too much at once
Motivated	Find uncertainty quite difficult to manage
Good teamworker	Can be too single-minded
Organised – meet targets	
Leadership skills	
Opportunities	Threats
Good position at work	Balancing work and home life
Commitment to further study	Uncertain commercial market, especially in IT
Support from work for further training	What are the priorities?
Supportive family	

The basic SWOT analysis framework helps you to organise and prioritise factors that are related to the subject being analysed, in this case your personal and career development. As you will see by doing the next activity, you can plan to build on your strengths and deal with your weaknesses, which will put you in a better position to take advantage of any opportunities and counter any threats.

### Activity 8

Allow about 30 minutes

#### Part 1

Look at the example in Table 2 and then fill in the template for this activity in the resource pack to organise your thoughts and explore what you do well, the areas you

need to work on, the possibilities that are open to you and the things that might cause difficulties.

- **Strengths:** what do you do well? What do other people see as your strengths?
- **Weaknesses:** what areas need development? What should you avoid?
- **Opportunities:** what possibilities are open to you? What resources do you have? Who can help you?
- **Threats:** what might cause you difficulties? What responsibilities do you have? What might restrict you?

This technique can help you to focus on the main issues you need to consider and to aim for a specific goal that is achievable. Once you've used it to identify what is feasible, you can start to prioritise and decide what you want to achieve first.

You might discover that your strengths are grouped in some areas rather than others. It's useful to know this, as it enables you to recognise the talents you have and also to see whether there are gaps you want to work on. It's also useful as evidence when you're completing a CV or attending an interview.

## Part 2

As you may be discovering, it's helpful to reflect on your past as you approach a decision that will significantly affect your life. Having worked your way through Block 1 of *Planning a better future*, you may have begun to gain more insights about yourself. Your discoveries might be to do with your skills and abilities or your attitudes, ambitions, needs and values. You may have learned more about your personality, temperament or way of dealing with the world.

Take a few minutes to think about what have you learned and note down your thoughts. It may also be helpful to talk about your findings with someone you trust to give an honest opinion to see if they agree with your own self-image.

Provide your answer...

You've now completed Section 6 – well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

# What you have learned in this block

- In this block you have sought to recognise your current capabilities by looking at your work and non-work experiences, identifying helpful and hindering factors and analysing your strengths and weaknesses in relation to the opportunities and threats that you see around you.

## Block 1 quiz

Well done, you have now reached the end of Block 1 of *Planning a better future*, and it is time to attempt the assessment questions. This is designed to be a fun activity to help consolidate your learning.

There are only five questions, and if you get at least four correct answers you will be able to download your badge for the ‘How did I get here?’ block (plus you get more than one try!).

- I would like to try the Block 1 quiz to get my badge.

If you are studying this course using one of the alternative formats, please note that you will need to go online to take this quiz.

## I've finished this block. What next?

You can now choose to move on to Block 2, Where do I want to go?, or to [one of the other blocks](#) so you can continue collecting your badges.

If you feel that you've now got what you need from the course and don't wish to attempt the quiz or continue collecting your badges, please visit the Taking my learning further section. There you can reflect on what you have learned and find suggestions of further learning opportunities.

We would love to know what you thought of the course and how you plan to use what you have learned. Your feedback is anonymous and will help us to improve our offer.

- Take our [Open University end-of-course survey](#).

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