CAREER FOG – finding your way forwards when unsure of your direction…

Confused?  Daunted?  Perplexed?  Don’t know where to start?
Is this how you feel about your future? If it is then you are not alone and it is entirely natural. Many people are unclear about the path they want to follow after university. Maybe you want to find a placement, or a full time graduate job, or change career; but you just don’t know where to start. The question is what do you do about it? This Hot Tips sheet will give you some pointers that may help to lift the career fog.

Patience and Perseverance
The first thing to say is that the solution to your career fog won’t simply appear out of thin air. For many people this takes time, you will have to work at it and apply yourself to some of the techniques described below. A first goal might be to become more focussed (e.g. by choosing an industry, or job activities, or location). Think about what is important to you in a job and what will make you happy, rather than trying to identify a ‘perfect’ job title. Once you have done this you can set further goals. By keeping an open mind, and exploring ideas, you never know what opportunities will appear.

So where to start?
A good beginning is to reflect on your own life experiences up to this point, for example:

- Your values – what is most important to you?
- Your degree subject – what topics did you enjoy?
- Your study skills – what were you good at: research, analysis, presentations, team work, etc?
- Work - part-time or full-time; what did you enjoy - your duties and your skills?
- Volunteering activities you may have done – what did you gain.
- Clubs/societies – did you enjoy positions of responsibility such as president, treasurer or captain?
- Anything else - gap year, working for family, community groups, or hobbies such as web design?

Try not to be swayed by the “environment” in which you did these things. For example, if you worked part-time during your studies serving customers in a fast-food restaurant, then this may not be your future career choice. But if this involved meeting and talking to people and you enjoyed it, then you could explore job options that involve doing these things but in a different environment, e.g. consultancy, retail management, account management, careers with high levels of contact with people.

Where am I now?
Once you have identified your list of life experiences then you may want to follow this process:

- For each experience start a ‘mind map’ or simply write a list, then …..
  - Write down the activities and skills involved.
  - Write down the pros and cons for each.
  - Write a list of likes and dislikes for each.
  - Identify patterns, i.e. positive repetitions of activities that you would like to do in future jobs.
  - You can then use this to ‘map’ onto job details you see when you are job searching, the idea being that if a job contains a number of attributes on your list then it could well be a job that you can do and will enjoy doing.

To help understand yourself better and get more of an idea of your strengths, motivations, resilience and personality you can undertake a range of assessments using our on-line Resources centre. You will get a personalised written report for each assessment completed, which will help inform your Career thinking: http://www.brookes.ac.uk/students/careers/. We are always happy to show you such assessments too in person – just visit Careers.
What else can I do?

- **Do I want to use my degree?**

  This may sound a strange question to ask yourself, but a large majority of employers who recruit graduates do not require a specific degree subject and so knowing this can open up a whole world of new options for you. For example graduates from non-vocational courses such as English and History often find jobs in marketing, consultancy, administration, HR and many others.

- **Career interests & skills questionnaires**

  These will help you to build a profile and generate a list of possible job options for you. The process is designed to get you thinking, to explore new & different options, and you will need to weigh up the suggestions in light of other factors important to you. Common tools are:

  - **Kudos Adult Directions** > via Resources tab on [www.brookes.ac.uk/careers](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/careers) - very comprehensive assessment
  - **Prospects** [https://www.prospects.ac.uk/planner](https://www.prospects.ac.uk/planner) – try Career Planner and Job Match (Beta)

Where do I want to be?

Knowing what you are aiming for can also help. The acronym **SPEEDCOP** will encourage you to think about all the different aspects you might want in a future job. Use it to paint a picture of how you see your future work.

- **Surroundings** – how do you see these, e.g. city or country, office-based or out and about?
- **Prospects** - do you want career progression or stability, do you want to specialise or have variety?
- **Entry & training** - what qualifications might be needed, would experience be required? Would training be offered?
- **Effects** – would you mind if the job impacted on your personal life, e.g. 9 to 5 or Xmas work?
- **Description of work (duties)** - what might you be doing i.e. what sort of activities would you want to do on a daily basis? Link this to the previous activities on this sheet.
- **Conditions** – what benefits might you want your employer to offer, e.g. flexi time, do they offer a pension, how much annual leave might there be?
- **Organisation** – is it large, small, ethical, profit driven, charity, public sector?
- **People** – what would you want your colleagues to be like; professional, easy going, busy?

**Success – requires Action on your part**

Not doing anything will not clear your career fog; the “light bulb” moment will not happen. Often the only way to find inspiration and motivation is to do something. Even small steps help achieve larger goals. The following are essential in order to find your way through the career fog:

- Reflect & research.
- Experience – find work experience, internships, volunteer or work shadowing.
- Network – speak to friends and family about their jobs and ask for contacts – fact finding.
- Open mind – keep your mind, eyes and ears open to opportunities that might present themselves.
- Explore – make an effort to search out options that might suit you.
- Do something – even small steps can boost your motivation.

**Summary**

There's often no quick solution, career exploration and clearing the fog takes time and it does take application. If you are not a reflective person, or you are finding the whole process very difficult, then our Career Consultants can help you through this process and help you get a plan of action together. So do get in touch with the Careers: **Email:** careers@brookes.ac.uk **Telephone:** 01865 484670

Reviewed: August 2019               Next Review: Summer 2020

[www.brookes.ac.uk/careers](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/careers)