

I don't know what I want to do!

How to start planning life after University

'Career Planning' (sometimes called 'career exploration / research') is a term to describe the process involved in ensuring you are well-informed and prepared regarding:

- what jobs / professions you can do with your degree
- what type of work you might enjoy and be good at, and
- what opportunities are available

Career planning isn't necessarily about knowing what you want to do for the rest of your life, although if you do then great!

Starting the Career Planning Process

Three things are required from you for effective career research and planning

- time & commitment - start early and allocate plenty of time alongside your studies
- an open mind - imagine yourself in various careers, research different options
- say yes to opportunities! attend events, ask questions, develop skills
- gain experience

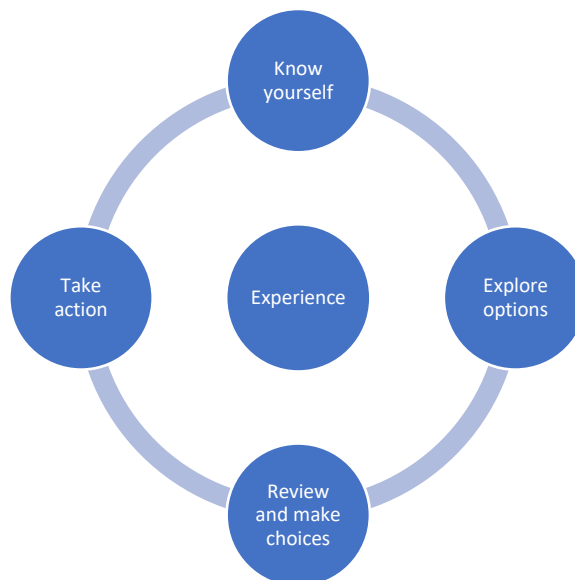
Career planning can be overwhelming, as there is lots of information to process, options to explore, and decisions to be made.

Fortunately, there is a very simple, tried and tested process you can follow (DOTS - (Law & Watts, 1977)). This process should be equally useful whether you have no idea what you want to do, or you have some idea but need to plan how you are going to do it.

The DOTS process

The DOTS process requires you to:

- Know Yourself
- Explore Options
- Review, reflect & make choices
- Take Actions



Reviewing / reflecting on your experiences enables you to:

Gain a better understanding of yourself

- what motivates you
- where your passions lie
- what you like doing (as well as what you don't like doing)
- test out any career ideas
- identify your skills/ abilities and strengths
- improve your confidence

Gain a better understanding of the employment market

- Find out what it's 'really like'
- Develop contacts
- Test out what it's like working in different sectors, types of organisations etc
- Get insider knowledge and tips from people already in the industry/ sector of interest

Strengthen your competitive edge

- Demonstrate your commitment and enthusiasm to a career/ sector
- Provides you with evidence to present to employers about your skills and abilities
- Enables you to produce more convincing applications
- Improves your performance at interview/ assessment centre
- It may lead to offer of work later on

It doesn't matter what kind of experience or where you gained it; the important thing is that you get it, reflect on it and consider what you've learned – either about yourself, your preferred career areas, or where your strengths lie. It will also help you decide whether your plan is realistic or attainable in your timescale, whether an alternative approach might be required, or you might need to develop more relevant skills or gain additional experience in order to achieve them.

Knowing Yourself

It's hard to know what you might like to do next, if you don't know where your strengths and interests lie

- what is important to you
- what are your personal qualities
- what motivates you and what you are good at
- what you enjoy

What is important to you?

Working (or living) in a way which is incompatible with your values is likely to make you miserable and your work a challenge. What do you want from a job and an employer?

These could include:

- a variety of tasks, people, places, projects
- the opportunity to be creative
- shared social and ethical values

What are your personal qualities?

These play an important part in how rewarding you might find, and effective you might be in different careers.

For example:

- are you naturally outgoing or quiet?
- do you prefer working in groups or individually?
- do you plan things in advance or jump straight in?

Try this free online resource: [16 Personalities](#)

What motivates you / what do you enjoy?

Reflecting on things you like doing - as well as things you don't enjoy doing - can tell you a lot about yourself. Gather information from all areas of your life, not just your studies - do any common themes emerge?

- what interests you?
- what motivates you?
- what things inspire you and get you most excited?
- what things have you previously enjoyed doing?

Some online tools to help you:

[Career Unlocker](#)

[Career Tools – Gro](#)

What are you good at?

This is about your skills and abilities: most people find there are some things they are better at than others. Some skills can be learned by almost everyone, like learning to drive, and others only by certain people.

Try listing what you feel are your current main skills, and then consider which of these you really enjoy doing. Reflecting on your experience is an excellent way of learning about yourself and your abilities. Remember to consider ALL areas of your life - study, work, volunteering, hobbies, and social life.

- You can practice tackling some of these questions in the *[Career Planning online workshop / workbook](#) on the Hub
- Read up on *[Identifying and Articulating your Skills](#) in our handout:

A great way of exploring and assessing your skills is to try out online tests, questionnaires, assessments and games used by graduate employers in their recruitment.

As a Bangor University student you can log into an exclusive **Graduates First** account, where you have full access to a wide range of these tools, to help you explore and assess:

- how your personality fits into a 'work style'
- how much of a risk taker you are
- how good you are at making decisions
- your ability and approach to solving problems
- what kind of manager you might be
- how good you are at handling numbers
- how logical you are

These resources not only help with your career research and planning, but you'll also be familiarising yourself with graduate recruitment practices and improving your performance at the same time!

[Log in](#) with your student ID and password to get started!

Exploring Options

Once you start exploring your interests, motivations, skills and qualities, you can use this information to research what type of work and work environment you would enjoy. As you gather this information, notice what interests you. You'll also become extremely knowledgeable!

- job sectors and job roles - explore their various roles and responsibilities
- the working environment - salary expectations, working hours, opportunity to travel
- organisations and employers - what they do, where they are based, how they recruit and what they are looking for

There are lots of different ways to explore your career options

- your course
- events & opportunities
- careers advice & guidance
- online resources
- social media

Your course

If you are studying a vocational course such as Primary Education, your qualification will lead directly into a specific career. However, most courses include modules, assignments and activities that enable you to explore how your academic discipline can translate into 'subject-specific' careers. These can include placement and work experience modules, field trips, work-based learning, industry focused topics and assignments to name a few.

Events & opportunities

Careers Fairs take place on campus and / or online each year, grouped either by your academic college, or by sector – there are also a host of online graduate events and fairs hosted by professional bodies such as the [Royal Geographical Society](#) and [LawCareers.net](#) – follow on social media or sign up to the mailing lists of organisations that interest you. Regular guest lectures are arranged by your academic school, as well as employer presentations and events. Employability workshops and events are run centrally by Employability Service. There are also opportunities to attend external careers fairs, such as the Big Graduate Careers Fair in Manchester!

There are so many opportunities available at Bangor to help you with career exploration and planning, from paid internships, to volunteering through the Student's Union, Enterprise by Design, competitions and initiatives.

Careers advice & guidance

You can access the Employability service in person or online. As well as our workshops and help finding work and work experience, you can chat to an Employability Adviser who can help you explore your career options. They are experts at guiding you through the career planning process, even if you don't know where to start!

You can find out more about [*Adviser Appointments](#) and what to expect.

Online resources

It pays to have a focused, methodical approach when researching online, as it's too easy to get overwhelmed. Here are some key areas to get you started.

Graduate Careers websites

- General help with getting started on career planning:
[Target Jobs – Finding a Job](#)
- What you could do with your degree subject
[Prospects – What can I do with my degree?](#)

Information about job sectors

[Prospects – Job Sectors](#)

[Target Jobs – Career Sectors](#)

- Up-to-date job profiles and recent graduate case studies

[Prospects – Job Profiles](#)

- Advertised job / work experience opportunities

[TARGETconnect](#)

[Prospects – Graduate Jobs](#)

[Target Jobs](#)

Job Searching websites

- Search current job vacancies for ideas and inspiration
- Familiarise yourself with job roles and requirements
- Read our handout on looking for graduate jobs

*[Finding a Graduate Job](#)

Professional Bodies

- Information regarding specific professional standards
- Industry / sector news, including growth areas for jobs
- Student membership is either free or heavily discounted. You can sometimes access training and careers advice – and membership looks good on your CV

Direct Employer websites

Discover key employers - where they are based, what they are offering and what they are looking for

- the variety of job roles within an organisation
- what it's like to work for them
- whether they offer training, work experience, internships and/or vacation schemes

Social Media

- LinkedIn is a great place to find out about what recent (and not-so-recent) graduates go on to do after graduation, get information about opportunities, ideas and inspiration. Build your network - you can also use this platform to approach professionals and early career graduates for advice and insights, developing your knowledge and your contacts.
- Twitter is a great place to keep well-informed about what's going on in certain sectors. By following employers and participating positively, you will find out about work experience and job opportunities!

Review and make decisions

Take stock – what have you found out? It is useful at this stage to start making plans for the shorter and longer term, as well as considering how realistic or achievable your plans are - do you have a contingency or back up plan?

Speaking to an Employability Adviser can help you start to plan, narrow down options, or make decisions, but to get you started you may want to have a go yourself first. A good action plan should use SMART objectives.

Specific - Goals should be as specific as possible. For example, instead of being “Get work experience with a PR firm for summer”, you could say, identify 20 companies to contact regarding work experience.

Measurable - It needs to be something measurable so you know whether or not you’ve actually done it! So again, using the above example you would state “20 companies” as opposed to all the PR companies in London (how would you know if you had contacted every single one?)

Attainable - It is much better to break an ‘overall’ goal down into smaller steps and treat each one of these as a separate goal. For example, breaking down “get PR work experience over summer” into various, achievable steps, might give you the following smaller goals;

1. Identify PR firms in London
2. Research these and select 20 to contact regarding work experience
3. Contact the firms

4. If successful, plan work experience
5. If not, review contacts and contact more

So in this example, identifying and researching 20 companies is attainable.

Relevant - Ensure each of your goals is relevant to the 'bigger picture'. In this example, we might assume that this student is interested in a career in PR after university, in which case gaining experience and contacts at this stage is most definitely relevant.

Time-bound - Set yourself deadlines for meeting each goal/ objective. For example, you could give yourself one week to do initial broad research on PR firms in London, then two-weeks to do the more detailed research in order to identify the companies you wanted to contact. Even if you need to adjust your timescales as you progress, it is still useful to use them.

Take Action

Start working through your action plan/s:

These could include:

- finding work experience
- finding work experience opportunities in specific sectors
- finding out more about postgraduate study
- exploring time out/ gap year options
- getting some advice and guidance on writing CVs/ applications
- finding out about what you need to do and when (there are some very early closing dates!)
- exploring how to make yourself more employable
- reflecting on the skills you've developed

CHECKLIST

Feel you have a fairly good idea of what you want to do after university? This checklist should help you see whether you have everything covered, or need to consider additional points.

1	<p>Do you <i>really</i> know what this job entails?</p> <p>Thorough research is essential, many people work hard towards a particular career only to achieve it and realise it isn't what they expected.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careers information sources – outlined in the “Explore Options” section of this guide • Try speaking to people already working in the sector/role of interest – network • Try and get work experience with a <i>range</i> of employers, or types of organisation in your fields of interest 	
2	<p>How does this correlate with you and your ideals/ circumstances?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For example, if staying in North Wales is important to you, do these types of organisations/ opportunities exist? • If not, where are they and would you be willing to relocate? • The types of employers or organisations which provide such opportunities; do they fit with your values/ personality? • Are you interested in quick progression, financial reward etc? Are these (or other relevant personal goals) realistic in your preferred field? 	
3	<p>Achieving it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the required/preferred skills/qualifications/experience? • Do you have these? • If not, what can you do to develop them? • If yes, what is the <i>evidence</i>? • Is this a realistic step immediately from university or might you have to take smaller steps working towards this as an ultimate goal? • If so, what are your smaller steps going to be? • Are you actively networking with people/ organisations in that sector? • What can you do now to ensure you are a quality candidate for such positions/sectors? 	

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**student only resource*