

# Returning to STEM



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# Introduction

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Welcome to the free badged course Returning to STEM. This course is here to help you get back to work in science, technology, engineering or mathematics, and is intended for anyone who wants to get back into STEM work after having a break, whether to care for family or because of redundancy or other reasons.

The course lasts 8 weeks, with approximately 3 hours' study time each week. You can work through the course at your own pace, so if you have more time one week there is no problem with pushing on to complete another week's study.

Each week will include reading, videos and activities. Some will be individual activities in which you will spend time thinking about your own life and experiences, researching a topic or finding information online.

There are also several points in the course where you will need to either reflect on your experience or write other notes. It's up to you how you keep your notes; for example, online or using a notebook of some sort.

Every week ends with an interactive quizzes, of which Weeks 4 and 8 will provide you with an opportunity to earn a badge to demonstrate your new skills. You can read more on how to study the course and about badges in the next sections.

Find out more about studying with The Open University by [visiting our online prospectus](#).

# Learning Outcomes

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After completing this course you will be able to:

- identify key experiences and attributes, and know how to use online tools effectively to be visible
- identify long-term goals and create an action plan and CV to achieve these
- know about future trends in STEM employment and where to find STEM jobs online
- be able to identify mentors and networks that can help with returning to work
- understand work–life balance solutions and know more about different types of flexible and agile working.

# Week 1: The story so far

## Week 1 Introduction

In this course, you'll learn about new and inspiring employment opportunities and trends in STEM (**S**cience, **T**echnology, **E**ngineering and **M**athematics), see how other people have navigated their careers and, most importantly, how they have made a return to STEM employment following a career break. Throughout the course, you'll be given challenging and thought-provoking activities to help you define your next steps.

Watch the video to hear Dr Sue Black OBE introduce this badged free course and Week 1.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Week 1 Introduction Video](#)



You'll begin the course by taking a look at some of the potential pitfalls and steps up in getting back to work, and think about what these might mean to you. You'll also find out what the course might do for you. Next, you'll move on to reflect on your career so far and start to look at ways you might be able to make a change.

As suggested in the [Introduction and guidance](#), it is recommended that you keep notes (either online or paper-based, whichever you prefer) to record your notes and responses to the activities throughout the course. There are also several tables and documents which are useful to work on directly and keep.

By the end of this week you should be able to:

- reflect on your own career journey
- identify your key experiences and attributes



- know what some of the main strategies for returning to work look like
- be prepared and motivated to make a change.

Before you start, The Open University would really appreciate a few minutes of your time to tell us about yourself and your expectations of the course. Your input will help to further improve the online learning experience. If you'd like to help, and if you haven't done so already, please fill in this optional survey.

To view this content please access the complete course on [OpenLearn](#)

## 1 What this course can offer you

Getting back to work after a career break is rather like a game of snakes and ladders: some of the help and hindrances you encounter are predictable but others arrive when you least expect them.

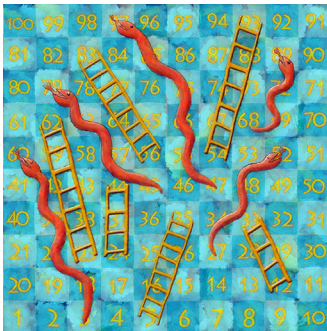


Figure 1 Snakes and ladders

Here are some of the pitfalls that you might encounter – have you thought about, or come across, any of these?

- no family nearby to help out
- suitable STEM jobs are all too far away
- my skills are out of date
- I can't get a nursery place for my child
- my partner works away
- I've been out of the country for too long
- I've lost contact with all my old colleagues
- I don't know what's going on in my industry sector any more
- my CV is outdated and full of gaps.

And what about steps up? What and who could help you return?

- an old school friend works in a well-known company – I'll ask her for help
- I've seen an advert for an internship on our community website
- I've found an online course which will update my skills
- I've got loads of voluntary work experience
- I'm excited about going back to work and being a professional again
- I'm ambitious and want to get on with my career again
- I'm still in touch with my old boss

- my friend has offered to pick up the kids twice a week.

## 1.1 Why STEM?

This course has been created because there are thousands of people in the United Kingdom (and many more worldwide), who are qualified in STEM subjects but are no longer working in the STEM professions. The UK government, and industry leaders, continue to be very concerned about what some people have called the 'leaky pipeline', with women leaving STEM education and employment at different points in their lives. This is not just a UK concern, though. In her book *Off Ramps and On Ramps* (2007), Sylvia Hewlett outlines a study carried out in the USA about women leaving STEM industries – a trend labelled 'The Hidden Brain Drain'.

This course is aimed at people who have taken a break from their STEM careers. The most common reason for taking a career break is to care for children or other family members. However, people leave the profession for a variety of reasons, and getting back to work can be a difficult transition, both practically and emotionally. This can be even more difficult when returning to STEM occupations as opposed to other professions, because, as the STEM sectors continue to employ more men than women, expectations about working patterns in these sectors remain modelled on the uninterrupted career that is more usual for men. Therefore, the focus of the course material and examples is on the typical experiences of women returning to STEM. That said, this course isn't just for women – there are plenty of men who have also had time out of work and face similar issues in getting back.

In this video, Carolien describes her reasons for taking a break from her engineering career and what motivated her to return.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Why STEM?](#)



For each of you, your life stories will differ and your circumstances and reasons for being out of work, as well as the length of your career break, will all be different. You will also have different constraints and difficulties to overcome, whether these are to do with

juggling your family commitments with work, with the availability and location of suitable jobs, or needing to update your skills. With this in mind, this course has been designed to be flexible enough to encompass a variety of needs and expectations.

This course is a bit different from other types of courses that you may have studied in the past. Rather than learning about a subject, you will reflect on your own experiences and aspirations and learn about yourself – the course is very practical and activity focused and will help you build up your CV, networks and action plan.

Now is a great time to be looking to return to STEM careers after a break. As you'll discover during the course, more and more STEM employers and recruiters are seeing STEM-qualified returners as a source to fill their vacancies in these areas. As you progress, you will encounter examples of employers who have special schemes to help you or can offer specialist advice about opportunities in the sector. You'll also discover new employment opportunities and trends.

Throughout the BOC, there are case study videos that show how other people have navigated their careers. Most importantly, you will find out how they've returned to STEM employment after a career break.

This course draws upon the experiences of people who have had similar experiences to your own. Getting back to work can be a difficult process and sharing your experiences with others who are in a similar situation can be enormously helpful.

Finally, you will get the chance to interact with others through a private online forum that has been set up specifically for this course. This will enable you to share your thoughts and experiences with other people who are also studying this course and are 'in the same boat', so to speak, and to find useful new contacts to help you in your journey towards returning to work.

## 2 Reflections on your working life

Making the transition back to work after a career break or period of unemployment can be a daunting prospect. Often, it can be quite hard to know where to begin. Week by week, this course will help you to reflect on what you have done before and identify where you want to go next. This will enable you to present yourself to potential employers in the most effective way.

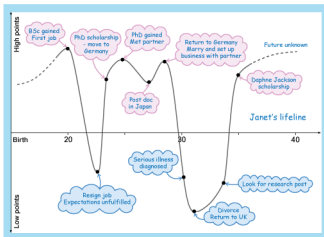
Rosie, an environmental scientist, summed up how she felt at the start of her 'returning' journey, and how she tried to turn her negative feelings into a force for change:

Because I was coming at it from being isolated in a village with not many contacts because of various reasons ... I felt kind of hopeless about the situation and all I could focus on was the gaps in my CV. And I also had this sort of feeling that everyone else was moving on while I was standing still. It's easy to look at it negatively but my advice would be 'Well actually, you know, turn it round and don't talk about what you haven't got, talk about what you *have* got.'

Before you can begin planning your return to STEM, it is useful to take some time to reflect on your employment history and career so far. What insights can you get from what you have experienced so far? Think about your past experiences, the choices you have made and the major events that have influenced you.

A useful technique to help you with this kind of reflection is to draw a 'lifeline' representing the ups and downs and key events that have influenced your career. It will help you to gather insights that can influence your future career choices, and help you start to think about things that you might want to develop or change. Janet, a scientist who returned to her career after a ten-year gap, found the lifeline really helpful, when she was thinking about what to do next:

The lifeline exercise was very powerful for me as I was at the start of the return to work process, it guided me into thinking about what I did and didn't like about previous jobs and why they had been successful/unsuccessful.



### Figure 2 Janet's lifeline

## Activity 1 My lifeline

Allow approximately 45 minutes

Try producing a lifeline for yourself. You can do this either by downloading the [lifeline chart](#) or, if you prefer, draw it by hand on a piece of paper or in your notebook. Do whatever you find easier. Be as creative as you like with this activity – it may take a few drafts before you are happy with how it looks.

If you found the lifeline activity interesting and want to know more about this subject, you may wish to read this [article by Herminia Ibarra](#) (2007), in particular pages 16–18. Ibarra's research explores how people manage and negotiate transitions such as career changes. During the early stages there is a phase of imagining, exploring options and 'trying out' potential new identities. The transition phase often entails conflicting feelings and a sense of being in-between different identities, and this is also true for those returning from career breaks. Part of the process is creating new narratives that help to establish new identities.

## 2.2 Telling your story

A lifeline is a personal reflection and a useful starting point for you to explore what you want to do next. However, there are many ways to tell your story, and you will need to think about which bits are useful for you to help achieve your goals. As you work through this course you will be focusing on how best to present both yourself and your career history in order to create a positive impression on potential employers. If you've been out of work for some time it can take a bit of time and practice to decide how you want to present yourself.

Carol Fishman Cohen returned to her corporate job after a career break at the age of 40, and has written about this in her book *Back on the Career Track* (2008). She advises

women on how to relaunch their careers by carefully picking out what they want others to see about them:

**You are your own spin doctor.** While you certainly want and need to be truthful about your experience, you have the ability to craft your own story. You can position yourself as you wish. The key is deciding *how* you want to position yourself. And before you can do that, you have to figure out what you want to go after.

(Cohen and Rabin, 2008)

### 3 Identifying your career drivers and values

One way of helping you to think about the next step in your career or your planned return to work is to try and understand what really motivates you. The lifeline activity should have helped you to see what activities have been rewarding for you in the past and what activities haven't. In this next activity you will reflect on which factors are most valuable to you in a job.

#### Activity 2 What do I value about work?

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Listed below are a number of factors that will help you to recognise, in more depth, which values are most important in driving your choice of job or working environment. These values cut across all types of job roles so are just as relevant whichever areas of STEM you are seeking to work in. So, for example, if 'Making friendly contacts with others' is important to you, it suggests that you value a 'Social' element in your work. You might be surprised by the range of possible factors that you find valuable. This is one of the advantages of taking a course like this: it opens up your thinking and suggests options and ideas you might not have considered before.

Identify how important each factor is to you by using the following scale:

- 3 = Very important
- 2 = Important
- 1 = Fairly important
- 0 = Not important

Read each factor in Column 1 and rate them all using the scale above. Try to use the full scale. Fill in the boxes in Table 1 below, or alternatively copy Table 1 into a notebook and fill it in.

**Table 1 Values**

Factors	Value	Rating (0–3)
Making decisions and working independently	Autonomy	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Change or variety in tasks, people, places	Variety	<i>Provide your answer...</i>

Scope to learn, study, think, analyse	Intellectual	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Making friendly contacts with others	Social	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Large income, expensive possessions	Economic	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Expressing ethical code or religious beliefs	Spiritual	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Using talents, developing skills	Using abilities	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Being part of an important organisation	Commitment	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Having lots of stimulus, excitement, thrills	Excitement	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Having influence or power over others	Authority	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Enjoying or making beautiful designs or things	Aesthetic	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Getting promotions, career progression	Advancement	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Helping or caring for others	Altruism	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Concern for surroundings or location	Comfort	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Being original, developing new ideas	Creativity	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Activity, keeping moving, handling things	Physical	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Taking risks; business and trading	Commercial	<i>Provide your answer...</i>

(Adapted from *Career planning and job-seeking workbook*, p. 30, Open University Careers Service.)

Make a note of which were the most important values for you. Did any of them surprise you? You may want to come back to these when you start to develop your action plan towards the end of the course.

## 4 Managing your digital footprint

The previous two sections invited you to focus on personal reflection. This section looks at the identity you are already presenting to the world. Throughout the BOC you will need to make decisions about what aspects of your life and experience you include or exclude in your applications and CV, and how best to describe the things you have achieved so far. This can take some time and will not necessarily be a one-off task; you will need to refine this as you get a clearer idea about what it is you want to do next. One way of describing this is **identity work**. You will work on this in more detail in Week 2.

A key part of your identity work is managing your digital footprint, which includes everything on the internet that is about you. This could include:

- a profile on social media such as Facebook, or Twitter (as well as LinkedIn)
- photos of you or that you, your friends or family have posted online
- anything you have written or that has been written about you; for example, on discussion boards, blogs or in articles.



Figure 3 Digital footprint

### Activity 3 Uncover your digital footprint

Allow approximately 10 minutes

To understand what people can view about you on the internet and to be able to see your digital footprint, try a Google search for yourself. This will show you what potential employers might see if they search for you. Search for your name now and see what information already exists about you. What did you find? Did it surprise you? If there are things that you don't necessarily want potential employers to see if they googled you, now is the time to think about changing your privacy settings on social media, or even removing material about yourself from certain sites.

## Some privacy tips

- Consider using a different name (for example, a nickname) for your more private personal profile, and change the privacy settings on your social networking site so that only your friends can see your personal information.
- Remove anything from your public profile that is personal or private, or that might cause a negative impression with a prospective employer. Avoid inappropriate language or ill-advised comments or jokes.



## Enhancing your footprint

You may be pleasantly surprised by the amount of coverage you have on social media and, in fact, some employment sectors (e.g. advertising, public relations and the media, as well as the tech sector) may expect and even actively encourage you to have a digital footprint. They may look for examples of your online creativity; for example, blogs, profiles or videos.

You can enhance your digital footprint by making contributions to blogs, news articles and discussions, or by adding reviews to technology websites. Keeping a positive online presence regularly updated can reduce the impact of any earlier content you may want to bury, because most internet searchers rarely access more than the top few results.

## 5 Strategies for returning

Returners from career breaks have different ways of presenting their stories to prospective employers and no single way is the right way. Sometimes it might be a good approach to emphasise the continuity between different parts of your working life; alternatively, you might be at a point where you want to take a new direction and so your story will be one of change. It all depends on what makes the most sense to you and how you want others to interpret your career history.

As you progress further through this course, you'll realise that there are a lot of common experiences and barriers facing those who are returning to STEM. Learning from the experiences of others in the same boat can be really helpful and you'll be looking at how you can strengthen your support networks later in the course. In this section, you will look at what has worked for others returning to STEM, and consider some of the strategies they used to get back to work.

In a recent survey carried out by Open University researchers, 167 women who had returned to STEM after a career break ('returners') were asked what had helped them succeed in getting back to work. While the types and fields of work they went back into varied enormously, the survey found five main strategies that had helped them (Herman, 2015). Figure 2 provides a summary of the strategies that have worked for others in your situation. You will be looking at these strategies in more detail in the next sections and returning to them as the course progresses. We will also give some examples of real life stories.

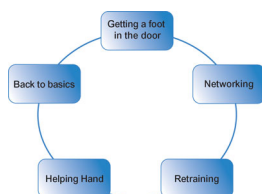


Figure 4 The five most common strategies used by women returning to STEM (Herman, 2015)

### 5.1 Foot in the door

A great way to get started on the journey back to work is volunteering or working in a non-STEM role within a STEM organisation, which can give you access to hidden job opportunities.



Shirley is a computer programmer who took a five year career break following a lengthy career in the IT industry. Her experience of returning illustrates the importance of getting 'a foot in the door', a way in to employment, which in this case was the chance to be interviewed for another job that had not originally been advertised.

When I went for the interview they then realised that, although I was a trainee Java developer, I did have twenty years worth of other experience in IT, and as it turned out the company also supported a lot of mainframe systems and all of my previous experience had been on mainframe systems. So I just think it was, yes, the course was very significant in that it just gave me the confidence to apply for that particular job and it just turned out that my experience fitted very well to the company.

Week 2 of this course includes a section on volunteering, which can be a useful way to get a foot in the door, and returnships (special internships designed for returners from career breaks). Returnships are an exciting new way-in for returners; this is discussed further in Week 8.

## 5.2 Networking

Your contacts and networks can help you find jobs, especially those that have not been publicly advertised. These can include friends or family as well as previous professional contacts and, as you'll find out in Week 2, you can use online networks such as LinkedIn to reconnect to people you have lost touch with.

One of the returners from the Open University survey of women who had returned to STEM was Sharon, a bio-medical scientist. She describes how she was originally reluctant to network but was advised:

'... to make contacts and the way to find a job is not necessarily to go for the applied jobs, the advertised jobs, people may create jobs for you', and of course that's exactly what happened with me because I went to the supervisor and ... basically he created a project, he had a sort of an idea of something, a half-baked idea that he would like to have done, and here I came along, and then he said 'well, I'll apply for the funding', so he did create the job, [...] I thought 'yeah, right, that will never happen', and it did!'

My husband ... was on secondment there in a different department, but because he had to speak to the department I'm now in as part of his work in chatting just sort of 'oh, well I know somebody who would quite like a job here', so he gave my CV to the Head of Department and then it went from there. That was not a usual kind of way in.

Rachel, who returned to work in the engineering industry, discusses the role of networks and unpaid work experience in her return to employment.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Networking](#)



This is an example of what is sometimes called the hidden job market – you may be surprised to learn that over 70 per cent of jobs are not openly advertised and rely on personal networks and contacts for recruitment. You will explore more about using networking as a strategy in Week 6.

### 5.3 Retraining

About half of the returners who took part in the Open University survey had undertaken further study or retraining as part of their strategy to return to STEM. Indeed, you might decide to undertake a completely new qualification that will take you into a different but related career. On the other hand, you may decide to refresh your skills and learn new techniques that will update your abilities in your specialist field.

Shirley, mentioned in Section 5.1, had been a mainframe computer programmer before her career break, and undertook a training course in Java to update her skills. In her case, the qualification provided her with the confidence boost to apply for other jobs.

If you are thinking about retraining, you will need to know a bit more about what the new and upcoming trends are in your sector to help you decide what would be relevant. In Week 3 you'll be looking at what's going on in the STEM industry sectors. There is also a [Further reading](#) section with links to courses and training opportunities.

### 5.4 Helping hand

Remember, there is plenty of support available to you in your quest to return to STEM work! There are a number of agencies and funding resources specifically created for returners from career breaks, as well as other organisations, advisors and formal networks to help you find jobs, start up a company or choose a suitable training course. You can find more details of these in the [Further reading](#) section.

If you have previously been a researcher and are hoping to return to a research career, either in industry or academia, there is a special scheme available that offers a two-year funded fellowship, run by the Daphne Jackson Trust. In this video, Katie Perry from the Daphne Jackson Trust describes the scheme.

Video content is not available in this format.

## Helping Hand



### 5.5 Back to basics

Sometimes it might be necessary to make a trade-off and work in a lower-status job, perhaps at low rates of pay, in return for flexibility and proximity to home. You may decide to use this as a stopgap until you can commit more time to work, but remember that you need to consider your work-life balance as a whole when you are planning your return. By all means be ambitious, but be realistic about what is feasible.

Shamin, whose previous career had been as a biochemical researcher in a large multinational company, became a school science technician as her first step to returning to STEM:

... that was my obvious route in because I'd been out of science for so long, and ... when the children were little that was quite a big problem or an issue for me because I haven't got any relatives to look after children in holidays and that sort of thing, so holidays have become I suppose a problem as well so then obviously that's where the technician job is brilliant because I've got the holidays ... I thought it would be a good place to start because I was well over qualified for it so it was just a job that I could go and do, and do well to start with. It was within my confidence range and it suited my lifestyle as well.

You'll get a chance to explore issues to do with work-life balance in Week 3 and decide which is the right strategy for you.

## 6 What do you want to get out of this course?

There will be several points in this course where you will reflect on your previous experiences and start to shape what you want to do next. You've already given some thought to your lifeline and previous employment. Now, you will start to think about what you hope to get out of this course.

Are you hoping the course will give you a career direction? Or do you know what type of work you want but aren't sure that you are in a position to make it happen? Are you hoping the course will help you address any fears you have about making a return to work?

It might be worth jotting down your thoughts; you'll be able to return to these at the end of the course to see how well you have matched up to your expectations and aspirations.

## 7 This week's quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

Week 1 practice quiz.

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you've finished.

To open in a new window, right click on the link above and select 'Open in new window'.

To view this content please access the complete course on [OpenLearn](#)

## 8 Summary

You've now completed the first week of the course – congratulations! You have reflected on your past experiences and started the groundwork for your transition back to work.

This week you have:

- reflected on your own career journey using the lifeline activity
- identified what your key experiences and attributes are
- become aware of some of the main strategies that others in your position have used in their successful returns to STEM
- increased your motivation to make a change in your life.

Next week you will be looking at how you present yourself and tell the story of who you are to potential employers or collaborators. You'll be doing this using online networking tools as well as via a conventional CV.

You can now go to [Week 2](#).

## Further reading

### Further reading and specialist resources for women returners to STEM

There are now a considerable number of sources of information to help STEM returners. In particular, there are professional institutions, employer institutions and federations, government (mainly local) organisations and specialist interest groups.

[WISE](#) is a not for profit organisation dedicated to the achievement of increased gender balance in the UK STEM workforce. WISE works from classroom to boardroom to inspire more girls and women to choose STEM careers and to support employers in creating a working environment in which women can thrive and do their best work. Individual

membership of WISE is free and WISE counts some of the country's largest STEM employers amongst its corporate and institutional members.

For professional scientists interested in returning to an academic or similar research-orientated career the Wellcome Trust has a helpful returners' guide – [‘Getting back into research after a career break’](#). This guide has been put together for people who, after a substantial break, are thinking about making the step back into research in biomedical or public health areas, although the advice given here should be broad enough to apply to other fields in science and medicine.

The [Daphne Jackson Trust](#) provides funded two year fellowships for returners to STEM research. Further details of how to apply can be found at their website.

Some professional bodies also provide specialist resources for career break returners.

- [The London Mathematical Society](#) women's section offers career guidance and support for women.
- [The Institute of Physics](#) has a guide for members planning a career break and negotiating work life balance on their return.
- [The Royal Society of Chemistry](#) has a Women Members Network and also runs an [internship programme](#) which particularly targets returners. You can also find ideas about [careers and future job profiles](#).

For engineers, the [Women's Engineering Society](#) provides peer support for women engineers of any discipline. WES has a section on career break returners.

There are 30+ professional engineering bodies at [the Engineering Council site](#). Many of these are concerned with the national shortage of engineering skills and keen to recruit and retain women engineers.

For those women with a particular interest in manufacturing, EEF helps [Women in Manufacturing](#) to support, attract and retain women across the UK manufacturing sector.

The [BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT](#), for those returning to the IT industry. Also, [techUK is developing a specific returners programme](#).

There are a number of recruitment agencies that specialise in STEM recruitment, especially in the engineering and technology sectors. Some of the larger firms such as Hays and Harvey Nash run networking events for women. One agency that is general in its scope is [STEM Graduates](#).

## Week 2: Presenting yourself

### Week 2 Introduction

One of the most important aspects of getting back to work is thinking about how you will present yourself to potential employers – or customers and clients if you plan to be self-employed.

Last week, you had an opportunity to look back at your career and working life, and to reflect on what you have done so far. In this week's activities, you will work on re-emerging into the world of work and presenting yourself to potential employers or collaborators. This will involve reflecting on who you are and how you want others to see you.

Watch Sue in the following video as she talks about your 'back to work toolkit':

Video content is not available in this format.

[Week 2 Introduction](#)



During this week, you will create a profile on the online professional networking site LinkedIn, and do some of the identity work needed as a first step back into employment. Please note that you can also develop your profile via My OpenLearn (this can be found in the menu running across the top of the screen) and that the Open University badge from this *Returning to STEM* course (and any other OpenLearn badges) can be exported to LinkedIn.

By the end of this week you should:

- have created a working LinkedIn profile
- know how to use online networks effectively to make yourself visible
- be able to find opportunities and potential employers.



# 1 Presenting yourself online: LinkedIn

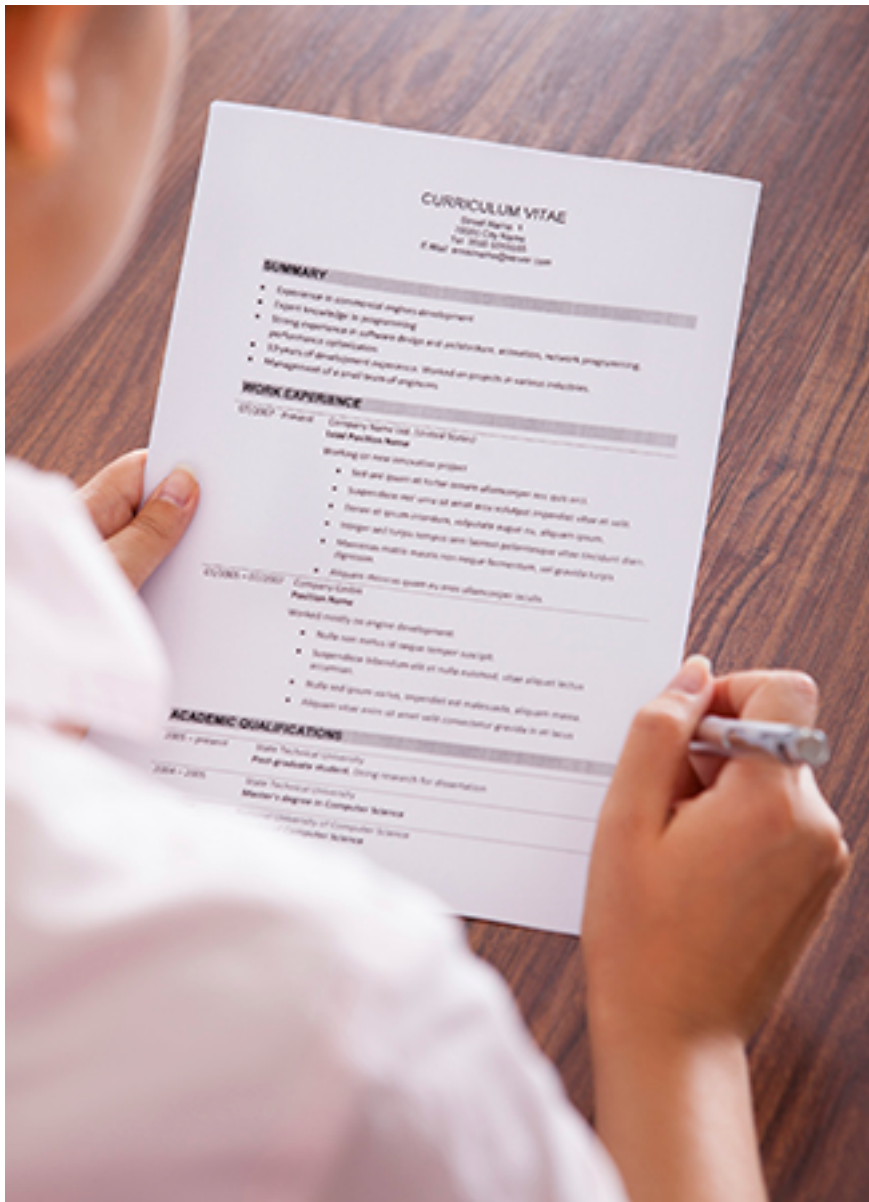


Figure 1 CV

A CV is one of the most important pieces of your toolkit when it comes to applying for jobs, and later in the course you will look at ways to make sure your CV stands out from the pile when it arrives with a recruiter. However a CV is not the only way to get noticed. These days you are also likely to need an online presence to make yourself visible to potential employers.

LinkedIn is one of the most used professional networking sites. It has the advantage of being both an online CV and networking tool, and as you will see in Week 6, networking is one of the most important success strategies for getting back after a career break.

This week you will begin to build your profile on LinkedIn, and start developing your networks by searching for former colleagues and/or fellow returners. By highlighting your valuable work experience and qualifications you will make it easier for employers to find you. Your career break, may well have taught you valuable transferable skills and helped

you to make useful contacts. Reflecting on these skills and drawing on the help and expertise of your contacts might help to build your confidence as you begin to search for a new opportunity.

## 1.1 Why LinkedIn for STEM?

LinkedIn is an effective and increasingly popular platform, especially for STEM recruitment, so it is worth getting to know how best to use it to your advantage. In a recent review based on data from over 300 million LinkedIn member profiles worldwide, 18 of the 25 positions listed were STEM roles. In other words, STEM specialities dominate hiring priorities, especially in the technology sector.

According to the report, the ten most sought after skills include:

1. statistical analysis and data mining
2. middleware and integration software
3. business intelligence
4. storage systems and management
5. Perl/Python/Ruby
6. mobile development
7. network and information security
8. SEO/SEM marketing
9. foreign language translation
10. Java development

The author of the report Maria Ignatova (2014) explains:

We thought it would be interesting for both recruiters and candidates to see what were the 'hottest professional skills on LinkedIn in 2014' – or put it in other words, what skills got people hired and kept recruiters searching this past year ...

Listen to John, an SSE HR manager, talk about how he uses LinkedIn in his company's recruitment.

Video content is not available in this format.

[John on LinkedIn](#)





## 1.2 About LinkedIn

LinkedIn has over 400 million users and has been designed to enable you to build and make the most of a network of contacts. By building a profile, you will be increasing your visibility and building your chances of finding jobs that you want and employers that want to hire you. As with a conventional paper-based CV, expertise (skills) and experience (work history) represent the primary components of your online identity on LinkedIn, and recruiters scan these sections when they are looking out for appropriate employees.

While many social networking sites tend to be dominated by young people, LinkedIn is ideally suited for returners. According to the Pew Research Centre (2015), LinkedIn is the only major social media platform where usage rates are higher among 30- to 49-year-olds than among 18- to 29-year-olds. This means that people with more professional experience are more likely to be on LinkedIn, making it a great place to build networks with others in your field.

### Privacy and security

Increasing your online visibility has become more and more important to making sure you are found by potential employers, but you may quite rightly be a bit concerned about privacy and security. As with all social media, understanding and having control over what others can see about you is vital for your own peace of mind, as well as ensuring potential employers are getting the impression of you that you want them to. With that in mind, you are going to start by examining what your privacy options are on LinkedIn. For instance, you can control the level of detail that is available to the general public and how much can only be seen by your contacts (called connections).

In the next activity, when you set up your LinkedIn account, you will consider the privacy settings to ensure you get your profile up to speed before you make it visible to your connections. There are a number of things you can control on LinkedIn to maintain your privacy, including limiting who can view elements of your profile to first connections only. (First connections are contacts that you have agreed to connect with or that you have reached out to and connected with.) You can also set your account so that your photo and full name are not visible to the general public.

## 2 Making the most of LinkedIn

If you already have a LinkedIn account, the rest of this week's activities will help you to optimise your account and maximise the opportunities for finding employment.

### Activity 1 Joining LinkedIn

Allow approximately 10 minutes

If you haven't already got a LinkedIn account, now is the time to begin by [registering and setting up a profile on LinkedIn](#), free of charge.

#### Discussion

If you need assistance with setting up a LinkedIn account, there are many free tutorials on YouTube that can help you. It might take you a while to gather all of the information that you want in order to populate all the sections of your LinkedIn profile. If you already have a CV, you can cut and paste sections from this into your profile. You don't need to do all the LinkedIn sections now; you will be looking through these throughout the week.

While you are setting up your LinkedIn account you will be asked if you want to connect with your contacts. You are advised to skip this stage for now; you'll find out how to make contacts later. One thing to remember while you are in the process of completing and collating all of the information for your LinkedIn profile is not to connect to people or make your profile public until you are sure it is ready for the world to see!

During this course you can take some time to get your profile into a state that you are happy with before making it publicly accessible. If you already have a LinkedIn profile you may want to edit and change your settings while you brush up the content to make it more suitable for its function as a job-seeking tool.

### Activity 2 How to use LinkedIn's privacy settings

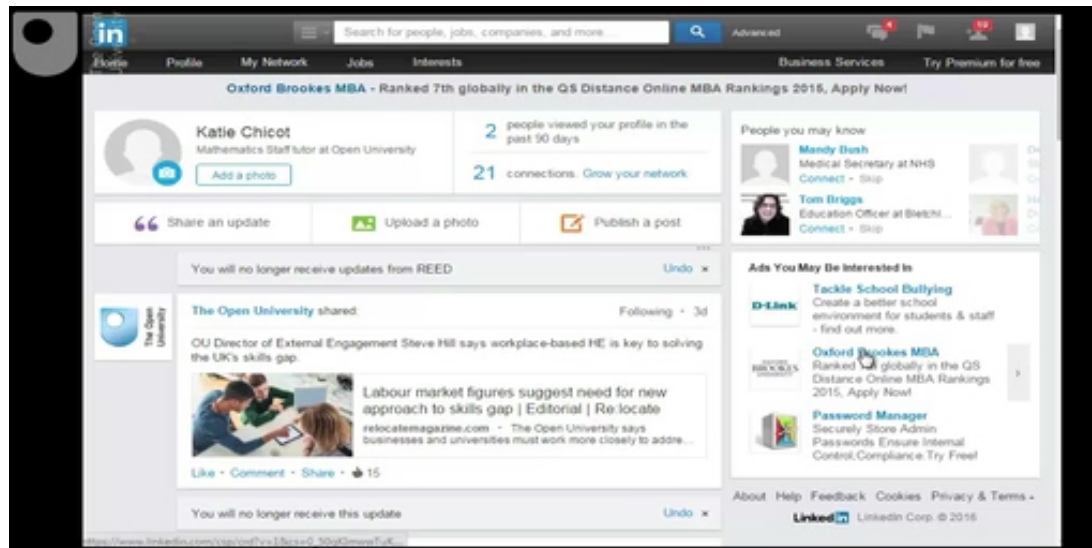
Allow approximately 5 minutes

Before you start to make a profile, you should consider the essential privacy setting changes you need to make. This will ensure that your connections won't receive updates about your profile changes until you are ready. **Make sure that your notifications are switched off so that your connections are not contacted immediately and before you are ready with your profile updates.** If you don't do this, each time you make any kind of change, your connections see this on their newsfeed as a notification. You need to get your profile to a finished state that you are happy with before going public.

Now watch a short video that outlines how to manage your privacy settings on LinkedIn. It's likely that the site may change over time and not look exactly the same as in the video, but this will still give you a good idea of how to manage your privacy settings.

Video content is not available in this format.

[LinkedIn Privacy](#)



### 3 Creating your online profile

To make the most of LinkedIn, you need to build up your profile with as much relevant information as possible. Having a completed profile offers you a greater chance for networking success, and LinkedIn helps you with suggestions along the way to complete your profile. Creating your profile is the online equivalent of creating your CV, so is a core task of your identity work.

### Tips for building an effective profile that attracts recruiters/employers

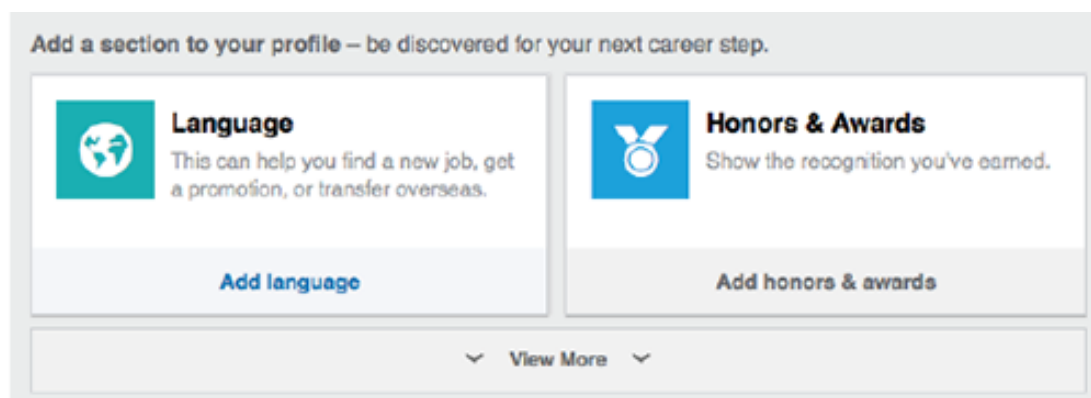


Figure 3 LinkedIn suggestions

During the first stage of setting up your profile, LinkedIn will give you useful suggestions and recommendations. For example, you may not have thought about adding any additional languages you can speak or awards you have received as well as the usual qualifications (Figure 3).

1. It's important to include a professional looking photograph. Your photo should have only you in it from the shoulders up. If you already have a photo on LinkedIn, make sure it's up to date, as an old photo can cause a surprise when you meet someone in person! To make the most of your profile, get a professional photographer or ask someone with a good quality camera to take your photo. Dress smartly, as if you are attending an interview, and keep the background simple so as not to detract from your face.
2. Your professional tagline (under your name) is a great opportunity to use some key words to highlight what you have to offer in terms of skills; for example, research and problem solving or communications skills. Most people use the tagline to show their current job title, but if you are not currently working then you will need to think up a tagline that sums up your experience and what you are hoping to do, using language that attracts recruiters. Activity 3 will help you with developing such a tagline.

### Activity 3 Creating a tagline that attracts recruiters

Allow approximately 15 minutes

When you are creating your tagline, you need to use attention-grabbing keywords that will help to entice a recruiter into looking through your profile and seeing what you have to offer.

Start by thinking about keywords that recruiters would use to find you on LinkedIn – you will find inspiration in job descriptions in the 'essential criteria' section and other LinkedIn profiles. For example, if you are looking for a mechanical engineering role you could use some of the following keywords: analysis, CAD, development, performance, testing, engineering, electrical, and so on.

In marketing language, your tagline is essentially your Unique Selling Point (USP). What unique qualities or skills do you have that you can offer an employer? Put yourself in the employer's shoes and ask yourself questions: 'Why should I hire you? What have you got to offer my company? What value can you bring to a company or organisation?'

## 3.1 Your profile

Your profile summary is an important section of your profile. The best way to gain inspiration for writing it is to look at people in careers that interest you and see how they describe their work and histories. Think like a recruiter when writing your profile and use the key words you used to search similar profiles on LinkedIn. Activity 4 will help you to develop your summary.

### Activity 4 Developing your summary

Allow approximately 30 minutes

Search on LinkedIn for some job titles that you are thinking of pursuing. If you don't yet know what specific job title interests you, try looking at the profiles of particular companies and their employees, or at professional institutions.

1. Think about your key strengths, how would you like others to see you? If you need help, ask your friends and family – what do they think you are good at?

2. Write a draft summary based on your research and key strengths. However, please do not launch your profile until it is ready.

## Further hints and tips to being found

You should aim to have a profile which is 100 per cent 'complete', giving you an 'All Star' profile strength. If you haven't completed this already, you should spend some time building up the sections of your profile listed below.

- Experience: complete this section, starting with your most recent job role. Include at least two jobs which you have had in the past and ensure you include clear job titles and work history. Your work history is not just a list of tasks, but should instead contain a selection of key accomplishments and, where possible, use quantifiable figures to draw the eye. To stand out from other profiles, use the opportunity to really sell your skills in this section and include all-important key words and phrases.
- Volunteering experience (see Section 3.2 for details)
- Education: make sure you include your qualifications at degree level along with other professional awards or training. It is not necessary to include school information unless you particularly want to
- Languages are highly sought after by employers, so do not forget to add any you are fluent in as an additional section to your profile.

Include your career break on your profile and don't try to hide it. Briefly explain the reason for this break; for example, 'parenting career break' or 'career break for travel'. This is much better than having a gap in your experience, as gaps that aren't addressed may cause the recruiter to question your ability, so a clear explanation can remove any reticence. Please include **any** voluntary, freelance or entrepreneurial roles you may have had. This can include consulting on a project, either ad hoc or unofficially, for an ex-colleague or friend, to demonstrate that you are continually developing your skills.

Listen to Julie Thornton, Head of HR at Tideway, talking about career breaks and how best to present these in a CV or in LinkedIn.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Julie Thornton](#)



When you have finished creating your profile, try searching for yourself on LinkedIn and check out your site as a visitor. Are you impressed? You can also click on the 'Profile' tab at the top and then 'View profile as' to see how you appear to either your connections or the general public. If you have signed out, you can edit your profile and summary by signing in again and making changes. Again, ensure that notifications are turned off and no messages are automatically sent to contacts.

### 3.2 Unpaid or voluntary work

If you've been out of work for some time, you can sometimes feel like you don't have anything to show for all of this time spent 'away'. In fact, the skills and experiences that you gain doing unpaid and voluntary work are often transferable to a work context, and many employers recognise their value.

Beryl is a returner who took part in the Open University research project described in Week 1. She returned to her job as a civil engineer after an eight year career break. Here she describes how she developed additional skills through her voluntary work as a school governor that helped her land a more senior job on her return to work:

I work for the school PTA and I became a school governor, ended up as Chair of Governors for a few years as well so I was quite usefully employed. I found the work in the school particularly useful because PTA work you are organising things, it was project management under a different guise, something that I was used to and with the governor work at the school as well you are managing things – managing finances, it was using skills that I had but in a completely different context. When I came back into engineering particularly I did use those years as PTA and Chair of Governors and that was particularly on my application form because I felt that the skills that I had learnt there and developed there were particularly relevant to taking a more senior job at work. The project management and the financial skills don't have to be acquired in the workplace they can be acquired anywhere and I think they are just as valid.

#### Recording your voluntary work



Even if you think you haven't done a lot, you should take some time to think laterally and creatively about all your unpaid activities, as you might well be surprised at the number of transferable skills you have acquired.

Voluntary work could include, for example, helping at a playgroup, organising events at a community centre or faith-based organisation, organising a school activity, chaperoning a trip or helping an elderly neighbour or a friend with their children. All of these activities and more help you to develop skills which are transferable, particularly in a management or organisational role, and these will enhance your CV and LinkedIn profile.

Need further inspiration? Here is a list of activities you might have been involved in during your career break:

- treasurer of a Parent Teacher Association
- member of an organising committee for a community event
- coach for a children's sports team
- playgroup helper
- reading with children in school
- designing leaflets for a local political campaign
- organising a camping trip for a youth group
- Citizens Advice
- organising charity events.

### Activity 5 Reflecting on your unpaid work

Allow approximately 15 minutes

Make a list of some of the skills you have used in voluntary or unpaid work:

#### Answer

You may have included some of the following:

- organising resources
- financial planning and budgeting
- managing other people
- communication (verbal and written)
- research and information seeking
- creativity
- leadership
- presentation or performance
- supporting or motivating others
- working in a team.

## 3.3 Expanding your voluntary work

Volunteering can be an ideal strategy for getting a foot in the door. Just as workplace practices are growing in their complexity, job hunters are also finding creative ways of gaining access to specific businesses. As a volunteer or intern, valuable experience can be gained in the workplace so finding the right opportunity is important. Volunteering can

boost your confidence, improve social interaction, build identity, create a sense of purpose and enable you to contribute positively to your community.

As a volunteer, you will not usually have a contract with the employer, but many formal volunteering schemes offer a volunteer's agreement that gives you some rights and lets you know what to expect – these can also indicate training, supervision, support, expenses covered, and so on. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), for example, has information on volunteers' legal status.

There is also another badged free course from The Open University on this topic:

[Introducing the voluntary sector.](#)

### **STEM Ambassadors and Code Clubs**

A good way to get some volunteering experience is to become a [STEM Ambassador](#). Over 25,000 STEM professionals volunteer as STEM Ambassadors. This involves going into schools to help out and talk about STEM subjects and to enrich the learning experience of children encouraging them to take up STEM subjects in school. Similarly, the national network of [Code Clubs](#) has been set up to connect schools with local volunteers with IT and programming skills, offering after-school activities for children aged 9 to 11.

These kinds of voluntary activities can be a great stepping stone towards a more formal volunteering placement and can show potential employers that you are committed both to your community and also to sharing your knowledge and skills. It's also part of your identity work and can help you get back in touch with your previous identity as a STEM professional.

## **4 Creating a network**

Once you've completed your profile, making connections and building up your network of contacts is one of the key features of LinkedIn that will help you with achieving the next step in your return to STEM, whether to find a job opportunity directly or to help you better understand what your options are.

You can add individuals that you already know one by one by sending them a personalised message. There are also a couple of features that can help you build up your network of connections. 'Add Connections' is a tool that uses your email contacts to help you build your network. LinkedIn will then ask for certain permissions to access your contacts. Once you agree to the permissions a list of potential email addresses/contacts will be given to you to follow up.

Another tool, 'Find Alumni', helps you to find contacts from your old school/university who are working in an industry, company or location of interest to you. Depending on how long ago you last studied, this could be more or less useful for you.

### **Important note**

To connect with new contacts, it is always best to send a personalised message – this can currently *only* be done via a PC or Mac. It is best not to try to connect with anyone on LinkedIn via a phone or tablet unless you already know them, as a generic connection request is sent.



### Activity 6 Search for connections

Allow approximately 20 minutes

Search LinkedIn for three people who you have worked or studied with, or who have been influential in your career. If you already have them as connections, look for new people.

You may be curious about others you knew in the past. With LinkedIn you get a much more work-related presentation of people than you may have known socially.

Remember, **if you look at someone's profile they will see this**, so choose carefully whose name you click on as there is limited anonymity on LinkedIn. You can, through your settings, choose to remain anonymous when you search profiles, but this means you won't be able to see who clicks on your profile, and you will lose the opportunity to make potential connections.

At this stage, make a note of where the people you have found are and what they are doing in their career at the moment. Try not to get discouraged by the apparent 'success' of other people, but use this as an inspiration. If they have not taken a career break they are likely to have progressed more quickly. They may have good tips about how they have managed to achieve success following a career break themselves.

In the next section we'll suggest some further steps for building your connections.

## 4.1 Building connections

You should now have a note of three people who you have worked or studied with, or people who have been influential in your career. The following steps are suggestions for how to develop your profile and build your connections.

1. Open the profile of one of your potential connections and read through their personal summary and tagline, and check out the additional sections of their profiles.
2. Make a comparison between the content of their profile and the content of your own. Use this opportunity to make notes of anything that is in their profile that you would like to add to your own. This could include information about any volunteer placements, details of professional affiliations and qualifications, organisations you support and maybe even some companies that they are following which you hadn't thought of.
3. Once you have looked at this person's profile, you can also see suggestions for who other people viewed, based both on this person's profile and similar roles.
4. If you do want to connect with these individuals now, you can send a message via LinkedIn, but **avoid using the generic message already provided by the site**. Personalise the message by drawing connections with work, study or interests. People are more likely to connect with you if they recognise they have something in common with you. Remember, at this stage you are *not* expected to contact your ex-colleagues/employers as your site is a 'work in progress', but you can use this opportunity to connect with people you know well, including your friends.

## 4.2 Expanding your LinkedIn reach

As you go along, you will want to build up the number of people in your LinkedIn network. Since LinkedIn searches are conducted over your network of contacts, this means more

people can find you and vice versa. Another good way to build up your number of connections is to join groups.

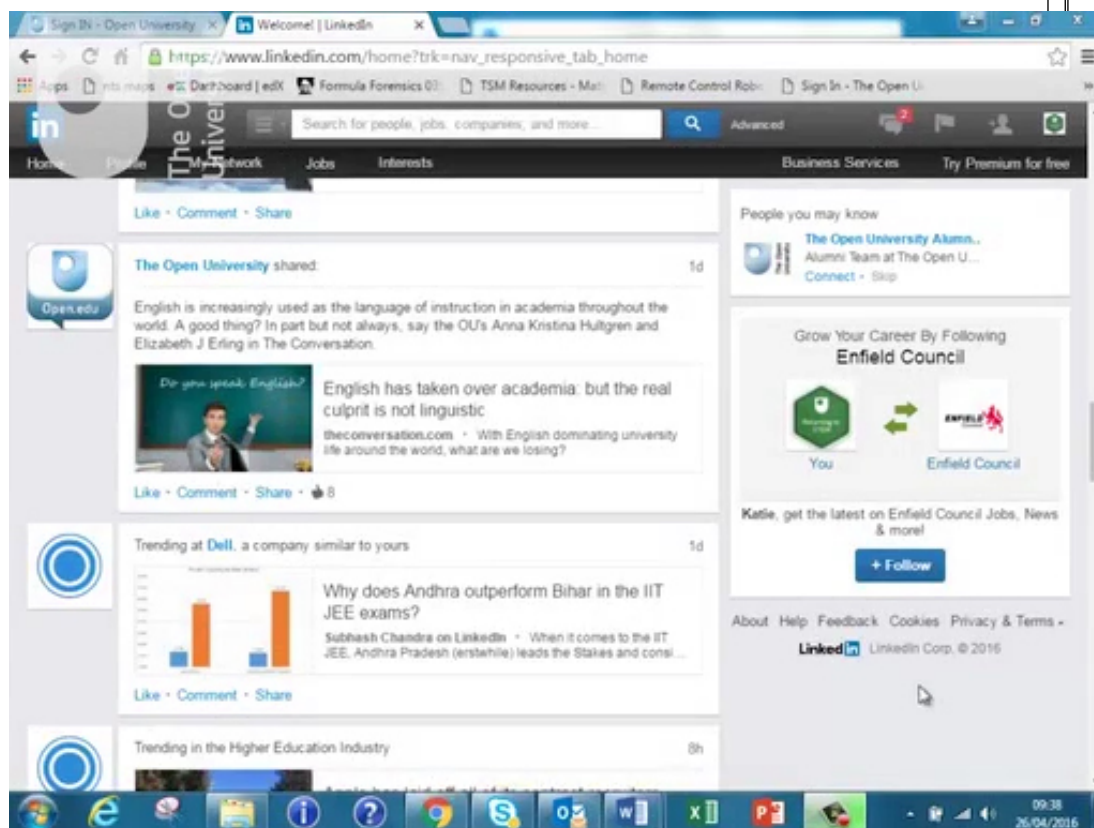
### Activity 7 Joining the OU Returners' LinkedIn group

Allow approximately 5 minutes

A [Returners LinkedIn group](#) has been set up especially for this course. The following video will guide you on how to join the group so you can make contact with the group members and stay in contact with them during the course. You might want to share useful resources, information on employers and interview tips, or just some encouraging words for others in your situation.

Video content is not available in this format.

Expanding your reach



There is also an OU Careers Advisory Service LinkedIn group, [TOUCaN](#), which will be useful – in total you can join up to 50 groups on LinkedIn.

### Activity 8 Joining additional groups

Allow approximately 15 minutes

Using the search box at the top of the LinkedIn home page, with 'Groups' selected from the adjacent drop-down menu, search for relevant groups that match your sector interests.

The following groups are a useful starting place:

- [Open University](#) (for current and past students)
- [Women in Science, Engineering & Technology](#)
- [STEM Returners](#).

If you haven't yet got an up to date CV you can build your CV at LinkedIn Labs using the information you have put into your profile. This site allows you to choose from different templates and formats. It's a good idea to start working on your CV at the same time as your LinkedIn profile. Later on in the course, you'll return to your CV and look at optimising it for particular job opportunities.

## 5 This week's quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

Week 2 practice quiz.

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you've finished.

To open in a new window, right click on the link above and select 'Open in new window'.

To view this content please access the complete course on [OpenLearn](#)

## 6 Summary

During this week you have worked on your identity and how you want to present yourself professionally. You have learned about the benefits of the online professional networking site LinkedIn, and used it to create an online profile. You have highlighted your valuable work experience and qualifications in your summary and tagline, which will make it easier for employers to find you. You have added details of unpaid work to your profile and seen that your career break, when reflected upon, may well have taught you valuable transferable skills and given you useful contacts.

This week was all about your skills, experience and contacts. Next week is all about creating your CV and looking at the changing world of STEM employment. You will look at the latest developments and growth areas of STEM employment and then you will research career paths in your sector.

You can now go to [Week 3](#).

## Week 3: What's going on in your sector

### Week 3 Introduction

Returning to work in STEM sectors can be daunting. The rapid pace of scientific and technological change means you may feel that many of the skills and experiences you have are out of date, and there are new jobs and new areas of work that didn't even exist when you first entered work. Be prepared for the possibility that when you look at the changes in different employment sectors you might want to rethink previous assumptions about which sector you may return to work in. It may be different from the one you worked in previously.

This week you will look at what opportunities there are in STEM employment.

Watch the following video in which Sue introduces the subject.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Week 3 Introduction Video](#)



This week you will be reading and researching – gathering background data and information about what the trends are in STEM employment that will help inform your decision-making about your next steps. You will also be working on preparing and developing your CV, which will be an essential tool in your return-to-work journey.

By the end of this week you should:

- be aware of the latest overall trends and issues in your chosen field
- be aware of government publications on trends in STEM and investment strategies
- be able to consider career options relevant to your background and experience
- have made a draft CV.

# 1 Employment trends in STEM

When you are returning from a career break, things that have changed may seem confusing. This change, however, is driven by science and technology, which create demand for new skills from a growing number of employers. With a background in STEM you are well placed to take advantage of the changes in the workplace. According to the UK government's *Working Future 2012-2022* Evidence Report (Wilson et al, 2014), between 2012 and 2015, the total number of people employed in core STEM occupations in the UK has grown by 13 per cent to 2.9 million; over the same period the number of women employed in core STEM occupations has risen by 40 per cent. So where might you be working when you return to STEM? In this section you will be looking at some key government and business reports about some expected trends in STEM employment.

## Activity 1 Trends in STEM

Allow approximately 30 minutes

Read through the following three passages, which give an overview of technology, engineering and science trends, and make a note of anything that surprises you or makes you think about new directions you might want to pursue.

### Technology

Technology has fundamentally changed the workplace and what was once a separate function has now been consolidated into core business. The most precious commodity is now data – organisations collect data in increasing quantities from their customers and other stakeholders. Looking forwards, analysis and application of this 'big data' will increasingly present new employment opportunities.

This analysis requires mathematicians, statisticians and coders to interrogate the data. New methods will be developed to work with these data sets. Work is likely to be carried out within multifunctional innovation teams who will be set targets of achieving specific business outcomes through the adoption of technology and the application of big data. This kind of work is not confined to the IT industry. Banks and financial services providers are now among the biggest spenders on technology as they try to gain competitive advantage. For example, the largest division within Goldman Sachs is the 9000 strong technology group (McLannahan and Noonan, 2015).

Specific IT skills are already in short supply and demand is forecast to continue outstripping supply over at least the next five years (Wilson et al, 2014). Software developers, system analysts, business analysts, web designers and specialist managers are the roles in greatest demand.

People with STEM skills have been trained to deal with data, understand data, analyse data and are the favoured choice for business-focused roles by many types of data-driven employers. A recent report from the CBI states that 'STEM qualified graduates have a real advantage in the jobs market with four out of 10 employers preferring STEM graduates over other types of graduates' (CBI/Pearson, 2015, p. 4).

Another big growth area in IT is security. Increasingly, databases are being criminally hacked for commercial gain and the protection of personal and proprietary data is a huge growth area for those with highly-specialist IT skills.

In the ICT professional category, the total number of people employed has grown by 20 per cent to one million; although still in a minority, the actual number of women working in the sector has grown by 40 per cent in that time (WISE, 2015).

## Engineering

Engineering is one of the biggest contributors to the UK economy. It is estimated that UK engineering businesses contributed £456bn to UK Gross Domestic Product – 27 per cent of the total (Kumar et al, 2016). Modern engineering encompasses a broad spectrum of technologies and industries – from biosciences to renewables, from electronics to space in addition to the more familiar transport and construction industries.

Many areas of engineering were affected by the financial crash of 2007–08 and the reduction in demand resulting from the austerity measures that were subsequently instituted globally and nationally. Even so, the single biggest issue occupying the overall industry for some time has been the imbalance in the supply and demand of engineering skills. As the industry looks forward to an era of substantially increased investment in engineering output, it is also facing a situation where there aren't enough people who have completed relevant apprenticeships and or who have a higher education qualification.

A trend we have seen in recent years is the rapid increase in the number of women entering the engineering sector. In the past three years, the total number of people employed in professional engineering occupations has grown by 14 per cent to 0.5 million; in the same time, the number of women engineers employed has tripled (WISE, 2015).

## Science

In this next passage, the opportunities and changes in the science sector are outlined by Cogent Skills (2015):

Cogent Skills works across the science sector, representing Life Sciences (pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, medical technology and consumer healthcare), the Industrial Sciences (chemicals, downstream, industrial biotechnology, polymers, advanced materials and formulations) and Nuclear. The science-based sector comprises some of the UK's most strategically important, value-adding and innovative employers in the UK. It provides for our energy and our healthcare needs as well as the raw materials for supply chains across every single area of industry. Within this highly skills-intensive footprint there are around 585,000 employees contributing in excess of £25bn in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the UK economy. The sector's productivity, at around £66,000 GVA per employee, represents a high-value contribution, particularly when benchmarked against the UK employee average of around £23,000.

These industries are developing technologies that improve lives and underpin the sustainability of the UK. All have molecular transformation at their core and are dependent on a continued flow of STEM skills.

The industries have an ageing workforce: in the process manufacturing sector just under 40 per cent of the existing workforce is over 45 years old, which requires a high replacement demand over the next five to ten years. This is compounded by cross-industry shortages of skilled technicians and the fact that the industry is reliant on STEM skills-sets, which have been in decline in recent years.



The manufacturing processes of these science-based industries are also both safety critical, and carbon/energy intensive and hence are heavily regulated from both a safety and environmental perspective.

## Sector drivers

Structural and technological developments have changed the way we do business. In the science industries, particularly life sciences, there has been a move from single corporate entities to collaborative ventures with smaller companies and the increased outsourcing of research and development to a growing supply chain.

There is now a premium on the mobility and transportability of skills, as well as on innovation. Evidence for this comes from employers. There is disquiet over the quality of recruits (at all levels), their lack of commercial work experience, the time it takes to make them work-ready, the lack of vocational pathways and equivalencies, the ability of employers to influence course content and provider complacency.

This is supported by employer surveys which consistently show that over a quarter of our sector vacancies remain hard to fill (UKCES Employer Skills Survey). This is well above the national average and includes some of the sector's key strategic sectors (for example in medical technology: 54 per cent of vacancies are hard to fill).

The Science Industry Partnership has an ambition to meet this challenge. This is because life sciences technologies and skills have the same scientific core as the wider biological and chemically based industrial sciences. This includes biotechnology, medical technology, consumer healthcare, chemicals and pharmaceuticals. More importantly, developments in life science research and applications have accelerated since the decoding of the human genome. It is widely recognised that the spread of these new fundamental principles and techniques into the economy has hardly begun.

This sector breakdown is as follows:

Sector	Number of Employees
Chemicals	97,045
Life Sciences	175,761
Nuclear	70,000
Paints	14,875
Petroleum	68,609
Polymer	158,541
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>584,831</b>

(Cogent Skills, 2015)

## Activity 2 Evaluating the statistics

Allow approximately 5 minutes

The [Department for Innovation and Skills \(2015\) Growth Dashboard](#) shows the trends in a number of STEM occupational categories. It says that 'in 2013, 32 per cent of vacancies were classified as skills shortage vacancies; an increase from 2011 levels' (p. 32).

On page 29 of the dashboard there is a breakdown of the sectors shown in Figure 1.

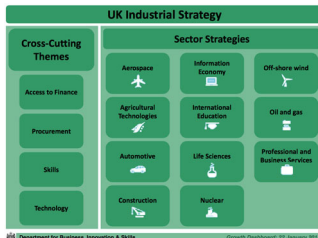


Figure 1 UK industrial strategy sectors (UKCES, 2015)

Go to page 29 of the dashboard and select the sector or sectors most related to the area of STEM you have previously worked in. Make a note of the amount or percentage of UK GVA which the sector represents and the percentage or number of UK jobs it has. It is useful to take a look at pages 29–44 of this government report and make notes on what you think are the most relevant trends in the area of STEM you are interested in.

### Discussion

Specific employment and GVA facts are:

- **Aerospace** – 7.6 per cent of manufacturing GVA (4.6 per cent in 2000) and 4.3 per cent of manufacturing employment (2.9 per cent in 2000).
- **The UK Agri-cultural Technologies sector** – contributes £10.4bn to GVA and employs 475,000 people.
- **Automotive** – 0.7 per cent of UK GVA and 5.9 per cent of UK manufacturing jobs.
- **Construction** – 6 per cent of UK GVA and 6 per cent of UK employment.
- **Information Economy** – the chart shows that in 2013 there were 900,000 jobs in the sector in 2013 and £68bn GVA.
- **International Education** – the education sector exported £18.1bn in 2012, with the majority of this (65 per cent) coming from higher education. The number of European Union Higher Education students in the UK has risen by 13,140 between 2007/08 and 2012/13. Over the same period the number of non-EU students has risen by 70,330.
- **Life Sciences** – employs 176,000 people, with a £51bn turnover.
- **Nuclear** – sales in the nuclear sector were £3.96bn in 2011/12. There were just under 36,000 jobs in the nuclear sector in 2011/12.
- **Off-shore wind** – the sector could deliver up to £7bn GVA (excluding exports) and support over 30,000 full time equivalent UK jobs.
- **Oil and gas** – the UK oil and gas industry GVA is £24.0bn and directly employs over 25,000 people. Once the supply chain is included, the industry supports about 280,000 jobs.
- **Professional and Business Services (PBS)** – the chart shows that in 2013 there were four million jobs in the sector and £160bn GVA.



You have now looked at an overview of the trends in STEM and begun to consider how this is relevant to you. In the next section you will look at a specific area where there is employment; demand either through a skills gap or a growth in the sector.

## 2 Skills shortage – where will the jobs be?

Now is a great time to be returning to a career in STEM as employment opportunities at all levels are set to expand considerably. In the next section, you will read summaries of some UK government reports about its future strategies and investment plans. It's an opportunity to think about where your existing skills and experience might be relevant and what new growth areas excite you.



Figure 2 Government investment in a range of infrastructure projects across England

The UK government has committed to an investment of £411bn between 2015 and 2020 in a range of infrastructure projects across England (Figure 2). The scale and scope of these projects will require skills across the spectrum of STEM disciplines.

Due to the nature of UK government devolution, some of these projects will also cover activities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In addition, the Scottish government (2012) has its own Infrastructure Plan detailing investments totalling approximately £25bn; the Northern Ireland Executive's (2016) Infrastructure Plan totals £8.25 million and the multi-billion Welsh government Infrastructure Investment Plan has been in place for several years.

These infrastructure investments promise a strong future for the engineering industry; defence spending is also set to rise and the demand for engineering and allied skills will continue to expand significantly across the UK.

As a complement to the UK National Infrastructure Plan, the UK government has announced a three million increase in the number of apprenticeships. Degree-level apprenticeships are part of the package, which will be funded by a levy on employers.

The upward trends in employment in engineering and IT-related occupations are reflected in a recent report from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, which reviews the requirement, through to 2022, for UK high level STEM skills (Wilson et al, 2014).

High-level STEM skills are considered to be of key importance to the performance of the UK economy across the board – in terms of jobs, productivity, innovation and global competitiveness. Ensuring that businesses have access to these skills is particularly critical to the process of innovation and will therefore be increasingly important to the UK's future competitiveness in global markets.

Engineering and IT professionals are particular priorities in terms of labour market need but, in general, the overall level of employment in higher-level STEM occupations is projected to grow by around 500,000 jobs, or 18 per cent, between 2012 and 2022.

This growth rate is around three times the projected rate for UK employment as a whole and reflects the generally positive prospects for jobs at the associate professional and professional levels.

Watch this interview with John Stewart, the HR Director for the energy company SSE, highlighting why companies are looking for returners.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Skills shortage](#)



## 2.1 Eight great technologies

In broader scientific terms, the government, with advice from the Research Councils, Innovate UK and the Government Office for Science, has identified, and announced financial support for eight emerging technologies as shown in Figure 3. The identified technologies are exciting, high-potential areas of STEM, mainly at an early stage in their growth.

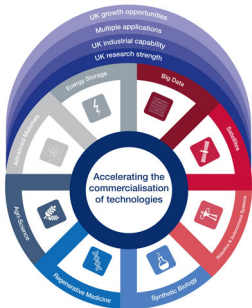


Figure 3 Eight Great Technologies

### 1. Big data and energy-efficient computing

As discussed in Section 1, the technology sector requires the development of new methods of handling data. Data is being generated at a growing rate, with 90 per cent of the world's data being generated in the last two years. As well as making use

of the data, work is also needed to minimise the computing power and memory needed for this data.

## 2. Satellites and commercial applications of space

Satellites are a vast source of data, both in terms of space and Earth surveillance. Use of satellites for communications and broadcasting will continue to grow. In terms of employers, Airbus and Thales are the main companies involved in the construction of satellite platforms.

## 3. Robotics and autonomous systems

Robotics now contributes strongly within agile manufacturing, logistics, medicine, healthcare, and commercial and consumer market segments. Using swarms of individually 'stupid' robots to complete extensive or complex tasks will become increasingly commonplace: for example, Coralbots were developed by Heriot-Watt University to assist with coral reef restoration and other threats to marine life. Markets for care robots and entertainment robots will also grow in importance.

## 4. Synthetic biology

This field is 'the convergence of IT and biological sciences to engineer genes to heal us, feed us and fuel us' (Willetts, 2013). Potentially, it is a vast field of research with many start-up companies.

## 5. Regenerative medicine and tissue engineering

This field covers the development of biological substitutes that can restore and maintain normal function with a very wide range of applications. It is currently focused on centres of medical research excellence.

## 6. Agri-science

The increased application of science to agriculture is becoming more and more urgent in order to address the impact of climate change and desertification and an increasing world population.

## 7. Advanced materials and nano-technology

The design of new and advanced materials – for example, nano-particles, graphene and quantum photonics – are all leading-edge applications that are close to being commercialised.

## 8. Energy and its storage

Renewable energy and nuclear power have been a strong focus for the energy generation industry for some time. The 2015 Paris Climate Change Conference (Climate Action, 2015) has emphasised the size of the task ahead. As well as wind, solar and wave energy sources, plans for new nuclear power stations are likely to offer employment opportunities. Another growth area is power storage for renewable energy, including the UK National Grid, as well as new commercial applications (particularly cars and other vehicles).

## 2.2 STEM occupations and skills

In a recent government report (UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2015), 38 high level STEM occupations were considered critical and likely to be areas of increased recruitment. Table 1 lists these occupations.

**Table 1 Critical STEM occupations for recruitment**

Rank	Occupation
1	Programmers and software development professionals
2	Production managers and directors in manufacturing
3	IT specialist managers
4	Information technology and telecommunications professionals (not elsewhere classified)
5	Engineering professionals (not elsewhere classified)
6	Mechanical engineers
7	IT business analysts, architects and systems designers
8	Design and development engineers
9	Civil engineers
10	IT project and programme managers
11	Electrical engineers
12	Production and process engineers
13	Electronics engineers
14	Information technology and telecommunications directors
15	Quality assurance and regulatory professionals
16	Web design and development professionals
17	Engineering technicians
18	Biological scientists and biochemists
19	Health and safety officers
20	Research and development managers
21	Quality control and planning engineers
22	Electrical and electronics technicians
23	Natural and social science professionals (not elsewhere classified)
24	Waste disposal and environmental services managers
25	Building and civil engineering technicians
26	Planning, process and production technicians
27	Laboratory technicians
28	Production managers and directors in mining and energy
29	Environment professionals
30	Science, engineering and production technicians (not elsewhere classified)
31	Environmental health professionals
32	Quality assurance technicians
33	Physical scientists
34	IT operations technicians

35	Chemical scientists
36	IT user support technicians
37	Conservation professionals
38	IT engineers

(Adapted from UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2015)

### Activity 3 Thinking about your skills

Allow about 30 minutes

Using Table 1 as a prompt, draw a spider diagram (sometimes called a mind map) of your skills and experience matching them to the kinds of jobs that are likely to be available in your field. Also note where you think you might need additional training if you were going to enter this area of work.



Figure 4 Spider diagram

You can draw your diagram by hand or using a mind-mapping tool such as FreeView that is free to download and use.

You've researched different areas of growth in STEM employment and thought about which areas are likely to match your skills. You might also want to consider going to further study or training to update your skills and knowledge.

## 2.3 Update your skills or study for another qualification

If you are thinking about updating your skills or retraining and making a career change, you will need to do some investigation into possible courses.

Informal learning such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) can be a quick (and low cost) way to update sector-specific skills and knowledge, and also to test out new subject areas that you might be interested in pursuing. Online and distance qualifications in many STEM areas are available for part-time study at The Open University. You might also want to look at local colleges and universities in your area (UCAS can provide lists of courses, including postgraduate options).

In making your decision about which course to study, remember to check what the expanding areas of employment are in your region, including forecasts of sectors of growth, as indicated in the previous section. You can find links to local labour market information in the Further Reading section for this week.

For industry-specific training, look at the training options that are available from your professional body.

You may also want to investigate funding sources to help you with your retraining. Are you eligible for a student loan? Are there any suitable scholarships targeting mature students/part-time students?

In the next section we turn back to your profile and how to present yourself to potential employers.

## 3 Creating a CV

Last week you added your experience, skills and qualifications to your LinkedIn profile. This week you have looked at what skills are in demand in your sector. You will now bring those things together to make a draft CV. If you haven't yet got an up-to-date CV you can build one at LinkedIn from the information you have put into your profile.

### Activity 4 Downloading your CV

Allow approximately 5 minutes

You can download and save your Linked In profile into a PDF.

1. Click **Profile** at the top of your homepage.
2. Move your cursor over the **Down arrow** next to the **View profile as** button.
3. Select **Save to PDF**.

The PDF file will be downloaded and saved to the default download location on your computer. Once you open the file you can print it, or alternatively, if you want to edit the CV further then cut and paste the text into a Word document.

#### Comment

If you want to edit the CV further then cut and paste the text into a Word document.

You are going to spend some time considering the look and feel of your CV. You can either use the CV you downloaded from LinkedIn or, alternatively, you may already have a CV that you've used for previous job applications.

## Space and font

Your use of space and font can have a surprising degree of impact on the way your CV is perceived and the image you want to project. Recruitment experts advise you to keep the font simple, with many recommending using either Arial for simplicity and readability, or Helvetica, which has the right mix of professional seriousness and clarity. Some recruiters advise against using Calibri or Times New Roman: because they are the 'default' fonts on many templates, it can look as though you haven't considered any other options. You should also consider what looks good on screen as well as in print – always assume that prospective employers will print a hard copy of your CV – and avoid using flowery or gimmicky fonts such as Comic Sans. It's worth trying out some ready-made templates to see what kind of style you'd like your CV to have and which one you think gives the impression you are trying to portray.

## Format

You'll probably develop your CV in Word or another word processing package; you are unlikely to be sending out printed copies these days so you will need to have a version of it

available as a PDF suitable for emailing. You'll also need a plain text format version that you can easily copy from and paste into online forms. If you try and copy and paste from a nicely formatted Word document, the end result can end up looking messy because of hidden formatting characters in the text. Above all, pay attention to what the employer or recruiter has asked for when you write your CV or application and stick to their requirements.

## Language

Your use of language should convey your strengths and abilities, so think carefully about your choice of words. Table 2 contains a list of power and action words and terms that can help your CV sound dynamic and assertive.

**Table 2 Powerful terms for you CV**

More than x years extensive and diverse experience in	Expertise and demonstrated skills in
Extensive academic/practical background in	Experienced in all facets/phases/aspects of
Knowledge of/experienced as/in	Extensive training/involvement in
Proficient/competent at	Initially employed to/joined organisation to specialise in
Provided technical assistance to	Worked closely with
Constant interaction with	Promoted to
Succeeded in	Proven track record in
Experience involved/included	Successful in/at
Reported to	In charge of
Now involved in	Familiar with
Employed to	Assigned to
Edited	Established
Formulated	Initiated
Implemented	Managed
Instrumental in	

(Source: [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk))

Another handy tip is to use the past tense to introduce an achievement – it gives the impression that you've completed and achieved something. For example, use 'designed suspension bridge', rather than 'designing suspension bridge' or 'investigated' rather than 'the investigation of'. Avoid the use of the first-person 'I' if you can, and drop the words 'a', 'an' and 'the'.

## Emphasis and tone

Try and come across as positive; focus on what you have achieved and what you have to offer. Don't be apologetic about gaps in your career. Explain gaps concisely and focus on the skills developed through voluntary activities/re-training/studying during that period to



show that it has been a productive and positive experience. Remember to highlight and emphasise your relevant skills and experience.

## References

It is generally best to just put 'References available on request' on a CV to avoid referee fatigue. This is particularly important if you are applying for lots of jobs, and particularly if you are sending speculative applications or uploading your CV to a recruitment website.

### Activity 5 The tone of your CV

Allow approximately 15 minutes

Open your CV and update it so that it is in a format and font you are happy with. Re-read it. Are you happy with its emphasis, tone and language?

#### Discussion

You have seen what skills are in demand in your sector. Try to highlight these skills on your CV and show where you have demonstrated them.

Later on in the course, you'll return to your CV and look at optimising it for particular job opportunities.

## 4 Good places for women to work

There is clear momentum behind the recruitment of women into STEM occupations, driven by support from the senior management of major UK companies and by evidence from McKinsey & Company's research into the business benefits of a gender diverse workforce (Hunt et al, 2015). This research correlates a company's financial performance with the gender diversity of its organisation and demonstrates a competitive advantage of diverse organisations compared to less diverse peers companies.

In 2014 WISE convened a group of STEM industry leaders with a brief to develop a process that would guide enlightened companies along a journey from a commitment to gender diversity to actual accomplishment; this brief was supported by the government via the Cabinet Office (WISE, 2014). The output, the *WISE Industry-led Ten Steps*, has been committed to by 40 chairs/chief executives of major STEM employers in the UK. These companies are fully committed to creating a workplace environment that supports women's retention and progression. You can find their details on [the WISE website](#).

Watch Sarah Golding of Bechtel talking about the company's diversity policies and its use of the WISE Ten Steps.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Places for women to work](#)



## 5 This week's quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

Week 3 practice quiz.

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you've finished.

To open in a new window, right click on the link above and select 'Open in new window'.

To view this content please access the complete course on [OpenLearn](#)

## 6 Summary

This week you have learned about the latest developments in STEM employment and the expected growth areas. You should now be:

- aware of the latest overall trends and issues in your chosen field
- aware of government publications on trends in STEM and investment strategies
- able to consider career options relevant to your background and experience.

Next week, you will be exploring the changes that are happening in the way people work and, in particular, reviewing new ways of flexible and agile working that are becoming increasingly possible and widespread. You'll then look at your legal entitlements as well as considering options of working for yourself.

You can now go to [Week 4](#).

## Further reading

## Further reading about sector trends in STEM

A good place to get general information about your sector is your professional body. Another source of information about careers for graduates, including sector trends and career pathways is [the Prospects website](#).

[The annual Skills & Demand in Industry survey](#) from the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) is based on telephone interviews with over 400 employers of engineering and technology staff drawn from across the UK. The one undertaken in June 2015 identifies ongoing high demand for engineers, with jobs on the increase in many sectors. Nearly two-thirds of employers think skills gaps are a threat to their business.

EEF is an employer's federation which published the ['Manufacturing, Britain's Future' report](#) in February 2015. It defines a '4th Industrial Revolution', created by digitisation, as a huge opportunity but draws attention to the importance of getting enough of the right (STEM) skills to be able to realise the potential.

A government dashboard summarises [important facts and figures on UK growth and sector performance](#), as well as the government's growth and industrial policy.

The 2015 edition of an [annual survey of the UK technology industry](#) was produced by recruitment company Mortimer Spinks in collaboration with *Computer Weekly* magazine.

A collaboration between the Tech Partnership, a growing network of employers with a stake in the digital economy and BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT, provides rich [information about the representation and role of women in IT in the UK](#) and provides international benchmarks.

To learn more about the development of the robotics industry visit [Robotics Business Review](#).

To see what's going on in the world of synthetic biology, look at the [SynBiology website](#).

## Further reading about local and regional trends

[The Scottish government](#) provides information about growth sectors in Scotland.

[NIDirect](#) provides the same service for Northern Ireland.

[Local Enterprise Partnerships](#) (LEPs) are a further source of local information. LEPs bring together local government and business to support the local economy. They all have a skills strategy, which you can find online. Major STEM employers and universities are often represented on LEP boards.

The larger [Chambers of Commerce](#) are a further source of information about local skills requirements. Look for news and reports on their websites, as well as contact details for local employers.

[The Federation of Small Businesses](#) is another doorway into local enterprise.

# Week 4: New ways of working

## Week 4 Introduction

My father had one job in his lifetime. I will have six jobs in my lifetime. My children will have six jobs at the same time.

Robin Chase, founder of Zipcar

Last week, you looked at trends within STEM industries and the types of careers and job opportunities that are likely to be growing in these fields. This week, you will be exploring the changes that are happening in the way people work and, in particular, reviewing new ways of flexible and agile working that are becoming increasingly possible and widespread. You'll start by reflecting on what is meant by a career and explore some of the implications of increased flexibility at work, both positive and negative. You'll then look at different types of flexible and agile working, your legal entitlements; and consider options of working for yourself.

Watch Sue introduce the different ways people work in order to manage their busy lives.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Week 4 Introduction Video](#)



By the end of this week you should:

- have reflected on what a career means
- know more about different types of flexible and agile working
- thought about the pros and cons of home working
- understand your legal rights and how to negotiate for what you want
- know more about the pros and cons of being self-employed.

## 1 What is a career?

The term 'career' means different things to different people. A career has traditionally been understood as a lifelong identity, and often involved working for the same organisation or in the same professional field. However, in recent years perceptions and the reality of careers have changed, in both academic research and everyday understandings. This means that an organisational career for life doesn't apply in many sectors; this is also true of STEM based careers – a career is a lifetime narrative that can change over time. For example, many career experts talk about the 'boundaryless career' and protean careers. These terms describe a career being led by the individual rather than a conventional pathway, one that may span a number of organisations, job roles and working patterns across a lifetime of working.

Over the course of a lifetime, careers are often interrupted and non-linear, and this is especially true for women with children who are likely to take a career break or have periods of part-time work. There are, of course, other reasons that people have periods out of work, either through choice or otherwise. In fact, the idea of an uninterrupted career is based on a rather old fashioned model which no longer fits most of the workforce. More and more people don't have one single job, but may instead have what is known as a portfolio career, working on projects for several organisations or individuals; and sometimes combining this with a salaried part-time or full-time job. The world of work is changing and previously held assumptions about careers are no longer appropriate. However, especially in some STEM industries, the traditional model of a career for life is still considered to be the norm, so employers are not always aware of the challenges of coming back after a career break, especially for women.

Now listen to these returners talk about what 'career' means to them and note any differences or similarities with your own experiences.

Video content is not available in this format.

[What is a career?](#)



## 2 Being flexible: what it means in the workplace

Flexible working refers to various patterns of working that are different from a traditional '9-to-5' job. Attitudes to flexible working, along with changes in legal rights, mean there are a range of options for flexible working that can make it feasible to combine work with childcare or other caring commitments. What does flexibility in the workplace really mean, though? The term 'flexibility' can refer to both time and place, and applies to employers as well as those they employ, so it is a complex picture.

Recent legislation on flexible working means that you can request to work hours that fit around other commitments, but, on the other hand, increasing flexibility at work also means that your employer might require you to work either different shifts or in different locations and this can lead to the blurring of boundaries between home and work.

### Activity 1 What is flexible working?

Allow approximately 5 minutes

What do you understand by flexible working? Make a list of as many flexible working practices that you can think of that include flexibility in hours as well as place of work.

#### Discussion

Here are some types of flexible working hours that you may have thought of:

- part-time or reduced hours working
- flexi-time (when you have scope to change work hours outside of 'core' business periods)
- job sharing
- compressed hours – for example, fitting a five-day week into four days
- term-time working – paid or unpaid leave during school holidays
- annual hours – agreed hours split into 'set' and 'reserve' shifts, worked as demand dictates
- zero-hour contracts.

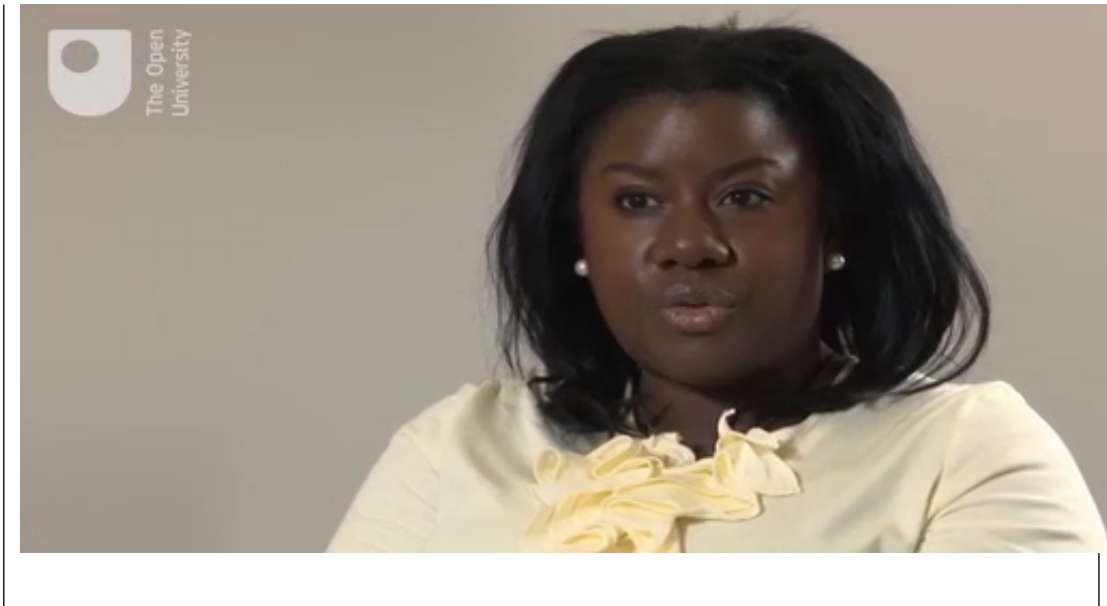
In terms of location, there are options such as remote or home-based working, working in a managed workspace (or even a café with Wi-Fi access) or self-employment where you decide your own hours and location of work.

Listen to Simone talk about her experience of flexible working.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Flexible working?](#)





In the next section you will look a bit more closely at what these different flexible work options mean in practice.

## 2.1 Part-time working

Women are much more likely to work part-time than men. In 2013 around 13.4 million women aged 16 to 64 were in work (42 per cent part-time) and 15.3 million men (12 per cent part-time). Even among those who worked full-time there were differences in the average hours worked per week. For example, men on full-time contracts worked on average 44 hours per week while women working full-time worked 40 hours per week (Office for National Statistics, 2013).

However, most part-time jobs are at a lower skill level and lower paid than full-time work, and it is still very difficult to find senior level part-time work, thus many women who return to work are faced with having to re-enter work at lower levels than before their career breaks.

With changes in legislation it is increasingly possible to negotiate reduced hours once you are in employment, but this entitlement does not necessarily cover you if you are trying to get back into work after a break.

## What are zero-hour contracts?

Zero-hour contracts refer to an employee who is on call with no set minimum hours or definite schedule and yet works under an employment contract. Often, they receive no holiday or sick pay. A prevalence of zero-hour contracts is found in the hotel and restaurants sector, the health sector and the education sector; for example, 90 per cent of McDonald's workforce in the UK (upwards of 80,000 workers) are employed on zero-hour contracts (Neville, 2013). Although there is not much job security or predictability on such contracts, for some people the flexibility of being able to work when and where they want can be attractive, especially if combined with other work. It might be a useful stopgap and a way to build up work experience after a career break.



## 2.2 Job share

If an employer is advertising a full-time post, it may be possible to apply to share the job with someone else. If you already know someone who would like to share the job with you, and who also meets the job requirements, you can apply together. However, if you don't know anyone with the requisite skills and experience, there are specialist employment agencies that are able to help with finding job shares. These include:

- [Capability Jane](#) for flexible, part-time, job shares
- [Ginibee](#), a job share platform matching candidates for job shares and educating organisations on job sharing
- [Timewise Jobs](#), a jobs board from Timewise, a specialist organisation that focusses on job shares.
- [Working Mums](#), which features a jobs board that includes some part-time STEM roles.

## 2.3 Making a flexible working request

Since 30 June 2014 every employee in the UK has the statutory right to request flexible working after 26 weeks of employment service. This will not only help those already working to manage life changes and challenges (such as childcare, health or other family commitments), but also encourage those who are returning to work to find a working structure that suits their lifestyle. It is worth knowing about your flexible working rights, even though employees with less than 26 weeks service do not have a statutory right to request flexible working, as some employers may allow all staff to make a request. These are the steps required to make a flexible working request if you are already in work.

To make a request for flexible working employees must:

- make their request in writing, state the date the request is made, the change to working conditions they are seeking, and the date they would like the change to take effect
- state whether they have made a previous application for flexible work and the date of that application
- outline what change to working conditions they are seeking and how they think this may affect the business, for example, cost saving to the business
- state if they are making their request in relation to the Equality Act 2010, for example, as a reasonable adjustment for a disabled employee.

If you live in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland you may well find there are subtle differences to the legislation in operation, so do be aware of this. There are also European directives regarding employment that are worth researching, as these will have implications if you are considering working elsewhere in the European Union.

Now listen to Azu talk about how she negotiated part time working arrangements with her employers.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Flexible working request](#)



## 2.4 Remote working: when home is your workplace

Working from home can be an attractive option for anyone thinking about returning to work after a career break. It solves the problem of having to commute long distances, and can combine well with responsibilities of family life such as dropping children off at school. Of course, home working is not really a new way of working. However, with advances in communications technologies many more jobs can be carried out in locations other than the traditional office. For some people, this means being home-based, but for others it may mean working on the move or in a number of locations. There are also different types of home-based working. You may be employed entirely as a home-based worker, in which case there are different terms and conditions to someone whose substantive place of work is in an office or company building, but who works part of the time from home. Many employers will offer the flexibility to work from home some of the time, although the job itself would not officially be a home-based contract.

If you are thinking about working from home as a possibility (either for all or part of your contract), there are a number of things you will need to think about:

- Where will you work? Do you have a dedicated space?
- Although it may seem like a good way to combine work and childcare, how can you realistically work if you have other people in the house demanding your time?
- Would you work full-time from home or only part of the week?
- How will you cope with working alone? Some people are more people-oriented and benefit more from day-to-day contact with colleagues and the bustle of an office or other workplace environment. This may be especially true if you have been out of work for some time; working from home may continue your sense of isolation and being peripheral to the main workplace.
- How easily will you be able to separate out and keep boundaries between your work and home life?

Rachel Stanley was able to negotiate with her future employer about working from home when she returned from her career break.

'I like the challenge my work gives me. I'm doing engineering research, where there's always something new to discover.'

Rachel saw an advert for full-time roles at a large energy supplier. The advert included a sentence that attracted her attention: 'If you require more flexibility in your career, we also have freelance opportunities.' Now Rachel is an associate electrical engineer, working from home and choosing her own hours to fit around childcare.

'I work from home, but go into the office as required for meetings (usually only once every four weeks) and visit other places from time to time. [My employer] provided me with a laptop and router and I'm networked from home – I know that other associates work very flexibly too. I can also choose my own hours – up to 20 per week – and can reduce them over the school holidays.'

Rachel was very open with the employer about her preferred working hours from the very beginning. After making an initial phone call she was contacted by the Head of Electrical Engineering to discuss possibilities. 'We talked things through from there,' says Rachel.

'Previously, I'd applied for full-time roles, with the aim of negotiating hours further down the line. I'd get to the second interview stage, but felt that my lack of enthusiasm always showed.'

I feel so lucky. Even though I'm working from home, I work very closely with my colleagues in the office and get a real buzz from the teamwork. The area I'm working in is low carbon energy, so the role I'm doing has a real potential to make a difference to the world.'

## Activity 2 How can working from home work for you?

Allow approximately 15 minutes

What practical considerations would you need to take into account if you were working from home?

### Discussion

Here are some adjustments you may need to make to your home:

- ensure that you have the right equipment; for example, computer, internet access/work network access if required, webcam for video meetings
- have a good desk and comfortable chair, with decent lighting
- designate a place to work and make sure you have privacy from other people in your household
- create storage space for your work documents and files

Some other things you might need to consider include:

- security issues for equipment and data; for example, passwords, firewalls, secure place for confidential data
- agreed core hours – when colleagues/clients can contact you
- how to avoid being lonely – keeping in touch with colleagues.

The 2014 [Characteristics of Home Workers report](#) (Office for National Statistics, 2014) indicated that 4.2 million people in the UK (out of 30.2 million people in total at work) are home workers (see Figures 1 and 2 below.) This shows the highest rise in home working since records began, and an interesting feature is that almost two-thirds of home workers were self-employed in 2014. The report's statistics allow you to see which occupations/sectors have the most home workers, where such workers are found geographically and average pay differences between home workers and non-home workers (see Figure 2 - a rather surprising result!).

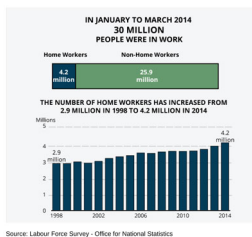


Figure 1 Number of homeworkers in the UK 1998 - 2014 (ONS 2014, p. 2)



Figure 2 Median hourly earnings of home working and non-home working employees (ONS 2014, p. 9)

### 3 Working for yourself

More and more people are working for themselves, either as freelancers or setting up their own businesses, and this can be an attractive option to get back into work after a career break. Self-employment can mean the chance to work more flexibly and control your own working hours, something that can be helpful if you want to combine working with looking after small children.

The opportunities for starting up in business have expanded rapidly with internet trading and marketing. Digital start-ups can attract funding, either from venture capitalists or via crowdsourcing, so there are more options for trying something out. If you have technology skills, then this might be an option, but there are also plenty of other STEM related business opportunities.

Many digital start-ups begin as micro-businesses that exploit the spare capacity in assets or under-utilised skills and use the reach of technology to find an audience or market. This is the underlying model of many recent online businesses such as AirBnB and Uber.

Robin Chase describes how this idea of excess capacity inspired her to set up Zipcar, a car sharing business, when she was still a stay-at-home mum:

Leveraging excess proved to be an important component of Zipcar's success. Before Zipcar, people in Boston who needed a car had just two options. They could rent in twenty-four-hour bundles, or they could own their own car, paying an average of \$8000 a year in depreciation and costs for insuring, parking, maintaining, and fueling it. Zipcar allowed people to book cars near them in less

than twenty seconds and rent them for as little as thirty minutes ... I knew that Zipcar would win on the economics if it allowed people to pay only for the amount of car they actually used. The 'excess' could then be purchased by other drivers. Instead of owning 100 per cent of a car and using it one per cent of the time, it was possible to align usage and cost much more closely. And instead of one thousand urban residents owning four hundred cars, with Zipcar these same one thousand active drivers are satisfied with just thirty cars.

(Chase, 2015)

While it is beyond the scope of this course to give any detailed training or advice on how to start up in business, we have brought together some suggestions and links to some excellent organisations and networks specifically targeted at helping new entrepreneurs. These are detailed in the [Further reading](#) section, which offers some further guidance and resources for those of you who may be considering self-employment as your way to return to STEM.

## Consultancy in STEM

One of the options for self-employment for those with a STEM background is to become a self-employed consultant in your field. Professional institutions may be able to help with networking and support if this is the direction you wish to take.

In this video, Barbara talks about how she worked as a consultant in the engineering industry after her career break, and highlights some of the advantages and difficulties.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Barbara](#)



Having examined a range of flexible working practices you will now hear from employers about what they can offer.

## 4 Flexible working: the employer perspective



Figure 3 Contract

Employers are increasingly becoming used to managing flexible working and seeing this as a positive benefit to their organisation, and it's useful to hear what they have to say when you are thinking about how to make the case to a potential employer yourself.

Here are two employers, John from SSE and Julie from Tideway, talking about the range of working patterns available in their companies and how this benefits their organisations.

Video content is not available in this format.

[John from SSE](#)



### 4.1 Steps to returning

You have seen the flexible arrangements that other returners have put in place to help them manage their return to work. Now have a think about which of the arrangements discussed in this week would suit you best and why. Which would not work for you at all?

In thinking about your preferred working method you considered the constraints you have to work within. Next week you will focus in particular on how to manage your time. To prepare for next week, complete Activity 3, which will help you to take a serious look at how you are currently spending your time.



### Activity 3 Mapping your time

Allow approximately 25 minutes

Over the course of a week (or over the course of a typical weekday and weekend day) make a note of how much time you spent each day on the various activities listed below.

- sleep
- commuting
- work
- education/training/research
- care for dependents
- health and fitness
- leisure and socialising
- family commitments
- chores

#### Discussion

Keep your notes for use next week. This 'time diary' will be useful in making decisions about what changes you can fit into your life.

## 5 This week's quiz

Now it's time to complete the Week 4 badge quiz. It is similar to previous quizzes, but this time, instead of answering five questions there will be 15.

Week 4 compulsory badge quiz.

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you've finished.

To open in a new window, right click on the link above and select 'Open in new window'.

To view this content please access the complete course on [OpenLearn](#)

## 6 Summary

This week you considered the spectrum of flexible and agile working arrangements. You should now:

- have reflected on what a career means
- know more about different types of flexible and agile working
- have thought about the pros and cons of home working
- know more about your legal rights to flexible working and how to negotiate for what you want
- know more about the pros and cons of being self-employed.

The working environment you wish to return to will bring its own challenges and opportunities and it is therefore also important to understand what you are aiming for in your own work-life balance. Next week, you will reflect on your own aspirations with respect to work-life balance in light of how others have dealt with these issues. You will



evaluate your own time management and identify potential changes in how you spend your time in order to work towards a work-life balance that suits you.

You can now go to [Week 5](#).

## Further reading

### Further reading about self-employment in STEM

The [smallbusiness.co.uk](http://smallbusiness.co.uk) website is a good starting point for those thinking of self-employment.

[The Federation of Small Businesses](#) offers general and financial advice to its members as well as networking opportunities.

[The Citizens Advice Bureau](#) has more information about legal and tax issues.

The following organisations offer help specifically for female entrepreneurs:

[Prowess](#) is a network of organisations and individuals who support the growth of women's business ownership. This is probably the best place to start in order to find a more local support organisation.

[Everywoman](#) is an online network and resource provider for women business owners that offers training, advice and inspiration.

### Further reading about legislation

There are more [details on flexible working rights](#) on the ACAS website.

The UK Government website contains more [general information about employment rights in the UK](#).

Employment rights vary between countries, but all European countries have to comply with EU legislation. If you are living or thinking of [working in another EU country](#) it would be worth checking on local legislation.

### Further reading on working from home

Health and safety guidance on working alone whether as self-employed or as an employee is included in this [Health and safety guidance for lone workers](#) brochure by the Government.

## Week 5: Work–life balance

### Week 5 Introduction

Deciding to return to work or, alternatively, to change direction is just the first step – once you start on your new path your life will become different and there will be changes that affect both you and those around you. This week is aimed at helping you think through what your priorities are and the kind of balance you want to achieve between your work and other aspects of your life.

Work–life balance does not just mean managing and juggling your caring responsibilities. It is a much broader concept that takes a holistic view of your life, including family, friendships, home and community as well as work.

Now watch Sue as she introduces what you'll be doing this week and tells you a little about what work–life balance means for her.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Sue](#)



By the end of this week you should be able to:

- reflect on your own aspirations with respect to work–life balance in the light of how others have dealt with these issues
- identify your own work–life balance issues and potential solutions to these
- evaluate your time management and use tools to identify potential changes in how you use your time.

# 1 Changing priorities: the ABC model

What you want from your work–life balance does not stay the same throughout your life, but will change depending on other priorities and concerns. Lisa Mainiero and Sherry Sullivan are psychologists who specialise in the study of careers. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) developed a model, called the Kaleidoscope ABC model, to try and capture the changing nature of work-life priorities.



Figure 1 Kaleidoscope

According to them, there are three main factors influencing career choices and decision making – authenticity, balance and challenge – and the priorities that we have as individuals change over our lives. The same research showed men and women tend to make these decisions differently. The traditional male career prioritises work, with other factors fitting around this. For most women on the other hand, the priorities shift around, creating different career patterns in the kaleidoscope.

- **Authenticity** describes being true to oneself – and in the work context this means focusing on the values and drivers that are most important to you personally. This often becomes a priority in late career, and could even mean giving up paid work to pursue a long held ambition.
- **Balance** – getting the right balance between work and other aspects of life – is often a greater priority (especially for women) in mid-career and in many cases can be the trigger for taking a career break, when the demands of work and family are at their most intense.
- **Challenge** – being motivated and excited about a project or assignment at work – is a driver at all career stages, but often this is a priority in your early career and fuels the need to find work that will stretch you and lead to new insights, skills and learning.

All three aspects ebb and flow at different life stages, but Mainiero and Sullivan noticed some gender differences in how these priorities change over the course of a lifetime. They found that men were more likely to continue to pursue challenges throughout the early and mid-career stages, while women (if and when they have children) tended to focus on balance in mid-career.

## Activity 1 Your life and the ABC model

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Think about your own life priorities and how these have changed over your career. Note how your own experience fits with the ABC model described above. Which of these three would you see as your main priority now?

### Discussion

Perhaps you have spent a long time balancing your commitments and think now is the time for authenticity and challenge, though it's quite likely that you are still in the

process of balancing your desire for authenticity with many demands on your time. This week will help you reflect on that balance.

There are many practical considerations to be taken into account, some of which you cannot control or change. There are gender-related barriers which women face in their attempts to access learning opportunities, employment, career development and personal progression. You will look at these issues in more detail shortly.

During this week you will make notes and complete activities about the impact that returning to work will have on your life. You will consider the plans you need to make in advance of returning to work in order to make the transition successfully. Save your notes from the activities in this section, as you will use them to make your action plan in Week 8.

## 2 Where does your time go?

In this section you will look more closely at how your time is used.

One of the important considerations in planning to return to work after a break is thinking about how you are going to manage your time. Before you start thinking about the practicalities of juggling work, family and other commitments, it's worth thinking a bit about how you spend your time. This will help you when you get to the point of making plans to accommodate new activities and commitments into your schedule, and help you identify areas where you need additional support, or perhaps where you could be more efficient with your time. Above all, you will need to use your skills to prioritise.

### Activity 2 Your work–life balance

Allow approximately 5 minutes

Last week we asked you to keep a diary of how much time you spend each day on the various activities listed below:

- sleep
- commuting
- work
- education/training/research
- caring for dependents
- health and fitness
- leisure and socialising
- family commitments
- chores.

Take a look at what you noted and add up the number of hours you spend in total on these things. Now subtract your total from 168 (hours in a week) to find how much time you have left over each week.

#### Discussion

Now you have completed a diary of your activities, reflect on your results by considering the following questions about your own work life balance:

- Are there aspects that you would like to change?

- Are your priorities likely to change in the future?
- In which areas can you afford to be more flexible?

Whatever work-life balance you aspire to, managing and planning your time are going to become very important when you try to take on the added responsibility of returning to work. We will look at a number of time management tools this week.

### Activity 3 Prioritising your activities

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Now you know how you are spending your time, it is useful to think about how to prioritise these varied activities. A useful method that can help in prioritisation is to think about how important or urgent (imminent) the task is and then categorise each task into one of four categories:

Important and urgent  
 Important but not urgent  
 Not important but urgent  
 Not important and not urgent

Important and urgent	Important but not urgent
Not important but urgent	Not important and not urgent

Figure 2 Categories

Look at the diary you kept last week of how you spent your time. Find an activity for each of the categories:

Important and urgent  
 Important but not urgent  
 Not important but urgent  
 Not important and not urgent

In this section, you have looked at how you are spending your time at the moment. In the next sections, you will think about the range of factors you have to consider before returning to the workplace. These responsibilities are different for every individual. Once you have looked at your responsibilities and thought about what your priorities are, you will return to the subject of planning your time in order to achieve the work-life balance you want.

### 3 Creating the work–life balance you want



Figure 3 Work–life balance

This section aims to get you thinking about how your life may have to change when you return to work. You will hear how different people made decisions about their own work–life balance and what issues they had to consider when they first went back to work after a break.

The issues addressed are:

- time
- location
- childcare and other caring responsibilities
- money
- the rest of your life
- what does it feel like? – coping with conflicting roles.

In this video, two women who returned from career breaks – Barbara and Anne – talk about what work life balance means to them.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Career breaks](#)



### 3.1 Time



Figure 4 Time

One of the key issues you'll need to decide is how you want to work and how you will manage your time. Some returners find themselves working too many hours, perhaps due to peer pressure or the demands of their working environment, while others settle for too few hours and feel that their real potential may be undeveloped.

Finding the right balance will depend on careful reflection of your own circumstances and an awareness of the choices that might be available. For example, it has been reported that across Europe, between two-fifths and two-thirds of women would like a change in the number of hours they work (Silim and Stirling, 2014, p. 23). The UK has the highest proportion of female part-time workers in Europe (see Table 1).

**Table 1 Percentage of workers who work part-time because of caring responsibilities by country, 2012**

	Female	Male
UK	41.7	5.7
Germany	25.5	2.7
Spain	14.6	1.2
Netherlands	36.6	7.8
France	33.7	6.4
Sweden	20.1	6.4
Poland	9.4	0.6

Source: Silim and Stirling (2014)

Look back at the diary you kept last week of how you spent your time, and your notes from Activity 2. How many hours per week could you work? If you gave up some of the activities that were less important to you, or that you could delegate, how many hours do you have for the working day? How flexible can you be about what those hours are? You will come back to the issue of time management and planning later this week.

### 3.2 Location

Think about where you would like to work – some jobs may require you to travel a lot or to work abroad.





Figure 5 Location

Consider the following questions and think about your own preferred work location:

- How long you would be prepared to commute each day?
- Would you drive, travel by train, cycle, or a combination of these?
- Would you be able, and prepared, to work further away from home and to stay overnight some nights?
- Would you consider moving for a job?
- What arrangements would you need to make; for example, for dropping off or picking up your children from school?
- Would you be willing to work all or part of the time from home?

#### Activity 4 Travel radius

Allow approximately 20 minutes

Considering your answers to the questions above, what does your travel to work radius look like? Open a route planning tool, such as Google Maps, and see how far you can commute by car if this is your preferred method. Alternatively, if the train is more convenient for you, look at the train lines on [National Rail Enquiries](#) and see where you could reasonably get to in the time you have allotted for commuting. It is also be worth checking your local bus and/or tram provision.

### 3.3 Childcare and other caring responsibilities



Figure 6 Childcare

The following section is particularly relevant to those of you who are parents or carers. However, it is helpful for anyone returning to work to be aware of the issues described. Finding suitable childcare can be one of the most difficult and stressful aspects of returning to work. If you need to arrange childcare in order to return to work, you will need to do some research to find the best option for you.

Now listen to Carolein, Verena, Azu and Simone talking about the childcare arrangements they made for their return to work and the rationale for their decisions.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Childcare arrangements](#)



#### Caring for elderly or other dependants

In England and Wales, there are around six million people providing unpaid care for an ill, frail or disabled family member or friend (White, 2013) and in Scotland a further half million. In other words, one in eight adults looks after a relative or friend who cannot manage without help because of sickness, age or disability. Being a carer can be an isolating experience. If you're in this position you can get advice and support from [The Carers UK website](#), which has lively forums featuring contributions from people experiencing similar hurdles.

Many of the problems and solutions that arise as a result of childcare are similar to those of caring for other dependents.

### Activity 5 Planning your caring arrangements

Allow approximately 15 minutes

Now make notes on which care arrangements (for children or other dependents) you will need to make when you return to work or training. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the different options available?

Some of the questions you might need to consider include:

- Who else might share the responsibility for looking after your children? (Partner, parents or other family members)
- Would you be looking for informal or reciprocal arrangements with friends, or seeking paid childcare?
- Where would you prefer your children to be looked after? Your home, another home or a nursery?
- How many hours per day and how many days per week would you want childcare for?
- What can you afford to pay in terms of childcare costs?
- If you have school age children, is there an after school play scheme they can attend? What will you do in the school holidays?

### Discussion

There are many different arrangements to caring for dependents. Below, Amanda describes how she felt about her childcare arrangements.

One of the most important things, I think, that allowed me to return to work has been having confidence in my childcare arrangements. With my older daughter, certainly for the first year she was with a member of my family, but at various points through the various ages of the children, I have had different childcare arrangements. My older daughter went to a day nursery which we did a lot of research choosing something that would be suitable that would work for us, that we knew would be reliable and we had confidence in. When I came back to work after my second daughter, I actually hired a nanny and again I spent an awful lot of time while I was still on leave working, you know, interviewing nannies, finding somebody I was happy with, having her at home with me for quite a long period of time so that by the time I came back to work I was totally happy with the arrangement. I was very, very lucky that I found the right person and that that arrangement lasted for several years which obviously is good for me and was good for the children. So personally, I can't emphasise enough how important it is for you to be happy with your childcare arrangements and that is just about planning and work and preparation and really going into every detail. I mean, I went through, you know, so many interviews, but this was the most important job that I was ever going to hire for, so I spent a lot of time making sure I had got the right arrangements and that leaves me free then so that I don't have to worry about childcare when I am at work.

It is really, really important that when you are at work you are not worried about your childcare arrangements and again, for that flexibility it is

important that you have got an arrangement that really works for you. I do have that flexibility because I have got a childminder, but I try not to use that because I feel that it is a slippery slope. For example, I have certain pick up times on certain days and I try to stick to them religiously because I just feel – it would be very easy for me to pay the money and make them all half an hour later or an hour later and that might make things much more convenient for me at work – but nonetheless, that is eating into the children's time at home, you know, I feel that the children need to be at home and need to be as my older daughter, doing her homework and need to be bathed and in bed and so I try not to eat into that time, I try not to be late. You know, like I say I would much rather pack up and take something home with me and do it later in the evening, rather than eat into that time with the children.

In addition to the day-to-day care of dependents, it's also necessary to think through what you will do when an unforeseen event occurs.

### Activity 6 Contingency planning

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Make some notes on the following:

- What plans can you put in place for unforeseen events, for example, children being unwell at the start of a day? What will you do if you receive a phone call from the school/carer during the day?

#### Discussion

It's important to have a back-up plan for the days when a problem arises out of the blue. If you have a particularly important work activity which you can't drop, then on those days you need to know that somebody else can be available to help if your regular care arrangements aren't available.



### 3.4 Money



Figure 7 Money

While this may seem simple and obvious, the decision you make about work–life balance will include financial considerations such as expenditure on childcare, travel and so on. However, you may also be influenced by your earning potential in different sectors and jobs. One of the things to be aware of is the gender pay gap. Of course, it is illegal to pay women less for the same work as a man, but the difference (in percentage terms) between the average earnings of women and men working full-time in 2010 was 15.5 per cent for hourly earnings excluding overtime and 21.5 per cent for gross weekly earnings. The difference in the mean hourly earnings of men who work full-time and women who work part-time (the part-time women's pay gap) was also narrower in 2010 than in any previous year, at 34.5 per cent (Perfect, 2011). The difference in earnings is associated with a range of factors. Direct discrimination is only a minor factor with a notable problem being **the way women's competences are valued** compared to men's: shelf stacking (more likely done by men) can be more highly paid than supermarket checkout work (likely to be done by women). Another cause is segregation in the labour market.

The money you earn impacts on the choices you can make about paying for childcare or other help and the distance you can travel to work. For women who are returning to STEM industries, choices are further constrained by the location and availability of suitable jobs.

It is known that one reason for the gender pay gap is that women are less likely to request raises or negotiate their salary when they begin a job, and therefore are generally more likely to financially undervalue their skills. So it's important that when you begin applying for jobs, you will need to think about what salary you are aiming for and be prepared to negotiate with a potential employer about your pay.

Next week, you will look at mentors and other people who can offer you support. A mentor might be a good person to talk to if you have reservations or questions about asking for a pay increase.

### 3.5 Balancing work with the rest of your life

There may be other needs, responsibilities and constraints not yet mentioned that you need to think through, for example:

- your age and/or health
- having additional needs; for example, you may have a disability that makes travelling difficult for you
- wanting to get a qualification as quickly as possible
- needing to gain a qualification which also gives professional recognition.

To achieve your ideal work-life balance, life coach Maggie Currie suggests:

“A balanced life is one where you spread your energy and effort – emotional, intellectual, imaginative, spiritual and physical – between key areas of importance. The neglect of one or more areas, or anchor points, may threaten the vitality of the whole.”

(Currie, 2005)

At the beginning of this week you considered work–life balance as a holistic concept, not just juggling your job and other responsibilities. You will now look again at the other areas of your life.

#### Activity 7 Wider work–life balance

Allow approximately 15 minutes

Make some notes on the wider work–life balance commitments you will have to think about and prioritise. Make a note of the commitments you currently have under the following categories. You will come back to these in a later activity when you will begin to assess your priorities and think about time management.

##### **Yourself**

Do you have interests that you regularly make time for? These could be creative, sporting, spiritual, and so on. What about time for fitness and health?

##### **Relationships with family and friends**

Apart from those dependent on you for care, how much time do you give your family and friendships? How might your social life be affected when you return to work?

##### **Community**

Are you involved in any groups or activities in your local community (political, social, youth, religious, educational or charitable)? If so, how much time will you set aside to maintain these?

##### **Future plans**

Do you envisage that your return to work will involve extra learning and studying? Particularly if you are returning to a scientific or technical job, you may need to build in time to develop your skills and expertise and keep up with new developments.



### 3.6 What does it feel like? Coping with conflicting roles

Apart from practical considerations, there are emotional issues that you will need to think about with regard to returning to work. If you live with other people – especially a partner or children – what do they think about your plan to go back to work? How will it affect them? Will they have to take on additional responsibilities at home or organising daily life? How do they feel about this? What will others in your extended family think? There is also the consideration of other roles you have had while you haven't been in paid work. Are you able to make a transition away from this if you need to?

Mothers, in particular, can feel others are critical of their decision to return to work. However, attitudes towards 'working mothers' have changed as the numbers of women with children also doing paid work have increased in recent years.

That said, you may still encounter criticism from others and most people have feelings of guilt or conflict about their changing role.

#### Activity 8 The impact of conflicting roles

Allow approximately 15 minutes

Now make notes about how you feel about your return to work. What would your preferred work pattern involve for others who depend on you? How will you and they prepare to cope with the changes ahead?

Now listen to how Azu, who talks about coping with guilt when juggling conflicting priorities.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Conflicting priorities](#)



## 4 There are only so many hours in a day

When you return to work, one of the things you may find is that you have to be very organised about your time.

However well you plan, you may find that, in addition to your new job or studying commitment, there are simply not enough hours in the day to do what you were doing before. Returning to work is an exercise in balancing needs. Look back at the diary you kept last week of how you spent your time, along with your notes from Activity 2, and think about whether there are any changes you can make in order to accommodate a new commitment. One of the skills you'll need to use is prioritisation – you're probably used to this already, but here's a technique to help you make decisions about managing your own time.

### Activity 9 Further prioritising

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Have a think about what your priorities are and which things you would be prepared to give up. Think about the activities you listed in Activity 2. What can you delegate to others? What activities can you adapt? What can you let go of completely or leave until you have more time?

Enter your answers using these headings:

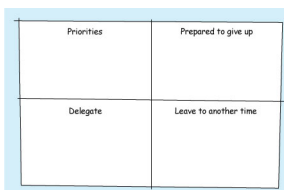
Priorities

Prepared to give up

Delegate

Leave to another time

As with Activity 3, you can write these into a grid to make your priorities easier to consider.



Priorities	Prepared to give up
Delegate	Leave to another time

Figure 8 Further prioritising grid

### Discussion

What are the core activities that you have to maintain? Can these fit alongside a job?

You may have thought about how you'd change your domestic arrangements, for example, would another family member take on some chores? Would shopping online save you some time? If your children are at school, can you delegate the school run to someone else?

What are you prepared to give up or put on hold? A hobby or community commitment?

The important thing is to know what you need to spend your time on and what can be done differently.

## 4.1 Time management

There are entire courses devoted to time management; in this section, though, you will look at one or two headline ways to manage your time when you have a lot of commitments.

You have looked at how you currently spend your time and what your priorities are. So far, this course has helped you with delegating activities and deciding which activities you can give up. Once you have decided what you need to do and what you can delegate, you need to work out how you will fit everything in. This involves planning and recording.

### 1. Get a diary and use it

You are going to need an electronic or paper diary/calendar. An online calendar can be synced from your smartphone and other devices. All your commitments (and anybody else's commitments that you are responsible for) will be recorded in your calendar, so you'll need to have this available at all times (a calendar at home on the wall won't work).

### 2. Planning time

As well as recording the times of your commitments and making sure they don't overlap, you need to plan and record the time that you need in order to prepare any more complicated work or organisational work. Allow contingency time; as discussed earlier, unforeseen events (such as family illness) can change your plans.

### 3. No procrastinating

One way in which time can easily drain away is through procrastination. We all put off work that is unpalatable for whatever reason and there are so many different ways to procrastinate.

When any work (domestic or paid) is passed to you, either do it there and then or make a note of when you are going to do it. If you delegate the work, then make a note in your diary of when you need to check the work is completed.

### 4. Focus

At home and at work, there will be interruptions. Depending on your role and other commitments, it may be that these are necessary. If you know that you have work that requires you to focus then you need a system that will give you a spell of uninterrupted time. One suggestion is to turn your email off completely and make sure your phone is on silent – beeping devices have a way of pushing themselves to the top of our priority list, even though they may not be urgent or important at all. There are times when you need to give yourself the space to focus on the task in hand.

It is important to leave aside a piece of time each week or month to think about how you are managing your time. As scheduling and planning becomes more natural to you, you should find you can achieve more with the time you have:

Video content is not available in this format.

[Scheduling](#)



### Activity 10 Changing your time management habits

Allow approximately 30 minutes

In this activity, you will list things that you can do to help you get ready for the increased level of time management that you will need when you return to work. The actions you think of here can transfer to your action plan at the end of the course, but you can start your new regime sooner and start to establish positive habits.

1. Tracking your time wasters – make a list of your main distractions. For example, learn how to turn off unnecessary notifications on your phone.
2. Planning ahead – set up an online calendar that you can share with your partner or another important person in your network.
3. Synchronise your to-do lists – at the moment these might be on your phone, sticky notes on the fridge, or possibly just in your head. Think about a way to ensure all of these lists are collected in one place – again, there are online tools that could help with this.

## 5 This week's quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

Week 5 practice quiz.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding Ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

To view this content please access the complete course on [OpenLearn](#)

## 6 Summary

During this week you have looked at different aspects of work–life balance. You reflected on your own aspirations with respect to work–life balance in the light of how others have

dealt with these issues. In addition, you identified your own work–life balance issues and potential solutions to these issues, and evaluated your time management and looked at tools to help manage your time and manage changes in how you spend your time.

Specifically this week you have:

- learned about the Kaleidoscope ABC model of career development
- calculated your work-life balance and priorities
- considered specific issues including:
  - time
  - location
  - childcare and other caring responsibilities
  - money
  - time for yourself
  - coping with conflicting roles.
- learned about prioritisation and time management techniques.

Save your notes from the activities in this week as you will use them to make your action plan in Week 8.

Next week, you'll be finding out how to get support to help you to meet the particular challenges of returning to the workplace. The week starts with strategies to boost your confidence, and then you go on to look at mentoring and networking, and how these mechanisms can support you in your career progression.

You can now go to [Week 6](#).

## Further Reading

If you want to know more about the ABC Kaleidoscope model, you can download and read

[Mainiero, L.A. and Sullivan, S.E. \(2006\). \*The ABCs of a Kaleidoscope career\* \[Online\]  
Available at <http://changethis.com/manifesto/25.02.ABCKal/pdf/25.02.ABCKal.pdf>](http://changethis.com/manifesto/25.02.ABCKal/pdf/25.02.ABCKal.pdf)

## Week 6: Getting support

### Week 6 Introduction

Don't think you can do it all by yourself – ask for help! Get as many people on board as you can – family, friends and colleagues as well as support networks ... They were great at telling me where I could go for help and constantly updated me on what was happening next.

Patricia McCalla, building control surveyor and career break returner

Last week you looked at work–life balance and, in doing so, you may have identified areas where you will need to get support.

This week, you'll be finding out how to get support to help you to meet the particular challenges of returning to the workplace. Meeting these challenges is much easier if you get advice, encouragement and help from people around you. You will start by looking at strategies to boost your confidence, and then go on to look at mentoring and how others can support you in your career progression. You'll also be learning how best to develop your networks and contacts using LinkedIn.

Now listen to Sue, who's going to tell you what to expect from this week, as well as how mentors have helped her in her own career:

Video content is not available in this format.

[Sue](#)



By the end of this week you will have:

- used positive thinking to increase your confidence
- reflected on formal and informal mentors who have influenced you

- identified mentors who can help you in the future
- mapped the three circles of networks and contacts
- used LinkedIn to extend your own network of contacts
- written and practised your elevator pitch.

## 1 Getting back your confidence

One of the main obstacles for people who have been out of work for any length of time is reduced confidence. It's natural to feel like this – the world of work seems fast-paced and unfamiliar. Returning to work seems like a huge and scary life change and sometimes it can be hard to believe that you still have all those work competences that you used to take for granted.

The first thing to recognise is that these feelings are completely normal and to be expected; almost everyone in your situation will feel apprehensive and nervous to some extent.

The key to building up your confidence after a break is to think positively about your achievements and build on your strengths.

### Activity 1 Thinking positively to increase confidence

Allow approximately 15 minutes

If you are feeling a bit down, negative thoughts can take over, and this in turn can impact on your behaviour, your self-belief and your aspirations for the future. Now is the time to get back in touch with your strengths, abilities, useful experience and competences.

Try this three-step exercise:

1. Think of something you have done that you are proud of or that gave you a sense of achievement. This doesn't have to be something from your paid work. It could be from your education, a hobby, from sport or perhaps a big challenge that you managed to overcome.
2. Now think about the characteristics, attributes and skills that enabled you to achieve this thing. Examples might include determination, strength, creativity, focus, courage, a certain skill or a particular talent. You might have demonstrated the ability to organise, plan, manage, budget, or choose from a range of other skills. Please do not attribute all your success to luck, chance or to someone else – take ownership and be proud of what you've done!
3. Write a list of the characteristics, attributes and skills you came up with. Can you think of other ways you have used these? Keep this list in your notebook, as it will help remind you how capable you are and will provide material and ideas for your job applications.



## 2 Mentoring

At some stage in their lives or careers, many people have benefited from the support of a mentor. A mentor can be an advisor, a role model or a sounding board, and can provide a safe place for you to talk openly about your hopes and ambitions, along with the challenges you face. Your mentor may be someone you chat with over coffee from time to time, or a powerful sponsor who opens doors and helps you make strategic connections. Alternatively, mentors can be 'formal'; that is, someone who is paired with you by an organised mentoring scheme, or 'informal', such as a friend or colleague who provides support to you on an ad hoc basis.

A mentor can be someone with whom you identify, because they are like you in some way and because you can see yourself in them. He or she is prepared to take you under their wing, to show an interest in you and your career and help you to achieve your goals. A mentor is often able to share relevant experiences from their own life and suggest actions and strategies for you to consider.

Perhaps you are lucky enough to have a mentor already (even if you didn't realise it), or maybe you had one at some time in the past?

### Activity 2 Reflecting on previous mentors

Allow approximately 30 minutes

1. Make a list of any **formal** mentors you have had in the past. These could have been at work, or perhaps an academic supervisor or research group leader. What was this experience like and what benefits did you get out of it? Could you resume contact with any of these?

**Table 1 Previous mentors**

Mentor name	Role/relationship	Positive influence	Contact again?
e.g. Sam Jones	Line manager	Career advice	Yes
<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>

2. Now try this short activity to identify your **informal** mentors:
  - ii. Look back at the lifeline that you drew in Week 1. Who are the influential people that have helped you to develop and build your career?
  - iii. At what points in your journey did they come into your life?

- iv. In what way were/are they influential?
- v. What did you learn from your time with each of these people?

## 2.1 How can a mentor help you?

A good mentor will get to know you and then tailor their help to suit your needs; the needs and development goals of the mentee are central to this relationship. A mentor's help may include:

- encouraging you to talk through your options, helping you to organise your thoughts and reach sensible conclusions and decisions
- helping you to identify and articulate your career goals and then, by prompting you to take action, assisting you to move towards these goals
- sharing their own experiences and telling you about success strategies they have adopted – for example, how they juggle responsibilities at home and work, or how they coped with disappointment when an application they made was unsuccessful
- giving you feedback on your CV, or your job applications
- introducing you to people from their network who might be useful to you
- providing a 'safe place' for you to talk in confidence about the things that go wrong or the things that you find difficult
- providing coaching to help develop skills and confidence; for example, by practising interview questions with you or watching you practise a presentation and providing feedback.

## Finding a new mentor

If you don't have a mentor already, perhaps there is someone you respect who you could approach? This could be someone who has themselves returned from a career break, or someone who works in the sector you wish to join, or just a kind, empathetic person who is wise and a good listener. Most people are very flattered to be asked. All you need them to do is provide a small amount of time – maybe an hour a month – to meet with you and help you set and work towards some achievable goals around returning to work. It really helps if they are willing to share their own experiences and offer a little advice when appropriate.

Try to think of three people who could possibly be mentors for you.

You could also try joining a more formal mentoring scheme. The [MentorSET scheme](#) has been specifically set up for women in STEM to find mentors. Alternatively, some professional bodies also have their own mentoring schemes, so it is worth looking into these to find experts in your own field of work. Some examples and contact information are provided in the [Further reading](#) section.

## Managing your mentoring relationship

When you start a mentoring relationship, it is often useful to establish how long you think this might continue and how frequently you expect to be in contact. Most people like to help out, but if they are busy they can sometimes be wary of making a long term and

open-ended commitment, so your expectations should be made clear from the outset. Will you meet up in person or communicate via email or Skype, for example? Do you want your mentor to help you for a limited time and for a specific purpose, or more generally in helping you get your career back on track? Once you have a mentor, make the most of them: note down the goals you are working towards and give them a copy, then prepare a short update on your progress each time you meet with them. Remember to thank them for their time and support when you meet.

One of the ways you can identify a suitable mentor is to use people in your networks. As well as people you know already, your networks can help you to establish contact with others and widen your pool of potential mentors and support.

### 3 Networking

In this section you'll be looking at how to start brushing up, building and tapping into your networks. If you spend a little time thinking about who you know, you can probably find people who can help you in a variety of ways.

The word 'networking' elicits a range of responses. Some see it as self-promotion – a sort of pressurised, egotistical form of personal marketing where you push yourself forward ruthlessly to get noticed.

Perhaps a more useful definition of networking is that which is used by businesses. Networking is 'the building and nurturing of personal and professional relationships to create a system or chain of information, contacts and support' (De Janasz et al., 2009, p. 328). This definition highlights the benefits of belonging to networks. They provide the three key ingredients that a returner needs when looking for a job or re-establishing a career – 'information, contacts and support'.

Returners often say that they don't have any networks and it is true that it can be hard to keep your professional networks alive when you are out of work for a period of time, but with a little bit of thought, you can discover that you already have a personal and professional network – even if you don't recognise it as such. It's not necessary to strictly separate out the personal and professional elements of your network. Regardless of how or why you know people, each person you know is a potentially useful contact and the reason you know them is normally because you have some shared goal, interest or experience.

Listen to Azu talk about how her STEM ambassador volunteering work helped her build her networks and helped her return to work.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Azu](#)



### Activity 3 Mapping out your network

Allow approximately 30 minutes

When thinking about building or maintaining your networks, it is sometimes a good idea to start by mapping out where you stand currently. So think – **who do you know?** It may help to use the following simple framework.

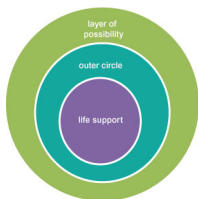


Figure 1 Ever increasing circles: mapping your networks

1. First, there are the people immediately around you with whom you speak or liaise on a daily or weekly basis. This is the central core of your network, your inner circle – your **life support**. Most (though not all) of the people here will be family members, geographically close to you, or connected to you through marriage, other partnerships or long standing friendships. Many of them will be ‘need-to-know’ people with whom you simply must get on and who have a direct impact on the smooth running of your life, your work and your emotional wellbeing. Many of them will be as dependent on you as you are on them.
2. The next layer – your **outer circle** – is just slightly more distant but potentially also vital to your success and happiness. This layer includes the wider network of people around you with whom you share experiences, such as wider family and more distant friends, parents of your children’s friends, your neighbours, your partner’s colleagues and a range of contacts from your previous employment. This circle includes people who could help you to solve a particular problem.
3. Then there is your outer circle – your **layer of possibility**. This layer is full of people with whom you either share interests or have something in common with and to whom you could, potentially, be properly connected. Sometimes you don’t know these people at all, or you don’t know them very well. Importantly, this layer also contains people

who might benefit from getting in touch with you; people who are interested in your skills and knowledge, who are recruiting or who are keen to make referrals to others who are recruiting. This layer is full of potential and possible openings. In order to tap into it and benefit from it you need to think about your profile. Who knows you and what you do? How do they know you? What can they find out about you? How easy are you to find?

Download the [Network map template](#) and write the names of people in your network in the different circles.

### Discussion

In terms of actions to protect, maintain and develop your networks, consider the following:

1. The people in your life support circle are vital to everyday home and working life. These relationships are very important and should be a priority. Beware of stress, or pressures on your time that cause you to neglect relationships in this circle. Maintaining good relationships with your main support circle is linked with good time management, sensible prioritising and regular communication.
2. Your outer circle is full of people who can add value to your life, either because they can help you to do the things you need to do, or because you can help them to do things that benefit you both. This circle will include a range of people; for example, you may have met them while working, or because of shared hobbies or interests, or through volunteer organisations such as the Parents Association at your children's school. Contacts in this layer can be great facilitators, so mapping this layer can be useful because it can contain a variety of people who are in a position to help you in different ways:
  - Do you know any former work colleagues who could update you on developments in your industry sector? Could they act as a referee, or review your CV? Do they know of any openings or opportunities, or could they help with a short work placement or shadowing opportunity to help rebuild your knowledge, skills or confidence? If yes, why not drop them an email saying you would love their advice and ask if you could speak by phone or, better still, if you could buy them a coffee and have a quick chat?
  - Are you making the most of the networking opportunities that are around you every day? Are you attending events or conferences that would update your knowledge and help you meet people? Are you looking out for relevant training programmes to refresh your skills? Are you meeting new people through volunteering? Are there online groups that you could join? When opportunities come along, be brave and step forward!
3. To develop your layer of possibility, you need to be thinking widely, expanding your horizons and thinking about your visibility and your online profile. Some suggestions for developing your layer of possibility are joining a professional body, attending lectures or networking events in your region, or looking for online communities to join, following others online, and reading newsletters and blogs.

## 3.1 Exploring your personal networks

In the previous activity, you mapped out some of the key people in your networks and identified them into strong or weaker ties and those who you might potentially reach out

to. However, it's not always so easy to pinpoint who would be the most useful people to support you in which way. In the next activity, you will look at a more functional approach to using your networks.

### Activity 4 Taking a functional look at your contacts

Allow approximately 15 minutes

Let's examine in more depth how you can use your current network of contacts more smartly. You will need a sheet of paper and a pencil; alternatively, you could do this activity on your computer.

#### Step 1

Think of a current situation, problem or challenge in your life; for example, 'I need to improve my IT skills' or 'I need to reorganise my childcare so that I have more free time for job search'.

Note this down in the centre of your paper like this:



#### Step 2

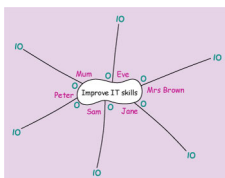
Now think of all the people you know, or know of, who could help you to address this issue and write their names down like this:



These people might help by recommending a course, giving you coaching, telling you about their own experiences, lending you a book, and so on; they represent a subgroup of your personal support network. Sometimes, it can be useful to include organisations in your networking, but in this exercise you are focusing on people, so please only include named individuals on your page.

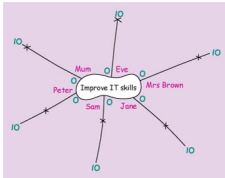
#### Step 3

Next to each name, draw a line and make this into a scale of 0 to 10 by noting the numbers 0 and 10 at each end of your line, like this (0s should be in the centre of your diagram and 10s around the edges):



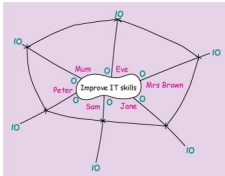
#### Step 4

Now, for each person, place an X on this scale of 0–10 (where 0 = highly unlikely and 10 = extremely likely) at the point which you believe reflects that person's willingness to help you, or the likelihood that they will give you the support you need, like this:



### Step 5

Join up all the Xs as shown, and look at the space that you have created around your problem:



This space represents an area of opportunity and resources that you can tap into. Look at areas where there is little space around your problem (like the lower part of the diagram above). This is where your personal support network is weak.

### Step 6

Think about any weak parts of your personal support network and how you might strengthen them. Write a short list of actions that will help you to strengthen your contacts. These might include making a phone call, attending a meeting or offering to help someone else out.

Remember that networking is a two-way process. Be generous in your support of others and they are likely to reciprocate when the opportunity allows.

Listen to Barbara describing how she has maintained her networks.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Barbara](#)





## 3.2 Networking using LinkedIn

In Week 2 [you set up a profile on LinkedIn](#) and started making connections with people you know. Now that you have looked more closely at what you might gain from mentoring and networking, you will revisit LinkedIn and increase the power and reach of your networks.

### Activity 5 Exploring LinkedIn networks

Allow about 30 minutes

Previously, you searched LinkedIn for three people you had worked or studied with, or people who have been influential in your career.

If you did not make contact with these people at the time, then connect with these individuals now by sending them a message via LinkedIn. **Remember to avoid using the generic message already provided by the site!** Personalise the message by drawing connections with work, study or interests; people are more likely to connect with you if they recognise they have something in common with you.

You will now take this one stage further and use your established network contacts to expand your network and reach a bigger potential audience with your online profile. Before you do this, go through your LinkedIn profile and check that you are happy for this to be publicly available. Is your photo up to date and professional looking? Have you entered your profile summary and tag line? Are all your educational and work history sections up to date?

Now, pick two of your existing contacts and look through their list of connections. Find a further five people in this second level of contacts that you would like to be introduced to, people you think might be useful sources of information for your job search, or who might have similar experiences to you. Then email your original contact and ask them to introduce you to the person you've identified.

## Recommendations

Recommendations are a great way of moving up in the search results. The more recommendations you have from previous job roles, the better; these are great testimonials about the type of professional you are. Recommendations don't just have to be work-related; they can also be related to your volunteering activities. Your LinkedIn network is the way to get recommendations. Take some time now to recommend the skills of people in your network and they will take time to do the same in return.

## 3.3 Developing your face-to-face networking skills

With over 70 per cent of jobs not advertised online, you'll find that a number of employers privately refer to their professional networks to fill vacancies. This means that face-to-face or online networking should be high on your list of priorities. You have already looked at online networking so, in this section, you will consider what you can do to increase your confidence about meeting new people and face-to-face networking. This is important as developing your networking skills will help you with interviews at a later stage of your job search.

### Activity 6 Create and practise your elevator pitch

Allow approximately 20 minutes

A well-known technique for business networking is what is known as the elevator pitch. This is based on an imaginary situation where you happen to be in a lift with someone who could potentially be influential or perhaps invest in your company, so you need to know in advance what key message you want to convey in a short space of time. Having this sort of speech prepared allows you to make the most of situations when you meet new people and they ask you 'what do you do'. Instead of being stuck for words and talking about what you used to do or apologetically saying 'I'm just a mum...', you can say something positive about what your aspirations are and that you are aiming to return to work.

Prepare a short summary of who you are and what you are hoping to do when you return to work. It should be no more than one minute long. Next, practise your pitch a couple of times so that it comes naturally and you can use it to introduce yourself in networking situations. Think of this as the face-to-face version of the profile summary that you prepared earlier for your LinkedIn site.

### Activity 7 Practise your body language

Allow approximately 25 minutes

Before you start meeting people, think about your body language, and how this can also affect your confidence and how you present yourself to others. It's well known that other people will respond to tiny clues and subtle ways in which our bodies give subliminal messages. However, what is less well known is that your posture changes your own level of confidence too. Even a couple of minutes of adopting a different posture can help you feel more confident, which will be reflected in how others perceive you and will, in turn, increase your chances of networking and interview success.

If you would like to explore this further you might like to watch

[Amy Cuddy's TED talk on body language](#).

If you have time, try to put these two pieces together – the elevator pitch and your body language. Find a quiet place and a time where you can practise your elevator pitch in front of the mirror, using the techniques that Amy has outlined. It will probably feel weird at first, but persevere until you are familiar with it. What does it feel like? Do you feel different when you adopt a more assertive and open posture?

## 4 This week's quiz

Well done, you're now ready for the weekly quiz.

Week 6 practice quiz.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding Ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

To view this content please access the complete course on [OpenLearn](#)

## Summary

This week you have explored how you can get support, both through your networks and by accessing the power of mentors. The techniques you've identified and practised will help to increase your confidence and maximise your access to job opportunities and your successful return to work. This week you have:

- used positive thinking to increase your confidence
- reflected on formal and informal mentors who have influenced you
- identified mentors who can help you in the future
- mapped the three circles of networks and contacts
- used LinkedIn to extend your network of contacts
- written and practised your elevator pitch.

Next week, you'll be getting right down to the hard work of job seeking and applying for jobs, whether they are advertised or tucked away in the hidden job market. You'll be looking at how to apply, honing your CV and covering letters, and getting top tips from recruiters and employers.

You can now go to [Week 7](#).

## Further reading

[MentorSET](#) is a specialist mentoring scheme for women in STEM – to register and find a mentor contact them on their website.

There are also a number of specialist mentoring schemes run by professional bodies:

[Alta mentoring scheme](#) for women in aviation and aerospace.

[The Women in Pharmacology Advisory Group's mentoring scheme](#)

[Institute of Physics Career Mentoring scheme](#).

# Week 7: Finding the STEM opportunity you want

## Week 7 Introduction

Last week, you looked at how networking can help you to tap into the hidden job market, and how you should make sure to give as much time to this aspect of returning to work as you would looking for advertised vacancies.

This week, you will be practising and developing skills in locating, and applying, for work, and hopefully also finding some valuable information sources that you can use in the future. Who knows, while practising these techniques you may just find the job you are looking for! Searching for employment is really like a job in itself, a project that needs management. With that in mind, you might want to make use of the time management techniques that you identified in Week 5. In fact you may wish to consider looking for a job as a marketing campaign on behalf of yourself!

Listen to Sue talk about finding and getting jobs:

Video content is not available in this format.

[Sue](#)



The first part of the work for this week is all about finding job vacancies and where to look for advertised posts. You'll also be going back to LinkedIn to see how you can research and reach companies or other organisations that you are interested in working for or with.

In the second part of the week, you will work on tailoring your CV and applications to specific vacancies. Your CV will be your best marketing tool, regardless of whether you are planning to respond to an advertised vacancy or an opportunity that comes up via one of your network of contacts. It will also be important if you are planning to go on to further

study or retraining. Whatever your next step, you will need to be able to present your career story in the best possible light.

By the end of the week you should:

- be familiar with a range of online job search resources
- be able to adapt your CV for a specific purpose
- be able to write a cover letter and a speculative application
- know the importance of preparation in order to perform well in an interview.

## 1 What's out there? Finding job vacancies

In [Week 3](#) you looked at what was going on in your industry sector and heard from employers in STEM about the latest and upcoming trends in these sectors.



Figure 1 Jobs page

Developing an understanding of the sector you intend to pursue work in, coupled with a consideration of the companies and organisations within a specific locality, will improve your chances of successfully finding employment. The availability of jobs can depend on

which area you live in, especially if you are wanting to work in a specific sector. You may want to take another look at the notes you made in Week 3, and refresh your knowledge about what opportunities are likely to be coming up in your own industry sector, and look again at the links provided in the [Further reading](#) page.

## 1.1 Job hunting online

LinkedIn is one of the most useful sites for job seeking, but it is not the only one. Later on this week, you will return to your LinkedIn page and look at using this for job seeking. Before that though, it's worth making yourself familiar with the range of other online recruitment sites that offer the biggest sources of advertised job vacancies. In fact, there are so many job vacancy sites out there that this can sometimes feel overwhelming. Fortunately, many of them are targeted to particular types of work and this can narrow down your search accordingly.

You will probably also want (or need) to narrow down your search to a particular geographical area. When you looked at work-life balance in Week 5, you considered the distance you would be able to manage when travelling to and from work.

If you are interested in a particular employer, you should go directly to that company's website; this is because not all jobs make it onto agency websites. However, if you don't have a clear idea of the employer you want to look at, then the job vacancy sites are a good place to start looking.

In the next activity, you are going to search some websites that might provide you with relevant job vacancies. There are additional suggestions and links in the [Further reading](#) section.

## 1.2 Job vacancy sites

The following activities will help you find your way around the multiple job options that are online. You may wish to revisit these activities over a period of several days to see if anything has changed or whether new opportunities have arisen.

Your first task will be to subscribe to two job search agencies or email lists.

Below, and in the [Further reading](#) section, there are a number of links to websites where jobs are advertised. Look at those briefly, and explore at least three of them in more depth. Bookmark those that you think will be useful.

### Activity 1 Subscribing to job vacancy sites

Allow approximately 45 minutes

Find two websites from the list below, or from the [Further reading](#) section if you prefer, that you think would be useful and likely to provide you with relevant job vacancies. By subscribing to an email service, you will receive emails that alert you to new job vacancies as they arise, so it's highly recommended that you subscribe. Often, you can tailor these alerts to your particular requirements (for example, location, salary, job role).

Here are some general job vacancy sites to get you started. There are plenty more specialist sites for different STEM sectors. As these frequently change we recommend you search for these online.

[Jobsite](#)

[UK Jobs Guide](#)



[Fish4jobs](#)  
[Monster](#)  
[gradireland](#)

### Tip: Avoiding spam in your personal email account

Once you start seriously job seeking online and registering with online jobsites, you are likely to start to get a lot of additional emails and possibly even spam. For this reason, it is a good idea to set up a new email account specifically for your job search activities. There are a number of free services available, such as Yahoo! or Gmail.

Your second task is to identify possible jobs.

### Activity 2 Getting further information

Allow approximately 20 minutes

Look through your selected websites and identify a job that you might consider applying for, either now or in the future.

Request further details – this might include an application form or job description, as well as information about the employer.

Look through the job description and further particulars and tick or make notes on which of the skills and requirements you can easily meet, those that are a bit of a stretch and those you simply don't have (yet).

If you see a few vacancies that look useful to you then start to compile a folder or list of possible jobs, both those that you are interested in, and those that you think you could do.

#### Discussion

Tip: Remember, you don't need to tick all the boxes – they are there to guide recruiters but are not always necessary! You've probably heard the following statistic: Men apply for a job when they meet only 60 per cent of the qualifications, but women apply only if they meet 100 per cent of them (Mohr, 2014).

## 1.3 Job seeking using LinkedIn

To help you collate a list of local organisations relevant to your job search, LinkedIn has a company directory that can be browsed by industry, providing a way for you to access company information and increase your professional network. You can search directly for companies and as you do so, LinkedIn will offer you more suggestions of similar companies on the right side of the page.

In Week 2 you set up your profile and worked on building your networks, including joining groups on LinkedIn. You will now look at how you can help employers find you. As you saw, LinkedIn is increasingly being used by recruitment agencies and company recruiters to identify potential employees, so it is worth expanding your networks and working on your profile in order to help the right employers to find you.



## 1.4 Using recruitment agencies

Recruitment agencies can help you to find work but, as with an employer, you have to show the agent what skills you have and where you are able to work.

You can find recruitment agencies relevant to your sector by searching online. Many recruitment agencies also have a presence on LinkedIn; by using the company directory section you can browse these by industry and then browse by staffing/recruiting.

In the next section, you will look again at how to ensure your CV is doing the job you want it to do, and tailoring your CV to a specific job that you want.

## 2 Getting the job



Figure 2 Desert island

When you use your CV as part of a job application, you will need to tailor it closely to the requirements of the job. In this section, you will use the personal and professional information you have saved to LinkedIn to create a CV with a specific job in mind. Don't forget that your CV is your marketing tool, and you need to make sure it reflects exactly what you want to portray about yourself to a prospective employer.

Different employers expect to receive information about you in a variety of formats, so do check out what is required **before** starting your application. Some employers will send you an application form to complete and specifically ask you **not** to send a CV. They will still want the same information, but will want you to transfer this information onto their own application form instead. In this case, you can transfer the key information from your CV by copying and pasting it into the application form.

### 2.1 Improving your CV

In this section you will look at what makes a good CV. You will then amend your CV so that it does the job of selling you to a particular employer or retraining opportunity. You should consider the following when preparing your CV.

#### Priority

A skills-based CV prioritises the attributes, skills and experience you have that are relevant to the role. Make sure you put the most important things first, so list your employment history in reverse chronological order. You don't need to include everything about yourself – be selective with what you put in and only add things that will strengthen your application.

If you are struggling to be concise, thin the information out using the STAR technique:

**Situation:** what was the situation and when did it take place?

**Task:** what task was it, and what was the objective?

**Action:** what action did you take to achieve this?

**Results:** what happened as a result of your action?

Providing facts and figures can communicate powerfully to an employer the value that you will add to their organisation.

## 2.2 Your amended CV

In the next activity you will produce a revised CV geared to one of the employment opportunities you found in [Activity 2](#). Make sure the opportunity is one that you would genuinely be interested in applying for.

Listen to Julie Thornton, Head of HR at Tideway, describe what employers are looking for in an application.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Julie](#)



### Activity 3 Producing an amended CV

Allow approximately 40 minutes

Open the CV you produced in Week 3 in Word or another word processor; you are now ready to edit your CV.

Find the job description that you saved in Activity 2 and review the text of your CV, using the job description for the opportunity you have chosen. Think about how you might want to emphasise or minimise certain aspects of your experience to fit with the requirements of the new job. Decide whether you want to go for a chronological or skills-based CV. In either case, consider using a personal summary at the start of your CV to outline what you have to offer. Don't forget to look at your use of language and tone.

Once you've created a tailor-made CV for a job you are interested in, you'll probably need to review and revise this a couple of times if you are really thinking of applying for the post. Perhaps this has just been a practice run this time, but it's likely to be the sort of thing you will have to do a number of times before you find the job or opportunity you want. If you do decide to send off this version, the next step is to create a covering letter.

### 3 Covering letters and speculative letters



Figure 3 Wax seal

A covering letter is an opportunity to personalise and tailor an application, and show precisely how you fit the requirements of the job. It's your chance to introduce yourself and highlight what you want the recruiter or employer to know about you. As with your CV, you want to make an excellent initial impact with your covering letter. It should, therefore, show how you meet the specific criteria detailed on the person specification or job description.

You won't know if they'll look at your CV or covering letter first, so cover your most relevant skills and qualifications in the first couple of sentences of the letter. Give a personal summary, tailored towards the particular job involved. Next, expand on the most relevant experience and training from your CV, then cover any other areas of your CV where you think you have developed skills relevant to the job. Make sure you match your skills to the person specification, and use the same key words where possible. Finally, conclude by encouraging them to contact you if they want any further information.

#### Activity 4 Drafting a covering letter

Allow approximately 40 minutes

Write a covering letter to accompany your CV for the job you have chosen. Start by working through the job description and identifying the key words and requirements. Make notes on how your skills and experience fit with these key requirements and then structure your letter according to the advice above.

If the employer is asking you to complete an application form, you should put the information you would include in a covering letter in an additional or supplementary information page.

### 3.1 Speculative applications

Speculative applications are a way of targeting organisations you wish to work for, even if they're not currently advertising.

You can try this approach with organisations that:

- don't have to advertise because they receive so many speculative applications
- use recruitment agencies or word of mouth to fill vacancies
- are within a defined geographical area, if you are restricted in where you can work
- you really want to work for.

A speculative letter should be tailored to the specific organisation being applied to, rather than a standard letter used for a number of speculative applications, and should be addressed to a named individual.

The letter should be clearly structured to cover:

- the kind of work you're looking for
- why you want to work for that organisation in particular
- why you are suitable – emphasise your relevant skills, experience and personal qualities by elaborating on the information on your enclosed CV.

Remember to end the letter positively and enthusiastically.

Try to offer a number of options in your letter. If they have no vacancies, could they keep your details on file? Are you interested in unpaid work experience? If so, say so!

Finally, don't forget to spell check the document, and also carefully proofread the letter as there are errors a spell checker won't pick up (for example typing 'form' instead of 'from'). As with all applications and letters, it's best to ask a friend to check it for you, just in case you have missed something obvious.

## Drafting a speculative letter

If you have time, you might like to find an employer or organisation that you would like to work for. You could use LinkedIn to narrow down the choices, or use some of the STEM trends information from Week 3 to identify employers in sectors that are growing and expanding. You could do this as a real application, or just as a practice exercise to get familiar with the process of a speculative application. Try writing a speculative letter using the tips above.

Have a look at this [sample speculative letter](#) and, if you've written one, see how this compares with yours. Have you seen anything you think you would now wish to change in your letter?

## What happens next?

If you don't hear from an employer, wait 7-10 days and then follow up with a phone call. Ask if they have received your letter and CV; if they have, ask to discuss its contents further.

If you are lucky enough to hear back and be invited for an interview, either from a speculative application or an advertised job, the next step will be to get ready for it. In the next section, we will look briefly at how best to prepare yourself.

## 4 Interview confidence and preparation

Fear of interviews can act as a barrier to employment, so it's a good idea to work on your confidence in this area, and the easiest way to improve your confidence is to practise and prepare. There is a limit to how much this course can help you prepare for a specific interview, but we can offer you some hints and tips.

## Preparing

Preparation is the key to a successful interview. In particular you should:

- check in advance what the format of the interview will be; for example, how many people will be on the panel; will you need to do a presentation?
- familiarise yourself with what the job entails
- decide how your skills and experience suit the role by checking the selection criteria or the job description
- try to predict what you may be asked and draft suitable answers to generic questions – think about examples from your study, work or personal life to demonstrate key skills. Typical interview questions include:
  - a. Why do you think you are suitable for this role?
  - b. Why do you want to work for this company?
  - c. How would you deal with the following situation(s) (specific to your sector)?
  - d. Examples of working in a team, dealing with conflict, and so on.
- read through your CV or application form and covering letter thoroughly
- prepare some questions to ask the interviewers at the end.

Once you have thought about questions you might be asked, practise saying your responses out loud and confidently – you could do this by yourself or with someone you trust. Think about your body language and, if you wish, [try out some of the expansive poses recommended by Amy Cuddy](#) on body language and confidence. If you are someone who gets so nervous that you don't think you can manage an interview situation, it might be worth trying some relaxation techniques or, alternatively, consult your GP for advice on coping with stress. It's quite common to feel like this, especially after a long time outside work.

## 5 This week's quiz

Well done, you're now ready for the weekly quiz.

Week 7 practice quiz.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding Ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

To view this content please access the complete course on [OpenLearn](#)

## 6 Summary

This week's work has concentrated on developing the skills and information that you will need in order to enter or return to your career. The CV that you've improved upon this week will be your most important marketing tool in the next stage of your path to employment. Don't forget, though, that you will need to tailor your CV specifically to fit each employment opportunity that comes along – it is a document that will need to be constantly revised and updated. You've looked at various ways to find opportunities – speculative letters, online job portals and recruitment agencies. You've also started preparing for interviews, which can be one of the trickiest hurdles that you can face if you've been out of the job market for a long time. Next week, you will reflect on everything that you've learned in this course and bring it all together into a powerful action plan that will help you on your journey back to STEM work.

You can now go to [Week 8](#).

## Further reading

The [WISE Campaign website](#) has a section where STEM employers advertise their vacancies and you can sign up to their weekly job alert bulletin

Many universities, including [The Open University](#), have their own vacancy websites, including JobZone, in addition to the provision of resources advertising [Regional and national vacancies](#). Additionally, there are a number of [regional and national sources](#) that give vacancy listings and other assistance in job hunting for graduates within different areas of the UK.

For jobs in local authorities, the [Local Government Jobs](#) website is a useful starting point.

The [Recruitment & Employment Confederation](#) represents recruitment agencies and provides lists of its members on its website, searchable by sector and geographical location.



Professional bodies and trade associations often carry vacancies on their websites or produce vacancy bulletins.

[Milkround](#) has listings for hundreds of internships and thousands of graduate job opportunities, searchable by location, industry and job role or type.

If you are interested in jobs in an academic environment go to [jobs.ac.uk](https://jobs.ac.uk).

If you're interested in the not for profit/third sector, see [Elevator - The Good Job Network](#) and [Third Sector Jobs](#).

All [JobCentre vacancies](#) can be viewed online. JobCentres can be helpful if you are seeking paid work experience although they rarely have professional vacancies in STEM. However they can be a good source of advice, for example they have disability support advisers.

[The Riley Guide](#) is a directory of online employment and career sources and services and is very good for job hunting. Although the focus is on the United States, the site contains a lot of useful links and information – if you look at this, we suggest you start by looking at the section entitled 'How to Job Search'.

[The Jobhunter's Bible](#) offers a broad range of advice on job hunting, and how you can use the internet to find vacancies. Follow the links for job listings.

## Recruitment agencies specialising in part time work:

[Capability Jane](#) for flexible, part-time, job shares.

[Ginibee](#) is a job share platform matching candidates for job shares and educating organisations on job sharing.

[Timewise Jobs](#) is a jobs board from Timewise, a specialist organisation that focusses on job shares.

[Working Mums](#) features a jobs board that includes some part-time STEM roles.

## Week 8: Planning your next steps

### Week 8 Introduction

This is the last week of the course, but rather than viewing it as an ending you should consider this as the start of the next stage of your journey and a new phase in your career development.

This week you will develop a powerful action plan that will help you move forward with your return to work. You will start by identifying your long-term goals and ambitions, and then outline the steps required to get there.

Before you go on to creating your own unique action plan, you'll look again at the strategies that have worked for others returning to STEM.

First, listen to Sue talking about what this week is going to involve and hear about how she returned to education to study computing:

Video content is not available in this format.

[Study computing](#)



By the end of the week you should have:

- reflected on everything you've learned on this BOC
- identified your long-term goals and ambitions
- created an action plan which breaks your long term goals into a series of achievable steps.

# 1 Strategies for returning to STEM

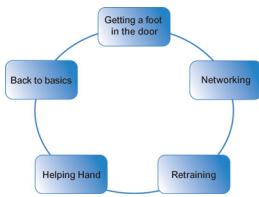


Figure 1 Strategies

In [Week 1](#), you read about the strategies that worked for people who have successfully returned to STEM after a career break. While the types of work they went back into varied considerably, there were five main strategies that had helped them:

- **Foot in the door** – a great way to get started on the journey back to work is volunteering, carrying out unpaid work, or working in a non-STEM role within a STEM organisation, which can give you access to hidden job opportunities.
- **Networking** – your contacts and networks can help you find jobs that have not been publicly advertised. These can include friends or family as well as previous professional contacts, and you can use LinkedIn to reconnect with employers or former work colleagues who you have previously lost touch with.
- **Retraining** – you might decide to undertake a completely new qualification that will take you into a different but related career. On the other hand, you may need to refresh your skills and learn new techniques that will update you in your specialist field.
- **Helping hand** – remember, you are not alone in your quest to return to STEM work. There are a number of agencies and funding resources specifically for women returners, such as the [Daphne Jackson Trust](#), as well as other organisations, advisors and formal networks.
- **Back to basics** – sometimes it might be necessary to make a trade-off and work in a lower status job, perhaps at low rates of pay, in return for flexibility and proximity to home. You may decide to use this as a stopgap until a future time when you can commit more time to work. Remember that you need to consider your work life balance as a whole when you are planning your return, so, by all means be ambitious, but you must also be realistic about what is feasible.

## 1.1 Reviewing your progress

Before you start setting goals and making plans, it's worth taking a bit of time to review what you have done so far on the course, and also to look over some of the notes you've written and the activities you've carried out. These will give you a firm basis for writing your action plan.

### Activity 1 Reflecting on the course

Allow approximately 20 minutes

Make a note of one thing you have learned from each week of the course. This could be something you have discovered about yourself, something you have learned from another person, or something that you've read or thought about.

For example, you might have found it challenging in the second week to account for the gaps in your employment record when creating your LinkedIn page and CV.

Understanding the valuable skills and experience gained while being, for example, a carer, living abroad, changing career direction, doing volunteer work and/or running a parent/teacher group can help you be positive and unapologetic in addressing this.

In Week 6, you looked at how you may have lost confidence as a result of being out of work. What did you learn from this week and what strategies did you decide might help to overcome this barrier?

Remember, these are just examples – you should focus on your own insights and learning that are specific to you.

Here is a reminder of what you have covered so far:

Study Week	Main topics covered
1	Learning from your experiences
2	Presenting yourself – online and on paper
3	What's going on in your industry sector; what are the possibilities and future trends?
4	New ways of working – flexibility and other options
5	Achieving a harmonious work–life balance
6	Getting support – mentoring and networking
7	Finding your way round the job market

Fill in your notes using the [week-by-week reflection table](#).

## 2 Where next?

During your study of the course, you should have started to formulate an idea of what you want to do next. The action plan that you will create this week will act as a map to guide you on the next part of your journey. However, before you start creating this, it's important to have a destination in mind, so you'll now take some time to clarify exactly where you are heading.

You will now look again at some of the options that you've explored during this course.



Figure 2 Signpost

## 2.1 Update your skills or study for another qualification

If you are thinking about updating your skills or retraining and making a career change, you will need to do some investigation into possible courses.

## 2.2 Volunteering and returnships

In Week 2, you considered the benefits of volunteering and good places to look for opportunities. These are ideal strategies for getting a 'foot in the door'.

### Returnships

Most people have heard of internships and know that these are increasingly being seen as a useful way to gain experience within a company. Internships can be unpaid (in which case you are considered a volunteer) or paid. They can also provide a 'foot in the door', leading to appointment in a permanent position – it's a chance for the employer to try out the employee and vice versa.

Returnships are similar to internships, but have been developed specifically to support people coming back after a career break. They are usually short-term, paid contracts (typically 12 weeks) and help provide a first step back into work, offering a chance for both you and the employer to test the water before committing to a permanent job. Goldman Sachs in the USA started the idea in 2008 and since then, a number of high profile large companies have been offering these internships for returners in the UK.

A useful list of returnships offered in the UK can be found on the [Women's Engineering Society website](#). As these opportunities are constantly changing and being updated, we suggest you search online for 'returnship' to find the latest opportunities.

One example of an engineering company which has taken this approach is Tideway. Listen to Julie Thornton, Head of HR, talk about returnships with Tideway:

Video content is not available in this format.

[Julie Thornton](#)



## Self-employment or consultancy

In Week 4 you looked at different ways of working, including self-employment and consultancy. If this option interests you, you will need to do some more ground work; for example, looking at costings and business planning. Useful links about self-employment are given in the [Further reading](#) section.

## Job seeking/recruitment agencies

You looked at job seeking strategies in detail in Week 7. When you start seriously looking for jobs, you will need to set goals and targets that will keep up your momentum and maximise your opportunities of finding a job that you want.

## Get back into research

If you have previously been a researcher in one of the STEM subjects and want to get back to a research career, you may want to consider the [Daphne Jackson Trust](#). This is a scheme to support researchers in returning to their research careers, with part-time fellowships at universities.

Watch this video of Katie Perry talking in more detail about the Daphne Jackson Trust scheme:

Video content is not available in this format.  
[Daphne Jackson](#)



## Further careers advice

If, after reviewing all your options, you feel like you still need further advice and guidance, you may like to talk to a professional careers advisor. If so, you can get some advice from



the [Open University Careers Advisory Service pages](#) and find help at the [National Careers Service](#).

If there are any parts of this course you would like to reflect on again, you can look at the OpenLearn [Reboot Your STEM Career interactive toolkit](#). This includes a dashboard depicting which actions you've completed and those you need to work on further.

### 3 Setting your goals

Thinking about your return to work can be a bit bewildering with so many options, so it's important to have an idea of where you want to go before you start planning specific steps. A good place to start is with a vision statement, projecting yourself into the future and imagining yourself as you wish to become.



Figure 3 Crystal ball

In her book *Playing Big* (2014), Tara Mohr suggests that it is your inner mentor, the person who you really want to become, who will guide you better than any external mentor to defining your own criteria of success and to taking your next step to achieving this.

#### Activity 2 Vision statement

Allow approximately 30 minutes

You might want to find a quiet place to carry out this activity and a peaceful time without disruption when you can spend as much time as you need to make the most of it. Imagine yourself in five years time (if you want you can choose a longer timescale, maybe ten or 15 years). Don't get distracted by negative thoughts for the moment, such as how you have got there or what obstacles might get in your way. Allow your mind to really imagine yourself in the future.

Think about how it feels.

Where are you?

What do you hear and see?

Who are the people around you?

What are you doing?

Write down your thoughts and feelings and then try to condense this into a long-term vision statement. Think carefully about how you phrase this. It's important that you believe in your vision and are motivated by it. Be as specific as possible – the more focused your vision, the better. It should be inspirational, clear, memorable and concise. Your vision should be a long-term goal that will take some time to achieve and it might seem unbelievable and unrealistic today. Don't be afraid to aim high and discover what it is that you deeply want.

In 5 (or 10) years time I am...

*Provide your answer...*

### Discussion

Here are some examples of the completed activity:

#### Vision statement 1

In five years time I am working in a stimulating job that I really enjoy and where my engineering background is well utilised. I am a member of the product development team in which my contribution is important and I command a good degree of respect from my colleagues. I am flourishing personally and professionally and have plenty of opportunities to develop my career; including pitching to clients. The environment I work in is pleasant, close to home, and the company for I work for recognises the need for a contented workforce and is amenable to me working from home for some of the time.

#### Vision statement 2

I am the project leader of a plant genetics laboratory, in charge of a small group of research technicians, postgraduate students and postdocs. I am an integral member of the laboratory respected by all staff for my in-depth knowledge of my chosen discipline. The staff and I communicate well, with the result that each person is aware of where everyone else is heading in their work. As a result, all the staff are empowered and enjoy their research. The laboratory has a relaxed feel but each week we have a dynamic group meeting to reflect, set targets and improve practice. I ideally leave work by 5 pm each day.

#### Vision statement 3

I am self-employed as a web developer. I have a good income from my business and although I have flexible working hours I work hard and efficiently. Being able to work online means I am free to work in any location. I also get to choose my clients and will have a degree of freedom and independence. My previous experience in company employment will aid me in providing a professional service and I am a member of a professional institute, which ensures my training and expertise is constantly refreshed. I

am confident but realistic about my skills and experience and I'm organised with a list of work in the pipeline.

You might like to share your vision statement with a friend or family member. This step of sharing your vision is a small step but one that takes courage. The wishes and hopes we have often stay in our heads, yet formulating and sharing them with others is usually the first step to achieving them.

## 4 Creating your action plan

Now that you have a vision, this will guide you in the next part of the process – creating an action plan with goals that, one step at a time, will take you towards achieving your vision. Your vision will keep you focused and ensure your plans are heading in the direction you want them to.

### Guidelines for powerful goal setting

We are constantly making plans, but sometimes it's difficult to see them through. This is why a well thought-out set of goals needs a realistic action plan to achieve them. Take New Year, for example, which is traditionally a time for resolutions – we all know how quickly well-intentioned plans can slip away once the reality of life kicks in by February.



Figure 4 New Year's resolutions

The purpose of this section is to help you set realistic goals that can and will be achieved. First, here are some general guiding principles:

## Look forward, not backwards

It's important that when you set your goals you should try to adopt a positive approach, rather than framing your objectives in a negative tone. This will help you develop a sense that you are moving forwards and onwards towards the vision that you have created. Goals that are moving away from something and include the word 'don't' often have the result of reinforcing the negative feeling associated with them. Have a look at the examples below and see if you can think of any others:

Negative	Positive
I don't want to be stuck at home for the next two years.	I will find myself a new opportunity by the end of the year.
I don't want to remain out of touch with my subject area.	I will subscribe to <i>New Scientist</i> and check websites every week for relevant news.
I don't want to end up stressed by trying to do too much.	I'll organise my time effectively and regularly review my commitments.
I don't want my children to end up losing out as a result of my return to work.	I will plan childcare carefully and set up contingency plans in case one of the children is sick.

## Measure your progress

Achieving your goals will require persistence and determination, and there will be plenty of times when you might think that it's all too difficult and consider giving up. You should try and set up some kind of system to measure how you are doing, or even to amend your goals in the light of new ideas and experiences. In fact, measuring your progress can become a goal in itself: 'I will look at my action plan once a month'. Make an appointment with yourself and put a note in your diary for the days that you will do this.

As you work on progressing towards your goals and measuring how well you are doing, you should also be aware of how you might feel if you are not moving ahead as well as you had hoped. Don't treat your goals as a rigid business plan with sales forecasts that need to be met. Be kind to yourself and celebrate what you have achieved. Your goals are there to guide you on your journey and you should be prepared to celebrate small steps and achievements along the way.

## Top tips on goal setting

- Step beyond your comfort zone – don't just do what is familiar
- Set yourself mini challenges and take up opportunities when they arise – for example, giving a presentation
- Do something to boost your confidence every day
- Do something that revives you and gives you energy every day
- Celebrate achievements – keep in touch with other returners via the LinkedIn group and let each other know how you are doing
- Goals can be as small or large as you like – you just need to make a start! Set daily goals for small achievements if the thought of a big ambition is too daunting

- Share your goals with someone – that will make it more real and also ensure you are making a commitment
- Try to avoid negative thinking – it's all too easy to fall back on familiar excuses for not achieving what you really want.

## 4.1 Goals as SMART objectives

The acronym SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time bound) is used in project management in business, but also increasingly in many other fields. This is a useful tool in setting goals because it forces you to be much more precise about what you are aiming for and therefore more likely to achieve your desired outcome. While they are used regularly in a business context, you can apply the following principles to your own action plan:

- Specific: say exactly what you want to achieve
- Measurable: how will you know you have achieved it?
- Achievable: is it feasible – what barriers are there that will need to be overcome?
- Relevant: how does it relate to the overall goal?
- Time-bound: when will you do this?

### Activity 3 Creating your action plan

Allow about 45 minutes

This activity will guide you through creating your own action plan.

First, open your [Action Plan template](#).

Next, enter the following details:

1. description of goal
2. what it will involve
3. exactly how you will do this
4. resources needed
5. when you are going to do it
6. in the Notes section you can enter things like the possible consequences for yourself and others, and any barriers that need to be overcome.

You can now go on to create more action points related to specific goals for work, education, and personal life. You might well find that as you start to think creatively in one area of your life, you begin to develop ideas for action in others. Think of this as the start of a process. There is a sample action plan in the [Further reading](#) section.

## 4.2 What if I don't succeed?

However well thought through your action plan is, there may be times when you cannot achieve what you have set out to do. On a practical level, the best thing to do is to go back and review your goals in response to the changed situation.

It is not always that straightforward, though. You will also need to deal with the emotions that result from not achieving your objectives. Whatever the reason for not succeeding,

this can lead to a sense of disappointment, possibly even of failure. It's important to think about how you will deal with knock backs on your journey, and what resources you have to call on when things get tough.

Some of the ways you might help yourself recover from a disappointment and deal with stressful situations include:

- talking to a supportive friend
- doing physical activity such as sport or exercise
- active relaxation such as meditation
- getting away – a weekend away or even a short walk
- treat yourself – buy a box set
- listen to or play music
- watching TV or a film
- playing with the kids
- even cleaning or other housework can be relaxing!

#### Activity 4 Learning from failure

10 mins

It's a well-worn cliché that we can all learn from our mistakes, but it's one of the most important things to hang onto as you head off into this next phase of your life. There will inevitably be times when you will face disappointments but there is always something to be learned from each difficult situation.

Think back to a time when you were faced with a disappointment. What were your feelings associated with this event? What did you do to help yourself overcome these feelings and make yourself feel better? You may wish to revisit the [lifeline activity](#) that you did in Week 1 to trigger your memory. Think about what you learned from that experience and what you might do differently if the same thing happened again.

You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it.

Maya Angelou

#### Activity 5 Final activity

Allow approximately 20 minutes

Write a letter to yourself, describing what you plan to achieve in the next six months. This should relate clearly to the goals and objectives you have detailed in your Action Plan. You should save this in a safe place for six months, at which point you will re-read the letter – mark that date in your diary now. If you have put your plan into action, you may be surprised, not only by just how much you have accomplished in six months, but also the tone of the letter, which will indicate how your confidence has grown.



## 5 This week's quiz

You're now ready to take the final quiz for your badge. This quiz is another 15-question quiz, like Week 4.

Week 8 compulsory badge quiz.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding Ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

To view this content please access the complete course on [OpenLearn](#)

## 6 Summary

Congratulations – you have almost completed the *Returning to STEM* BOC! This week you have spent time thinking about your vision, finding your inner mentor and setting some realistic goals to help you in getting back to your STEM career. During this course, you've heard stories of other people who have been on a similar journey, and hopefully their experiences will act as an inspiration to spur you on. So before you go, take a look at this final video where you will hear some words of advice from those who have been on this journey before you. Most importantly, this week you have produced your action plan; this will act as a map and compass to help you on your way.

Don't forget that in order to finish the course and get your badge you will need to complete this week's quiz.

Good luck with your return to STEM!

Video content is not available in this format.

[Return to STEM](#)



**If you've gained your badge you'll receive an email to notify you. You can view and manage your badges in My OpenLearn within 24 hours of completing all the criteria to gain a badge.**

Now you've completed the course we would again appreciate a few minutes of your time to tell us a bit about your experience of studying it and what you plan to do next. We will use this information to provide better online experiences for all our learners and to share our findings with others. If you'd like to help, please fill in this optional survey.

To view this content please access the complete course on [OpenLearn](#)

## Further reading

[UCAS](#) offers information on university courses.

For more information about setting up in business, take a look at the [Prowess](#) website.

Further useful advice is available on the [UK government site](#).

[Sample Action Plan](#)

[Reboot Your STEM Career](#) is a comprehensive interactive toolkit to help you relaunch your career and navigate your way back into the world of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths.

## Conclusion

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This free course provided an introduction to studying . It took you through a series of exercises designed to develop your approach to study and learning at a distance, and helped to improve your confidence as an independent learner.

# Keep on learning

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Figure 3: Digital footprint

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### Week 2

Figure 1: CV © Andrew Popov/iStockphoto.com

Video: How to use LinkedIn privacy settings. Courtesy LinkedIn.

### Week 3

Activity 1: extract from Cogent skills for science industries (2015) *Our industries* [Online]. Available at [www.cogentskills.com/about-cogent-skills/our-industries](http://www.cogentskills.com/about-cogent-skills/our-industries)

Figure 1: adapted from: UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2015) *High level STEM skills requirements in the UK labour market* [Online]. Available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-level-stem-skills-requirements-in-the-uk-labour-market](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-level-stem-skills-requirements-in-the-uk-labour-market)

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Table 2: adapted from: [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)

## Week 4

Figure 1: adapted from: Office for National Statistics (2014) *Characteristics of Home Workers, 2014* [Online]. Available at [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_365592.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_365592.pdf)

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