

What about me? – A personal development course for carers in Wales



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Why might this course be useful to me?

Welcome to ***What about me? A personal development course for carers in Wales.***

When we look in the mirror we see our reflection. In everyday life we sometimes talk about being in a 'reflective mood', and we tend to reflect on things that don't have an obvious or straightforward answer. We might take time to reflect on something to consider it in more detail, in greater depth and in a new way.

Self-reflection is thinking about yourself to gain greater self-awareness and understanding. Conscious or unconscious it involves our thoughts, ideas, experience and knowledge. The process of reflection might be pleasurable or uncomfortable, or a mixture of both.

Reflection is a way of working on what we know already to create new knowledge and understanding. In this way it can help us recognise and appreciate skills and abilities that we have but often overlook. We can reflect at any time in our lives to help us examine our feelings around a whole range of experiences. It can help us review our decision making and motivations and for that reason it is used in learning and workplaces in relation to personal development and career planning.

While reflection can be uncomfortable it can also be liberating and empowering. Developing a better understanding of ourselves and our situation will enable us to move forward.

The diverse experiences of carers have informed the development of this course. Some are in a position where their caring role is changing. For others their role stays the same, but they are finding new ways to cope.

James, a carer who also works with a local carer service in Wales, sums up the skills and qualities he's seen in carers:

Video content is not available in this format.



Carers come from all walks of life and some have been caring from a young age while others may become a carer later in life. Many people bring pre-existing skills to caring, but being a carer can develop and highlight skills and attributes that often aren't recognised. Carers are often extremely organised, reliable and very good at handling pressure. They can quite often identify other people's emotion, just at a glance.

This course is intended to support carers to reflect on what their skills and strengths are, their goals and how they can achieve them.

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Learning Outcomes

By working through ***What about me?*** you'll achieve:

- a clearer understanding of your experiences as a carer and also in your wider roles
- an understanding of the various skills that you have developed as a carer and in your wider roles and how these are transferable to other situations
- an appreciation of personal qualities developed through your caring role
- a chance to think about your goals and aspirations for the future
- an idea of how you might work towards these goals and where you may get help and support
- the ability to use information technology (IT) to carry out reflective activities in writing and communicating
- the ability to use the internet to find information useful to you
- the ability to explore and use new ways of expressing ideas.

We hope that you'll find this course useful in reflecting on experiences that have some importance to you, and that it will help you with future choices or decision making.

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Introduction

What's in the course and how do I use it?



Figure 1

What about me? contains a mixture of personal reflection, ideas about how we learn from reflection and activities for you to try out for yourself.

It features case studies of carers with many different experiences of employment, education and caring. These case studies highlight a range of personal journeys and explore the circumstances and issues encountered as a result of their caring role.

There are five sessions within the course that include a range of activities to help you reflect on the following:

- [Session 1: Defining myself and how I feel about my present situation](#)
- [Session 2: Learning by looking at my life over time](#)
- [Session 3: Identifying my skills, qualities and abilities](#)
- [Session 4: Clarifying my goals and planning for the future](#)
- [Session 5: Identifying my next steps and where I can find information and support](#)

In each of the five sessions you will be invited to relate your own experiences to the ones illustrated and try out the individual tasks. Each section will take you about an hour to complete.

There is also a **Find out more** section at the end of the course, with information links and contact details for further resources and support.

My Reflection Log

You can complete the activities in a couple of ways:

- As you work through ***What about me?*** you can simply click on the downloadable activity sheets that we have provided.

Or

- Use [My Reflection Log](#), a personal resource that records your progress through the course as you undertake the various activities and tasks. You can add further notes and observations to this at any time. When you have completed the course we hope that this Log will be a useful reference source and basis for your planned next steps in life, study or career.

My Reflection Log is designed to be downloaded and saved to your computer or memory stick. You may find it helpful to do this now. It can then be opened and added to as required – but **don't forget to save it** every time you use it. If you prefer, you can print out the Log and use it to write down your thoughts.

Whichever option you choose, you will find it helpful to make notes either in your Log or in a notebook as you work through the course.

Using the course



Figure 2

There is a range of ways in which this course can be used. For example, you can work through these activities on your own or with a mentor, or in a group with a facilitator. If you are working in a face-to-face group, for instance, you might work on one session at a time over a number of weeks. You can also share your comments and ideas with others online, through Facebook for example.

If at any point you feel the course has brought difficult emotions, then you can visit [Carers.org](https://www.carers.org) to find out where your nearest local support service is or to talk to someone online.

A statement about confidentiality

When people reflect together this can make it easier to discuss things and you can get ideas from each other. But members of the group need to have confidence in each other and need to be committed to respecting each other's ideas, beliefs and experiences. They must agree to do this and also not to discuss outside the group anything that members say. No member ever needs to discuss anything that they do not want to talk about. Each one decides what they want to contribute.

If you are working through this course in a group, either online or face to face, take some time now to agree the rules you will follow to respect each other and ensure confidentiality.

Session 1: Defining myself and how I feel about my present situation

Session 1: Defining myself and how I feel about my present situation

What is reflection?



Figure 1.1

Reflection is a process that involves thinking and understanding – an honest exploration and examination of our previous experiences. It is thinking about things you have done and experienced in your life, and working out what you have learned from them so that you can better understand the person you are now, your qualities, what you are capable of and what you want to do. This kind of thinking can be helpful for anyone, at any time of life, whoever you are and whatever situation you are in.

The scope of your reflection can vary. For example, you might want to reflect on what you've learned from a recent work placement, caring responsibilities or study experience, or you might want to just take an overview of your life as a whole.

Reflection can be uncomfortable, depending on previous experiences, but it can also be liberating as we develop a better understanding of ourselves and our situation, and can then move forward.

If at any point you feel the course has brought difficult emotions then you can visit [Carers.org](https://www.carers.org) to find out where your nearest local support service is or to talk to someone online. There are also useful contacts in the [Find out more](#) section of this course.

Case studies

Listen to the following people talking about their experiences of caring, their roles and responsibilities and how they feel about their current situation.

If you want to read a speaker's words as you listen, click on the 'Transcript' link beneath the player.

Alana

Video content is not available in this format.



Alana is 17 years old and cares for her mum and sister. She helps with practical tasks and supports her mum and sister in understanding situations. Alana started caring when her dad left, helping her mum cope and taking care of her sister including attempting to resolve issues on behalf of her sister in school.

Alana goes out once a month with a young adult carer group and receives one-on-one support. She is studying Hairdressing in college, has just passed her Level 1 and will be progressing onto Level 2.

She does find it difficult studying while caring, she mentions her **A2A** card and **EMA** as things that help (see box below for more information).

A2A stands for **Access to Action Card**. Some Local Authorities in Wales issue these to young carers. It helps young people to tell teachers/tutors that they are carers.

EMA stands for **Education Maintenance Allowance**. It is a weekly payment for young people from low household incomes, to help cover the costs of them staying in education.

James

Video content is not available in this format.



James is 45 years old and cares for his mum who has Alzheimer's disease. James' mum has recently gone into residential care as the disease had reached a point where she needed to be in a safer environment.

Caring changed James' life significantly. He had a busy, successful career but as his mum's illness progressed, she moved closer to him and he found he needed more and more time to provide care for her. To be able to do this, James took voluntary redundancy and found part-time employment with a local carers' service.

Having left full-time employment, he was able to begin an MSc in Psychology one day a week. James finds -studying calming and comforting, and an important distraction.

Suzanne



Figure 1.2 (model photo used for illustrative purposes only)

Audio content is not available in this format.

Suzanne helps care for her brother who has schizophrenia. Suzanne feels her caring role isn't just about caring for her brother but also about supporting other members of her family including her dad.

When she first started caring for her brother, Suzanne found it difficult and felt quite alone coming to terms with changes to her brother's personality.

Suzanne feels that as a carer she has developed a greater awareness of her own instincts and feelings, as well as developing independent research skills. She also feels that caring helped her to question and challenge people in positions of expertise or authority. Five years on from her brother's diagnosis, Suzanne has found that in many ways it has had a positive impact and that her family has been brought closer together.

The support from the local carers' service was important to Suzanne, including the provision of counselling and training.

Suzanne is a writer and a community worker who sees herself in the future spending more time writing and having more work published.

Christine



Figure 1.3 (model photo used for illustrative purposes only)

Audio content is not available in this format.

Christine cares for her son who is 19 and has multiple and complex disabilities.

Christine considers herself a naturally caring person; she's a qualified nursery nurse, and enjoys looking after children. She finds it hard to call herself her son's carer because she is his mum.

The lowest point of caring for Christine is the loneliness and isolation, not just for herself but also for her son. Christine is frustrated with the lack of provision for her son locally.

Christine feels she has learned a great deal from caring for her son; about herself and everyone else in the world. The skills Christine identifies include empathy, determination, selflessness and the ability to be assertive particularly in support of her son.

Christine and her son are going through a period of transition as her son will be going to residential college soon. Christine knows this period is going to be difficult but remains positive and hopeful she can work through it with the support of her husband.

Claire

Video content is not available in this format.



Claire is 32 years old and cares for her partner who has Becker Muscular Dystrophy. She was also long-term carer for her mother who died in 2012. Her mother wasn't diagnosed but held many Asperger's/Autistic traits.

Claire feels being a carer has made her more understanding and improved her problem-solving skills and adaptability. Caring for her mother was an emotionally draining experience whereas caring for her partner is more physical.

School was not a good experience for Claire because of bullying and her home environment. After leaving school, she completed childcare courses but then struggled with her own mental health problems.

Claire has been learning sign language. She found it difficult to get to the point where she felt confident enough to go into a learning environment, but is now studying Institute of British Sign Language Level 1 and hopes to go onto Level 2.

Claire intends to do some voluntary work with deaf people so she can practise sign language and learn more. She feels she has learned most from the people she meets who have had struggles.

These examples show many of the challenges that carers experience but also the opportunities that carers have to develop their skills and pursue opportunities that matter to them – such as James' MSc in Psychology and Alana's hairdressing training course. Perhaps some aspects of the above stories reflect your own experiences?

Reflection isn't always easy – and thinking about your experiences of caring can be painful and difficult to think through, for any number of reasons. At the same time, it's not always easy to understand what you have learned from past experiences or decisions taken.

It's therefore sometimes quite helpful if you can work through these reflections with additional support if this is available to you – a friend or mentor or a support worker from a local carers' service, for instance. If at any point you feel the course has brought difficult emotions, then you can visit [Carers.org](https://www.carers.org) to find out where your nearest local support service is or to talk to someone online. There are also useful contacts in the [Find out more](#) section of this course.

Your reflection

Activity 1.1 Thinking about myself

You should spend around 20 minutes on this activity.

To get you started, think about the following four questions:

- How do I see myself now?
- What am I most proud of?
- What makes me happy?
- How would I like to see myself in the future?

Before trying to answer these questions have a look at the following examples, which show how Alana and James answered them.

Example 1: Alana

We know that Alana has completed a Level 1 in Hairdressing and is progressing onto Level 2. Have a look at Alana's table to see what Alana hopes for the future and how she sees herself now.

Table 1.1 Alana's table

How do I see myself now?	What makes me happy?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hairdresser• Quiet but once you get to know me confident• Determined• Talkative• Volunteering• Sometimes call myself stupid	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Following my dream• Friends• Family• Coming to Young Adult Carers group• Playing around with hair• Holidays
What am I most proud of?	How would I like to see myself in the future?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Passing hair level 1• Volunteering• Overcoming fears	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Successful• Hairdresser• Volunteer

Think about the following questions:

- Do you identify with anything Alana is saying?
- Do you have anything in common?
- What is different about your situation and how you feel?

Example 2: James

Now look at James' table and listen to him describing his experiences.

Table 1.2 James' table

Table 1.2 James' table

How do I see myself now?	What makes me happy?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Middle aged• In a period of change• Letting go of the past	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People• Laughter• Animals• Love• Peace• Studying• Good food• Thailand
What am I most proud of?	How would I like to see myself in the future?
Remaining cheerful in the face of adversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Qualified psychologist• Maybe working in academia• Happy

Video content is not available in this format.



Your table

Now fill in the boxes for yourself on [Activity sheet 1.1](#) that we have provided for you. We will return to this activity in Session 5 so you may want to keep a copy of your table.

OR

Open your [Reflection Log](#) and go to Activity 1.1. Once you have completed the activity, **make sure you save the document again.**

If you are working in a group and would like to share your answers, do so now.

Activity 1.2 Defining myself

You should spend around 20 minutes on this activity.

This activity asks you to think of the various roles you have in your life and what these involve.

In the previous section, we heard about Christine's experiences of caring for her son, what it has taught her and how she feels about it. Have a look at Christine's list of the roles that she now has in life, and then listen to her talking about these in the audio clip.

Table 1.3 Christine's table

My main roles in life	What I do
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wife• Mum• Daughter and daughter-in-law• Aunt and great aunt• Listener – to husband, son, family• First aider• Restorer of humour• Standing up for the 'under-dog' better than for myself	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Love, tend to and care for my son and husband.• Do what I can, learning to leave what I want to do but can't.• My therapy is paper crafting, also starting mixed media and textiles.• Mastering the sewing machine



Figure 1.4

Audio content is not available in this format.

The example above shows how we have different roles in life. We all have many roles in which we use a variety of skills and abilities.

Think about the following questions:

- Do you have anything in common with Christine?
- Have you had to deal with some of the same difficulties?
- Do you have goals you want to achieve?

In the previous section we also read about Claire and her role caring for her mother and her partner. Have a look at Claire's table where she describes her many roles and what she does.

Table 1.4 Claire's table

My main roles in life	What I do
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Carer• Partner• Daughter• Sister• Aunty• Student• Volunteer• Poet• Friend	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General care for my partner<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Assisting day to day activities◦ Assisting with transfers◦ Emotional support• Looking after my nieces• Staying in touch and seeing family and friends• Support women with mental health issues• Helping run and organise a drop in• Writing poetry and trying to get published• Learning British Sign Language

Now define yourself at the present time, and the roles you fulfil, in [Activity sheet 1.2](#).
OR

Open your [Reflection Log](#) and go to Activity 1.2. (If you forgot to save your Reflection Log, you can open a new document.) Once you have completed the activity, **make sure you save the document again**.

If you are working in a group, you might want to share your answers and discuss your roles with each other. Similarly, if you are working one-to-one with a mentor, use this time to tease out some of the ideas above.

Summary

Session 1 aimed to get you started on thinking about yourself and was designed to help you get an idea of how you feel about your present situation.

You probably discovered that you do a lot of things using a variety of skills and abilities – some may be ones you discovered through caring, others may be brought with you to caring. Maybe you didn't recognise how skilled you actually are, or what qualities you have? One of the aims of reflection is to help you recognise your own skills and talents.

You have now completed Session 1. In Session 2 you'll look at how these skills, abilities and qualities are developed over time.

[Session 2: Learning by looking at my life over time](#)

Session 2: Learning by looking at my life over time

Introduction

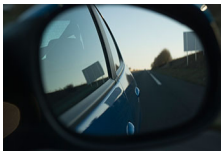


Figure 2.1

What can we learn by looking at our life, and our experiences, over time? How can this be helpful for the future?

Session 1 was about looking at yourself in your present situation. However, the person you are now is partly a result of everything that has happened to you in the past: who you were with, where you have been, what you have done and the outside events that have affected your life.

We learn from good and bad experiences and the ups and downs of life, but some people may have had extreme events in their life that would be distressing to revisit. If this is the case, you can choose to focus on areas of your life that you're happy to spend time thinking about.

Your experience of caring is likely to have a strong influence over your present situation. Your caring role may be something that developed over time. Perhaps like Christine, the word 'carer' may not be the way you think of yourself, it's just something that's normal to you. For others, becoming a carer might have been a sudden event. Whatever your situation, you will know that circumstances can change quickly and sometimes things happen that you don't have control over.

The value of looking at our roles and experiences, and recognising the influences on our lives, is that we can unpick what really interests and motivates us and start to understand our decision making: is there a pattern? For instance, what we consider important can change over time, or can differ at different points of our life. How we feel about these experiences can vary too.

So, how do we define high points and low points? Are there recurring themes in the choices we make? Can we see the difference between choices that we make and changes that happen that are out of our control?

In this session you are asked to look at your life experiences, including your caring experiences. The aim is to work out what skills and abilities you have built up, together with the qualities you have developed, particularly from caring, in addition to ones you have gained in other areas of your life.

Experiences over time

In this section you will be asked to draw a timeline to plot your life experience. The actual time frame will be up to you – it can include your whole life since childhood, or you might want to focus on recent study or work experience, or on specific roles you might have (such as carer, volunteer or student for example).

The timeline creates a graphic picture of your life – or a period in your life – that will help you to identify the ups and downs, and also any patterns or recurring themes that you may not have been aware of.

It can be very difficult to look back over our life or our experiences; for some people, this may bring to mind some issues or memories that they would rather not confront. If you find this activity distressing, you may want to omit it or to discuss it with someone you trust. Remember, you can also select which areas of your life you want to focus on.

If at any point you feel the course has brought difficult emotions then you can visit [Carers.org](https://www.carers.org) to find out where your nearest local support service is or to talk to someone online.

Before you try creating a timeline of your own life, we'd like you to look at a couple of examples and think about how they might relate to your own life and experiences.

Activity 2.1 Taking stock of my experiences over time

You should spend around 10 minutes on this activity.

Look at the example timelines. Then try to answer the questions that follow.

Example 1: Claire's timeline

Have a look at what Claire's timeline might look like.

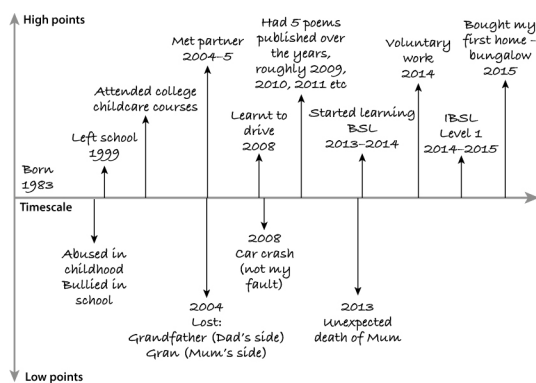


Figure 2.2 Claire's timeline

Example 2: Christine's timeline

Have a look at Christine's timeline.

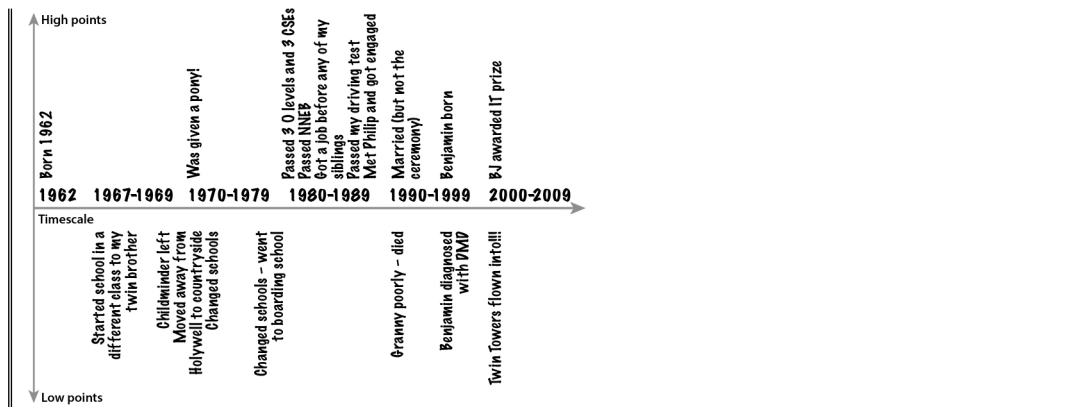


Figure 2.3 Christine's timeline

Reflection and discussion

Consider the following questions:

- Have you had any experiences similar to Claire's or Christine's?
- Do you have anything in common?
- What is different about your life experience?

Make some notes on [Activity sheet 2.1](#) provided.

OR

Go to Activity 2.1 of your [Reflection Log](#). Once you have completed the activity, **make sure you save the document again**.

If you are working in a group, you might want to share your answers and discuss your notes with each other, or discuss with a friend or mentor.

My timeline



Figure 2.4

Activity 2.2 My timeline

You should spend around 15 minutes on this activity.

Having looked at the examples from Claire and Christine, try drawing your own timeline.

Use [Activity sheet 2.2](#) provided.

OR

Go to Activity 2.2 in your [Reflection Log](#). Once you have completed your activity, **make sure you save the document again.**

Remember, it's up to you what you want to include and the time frame you want to focus on – your whole life, or a specific period. It doesn't need to be to scale. Low points are on the bottom half of the page and high points on the top half, just as Claire and Christine have done.

If you are studying in a group, you might like to share your timeline with others.

Learning from experience

We all experience ups and downs in life – good points and bad points. Whatever our experience, we are learning as we go. Learning is not something that stops when we leave childhood behind. Learning is lifelong. Some learning is about ourselves: the type of person we are and our strengths and qualities. Other learning is about skills, qualifications, understanding ideas and concepts, or the society we live in.

We'd now like you to move from plotting **what happened, when**, to thinking about what you've learned from these different roles and experiences, and how you've developed as a person over time.

Watch James, a carer and a support worker who works with carers, talk about the value of reflection.

Video content is not available in this format.



Now, think again about Claire. She had her share of ups and downs. What did she learn from these experiences?

Example 1: Claire's learning from experience

Look at what Claire says she learned from her experience:

- Struggled to put specific times on certain points.
- Yes I did recall feelings and memories.
- I've learnt that however negative a situation that you can learn from it.
- A positive in every negative.
- From losing my mum, to not worry over trivial things, embrace everyone and moments – life is too short.

- That I'm stronger than I thought as I've been through so much and achieved so much.
- That I am going in the right direction now, even if I wasn't before.

Claire reflects on how, although certain points were a struggle, she realised she is stronger than she thought and that no matter how negative a situation, you learn from it.

Here are some key phrases from Claire's comments:

- stronger, learn, struggled, achieved, right direction

By reflecting on her past experience, Claire has learned she is a strong individual who can learn from even negative and difficult situations, and that she believes she is moving in the right direction.

Reflection

Take a moment to think about the following questions:

- Was some of Claire's learning unexpected?
- Did Claire learn from bad experiences as well as good ones?

What I've learned from my past experience

In the next activity we'd like you to think about your past experiences and try to identify what you have learned from them.

Activity 2.3 Learning from my experience

You should spend around 15 minutes on this activity.

Look at your own timeline again and think about what you have learned from your experience. Looking over the ups and downs, does it help you to recall how you felt at each point? What did you learn from each situation? Perhaps you found out more about your individual qualities and the type of work that suits you: a quality such as 'hard-working', 'good-humoured' or 'resilient', perhaps? Or maybe you discovered that you need a change of direction?

Everyone's experience will be different. There is no right or wrong answer.

We can see that learning is ongoing throughout our lives, through the ups and the downs.

Add your thoughts on this to your timeline in a different colour or use

[Activity sheet 2.3](#).

OR

Go to Activity 2.3 in your [Reflection Log](#). Once you have completed your activity, **make sure you save the document again**.

If you are working in a group, either online or face to face, you may want to share this.

Looking backwards, looking forwards

In Session 1 you started to look at your own roles, skills and qualities. The key point here was that by reflecting on our experiences, we learn something from them that helps us to move forward.

Session 2 has shown how drawing a timeline is useful in terms of plotting **what happened** and **when**, and how we feel about these experiences; what we've learned from them and how they've helped to shape us as a person.

You have been looking back at your experiences of life, or a period of your life. Claire's and Christine's timelines illustrated that there are ups and downs, and that other factors have influenced their timelines.

Activity 2.4 Influences and choices

You should spend around 15 minutes on this activity.

In the next session you will be looking forward, and exploring the factors that influence the choices you make about your future. To start you thinking about the factors that influence your life, have a look at Figure 2.7. This spider diagram is a graphic way of illustrating connections.

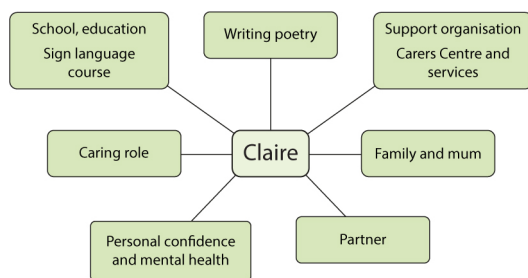


Figure 2.5 Spider diagram of what the main factors in Claire's life might look like

Thinking about the range of factors in your life that influence your choices about the future, try drawing a spider diagram for yourself on [Activity sheet 2.4](#) provided.

OR

Go to Activity 2.4 of your [Reflection Log](#). Once you have completed the activity, **make sure you save the document again**.

Summary

The aim of this session was to get you thinking about your life and everything you have learned from your experience so far. By thinking about your past life you discover how your experiences, both good and bad, have helped you to grow and how much you have learned from them. Have these activities been useful? Did you learn anything new from this that you hadn't noticed before?

You have now completed Session 2; you'll explore these ideas further in Session 3.

If you would like further guidance on any issues these activities have raised for you, you may find some helpful contacts in the [Find out more](#) section at the end of the course or you can visit [Carers.org](https://www.carers.org) to find out where your nearest local support service is or to talk to someone online.

[Session 3: Identifying my skills, qualities and abilities](#)

Session 3: Identifying my skills, qualities and abilities

Introduction



Figure 3.1

In this session we are going to look at learning in terms of skills, qualities and abilities gained both from caring responsibilities and through other areas of life. This will include formal skills developed through education and work, and other skills developed through experience of everyday life.

Carers' skills and qualities

We will start by watching Claire talking about the skills and qualities she has developed as a carer.

Video content is not available in this format.



Claire used some of the following key words and phrases to describe the skills and qualities she has developed from caring:

- understanding
- adapt
- problem solving
- reading between the lines
- supportive
- positive.

What are your thoughts about Claire's observations? Do you feel you have some of these skills and qualities?

Skills and qualities

Suzanne

Listen to Suzanne talking about the skills and qualities she has developed through her caring role.



Figure 3.2 (model photo used for illustrative purposes only)

Audio content is not available in this format.

So Suzanne's skills and qualities are:

- research
- gathering information
- supporting
- not afraid to disagree.

Activity 3.1 Thinking about my skills and qualities

You should spend around 15 minutes on this activity.

What do you think about Claire's and Suzanne's list of skills and qualities?

Have you thought about the personal qualities that you possess and how you might use these? What skills and qualities have you developed through your caring experiences? What other skills do you have, for example from your education or career?

Pick an event or a point in your timeline when you had to take action to resolve something. It could be something to do with family, work or practical issues like housing and money.

Look at James' table where he describes a difficult decision that he made, the skills that he used and the qualities he demonstrated.

Table 3.1 James' table

The event in my life
Turning down a job which I had worked hard for due to caring responsibilities
What I did
Interviewed and shadowed my retiring boss for 6 weeks then turned down the role – very difficult
What skills I used
Openness, clarity, logic, communication
What qualities I demonstrated
Kept my emotions in check
Remained resolute

Now make a list of what you did and then think about what skills you used, and the qualities that you have, that may have helped you.

Write your notes on [Activity sheet 3.1](#).

OR

Go to Activity 3.1 of your [Reflection Log](#). Once you have completed the activity, **make sure you save the document again**.

If you are working as a group you may want to discuss together. Or, you may want to discuss with a friend.

Reflection

Think about the following questions and make some notes in your Reflection Log or notebook:

- Did you find that you used some of the same skills as Claire, Suzanne or James?
- Did you discover that you have other skills, maybe some that you were not aware of?
- Are you now aware of qualities that you have but hadn't considered before?

Summary

The aim of this session was to get you thinking about how your experiences, including those you have had as a carer, have helped you develop skills and qualities.

Have you been able to recognise the skills and abilities that you have developed as a carer? Do you share those highlighted by the carers in this session? Do you have other qualities that your caring role has helped you to develop?

In the next session you will explore how these skills, qualities and abilities might be relevant to your future goals – for personal development, study or career.

[Session 4: Clarifying my goals and planning for the future](#)

Session 4: Clarifying my goals and planning for the future

Introduction



Figure 4.1

In Sessions 1–3 you’ve looked at ***where you are now*** and ***how you got there***. In this session you’ll think about ***where you want to be in the future***.

You may currently be in work or studying. If not, it may be the time is right for you to consider returning to work or resuming studies that have been put on hold, or even to change direction completely. This could involve building on the knowledge and skills you’ve gained from caring and thinking about studies that lead to care-related employment. Or you might want to start something completely new.

Your own starting point for study will depend on many things: your personal circumstances, previous educational qualifications, the length of time away from formal education or training, and opportunities for getting on to the courses that interest you.

Researching the study, role or career areas that you are interested in will help you with your plans, ensuring that you make an informed decision, and don’t end up on what you feel is the wrong path. It may be that you’re not in a position to act on your future goals yet, but thinking about it may be a useful process.

Choosing a job profile



Figure 4.2

Many of the skills and abilities that you looked at in Session 3 are transferable – skills you have developed in one area of your life that can be carried over into another area. In this session you are asked to think about the future – for example, which career or subject area you may be interested in – and then explore what the possibilities and options are for you.

A list of the main career areas is given in Activity 4.1. You can see that this list is very long – so how do you choose?

Activity 4.1 Using the computer to explore ideas

You should spend around 30 minutes on this activity.



Figure 4.3

If your main aim of completing ***What about me?*** is to help you decide on a future career or a career change, you may want to spend more time on this activity to fully explore your ideas. This will help ensure that you make a realistic, well-informed decision for yourself.

IT skills can help you research or explore your ideas. Click on at least one of the careers or subject areas listed in Table 4.1 that you are interested in, or perhaps are unfamiliar with. The career areas given here are links that will take you to job profile information in these areas. (Press the 'Ctrl' key on your keyboard and left-click with the mouse.)

Explore the information given for two job profiles, so that you are able to respond to the following points:

- What are the entry requirements for your chosen job profiles?
- Name two skills that are required for each of your chosen job profiles.
- Make a note of any point that particularly interests or surprises you.

You can complete this activity on your own or in pairs if you are in a group. Remember to save your answers because you will return to these in future activities.

Use either the [Activity sheet 4.1](#) or your notebook to record your answers.

OR

Go to Activity 4.1 of your [Reflection Log](#). Once you have completed the activity, **make sure you save the document again.**

If you want to look at careers information through the medium of Welsh or explore opportunities specific to Wales, you may want to go to the [Careers Wales website](#).

Table 4.1 Career areas

Administrative and clerical	Manufacturing and engineering
Alternative therapies	Marketing, selling and advertising
Animals, plants and land	Medical technology
Arts, crafts and design	Medicine and nursing
Catering services	Performing arts, broadcast and media
Construction	Publishing and journalism
Education and training	Retail sales and customer service
Environmental sciences	Science and research
Financial services	Security and uniformed services
General and personal services	Social services
Information technology and information management	Sport, leisure and tourism
Legal services	Storage, dispatching and delivery
Maintenance, service and repair	Transport
Management and planning	

(Source: [Directgov/National Careers Service: job profiles](#))

How did you get on? Were you able to answer the questions? Did any of the information surprise you?

The information that you have just researched will help you with the next activity in this session.

You may want to return to Activity 4.1 later to fully explore your ideas further, especially if your main aim is deciding on a future career or a career change.

Clarifying your goals

Planning a career takes time! If you are thinking of a new career, or perhaps wondering where further study and qualifications might lead you, you may want to research other resources before identifying possible goals for the future. Further information and advice is available from [Careers Wales](#) or [The Open University's Careers Advisory Service](#).

There is also a [Find out more](#) section at the end of the course, with information links and contact details for further resources and support.

Your goal may be a new career, a course of study, learning a new skill or improving your situation – whatever feels right for you at this stage of your life. Make a note of any points that you feel you need more information on, such as study skills, funding and fees or course choice, for example – the links given above will help you. Keep your notes safe because these will help you with your plans and in completing this course.

You've heard from James throughout the course. Now listen to James talk about his experience of studying part-time while caring.

James: life, work and study

Video content is not available in this format.



Claire: life, work and study

Video content is not available in this format.



As you listened to James and Claire, did you notice if they were always sure about what they wanted to do? Although James had wanted to do a masters degree, he had not originally planned to pursue post-graduate study. Claire had tried different education routes before she discovered her enjoyment and enthusiasm for sign language, in which she is now working towards a qualification.

Sometimes a change of direction or goal is forced upon us. We heard earlier about how James had to leave full-time employment after having to take up his role as a carer. Other changes or choices are made voluntarily, for example if we find that we enjoy a particular subject or have skills in another field.

Reflection

Do you already know what you want to do? Have you thought about different possibilities?

Activity 4.2 Clarifying my goals through visualisation

You should spend around 30 minutes on this activity.

You may have some idea of what direction you would like to go in now or you may still be thinking about it. When we have had difficult or disappointing experiences in our lives, these can affect our confidence and how we feel about the future.

You have explored your skills, qualities and abilities and have some idea of what you have to offer. Now ask yourself:

- Where am I now?
- What am I doing?

Take some time to imagine yourself in the future. Allow yourself to consider that there are possibilities for you.

Write a sentence saying what your hopes are for your future. You might find it useful to look back at the notes you made for Activity 4.1.

You can use [Activity sheet 4.2](#) or save this in your notebook.

OR

Go to Activity 4.2 of your [Reflection Log](#).

You can share this or keep it to yourself. Once you have completed the activity, **make sure you save the document again.**

Factors that can help or hinder you

Through their video and audio clips and their worksheets you've heard Claire, Christine, Suzanne, James and Alana talk about how they found it hard to do what they wanted because of some difficulties they had. They also talked about the help and support they had received; for example, in finding a job, being able to complete a qualification or going on work experience.

Reflection and discussion

- Can you remember anything in particular that helped these individuals to achieve their goals?
- Can you think of any difficulties they had to overcome?

Discuss this in your group or make a few notes if you are working alone.

Thinking about your life now, what do you feel can help you to achieve your goals? What things might make it difficult?

It can also be helpful to look at how you have made decisions and choices in the past, or how you have coped in difficult situations. This is especially important if you have made a few 'false starts' or things have not gone as well for you as you had hoped.

How do you make decisions and choices? For example, do you research the internet, speak to an adviser, friend or colleague, or contact local colleges or training organisations? Or do you decide quickly after hearing or seeing something? Your timeline may have helped you to see some points where, on reflection, you may have chosen differently if you had been better informed.

Have a look at what Alana has identified as factors that can help her achieve her goal and possible difficulties.

Table 4.2 Factors that can help Alana achieve her goal and possible difficulties

My goals	Factors that will help me to achieve them	Factors that might give me difficulties
Becoming a hairdresser	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• College• My determination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Caring role• Learning difficulties• Money• Travel• Self doubt

And now have a look at what Christine has identified as positive factors and possible difficulties.

Table 4.3 Christine's positive factors and possible difficulties

My goals	Factors that will help me to achieve them	Factors that might give me difficulties
----------	---	---

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get my son settled into college and get myself in the right position to move forward • Craft stall • Volunteering • Part time job to fund craft stall • College or university 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determination • Previous qualifications and experience • Desire and need for self-improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My son/caring role • My health • Finances • Travel • Keeping motivated if studying on my own
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Activity 4.3 Thinking about my goals: factors that can help or hinder me

You should spend around 30 minutes on this activity.

Use [Activity sheet 4.3](#), listing your goals and the factors that may help or hinder you in achieving them.

OR

Go to Activity 4.3 of your [Reflection Log](#). Once you have completed the activity, **make sure you save the document again**.

You will need the notes you made for Activity 4.2 about your goals. Write these in the first box; then list the factors that will help you and those that might make it difficult for you to achieve your goals. Your goal may be a new career, a course of study, learning a new skill or improving your situation – whatever feels right for you at this stage of your life.

Some of the factors that could help you achieve your goal, or the ones that may give difficulties, might be similar to those described by Christine and Alana in their tables. For example, both Christine and Alana identify finances as a difficulty and determination as a positive factor.

Overcoming difficulties

There are many ways to get help to overcome difficulties and to find the best way to achieve what you want. You can go to websites and search for the help you need online, or you can get advice face to face from some of the organisations listed in the [Find out more](#) section at the end of the course.

Have a look at the help Christine has to overcome difficulties.

Christine's sources of help

- NEWCIS (local carers' centre)
- Parents – finances
- Husband – understanding and support
- Business course – if I do set up a craft stall/shop
- Craft event's organiser
- FLVC – (local voluntary council)
- Fitfish – (retreat)

Christine identifies her local carers' service and family members as important sources of support, as well as other opportunities that would help, including pursuing studies and volunteering.

Activity 4.4 Help to overcome difficulties

You should spend around 30 minutes on this activity.

You have seen the sources of help that Christine identified. Now think about your own circumstances. If you think you will need help:

- Find out who can help you.
- Talk about and discuss your ideas and plans with the important people in your life.
- Check the list of organisations given in the [Find out more](#) section at the end of the course.
- Write down the details of any organisation you are thinking of asking for help.

Use [Activity sheet 4.4](#) to reflect on and list who you can ask or where you can go for help.

OR

Go to Activity 4.4 of your [Reflection Log](#). Once you have completed the activity, **make sure you save the document again.**

If you are working in a group context, you can discuss this with your group tutor and with others in your group.

Summary

You have now completed Session 4. This session focused on how to start working towards your goals, how to research and plan, how you can help yourself, and how to recognise that sometimes we need the help of others and to know where to find that help. In the final session of ***What about me?*** you will look more closely at the support networks in your own life that can help you as you work towards your goals. You will also identify other sources of information, advice and guidance that are available to you as you plan your next steps.

[Session 5: Identifying my next steps and where I can find information and support](#)

Session 5: Identifying my next steps and where I can find information and support

Introduction



Figure 5.1

You have been looking at how to start working towards your goals, and how you can help yourself. You now have an idea of where you want to get to and what difficulties there might be. You also know what aspects of your life might help you. We all need some help in getting to where we want to be in life. Are there people you know who can also help you and support you – family members, friends, work colleagues, carers' centre staff or others?

Listen to Alana describe the support she gets from the Young Adult Carers' scheme at NEWCIS, her local carers' centre.

Video content is not available in this format.



Look at the spider diagram in Figure 5.2, which shows Claire's support network.

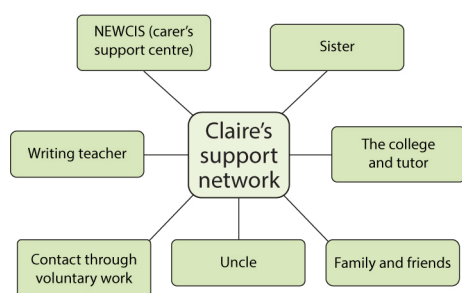


Figure 5.2 Claire's support network

Now look at Suzanne's support network.

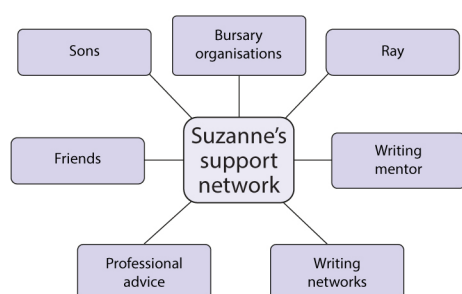


Figure 5.3 Suzanne's support network

Your support and next steps

- Did you find that you used some of the same skills as Claire, Suzanne or Alana?

- Did you discover that you have other skills, maybe some that you were not aware of?
- Are you now aware of qualities that you have but hadn't considered before?
- Does your support network have any similarities to Claire, Alana or Suzanne's?

Family and friends were mentioned but also organisations that could help them. In the next activity you will think about the people and organisations you think could help you towards achieving your goals.

Activity 5.1 My support networks

You should spend around 15 minutes on this activity.

Think about the people who have helped you or who might help you in the future with any plans you have.

Now make a spider diagram like the one for Claire and Suzanne on [Activity sheet 5.1](#) provided.

OR

Go to Activity 5.1 of your [Reflection Log](#). Once you have completed the activity, **make sure you save the document again.**

You have nearly reached the end of this course. Activity 5.2 involves planning the next move towards your goals – you need to think carefully about where you are trying to get to.

There is a lot of information and advice available if you would like further guidance or support. You can visit [Carers Trust](#) or [The Open University's Careers Advisory Service](#).

You can also use the [Find out more](#) section at the end of the course for information links and contact details for further resources and support.

Activity 5.2 My long-term goal and first 'next step'

You should spend around 15 minutes on this activity.

Starting from now and where you are at the moment, think very carefully about what you need to do to get to where you want to be. Think back on the activities you have done, and what you have learned from:

- your past experiences (Activity 2.3)
- the skills, qualities and abilities you have (Activity 3.2)
- anything that will help you, as well as any difficulties you may need to overcome (Activities 4.3 and 4.4)
- any people that you know will be there to help you (Activity 5.1).

We've heard from Suzanne throughout the course – and here are the long-term goals and the first next steps Suzanne identified.

Table 5.1 Suzanne's long-term goals and first next step

My long-term goal

- Living between Wales and USA
- Helping dad with caring
- Paid work with writing

What am I going to do?

Spend time with Dad this summer and research options in USA

Where will I go for help and advice?

- My dad
- Real estate agents
- Tax office, etc

When will I do this?

This summer

Use [Activity sheet 5.2](#) to reflect on your long-term goal and the actions you will take to achieve it. Use this information to write a sentence starting: 'The first step I am going to take ...'

OR

Go to Activity 5.2 in your [Reflection Log](#). Once you have completed the activity, **make sure you save the document again.**

Review your table

To help you summarise what you have gained from your reflections, we'd like you to return to the table you created in Session 1.

Activity 5.3 Review my table

You should spend around 15 minutes on this activity.



Figure 5.4

In the introduction to this course we said that 'reflection is a way of working on what we know already and it generates new knowledge'. Revisiting the table you completed in Session 1 is a means to assess this process of reflection. If you saved a copy of the table, keep it handy as you will need it at the end of this activity.

Take another look at Alana's table to remind you.

Table 5.2 Alana's table

How do I see myself now?	What makes me happy?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hairdresser• Quiet but once you get to know me confident• Determined• Talkative• Volunteering• Sometimes call myself stupid	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Following my dream• Friends• Family• Coming to Young Adult Carers group• Playing around with hair• Holidays
What am I most proud of?	How would I like to see myself in the future?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Passing hair level 1• Volunteering• Overcoming fears	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Successful• Hairdresser• Volunteer

As you did in Session 1, fill in the boxes in [Activity 5.3](#).

OR

Go to Activity 5.3 of your [Reflection Log](#). Once you have completed the activity, **make sure you save the document again**.

If you are working in a group and you would like to share your answers, when you have completed your table, compare it with the one that you completed in Session 1.

- Is it the same?
- Are there any changes?

It may be very similar or it may be quite different. Reflection is an on-going process that may not necessarily bring about immediate changes, but it may lead to subtle differences in our thinking about ourselves, our plans and our goals that will emerge over time.

Final activity

Your final activity is to summarise briefly what you have gained from this course.

Activity 5.4 What have I learned?

You should spend around 10 minutes on this activity.



Figure 5.5

Here are the **learning outcomes** that we listed in this course's introduction:

- a clearer understanding of your experiences as a carer and also in your wider roles
- an understanding of the various skills that you have developed as a carer and in your wider roles and how these are transferable to other situations
- an appreciation of personal qualities developed through your caring role
- a chance to think about your goals and aspirations for the future
- an idea of how you might work towards these goals and where you may get help and support
- the ability to use information technology (IT) to carry out reflective activities in writing and communicating
- the ability to use the internet to find information useful to you
- the ability to explore and use new ways of expressing ideas.

Make a note of the **learning outcomes** that you think you've achieved, either fully or partially. Also write down anything else you feel you have achieved that was not in them, such as making some new friends, learning that everybody has difficulties of some kind and so on.

You can use [Activity sheet 5.4](#) to complete this activity.

OR

Go to Activity 5.4 of your [Reflection Log](#). Once you have completed the activity, **make sure you save the document again.**

We hope you have enjoyed studying the course. We hope you have learned a little bit more about yourself: how much you can do and what you would like to do in the future. Everyone has strengths, qualities and abilities, and we sometimes need help in recognising and using these. We hope you will go on to achieve great things with your talents!

If you haven't done so already you may want to look at the [Find out more](#) section at the end of the course. It has information links and contact details for further resources and support including carers support services, careers, education and training.

[Find out more](#)

Find out more – Links resources and support

Introduction

This **Find out more** section of the course aims to give some useful information and contacts that may help you towards your goals. We have included information about carers' support organisations in Wales, education opportunities, careers and employment-based information, and volunteering opportunities in Wales.

Carers' support organisations

Name of organisation	Information	Contact details
Carers Trust and Carers Trust Wales	24 hour online support; where to find your local carers' services; dedicated help and advice including benefit entitlements, carers' needs assessments and much more.	www.carers.org

Local Carers' Centres and services	<p>Carers' centres are independent charities that deliver a wide range of local support services to meet the needs of carers in their own communities. All carers' centres provide, either by telephone, drop-in or outreach surgeries, the following core services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emotional support • information and advice; • a carer's voice. 	<p>To find your local carers' centre please look here:</p> <p>www.carers.org</p>
Crossroads Care schemes	<p>Crossroads Care schemes are a network of local independent charities providing respite services in the home enabling carers to take a break. This may be provided either as part of a care package funded through the local authority or paid for privately.</p>	<p>To find your nearest Crossroads Care scheme look here:</p> <p>www.carers.org</p>

What your Local Health Board and Local Authority offer to carers

Local Health Boards in Wales	All Health Boards have a requirement under the Carers Strategy (Wales) Measure 2010 to publish and implement a local Carers Information and Consultation Strategy telling carers what information and support they are entitled to, to help them in their caring role.	To find out what your Local Health Board is doing, log onto the 'NHS Wales' website and type in 'carers' in the search option: www.wales.nhs.uk/
Support provided by your Local Authority	Your Local Authority will also have details on carer support and what they provide.	You can find a list of them all on the link below. Just click on your region and type 'carers' in the search engine. http://gov.wales/topics/localgovernment/unitary-authorities/?lang=en
Citizens Advice Wales	Free advice on a wide range of issues – open to everyone in Wales and across the UK.	www.citizensadvice.org.uk/wales/

Education and training opportunities

There are lots of opportunities to develop your learning, either informally with free online resources, like this course or through local courses and tasters, which may be run through your local carers' centre or adult education provider. Local colleges also offer a programme of adult education classes.

OpenLearn (Open University)	A website with 10,000 hours of free learning content including video, audio and short courses.	www.open.edu/openlearn
OpenLearn Cymru (Open University in Wales)	A bilingual website with free courses available in English and Welsh including the What about me? course.	www.open.edu/openlearncymru
FutureLearn	A website with a range of courses offered free by different universities.	www.futurelearn.com
BBC Skillswise	A free website with courses and activities to improve your writing, maths and IT skills.	www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise
WEA Cymru	The largest provider of adult community learning in Wales. Provides courses in local community venues.	www.weacymru.org.uk
Local further education colleges	Many local further education colleges offer community learning courses.	This website lists all the colleges in Wales and through this you can link to their websites. The colleges in North and Mid Wales cover large areas and have many local centres. www.collegeswales.ac.uk/wales_colleges-42.aspx
Learn Direct Wales/ Cymru	Various online courses, some of which are free of charge	www.learndirect.co.uk/wales-eng/

General information about university and higher education study

UCAS	<p>A comprehensive website that provides information about full-time university study and courses; getting started, finding a course, applying and finance and support.</p> <p>While this is a useful website, it deals with full-time higher education study. If you want to study part time at a university, you are advised to contact the specific university directly.</p>	www.ucas.com
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Study at The Open University is part time and flexible so it can be fitted around your caring role and other responsibilities. Students can also take a break between modules and build up their qualifications at a pace to suit them.

The Open University	<p>This is the main Open University website. Explore our courses and qualifications, funding and financial support and what it's like to be a student with the OU.</p>	<p>www.open.ac.uk/study</p> <p>Contact: 029 2047 1170</p> <p>Email: Wales@open.ac.uk</p>
The Open University Careers Advisory Service	<p>This is a useful website to explore potential career options linked to OU courses and qualifications.</p>	<p>www.open.ac.uk/careers</p>

Careers information

Careers Wales	A comprehensive careers website for people living in Wales. It's for all ages and abilities and has information on jobs, courses and apprenticeships. It's a bilingual interactive site with specific information relevant to careers and opportunities in Wales.	www.careerswales.com/en/
Directgov: National careers service	<p>A UK-wide website with information and help with careers. It offers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help to choose or change career • skills tests, course search, job search advice • personalised help from careers advisers. 	https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx

Directgov: education and learning	Extensive web pages covering: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• information on apprenticeships and training for work• school admissions and transport• schools and curriculum• student finance• universities and higher education.	www.gov.uk/browse/education
Volunteering opportunities		
Volunteering Wales	The main website that lists volunteering opportunities across Wales.	www.volunteering-wales.net

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