

## Researching the options

### Ideas for activities and resources to use with your students

Based on insight and suggestions from careers advisers, UCAS has developed some resources for you to use with your students. The idea is to start by supporting broad research, so learners understand the tools available to them and the language used. Research can then be 'scaffolded' and learners can be directed to more individual and personalised research.

**Here is a list of resources which support the activities included within this pack.**

**You can [find and download all of the resources here](#):**

- Doing your research template
- Turning the spotlight on yourself
- I think I want to go onto higher education
- HE pros and cons
- I think I want to do an apprenticeship
- I think I want to take a gap year
- I think I want to go into employment
- I don't know what I want to do
- Preparing for careers
- Differences between school and university
- Tips from students and questions to ask
- Where to find UCAS information and advice
- Choosing the right course at the right uni
- Ready, steady, visit
- Apprenticeships guides (England and Scotland)
- Useful sources of careers information and LMI

### Activity 1: Turning the spotlight on yourself

#### Resources to use:

1. 'Turning the spotlight on yourself' resource
2. each of the 'I think I want to...' resources.

This is a self-reflection activity in which students start thinking about their interests and aspirations using the following three steps.

There is also a video on the [learner MOOC](#) called 'Turning the spotlight on yourself', which features careers advisers. You can download and use this to introduce the session.

## Introduction

### **So, how do you turn the spotlight on yourself?**

We all approach decision-making in different ways, and this can be influenced by various factors, such as our personality, how those around us make decisions, how confident we feel, how independent we are, the pressure we're feeling, and the extent we feel destiny plays a part in life.

Whichever approaches you use, here are some steps you can take to help you discover what's important to you and your future.

Using the '**Turning the spotlight on yourself**' resource, apply the steps below and jot down your thoughts and ideas.

#### **1. Where are you now?**

This is a good starting point – it's about you, so think carefully about the following:

- What are you interested in? (This could be hobbies, activities, or subjects.)
- What are your skills? (The sorts of things you're good at.)
- What do you value? (The things that are important to you, both in your social and study life.)
- What motivates you? (The things you're enthusiastic about, or encourage you to take action and get involved.)

#### **2. Where do you want to get to?**

You may have a clear picture of what you want to do next, or what career you're aiming for, or you may feel you don't have a clue yet. Chances are, you're somewhere in between, so what ideas do you have?

- Are there job roles or career areas you're interested in?
- Is there a subject you love?

- Do you have hobbies or interests you'd like to explore further?

### **3. How are you going to get there?**

You need to focus on the choices you have. You can consider and compare the post-18 options we've been looking at, by using the points you've identified about yourself.

Have a look at the 'I think I want to...' resources we've provided about each option. When you're familiar with what each option offers, you can compare them by asking yourself the following questions:

1. What are the potential advantages and disadvantages for you? Look at the pros and cons of each.
2. What is the potential impact of each option? Try to consider the impact each option would have for you short term (over the next year), medium term (the next five years), and long term. Think about what it would mean for you.
3. Which one do you prefer? Try to rank the different options in order of preference – from most interest to least interest.

This activity can be extended, with students starting to research each of the pathways open to them. The completed template can be the focus for review, and a starting point for discussions, including one-to-one, paired, or class discussions. The pros and cons relating to each pathway could be used to introduce or extend the activity and discussion.

## **Activity 2: Buzz quiz and researching job families**

**Resources to use:**

1. The [UCAS Careers quiz](#),
2. [UCAS' explore jobs](#),
3. [Prospects' jobs profiles](#) to research job families.

This is a starting point to help learners think about the sort of job or career they might like to aim for. If, and when, they begin to look at higher education courses, it's important learners make sure their chosen course enables them to pursue the career they're interested in. The Careers quiz is career-related. It can be fun, but a career quiz cannot tell learners what they should do, or their perfect job. However, it can give them some ideas to start looking at.

1. Use UCAS' Careers quiz as a starting point for learners – it's a fun, short quiz, that asks questions about their personality. Their answers are analysed to see which job areas might suit them.
2. To help learners explore what job sector they'd like to work in, use the results from the quiz, together with our job families information, to research further. There's a huge variety of job roles, which they may not have thought of. Set them a challenge to explore two jobs they've never heard of, two they've already thought of, and one they've never considered before.
3. During their research, get them to explore the type of qualifications required to pursue a job in this sector, e.g. is a specific degree required?
4. To extend the activity, encourage them to find two more jobs connected to each job sector.

## Activities 3,4, and 5: Researching higher education

### Resources to use:

1. 'Doing your research' template
2. 'Choosing the right course at the right university'
3. 'Tips from students and questions to ask'
4. 'Where to find UCAS information and advice'
5. 'Higher education pros and cons'
6. 'Differences between school and university'
7. 'Ready, steady, visit'

### Introduction

Higher education (HE) offers a wide range of subjects and courses. It gives students the opportunity to expand their knowledge of a subject they're passionate about, or that'll lead them to the career they're aiming for. However, university isn't just about learning, as the experience enriches students' lives, and develops the essential skills and knowledge they'll need for working life. HE qualifications are internationally recognised, and graduates have increased earning potential. HE also opens up a wide choice of career pathways. However, uni is a step up from school or college, and students need to be motivated to study and learn.

### Things to consider

Students could pursue a favourite subject or explore something new. It's worth exploring the wide range of courses and subjects on offer. Your students need to check the entry requirements for any courses they're interested in, to see if the subjects they're studying now, and their predicted grades, are a good fit. If they have any specific career aspirations, they need to check if they need particular subjects or qualifications.

### Activity 3: Students draw up a list of their top subjects or courses

#### Resources to use:

1. The [UCAS subject guides](#)
2. [UCAS search tool](#) to research and explore these further.

Here are some key things they need to find out:

- Which courses / subjects have entry requirements that are going to match your grades? If you have predicted grades, consider applying for at least one course with lower entry requirements as a reserve choice. However, also consider being more ambitious if there's a course with higher entry requirements that appeals to you.
- Make sure your course choices cover modules that are suitable for you – browse through the course outlines so you know what to expect, and consider if these match your interests.
- Costs – tuition fees can vary between course providers, and living expenses will vary depending on where you study, either in the UK or abroad. Also, check to see if there are any scholarships or bursaries on offer.
- See if the course or university / college offers any internship or placement opportunities – getting experience in the workplace could be useful.
- Does the course carry professional accreditation (for example, in psychology, is the course recognised by the British Psychological Society)?
- When are the open days? It's worth [visiting open days](#) if you can, because you'll find out more information, and get a feel for each university or college you're considering. If you can't attend open days, see if the university/college provides a [virtual tour on ucas.com](#) or their own website.

## Activity 4: Choosing the right course

### Resources to use:

1. 'Choosing the right course at the right university' resource
2. [UCAS' search tool](#), and the [Unistats](#) website.
3. The 'Tips from students' resource could be used as a starting point for introducing the activity and class discussion.

We all have different interests, motivations, and ways of learning, which influence course choices, and ultimately, success on a course. This activity enables learners to research course options carefully. Learners should think about these questions to find the course that's right for them.

Choosing the course	Choosing the university or college
What does the course cover?	Which is the 'best' university/course?
How is the course taught?	What type of university do I want to go to?
How is the course assessed?	How much do I want to spend on living expenses?
What links does the course/department have with employers?	
What do graduates do after their course?	

## Activity 5: Ready, steady, visit

If learners are planning a visit to a university or college, this activity will help them prepare for an open day or event.

### Resources to use:

1. 'Tips from students and questions to ask' resource
2. [UCAS' open days tips](#)
3. The checklists available on [the UCAS website](#).

**For disabled students**, there is a [tailored checklist](#) and [questions to ask as well as information and answers to questions about support for disabled students](#).

Start by looking at tips from students who've been through the experience. These outline what will be useful to find out in advance, ideas for questions, and what to look out for on the day to make the most of their visit.

1. Get learners to plan a list of questions they might want to ask.
2. Identify three people they should try speaking to, so they get a full perspective of the university or college, e.g. student ambassador, member of academic staff, and a member of student services.
3. Print off a map in advance, and identify three areas of the campus to visit, e.g. library or sport facilities.



## Activities 6 and 7: Researching apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are primarily jobs, so it's important students research this option fully. This activity involves learners creating a list of the jobs they're interested in, so they can focus on the sort of work and /or career pathway they want to follow.

### Introduction

Apprenticeships offer the opportunity to start work, earn a wage, and continue studying at a higher level.

- You can gain real knowledge, skills, and experience for specific careers.
- There are advanced and higher apprenticeships, including the new degree level apprenticeships. This option enables students to achieve a full bachelor's or master's degree as part of their apprenticeship.
- They are available in a wide range of sectors – from engineering and boat building, to veterinary nursing, hotel management, and accountancy – and focus on a variety of job roles.
- Your tuition fees will be paid for by your employer and the government, so apprentices can graduate debt-free.

### Things to consider

Apprenticeships involve training for a specific job, so it's important you're confident about starting work. You should also find out as much as you can about the job role, and the career and progression routes the apprenticeship could lead to. Competition for apprenticeships can be tough, as there's often a limited number of vacancies available, particularly on the new degree level apprenticeships. There's also a range of employer-led school leaver programmes, which offer a direct route into the world of work. You may be able to get a qualification as part of the programme.

## Activity 6: Research the job role

### Resources to use:

1. UCAS' Apprenticeships Guide
2. The 'I think I want to do an apprenticeship' resource
3. 'Useful sources of careers information and LMI'
4. 'Preparing for careers'
5. 'Doing your research' template.

Here are some of the key things learners need to know:

It's important to find out as much as you can about different job roles, industries, and employers offering jobs or apprenticeships, including the different career paths apprenticeships can lead to. You can find information about different careers on the [UCAS website](#), [Prospects job profiles](#), or job roles sections of your national careers website (such as [National Careers Service](#)). You need to take note of the entry requirements and, if appropriate, establish whether an apprenticeship is a valid pathway into this career.

Learners should look at the relevant apprenticeship standard (this sets out the specific knowledge and skills to be developed, and the job roles and qualifications the apprenticeship offers). UCAS' website provides information and links to [finding out more about apprenticeships and apprenticeship standards](#).

## Activity 7: Find two or three vacancies for the kind of apprenticeships you're interested in

### Resources to use:

1. 'Doing your research template'
2. 'I think I want to do an apprenticeship' 3. [UCAS apprenticeship information and advice](#)
4. 'UCAS Apprenticeships guides'.

Here are some of the key points you need to investigate:

- What work is involved in the apprenticeship job role – does it fit what you're looking for? Does it offer opportunities for career progression?
- Find out about the employer – is this the type of company you want to work for?
- Find out about the training provider, college, or university where you could be studying.
- What qualifications, subjects, and grades are they are looking for?
- What 'essential' and 'desirable' skills and experience do they ask for, and what qualities are they are looking for in applicants?
- Does the job require you to work in different locations across the country, or would you need to move away from home?
- What is the pay or salary, and do they offer other benefits or facilities you can use?
- For you, what are the three most and three least positive aspects of this apprenticeship?

Learners can check out the employer's website for further details and information. If they're considering an apprenticeship, they can also contact the employer, university, college, or training provider, to ask any questions they have.

## Activity 8: Researching gap years

Your students need to set goals to make their time productive. They need to identify what they want to achieve, and decide how much time they can be away for, and when. They can start researching the range of gap year and volunteering schemes available, or consider organising it themselves.

### Resources to use:

1. The 'I think I want to take a gap year' resource
2. 'Doing your research' resources
3. The ['Gap years and things to think about'](#) information on UCAS' website.

### Introduction

This can be a good choice if you're undecided about university, not sure what you want to do in the future, or if you just want a break from full-time education. A gap year offers you the opportunity to gain skills and experiences, while giving you time to reflect and focus on what you want to do next.

- A productive gap year can be valuable on your CV – many employers value the experiences students have gained if they've actively managed their time, set themselves goals, and stretched themselves.
- A gap year can also enhance your higher education studies – if you decide to apply for uni, you could tailor your gap year and relate it to the subject area you plan to study.
- Admissions tutors know that some students may take a little time adjusting to studying again, but many former gap year students are generally more focused and responsible.

### Things to consider

You need to set goals to make your time productive, so think about what you want to achieve. What value will it add to your university study, your CV, or career? How

much time can you be away and when? Research the range of gap year and volunteering schemes available, or consider organising it yourself. Research and compare costs and practicalities, such as flights, visas, insurance, and vaccinations. If you're planning to go overseas, check the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for advice.

### **Activity 8: Identify the top features or experiences you want to include in your gap year**

Here are some key points to think about:

- The essentials and the costs – flights, accommodation, visas, insurance, vaccinations, etc. Check the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website if you're thinking of going abroad. Set yourself a realistic budget that you can afford. Costs vary, so research carefully.
- Research the wide range of gap year and volunteering schemes available. If using an agency or scheme, check how long they have been running, if they're financially sound, and are members of a reputable organisation such as ABTA or Year Out Group, where they agree to follow a code of conduct.
- Consider using social media, online forums, and websites – look at the reviews, articles, and advice from people who've 'been there and done that' for the sort of gap year you're considering.
- Deadlines – you need to start planning well in advance. Some voluntary work schemes are popular and have deadlines, and you need to consider when you need the money to pay for any airfares or visas.

### **Activities 9 and 10: Researching going into work**

Some school leavers are ready to go into employment – they can start developing the essential skills and experience they need, while increasing their employability and earning. Getting work experience and building a CV will make them more attractive to employers, and can open up more job opportunities in future. However, it's important to focus on the sort of work and career they're interested in. They should also be able to demonstrate what they can offer potential employers.

**Resources to use:**

1. 'I think I want to go into employment'
2. 'Doing your research template'
3. 'Useful sources of careers information and LMI'
4. 'Preparing for careers'
5. 'Where to find UCAS' information and advice'.

### **Introduction**

This route offers you the chance to start earning, get experience, build your skills to increase your employability, and improve your CV.

- You can get onto the first step of your career, build confidence, gain experience, and meet new people.
- It's a chance to start developing the essential skills and experience you need for your career and career progression.
- Having work experience and building a CV will make you more attractive to employers, and open up more job opportunities in the future.

### **Things to consider**

Do you have a clear idea of what sort of career pathway you want to follow, and are you ready to start work? Do your research – it's worth spending time finding out about job profiles, industries, and employers offering the job roles you're interested in. You need to set out what you have to offer – your skills and qualities, work experience, qualifications, achievements, and interests. Link these to what employers are looking for in the job roles and career areas you're aiming for.

### **Activity 9: Draw up a list of the sorts of jobs you're looking for**

This will help you focus on the sort of work and / or career pathway you want to follow.

Research job roles, industries, and employers offering jobs or apprenticeships, including the career paths they could lead to. You can find information about different careers on the [UCAS website](#), [Prospects job profiles](#), or the careers section of your national careers website (such as [National Careers Service](#)). You should take note of entry requirements, and the sorts of skills employers look for.

### **Activity 10: Find two or three vacancies for the kind of job roles you're interested in**

Here are some key points you should investigate:

- What work does the job role involve – does it fit what you're looking for?
- Find out about the employer – is this the type of company you want to work for?
- What qualifications, subjects, and grades are they are looking for?
- What 'essential' and 'desirable' skills and experience do they ask for, and what qualities are they are looking for in applicants?
- Does the job require you to work in different locations across the country, or would you need to move away from home?
- What is the pay or salary, and do they offer any other benefits or facilities you can use?
- For you, what are the three most, and three least, positive aspects of this job opportunity?

You can check out the employer's website for more details and information. Remember, you can also contact the employer to ask any questions.