



Where do I want to go?

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Introduction



The SWOT analysis that you completed at the end of Block 1 should have helped you to take stock of your current position. However, it is important for you to understand that the SWOT analysis is a 'living document'. You should revisit it regularly to see what, if anything, has changed.

The next step is to focus more on the future, recognise what's important to you and what you want from life as a whole. In this block you'll look at your values, identify the kind of work that might interest you and learn how to explore your options, refine your ideas and make choices. This doesn't mean that you can achieve everything you wish for, as restrictions of one kind or another will limit everyone's range of choice. At this stage, however, it is important not to focus too much on restrictions that may narrow the scope of your ambitions. You'll get some advice on making decisions and setting realistic goals in Block 3.

Here's a video to introduce this block:

Video content is not available in this format.

Activity 1

Allow about 15 minutes

There are a couple of reasons why you may want to take another look at your SWOT results. It may be some time since you completed the SWOT analysis at the end of Block 1, and lots of things may have changed. For example, you may have addressed some of your weaknesses, or some of the threats might have disappeared. If anything has changed, amend your SWOT results to reflect the current position.

However, even if you have recently completed your SWOT analysis and it's still fresh in your mind, just take a few minutes to review it before you start Block 2. Ask yourself questions such as:

- Is there anything in the results that I'd like to change?
- What are my priorities in terms of addressing weaknesses and dealing with threats?
- What are my priorities in terms of building on my strengths and seizing opportunities?

Once you are happy with the results of your SWOT and have noted down any priorities, you have a sound basis on which to move forward.

Learning Outcomes

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

- understand the impact of change for you and what options are open to you.

1 What do I really want from work?

Activity 2 is designed to get you thinking about your values as a basis for helping you to decide what kind of work you would like to do. (You should complete this activity even if you have already got an idea of the area you'd like to work, as it may help you to confirm or discard it.)

Thinking about your values means deciding what is important to you in life. For example, it might be that you have a particular religious faith, which provides you with certain spiritual values and guidance on how to live your life. You might value education as being particularly important, or spending time with your family as being something to strive for. Some people value being part of a team that involves lots of collaborative working, while others focus more on competition and individual achievement.

The problem is that most people, most of the time, don't really think through what is important to them and then set their course accordingly. All too often people just drift along and end up in situations that conflict with their basic values. That's why it is important to take a step back from time to time and focus on what your values are and whether or not you are living your life according to them. If you aren't, this can lead to dissatisfaction and unhappiness with life and work. To some extent this may be because you simply haven't spent enough time consciously identifying what's really important to you. On the other hand, sometimes people know that they aren't living according to their values, but end up feeling trapped by circumstances and can't see a way out.

Activity 2

Allow about 20 minutes

Take the [work values test](#) to help you to decide what you really want from work. Don't forget to save or email the permanent link to your results, that you'll find at the bottom of the results page.

Comment

What did you think of the results? Did anything come as a surprise or were they much as you expected? Does this exercise make it any clearer to you what's most important to you in terms of work? For example, does it suggest the kind of work you like to do or the type of organisation you feel most comfortable working for?

Clearly, in some kinds of work, values such as caring (nursing), being creative (graphic design), taking risks (trading), etc., are of major importance. In the same way, a manufacturing company, a charity, a newspaper office, a local authority, a financial institution and so on will each have a different 'feel' as a place to work. Try to think through which would suit you best and how different types of work would fit in with the rest of your life. What's the best 'fit' for you, given your values and circumstances?

Remember, though, that it's your own values that are important here, so feel free to add to or ignore any of the statements and to change the order of importance.

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 kind of work would I like to do?



Considering your interests, things that you find appealing or enjoyable, is a good way of thinking about the type of work that you'd like to do. The next activity will help you to do this.

Activity 3

Allow about 30 minutes

Take the [career test](#) to get an idea of the kind of work that might suit you. Don't forget to save or email the permanent link to your results, which you'll find at the bottom of the results page.

Comment

What did you think of the results? Did you agree with your personality type? Were you surprised at some of the occupations that were suggested – or about others that weren't? You will probably have a bit of experience or knowledge of some of the occupations listed, but try to imagine whether or not you'd like doing the others that you are not so familiar with. It's not a question of your ability or qualifications at this stage – only your own preferences – so assume that you could do the job if you really wanted to. Make a note of any occupations that you found particularly appealing.

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 How satisfied am I with my current circumstances?

Activity 4 focuses on your current circumstances and asks you to gauge how satisfied you are with your work in a number of areas. If you aren't currently in paid employment, think about your life as a whole.

Activity 4

Allow about 20 minutes

Part 1

Go to the template for this activity in the resource pack and look through the list of factors, circling or highlighting the level that applies to your present circumstances.

Part 2

Now write a paragraph based on the selections that you made above, excluding all the items that you thought were 'About right' or 'Adequate'. Of the remaining items, can you say which are the most important to you and why?

Provide your answer...

Comment

Hopefully, Activities 2–4 have:

- suggested what you value most in your life and work
- helped you to identify areas of work that match your interests
- clarified sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with your current situation.

Your answers may begin to suggest either the kind of work you'd like to do or the kind of organisation you'd like to work for, as well as indicating the amount of work you would ideally want to do. You'll get a better idea of where you stand on this last point in the next activity.

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 How important is work in my life as a whole?



In Activity 4 the final area you considered was 'work-life balance'. In this activity you'll look at this in more depth because, before considering what you want to do, you need to be clear about how important work is to you. This is something that varies from person to person. You might be highly ambitious (even a 'workaholic'), or you might avoid positions that regularly eat into your leisure time. You may have found yourself in a job that takes over and leaves little time for family life, or you may prefer something that can give you a better balance between work and home life.

Activity 5 can help you to think about this. If you don't have much experience of paid work, think about your approach to other activities or projects you are involved with.

Activity 5

Allow about 15 minutes

Go to the template for this activity in the resource pack and rate each statement. Try to avoid choosing rating 3 'Neither true nor untrue', if possible. Then add up your scores in both the odd-numbered and even-numbered questions. Take the 'even' score away from the 'odd' score, even if it produces a minus number.

What did you score?

Comment

If you have a plus (+) score, the higher your score, the stronger your ambition. If you scored +20, for example, you would always put work first and aim high in your achievements. You might even be seen as a 'workaholic'.

If you have a minus (–) score, you don't see work as the most important aspect of your life. At the lower end of the scale (for example, if you scored –20), you would put your social life before work, have little concern about progressing your career and might be seen as 'laid-back'.

If you have a more central score, you keep a balance between work and leisure. You have some concern about doing well and making progress, but you don't let work rule your life.

Has completing this activity altered the rating you gave to your 'work–life balance' in Activity 4? Is it about right for you, or would you like to change this aspect of your life?

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 Review

Looking back over your SWOT results and the notes you've made on the activities completed in this block, you should now have a much clearer picture about your:

- capabilities
- values
- interests
- work preferences
- current circumstances.

Summarise what you have learned using the prompts below.

Activity 6

Allow about 30 minutes

What am I good at?

Write down the capabilities that you'd most like to use.

Provide your answer...

What are my main values?

Write down the values you'd like to fulfil.

Provide your answer...

What would I like to do?

Write down the occupations or job areas you'd like to work in.

Provide your answer...

How would I like to work with people? What kind of environment?

Write down the kind of contact you'd like to have with people, and the kind of environment you'd like.

Provide your answer...

What other aspects are important to me?

Write down any other factors that are important to you, such as location, travel, organisational structure, etc.

Provide your answer...

What changes would I like to make?

Write down some changes you would like to make in your life and work.

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 options are available to me?



Whatever your personal starting point, the extent to which you can reach your goals depends, in part, on being able to identify and take advantage of the opportunities open to you.

You will now focus on exploring new opportunities and/or looking to take advantage of ones that already exist. Whether you are interested in paid or voluntary work (or both) you need to be able to map out the options available and evaluate which might suit you best.

6.1 Exploring opportunities

How clear do you need to be about the kind of work you want before you start exploring opportunities? One way of thinking about this is to use a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is 'I have no idea what I want to do' and 10 is 'I know exactly what I want to do'. You will have the opportunity to try out this approach, but sometimes thinking about another person's situation can be a good way to start thinking about your own. The case study below offers a brief example, which might spark your own thoughts.

Case study: Christopher

Christopher is 35 and has been unemployed for 12 months; his last job was as a pizza delivery driver for a small local company that closed down. He has since lost his driving licence due to a succession of speeding fines.

Christopher gave himself a '3' on the 'clear about work' scale. His notes explained his thinking as follows:

I am saying '3' because really I would like to go back to driving, but I do not think I can in the short term. I might have wanted to do taxi work. I know what I do not want to do – work in construction or in a shop – and that is all that seems to be on offer in my local job centre. I have thought about working as a car mechanic, because I am pretty handy at that kind of thing, but I do not know if you have to have qualifications. Perhaps I need to ask around and find out about what I need to be a mechanic. I am not an exams kind of person so that might rule me out, if you need to do that.

Activity 7

Allow about 5 minutes

What do you notice about Christopher's case? Are Christopher's thoughts clear? Note down a few points.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Perhaps the first thing you noticed is that Christopher's career was disrupted when the company he worked for closed down. That's something he had no control over. However, you might think Christopher did have control over getting the speeding fines, which led to the loss of his driving licence. Although you might feel differently if you discovered that most of those fines were incurred doing the delivery job where he was under pressure to make deliveries on time.

You might also notice that Christopher considers, but dismisses, other types of driving work – at least for now. Instead, he identifies something different, but related. He thinks he might be interested in, and suited to, working as a mechanic. However, he has gaps in his knowledge and is able to identify a key question he needs to try to answer before he can assess if it is a viable opportunity for him.

Now think in a similar way about your own situation.

Activity 8

Allow about 15 minutes

This activity helps you to decide how clear you are about what you want to do, using a scale of 1 to 10, and to sort out what questions you might need to ask. On the scale, 1 represents feeling very confused about what work you want to find and 10 represents absolute certainty. Try to choose the number that best represents how you feel at the moment.

Now you have made this judgement, answer these points below to help you see why you might have rated your level of clarity in the way you did:

- 1 Why did you choose the number you did?
- 2 What do you now know about the kind of work you want to do?
- 3 What would you like to find out about work opportunities?

Provide your answer...

Comment

Hopefully, you found that you had some ideas about the kind of work you would like to do based on your work on the course so far. If you found yourself saying that you have no idea at all, be cautious. Is it really that you do not know? Or are you ruling yourself out of some things that might appeal to you?

Whether you are absolutely clear about what you want to do, or just have a vague idea with lots of doubts, you need to do some testing of what opportunities are available and what they might demand of you before you can start to pursue the career of your choice.

Remember, at this stage, you are not committing yourself to anything – you are just exploring the options, and can afford a bit of uncertainty. You can also afford to change your mind if your research shows that your initial ideas are not the best ones to pursue. Now that you've got some ideas to work on, your next task is to refine these further.

6.2 Finding out how to refine your ideas

However clear you feel about your preferred work options, it is useful to bear in mind how well they match you as a person, your current circumstances and your life plans. In this section, you are invited to find out more about one type of work and what it would demand of you.

This will work best if you can identify a particular type of work or specific career path as one that interests you. For instance, you might have identified a career in the retail sector as something you feel would suit you. Alternatively, you might be interested in voluntary work and feel that working at a food bank, or another charity that helps people, would be rewarding. Whatever your thoughts, you need to do a bit of research on what the opportunities for this type of work are in practice.

To do this you need to know where to look, and help may not always come from the most obvious place. Table 1 lists the possible people or organisations that you could use, and what information you could find out from them.

Table 1 Finding out information

Source	Description of information
Business columns of newspapers	May include features forecasting which employment sectors will be recruiting or are in decline.
Your local contacts	May hear of local jobs and, if they know you are looking, mention it to you.
National Careers Service website	A government website that includes information about training and apprenticeship opportunities.
Jobcentre Plus	As well as paid job vacancies, they have information on volunteer work and your rights in relation to seeking work.
Friends and family	They may have direct knowledge of the type of work you want to do, know if their organisations are recruiting or making people redundant in some areas, or may have good contacts that they can introduce you to.

Jobs pages of local newspapers	Give a good idea of what employers are looking for in certain types of work, and a sense of how frequently those jobs are advertised.
Professional institute magazines	Advertise jobs specific to their profession and this can give you a good idea of specialisms within the field.
Professional institute websites	Explain the knowledge and skills requirements for the type of work and the training available.
Organisation's own websites	Many have a 'careers' or 'working with us' section that tells you what kind of work environment they offer and the types of job for which they recruit.
Office of National Statistics	Provides information on jobs in the public and private sectors, and gives an analysis of the UK workforce jobs by sector. It also looks at industry changes.
Social media networks	A new and developing source of information about jobs and organisations.
Radio programmes	Local programmes might report on new businesses starting up in the area.
Community notice boards	They will occasionally carry job advertisements for local jobs, such as acting as clerk to the council.
Local Chamber of Commerce	Meeting people through this network may mean that you hear of jobs that are not advertised. This is true of many professional networks.

Activity 9

Allow about 10 minutes

In this activity you will need to select three of these potential sources of information that you can use now. This will vary depending on where you are located, but may mean that you are limited currently to searching on the internet. You can explore other useful sources at another time.

Spend a few moments thinking about which three sources you want to consult and why. Then note down your thoughts in the box below. For instance, you might be interested in a retail career and decide to look at supermarket or department store websites. You might also want to check if there is a specialist magazine for the retail sector and visit your local library to look at a few copies.

Provide your answer...

Comment

As you completed this activity, you may have found that your reason for choosing certain sources was simple curiosity because they directly relate to the type of work you are interested in, or they are easy or practical, or enjoyable for you in some way. Before going to your sources for information it is vital to start out knowing what you want to find out. You'll be helped with how to organise your thoughts on this next.

6.3 Questions to ask



If you don't know what you want to know, you will have no way of starting your research into different job opportunities – you just won't have a clue where to begin! So the next activity is designed to help you identify a few questions that you want answered. At this stage, these sorts of question might be useful:

- What is the availability of a particular kind of work?
- What is the nature of a particular kind of work?
- Is the work associated with a specific type of organisation?
- What are the practicalities, such as pay, working patterns or location?

Which of these questions are most important to you right now? Your answer might depend on how clear you are about the type of work you want, your motivations for pursuing the work and the time frames you have in mind. For example, if you are already in work but short of money, you might want to look for additional work that fits around your existing job. In this case you would be more concerned with the availability of work and with the practicalities, such as weekend or evening working options. If, however, you are already on a career path but considering a different employment sector, you might have questions about organisation types and availability in your area.

To help you decide what questions to ask, in the next activity you're going to look again at Christopher's situation.

Activity 10

Allow about 15 minutes

Christopher has decided that he wants to pursue the idea of becoming a car mechanic. Consider what questions you think he needs to ask, which are related to:

- availability of the work

- nature of the work
- types of organisation
- practicalities of the work.

Comment

This is not a full set of the questions that could be asked, but it illustrates how using the different question categories can help you to identify useful questions to explore.

- How many garages are there in my town? (Availability)
- How many advertisements for mechanics are there at the moment/have there been over the past six months? (Availability)
- What qualifications do you need to be a mechanic? (Practicalities)
- What does a car mechanic spend most time doing? (Nature of the work)
- Does a car mechanic spend all their time fixing cars or are there other tasks they have to do? (Nature of the work)
- Is there a difference between working for a chain of garages (such as Kwik Fit) and an independent garage? (Organisation type)
- How much could I expect to earn as a mechanic? (Practicalities)
- How long would it take me to train as a mechanic? (Practicalities)

Use these ideas for questions when you think about your own situation in the next activity.

Activity 11

Allow about 25 minutes

Remind yourself of the three sources of information you chose in Activity 9, and identify three questions you think it might be helpful for you to answer. Use the types of question listed above to prompt your thinking. For example, you might have listed 'National Office of Statistics' as one of the sources you will consider. If so, your questions could be as follows:

- What is the trend for software developers in the UK – are the numbers of employed workers going up or down?
- In which industry sectors do most software developers tend to be employed?
- How up to date are the figures on the current website? Do I need to check elsewhere too?

You will see that the questions here are largely about availability. However, the type of question you ask will be related to the source that you are consulting – consider this carefully when constructing your own questions.

Now go to the template for this activity in the resource pack and note down the information sources you chose and the questions you think will guide your research. The table below provides an example of how to organise your thoughts.

Table 2 An example of some questions

Information source	My three questions

Food bank website	<p>Are there any food banks close to my home?</p> <p>Is it possible to get to them by bus?</p> <p>What sort of work do they ask volunteers to do?</p>
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Comment

You are refining your ideas as you work through this process. At this point you should feel pleased with your progress. You already have:

- an idea of the work you want look into
- three information sources you are going to consult
- some questions to guide you as you go to the information sources.

Now you have a list of questions, you can start to research what you want to know.

6.4 Finding your answers

The next step is to find the answers to your questions. In other words, do your research. This is the kind of activity that, before you know it, you've spent a few hours on. That's fine if you have the time to spare; if not, keep an eye on the clock and try to spend no more than half an hour on your research. If you don't manage to get answers to all your questions now, come back to the activity at another time to finish it off. You will have plenty of time in Block 3 to look over what you have done, and to decide whether there is anything more you could do that would strengthen your action plan.

Activity 12

Allow about 30 minutes

This activity is designed to give you practical experience in finding the information you need, and in evaluating how well your work aspirations match what is available.

First, look for answers to the questions you identified in Activity 11. Spend the same amount of time on the three information sources you identified as useful. Note down any information you find, as well as the source of the information (in case you want to find it again).

When you've done this, use the template for this activity in the resource pack to organise the information under the following categories:

- availability of the work
- nature of the work
- types of organisation
- practicalities of the work.

Comment

If any of the four categories are empty, this might be an indication of the information you still need to seek so make a note of these too. You can return to the questions later.

Now you've had a chance to do some research into one type of work you are interested in, bear these processes in mind for any other work opportunities you have

identified, to consider in the future. It's time to think more about the information that you uncovered.

6.5 Broader options

It is common, when thinking about a job, to associate it with a full-time commitment to one organisation over a sustained period of time. Increasingly this is not the only way of working, and one way of thinking flexibly about the kind of work you want to do is to consider different work patterns. Some of these might combine well with your existing commitments. Others might be a stepping stone towards the work you want.

The list below contains different types of work patterns. As you look through it, ask yourself if any of these options might work for you. Some of the terms used are legal or technical ones, which are important to understand, so these are described for you.

- 1 **Part-time work** involves working for fewer hours a week than the equivalent full-time job. Such jobs normally have a set working pattern, such as every morning, or three specified days of the week. Part-time work has many advantages but can be particularly useful in enabling you to continue to build skills and experience while fulfilling other commitments.
- 2 **Temporary and contract work** is most often a job that has an end date, unlike a permanent job with an open-ended contract. It can give you experience and valuable contacts in a variety of environments, as well as being a valuable opportunity to 'taste' a range of jobs and help you to be clearer on what work best suits you. Another benefit of this is that you get a foot in the door of an organisation that interests you. It might then be possible to apply for permanent roles.
- 3 **Zero hours contract work** is a contract between an employer and a worker where the employer does not guarantee minimum working hours and the employee does not have to accept any work offered. The employee is still entitled to statutory employment rights. This type of contract obviously provides flexibility for both parties, which can sometimes suit an employee – depending on their circumstances.
- 4 **Home-based employee** is someone employed by an organisation but works from home for all or part of their working week.
- 5 **Self-employment** means working as a freelancer, for yourself, or running your own business, rather than working for an employer. Self-employment presents both opportunities and risks. It is an increasingly common form of work, and one that may or may not suit you.
- 6 **Flexible working** is something you can apply for if you are already in employment and have worked for your employer continuously for the last 26 weeks (this is correct at the time of writing, but check the current legislation that applies where you work). It can take different forms, but can mean:
 - flexitime – choosing when to start and end work within agreed limits
 - annualised hours – working a certain number of hours over a year but having some flexibility about when you work.
- 7 **Portfolio working** usually refers to work that involves earning your income from a variety of sources. For example, you might work on freelance contracts or as a part-time employee for several organisations and, perhaps, also run a business.

- 8 **Working in another country** can be a very attractive option if you are at a stage in your life when you feel free to live and work away from your home country. Perhaps you have the travel bug and would like to see as many different countries as you can? It could be that you think that work experience abroad will help you to obtain your chosen job when you return, or that improving your language skills might be important to your long-term plans.

Having learned about the potential work options, you need now to think about which ones might work for you, and the next section focuses on this.

6.6 Making choices and keeping going

At this point you may, understandably, be feeling overwhelmed by all the potential work options. The work and thinking you are doing on this course can feel challenging at times. You may think that there are just too many options, which may be making you feel unsettled. Although uncomfortable, these feelings are not necessarily a bad thing, as they can be a sign that you are making progress with the changes you want to make.

So, if you find yourself feeling daunted or lacking motivation to continue with exploring the options, some of the following tips might help:

- Prioritise only the options that you think you could make happen within the next three to six months.
- Do a ratings exercise on the options – give them 3 points if they feel really attractive, 2 points if they have some attraction and only 1 point if they do not appeal to you. Then concentrate your thinking only on the one or two top-scoring options.

6.7 Matching you and the work

Your work in Block 2 may have uncovered practical issues that you could face if you want to do a specific kind of work. For example, your preferred work options may not be widely available in your area, or you may have discovered that the type of volunteer work that you want to do is restricted to the organisation's head office, which is too far away for you.

Activity 13

Allow about 20 minutes

Before you let issues like these dominate your thinking, consider your timescales for finding your preferred type of work. Ask yourself these questions and note down the answers:

- How long are you prepared to work to develop your career and get the job you want?
- Do you have a time limit for entry into the job of your choice?
- Have you got time to study for any necessary qualifications?
- Do you have any other options?
- Are there other ways into the job?

Provide your answer...

Comment

You may not feel the need to answer these questions now, and that's fine. Alternatively, if you have concerns, you might want to note down your immediate thoughts. This allows you to 'park' the problems for now and move on. You can always return to these questions and your reflections later.

Earlier you considered your preferences based on your capabilities, values, interests and personal circumstances. It is usually only when you start to look at what is available that you discover that it might not be so easy to find job opportunities that match your preferences. Try not to become despondent. You may be able to retrain or find similar jobs that you can apply for. You may just need to think more flexibly, to take advantage of what is available.

Before moving on to Activity 14, remind yourself of how much you have already achieved. Focus only on the things you have done, not the things you might have left to one side. Whatever you are able to do on this course is great, as it still takes you forward. Remember that you will have your notes to return to at any stage in the future. You can pick up any loose threads when you feel ready and able to do that.

Activity 14

Allow approximately 20 minutes

First, read back through your notes and identify the type of work you want to find. Next, think about whether any of the eight options in Section 6.5 open up ways of working that you had not previously considered. For example, can you combine two forms of part-time work? Could you set up a small business from home, alongside your existing job if necessary? Would it be practical for you to do temporary work, as a way of finding out more about the types of work and employer that appeal to you?

Make some notes in answer to the following questions:

- 1 What work pattern options had you not previously considered?
- 2 Do any of them appeal to you? If so, why?
- 3 Do any of them seem to have the potential to provide a 'bridge' or 'stepping stone' to the work you want?
- 4 What research question(s) does this raise for you? What might you need to find out to test the viability of your new ideas?

Provide your answer...

Comment

As with many of the activities in the course, your answer will be personal to you. Whatever these are, they represent real progress in the career planning process – so well done!

6.8 Networking

You may have noticed that several of the information sources listed in Table 1 involve networks – a group of interconnected people who have something in common; for example, local contacts, friends and family, and social media websites and apps.

There are different types of network, all of which can help you to explore options and achieve your career goals.

Personal networks

Your personal network is likely to be made up of members from different areas of your life:

- your family
- friends
- educational contacts
- hobby or interest groups
- people in a similar situation or with similar perspectives.

As well as helping you to seek work, such networks can provide more general support. Sometimes you may just need encouragement to feel positive about your aspirations and achievements, or you may benefit from hearing the experiences of people in similar situations to you.

Organisational networks

Most organisations will have a number of informal networks of people with similar values, who trust and help each other to get things done. If you rely only on formal structures, you are missing opportunities, so it is useful for you to engage with or develop more informal networks. Three types of organisational networks have been identified:

- The 'advice' network – the key people that others turn to for advice.
- The 'trust' network – in which people have common interests and enough trust to support each other in times of crisis.
- The 'communication' network (often known as the 'grapevine') – where people talk to others about work issues on a regular basis.

You can also think about wider organisational networks, which include customers, suppliers, competitors, partners, government bodies, trade unions or professional associations.

Occupation-specific networks

Professional networks operate outside of organisations. For example, if you have membership of a professional institution, such as the Chartered Institute of Plumbing and Heating Engineering, then you have access to other people in your profession whether or not you work with them.

Not all occupational networks are attached to professional institutes. For example, a slimming club leader might be part of a regional network of leaders who meet for training or product updates.

For the self-employed, there are networks for local businesses who meet for mutual support. People who perform similar voluntary work, sometimes meet formally or informally to share ideas.

Now you've learned about different types of traditional networks, it's time to start thinking about your own networks.

Activity 15

Allow about 20 minutes

In this course you should concentrate on contacts that you think may be helpful with your career development – otherwise your network could become unusable just due to its size. Be careful who you omit though, because it may not be immediately obvious that a contact will be useful. Think about what you know about them and what they do before dismissing them.

Note down lists of people under the following headings:

- personal networks
- your family
- friends
- educational contacts
- hobby or interest groups
- people in a similar situation or with similar perspectives
- organisational networks
- occupation-specific networks.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Whether you have written a long or short list under the different categories – or even no list at all – is not important. This will entirely depend on what point you have reached in your life. What matters is that you have begun to think about mapping your networks.

It is important not to forget about online networks. This will be more or less prominent in your life depending on how you use the internet and how you feel about sharing information online. Whatever your situation, the next section will still give you a flavour of what is out there.

6.9 Social media networking

Social media networking involves online interaction with other people. These might be friends or total strangers, and often the interaction is through specific groups or communities who share similar interests. It can be a helpful way to expand your knowledge and contacts, or exchange mutual support. It is also becoming one of the ways

in which employers recruit people. It is becoming increasingly important to engage with these networks if you are serious about finding work.

Now you'll learn a little more about social media, that can be relevant to your career development.

Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn



At the time of writing this course, the three main platforms which may be of use in shaping your work or life are Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn (pronounced as 'linked in'). You may already be using one or more of these, but for those who aren't familiar with them, here's a brief overview of each:

- **Facebook** allows you to link up with friends, and even friends of those friends. It provides a place to share your news, views and items of interest. For recruitment, Facebook can bring together recruiters and job seekers, and you can use it to gather information on potential employers with Facebook pages.
- **Twitter** is mainly used on mobile phones and enables short messages of 140 characters or fewer to be sent to all the people who 'follow' an account. It may be used by recruiters to get messages out to many potential employees very quickly and so can be a very good way of keeping track of opportunities. Top tip: include your career interests in your Twitter profile. Make it a micro-pitch for work.
- **LinkedIn** is used primarily for 'work' networking. When you set up a profile, the system automatically links you with people you might know, initially using your own education and work experiences. You can also make contact with organisations and individuals who may be able to offer you work, or help you to find it. There are different levels of membership but the most basic (and free) level is more than adequate for most people.

Getting started with social media

Social media can be very useful for widening your existing networks and therefore career opportunities. Even though you may feel wary about using them, it is worth considering giving them a go if you're not already doing so.

Here are some tips to help you:

- Limit the amount of time you use it.
- Choose social media sites just for career development purposes.
- Log in to social media sites and just observe what's going on. It's fine to watch from the wings before making your appearance.

If you do take the plunge, these tips will help you to use the sites wisely:

- Be careful about what information you share and who you share it with.

- Don't accept new friends, followers or contacts without asking appropriate questions to establish who they are.
- Project yourself in a way that does not undermine your credibility at work.
- Avoid responding to negative comments about colleagues past or present, and people who have interviewed you.
- Think about the tone you use in your communications.

Activity 16

Allow about 15 minutes

Note down the networks that you are involved in and think about how each of them could help you to move forward with your career plans.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Hopefully, you now feel better informed about the potential that networks have to help you with your career development; by helping you to explore your options, access information about opportunities and also to apply for jobs.

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 Block 2 you've had the chance to look further into the work that interests you and to consider how various areas and options might align with your values and your current circumstances.
- You may well find that instead of having fewer questions now, you have more. This is to be expected when you start exploring your future options, so see this as a positive step in your career planning process.

In Block 3 you'll learn how to take decisions, set realistic goals and receive some practical advice and guidance on how to apply for jobs and succeed at interviews.

Block 2 quiz

Well done, you have now reached the end of Block 2 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 you will be able to download your badge for the 'Where do I want to go?' block (plus you get more than one try!).

- I would like to try the Block 2 quiz to get my badge.

I've finished this block. What next?

You can now choose to move on to Block 3, How do I get there?, 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](#).

References

123test (n.d. 1) 'Work values test' [Online]. Available at: <https://www.123test.com/work-values-test/> (Accessed 1 March 2016).

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