How to make career decisions

Use the following steps to explore your career options.

Step 1 Understand the basic concepts

- Career decision-making isn't magic.
- It is a process in which you have to be actively involved.
- No one else can make the decision for you (Would you want them to?).
- The career counsellor's job is to work with you and guide you through the process.
- The career decision you are making now probably isn't a lifelong decision, as you are likely to have several jobs during your working lifetime.
- There is not one 'ideal' job for you. There may be several jobs that will give you what you want from work.

Step 2 Look inwards – develop a profile of yourself

What do you want from a job? Think about it. Do you want to:

- Work with other people or by yourself?
- Work outdoors or indoors?
- Sit at a desk or have some physical activity?
- Work with ideas or use ideas (hands on) or do both?
- Help people in some way?
- Make a lot of money?
- Be always learning on the job?
- Have lots of variety and activity or have a structured, predictable workday?
- Make your own decisions about the best way to do the job or have someone closely supervise your work?
- Have a balance between work and non-work time?
- Work a 9 am to 5 pm day, do shift work or have flexible hours?
- Feel that the job you have is a secure job?
- Have a job that people you respect think is a 'good' job?
- Work intensely on a project and see it through to the end or focus on one stage of the project?
- Feel you are contributing to the community?
- Work with things or with people as the focus of your job e.g. engines, computers, animals, children or the elderly?

What do you do best? What are your strengths? Are they in:

- Humanities, mathematics, science, etc.?
- Working with ideas, words, things, etc.?
- Working with people?
- Working with your hands?
- Working with computers or machines?

What other things influence your decision? Perhaps:

- The opinions of family and friends?
- Employment opportunities?
- What you read or see in the media?
- The length of training to enter the job?
- Your age?
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- Staying in the local area?
- A disability or medical condition?

What job ideas have you already thought of? You can add to these ideas by completing a career questionnaire from one of the following websites.

- myfuture – http://www.myfuture.edu.au/ (Log in to ‘Build your free profile’)

**Step 3 Look outwards – gather information**

Read about the jobs in your occupational ideas list. These resources will help you.


Evaluate the information you are reading. Does it fit with the profile you have developed of yourself in Step 2? Your eventual aim is to come up with 2 or 3 preferred jobs that will give you satisfaction and will use your strengths.

Next you need to talk to people who are already employed in the occupations on your list. Don’t be afraid to do this, as most people are prepared to help you with your career research if you are polite, prepared with questions, and don’t waste their time. Use your own networks (parents’ friends, your friends’ parents, neighbours, etc.), Yellow Pages and the Internet to contact people in jobs you are interested in. Develop questions to ask them. Some possible questions are:

- What do you do in a typical workday?
- What do you like about the job?
- What do you dislike about the job?
- What is the recommended training to prepare for the job?
- Are there alternative training pathways?
- Are there people in the same occupation who do different things from you?
- Is there someone else you think I should speak to?
- Where do you go from here in this job?

It is helpful to discuss your findings with a friend or relative who knows you well and you feel comfortable talking with. Other peoples’ insights can sometimes help us clarify our thinking.

**Step 4 Prioritise the jobs**

By this time you should be able to put the jobs you have selected in order of your preference.

**Step 5 Plan a training pathway**

Because of your research, you will already know the various pathways to obtaining your occupational goal. Select the pathway that best suits you.

**Step 6 Act on your plan**