There are a wide range of career options to choose from but how to make that choice can be a major challenge for students, particularly when so many graduate recruiters do not demand a particular degree subject.

To get you started there are some suggestions below which may help you to take action. There are also some activities which could help you to understand key aspects of you as an individual and how these may relate to career choice for the future.

WHERE DO I START?

An excellent starting point in the process of creating ideas is to ask yourself two key questions: what would be the most important factors for you when choosing a career and secondly, what are the skills and strengths that you would like to use in your future job. It might also be useful to look at your weaknesses and how you might develop these into strengths. Remember that further study may be an option for you, and you can always develop new skills if needed.

BROADENING YOUR CAREER KNOWLEDGE

Your future choice of career need not be dictated by your degree subject but this can be a good place to start thinking about what really interests you.

It is worth emphasising how flexible the UK graduate employment market remains: over 40% of advertised jobs are open to applicants of any degree discipline. In addition to looking at careers related to your degree, you may like to explore options unrelated to your subject or get a broader feel for what jobs are out there, by using some of the resources listed at the end of this hand-out.

At this stage, you might find it helpful to use ‘Prospects Planner’, an online guidance program, which is available at: www.prospects.ac.uk. You are presented with a list of job activities, work values and skills and asked to select those that you would like to use in a career. The program then provides you with a list of occupations that most closely match your requirements.

It may also be useful to look at www.targetjobs.co.uk/careers-report which offers a complete self-assessment and looks at personal potential for graduate jobs.

THINKING ABOUT YOURSELF

A career is most likely to be satisfying if it enables you to use your preferred skills and personal qualities, but you may also want the work to be both interesting and worthwhile. It is important to realise that self-awareness is a key aspect in any career decision-making process. You will need to reflect on your strengths, personal qualities, skills, values, interests and experience so far, to enable you to build a clearer picture of yourself. You might do this by using real examples from your university life, work experience and extra-curricular activities. Building this picture of yourself will hopefully make you more confident when it comes to making decisions and researching opportunities in the job market and it will also make it much easier to market yourself to employers.

In addition, making decisions about your career is likely to be an on-going process throughout your working life, so developing your ability to assess yourself and identify what you want is a skill you will use again and again.

Your personality - Understanding your personality can help you think about how you prefer to approach problems, plan your time and relate to people. You can also learn about your preferred working environment and the types of work that you might find most rewarding. The Careers Service offers the opportunity to complete the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator (MBTI) that can give you some insight into your preferences and personality. Contact the Careers Service or look on our website for further information.

Assess your abilities and skills - It's important to be aware of what you have to offer if you are to make a realistic career choice. Think of all your qualifications, and also the skills you have developed through your studies, extra-curricular activities and any work experience. Don't take your achievements for granted as they can be a source of evidence for a range of transferable skills such as team-working, problem-solving, communication and many others that employers are keen to see in candidates. If you are unsure of your skills in the workplace, then think about getting work experience to test out and develop some of your preferred ones.

Think about what motivates you - A job that meets your motivational criteria is most probably going to be a fulfilling job. For some people, a high status and significant salary will be key factors when they are choosing a career.

Other people may place great importance on having a good balance between their work and home life. You may want to
‘make a difference’ in your job – what does this phrase mean to you? Is it about having a commercial impact, making a scientific discovery or helping a child to learn?

Below are some examples of factors to consider. There may be others that might be important to you – try to create a list for yourself.

- Status
- Continual learning/challenge
- Intellectual challenge
- Working with others
- Success
- Financial reward
- Using creativity
- Benefiting society
- Gathering expertise
- Responsibility

As well as thinking carefully about what factors are important to you and what skills you want to use and develop, it is also essential to consider what subject matter interests you and what it is that you would like to achieve in your career. The clearer you are about what will challenge and satisfy you, the easier it will be to select the ideas with the most potential.

Consider what interests you - Whatever your interests are - from your degree, extra-curricular activities or elsewhere - consider whether and how you might wish to use them. Do you want to focus your career on this area of interest or knowledge, or would you simply like to have it as a context for your job? Your leisure and other interests outside your degree studies may give you an indication of the type of career that might attract you. You may, for example, have a very real interest in conservation and the environment. Could you therefore investigate careers that might enable you to use this interest in some way, for example, environmental management or working for a conservation charity?

Sometimes your interests might be rather vague and you will need to focus on how they might be related to a particular career, for example, ‘an interest in overseas development’ could mean a variety of things. Do you want to use specific skills and knowledge on technical projects, for example water treatment, or contribute to government policy making or be responsible for fundraising with a charity such as Oxfam?

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR IDEAS

It is difficult to be absolutely 100% certain that any career is the right one for you before you start work, but it is possible to be more confident about your decision if you have gathered sufficient information to establish a good understanding of yourself and the role that you wish to consider.

It can be hard to make an informed choice if you are trying to satisfy too many requirements at once, especially if some of these requirements are potentially contradictory. It may be worth trying to prioritise your factors and thinking about how flexible you can be over certain factors. Consider the short and longer term. For example, could a high salary for a period of time (but in a job which is, to you, not particularly stimulating) enable you to have the money to turn your real interest into a small and far less lucrative business in the longer term?

Is using a particular interest in a job the factor that overrides everything else at the moment? When you have gathered a lot of information, try to evaluate your ideas by comparing the attractiveness of this career option with the likely effort involved in attaining it.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Available from the Careers Service:

- Careers Service website - tips on getting started with career planning at www.imperial.ac.uk/careers
- ‘What do Imperial graduates do?’ destination information - Find out what graduates in your degree discipline have gone on to do - www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/destinations
- ‘What Do Graduates Do?’ national destination information - National data about the destinations of graduates six months after leaving university - www.prospects.ac.uk
- Careers Information Library - see the ‘Options with your subject’ section - for tailored departmental careers information. The ‘Your degree in...’ section gives a focused analysis of the skills and knowledge conferred by the different subjects, and the employment options that are likely to prove most promising.
- ‘Your Degree, What Next?’ - a guide to the key issues involved in career choice can be read or printed from the Prospects website at www.prospects.ac.uk. Also available are ‘Your Masters – What Next?’ & ‘Your PhD – What Next?’
- Sector briefings - these give an overview of the range of occupations in different industries and can be useful if you have an idea of the industry in which you would like to work but don’t know much about the types of job - www.prospects.ac.uk
- Attend Careers Service Events - The Careers Service puts on an extensive range of events over the autumn, spring and summer terms, with many opportunities to meet potential employers. All events are listed on the website
- Speak to a Careers Consultant - The Careers Service can help you at any point in your career decision making process and up to 3 years after graduation.
- Websites of professional bodies, reference books and professional journals - can add further detail to your research into occupations and their demand

For information on the disclosure of disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, please see the information on the Careers Service website:

www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure

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