

The 5 Minute Career Action Plan

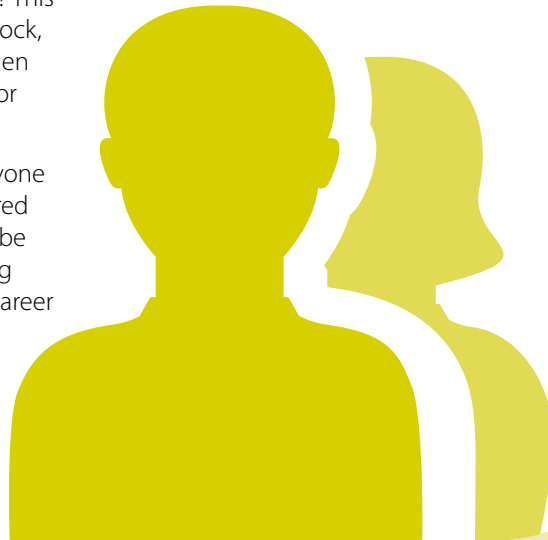
Interactive activities to help you focus on career success

Introduction

**Are you unsure of what you want to do next?
Do promotion opportunities keep slipping away from you?
Or are you simply drifting along?**

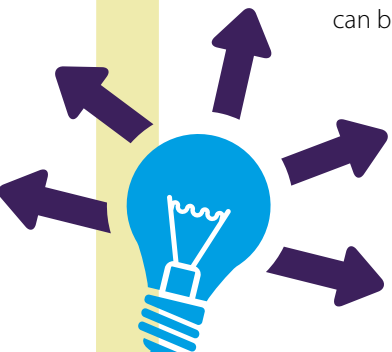
We spend most of our lives at work, but how often do we actively make a choice about our career and actually commit to a decision? This interactive guide will allow you to take stock, consider what is important to you and then help you to produce your own strategy for personal career success.

The 5 minute career action plan is for anyone who is short of time and wants a structured approach to their career planning. It can be particularly helpful for people just starting out, individuals seeking promotion or a career change and people wanting to address their work-life balance.



1 Why do I need a career action plan?

A career action plan enables you to focus your thoughts and ideas into a series of steps to achieve your career objectives within a realistic timescale. The process takes into account the fact that situations change and plans can be reviewed and altered.



The career action planning process



2 Where do I start

1. Consider where you are now

It is useful to examine your current situation and consider whether your work matches your aspirations, needs and lifestyle. Take some time to decide whether you are fulfilled and satisfied or whether something needs to change. Try the Career Focus Guide on the next page to assess this.

2. Decide where you want to be

You may have a clear idea about your career. However, it can be interesting to explore new possibilities, particularly if you're not happy in your current role. You can then use this information as a starting point to create a realistic vision of your future. The Career Focus Guide will help you to look at future options and decide what is important to you.

The career focus guide

Use the guide to shape your thoughts and ideas and then define what you intend to do. If you have a long list of aims, order them according to your priorities.

My career

Are you inspired by your work?	Y	N
Do you use your strengths and talents at work?	Y	N
Are you comfortable with your work colleagues?	Y	N
Does your work allow you to reach your potential?	Y	N
Are you valued and recognised at work in a way which is meaningful to you?	Y	N
Do you have the right stress level at work for you?	Y	N

My life

Are you in control of your life?	Y	N
Do you have a clear sense of purpose?	Y	N
Is there sufficient time for your family and friends?	Y	N
Do you have enough time to do what you need to relax and remain healthy?	Y	N
Is there sufficient time for leisure and to pursue your interests?	Y	N

My needs

What do you need to feel fulfilled in life?

What motivates and inspires you?

What energises you?

What are your priorities?

What kind of work would you like to do?

What is important to you in your work and life?

What is your preferred work environment?

My future

What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail?

Is anything holding you back and if so, how could you change this?

What do you want to have realistically achieved by the end of your life?

What are your options and priorities for the future?

Create a realistic vision of your future, which takes into account your work and your life

What do I need to find out about

What will I do? What are my broad aims?

3 Plan how to get there

This is where you decide on a strategy to achieve your career aims. If you want to remain focused and committed to your aims, it is helpful to identify specific tasks to achieve them. Your broad aims will set the scene and provide an overview of what you intend to do. The next stage is to break these down into more practical step-by-step goals.

Setting SMART goals can help you to keep on track. These are clear objectives, written simply and concisely which are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timed (SMART). They highlight exactly what you will do, specifying a clear, tangible outcome within a set time frame. Each task needs to be something that you are willing and able to do, as well as being relevant to your aims.

How to set SMART goals:

Specific	Identify a clear outcome that you want to achieve
Measurable	How will you know when you've done it?
Achievable	Is it feasible within your time frame? Are you motivated to complete it?
Relevant	Is it relevant to your career aims?
Timed	When will you complete this by?

Example:

Broad aim: To be promoted to Team Leader within the next 2-3 years

SMART goal: I will discuss my career aim with my manager by 30 April to establish the feasibility of my plans and identify and agree a set of personal and professional development targets by 31 May to enable my career progression.



4 Take action

This is where you implement your plan. However, even the most well thought out goals can sometimes be challenging. Some ideas are highlighted to help you to stay on course.

- **Assess your commitment to completing your goals**

Unless you are totally committed to your goals you are unlikely to complete them.

Reflect on your goals and give yourself a score of 0-10 for each one, with 0 for no commitment up to 10 for total commitment. If your score is less than 10, what would have to change to achieve a score of 10? Be sure to adapt your plans if required.

- **Are your aims and goals clear and feasible?**

Aims and goals need to be clearly defined and realistic if they are to be achieved. It helps if they are slightly challenging, but still within your comfort zone.

- **Make lists or use reminders**

Making To-do lists can also be very useful, enabling you to have a real sense of progress each time you tick off an item. Alternatively, try sending yourself a reminder in the form of a text message to kick-start your momentum.

- **Enlist some support**

Involving others in action planning can increase the chances of successful completion; identify friends, family, or a mentor who can support you and help you to stay focused.

- **Brainstorm your way forward**

Procrastination can get the better of us all, so if this applies to you, try brainstorming what to do next. Just write down anything and everything that comes to mind in relation to your goal, without being judgemental. Then order the relevant items according to what is important. This can break the block and get you started, even if things change later on.

- **Reward yourself**

In order to keep motivated while completing a series of tasks, it can make a difference to reward yourself as you complete each major milestone.

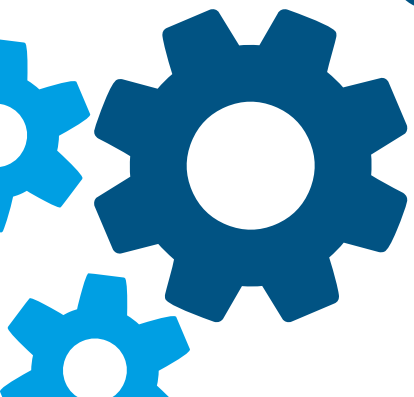
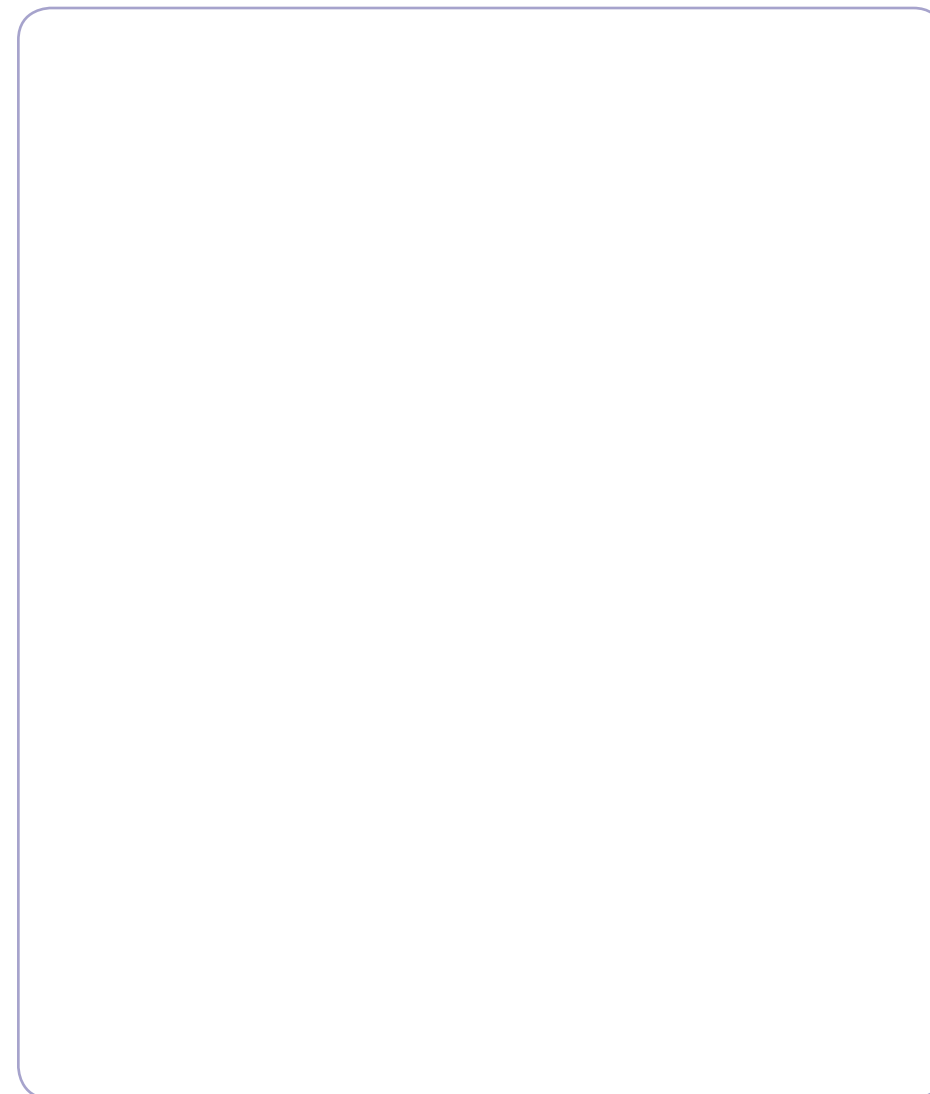
5 Review progress

Situations and priorities can change so a regular review process is valuable to ensure that your goals are still appropriate and allow new ones to be added. Decide how often is best for you. If things go wrong, use the experience as a learning opportunity and revise your plan accordingly.

10 top tips for career action planning

- 1) Recognise what is important in your career and life
- 2) Know what strengths and talents you can offer and how you can add value to an organisation
- 3) Keep up to date with changes in the work place and the sector
- 4) Identify any personal blocks or life constraints and how you can overcome them
- 5) Have a clear vision of your future
- 6) Identify broad aims and SMART goals
- 7) Find people who can support you in completing your goals
- 8) Reward yourself for successes
- 9) Mistakes can happen: use the experience to learn and then move on
- 10) Be flexible, review your progress regularly and be willing to adapt and change

Notes



Example of a SMART Career Action Plan

Broad Aim: To identify a new career where I feel that I can make a real difference

Goals	What will I do? Make your goal SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant)	Date to be completed by (Timed)	Outcome	Date completed
1	Undertake online research to Identify a local Career Consultant; arrange an appointment to consider my career options; meet up.	10 Jan	Identified Career Consultant; appointment on 10 Jan	10 Jan
2	Research and select a career-matching tool to identify potential career options; identify 3 job profiles of interest.	25 Jan	3 jobs of interest: Teacher Art therapist Holistic therapist	25 Jan
3	Using the internet, identify 3 local organisations offering my jobs of interest; arrange a meeting at each organisation to find out more about each role.	10 Feb	Meetings arranged at: Smalltown Primary School; Smalltown Art Therapy Group, Essence Holistic Therapy Clinic	10 Feb
4	Meet with staff in roles of interest; reflect on and list the pros and cons of each job to enable me to consider the reality of each option. Prioritise the list of options.	10 March	Interested in exploring teaching and art therapy; excluded Holistic therapy as prefer to be employed by an organisation rather than self-employed	10 March
5	Talk to Career Consultant to discuss my career options in more detail and decide what to do next.	20 March	Spoke to Career Consultant on 20 March; decided to work shadow teacher and art therapist	20 March
6	Organise and complete work shadowing with primary school teacher and art therapist to enable me to make a career choice.	30 April	Decided to pursue art therapy as a career	30 April

Now you can use the template on the next page to produce your own career action plan.

Start with your broad aims, order them according to your priorities and then break each one down into a set of SMART goals.

About the author

Dr Wendy Broad is an independent career and professional development consultant. She started her career as a biomedical research scientist and manager in the pharmaceutical industry and more recently worked in the higher education sector in a variety of careers and professional development roles. She has a qualification in career guidance from the University of Warwick and is an accredited Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) facilitator and Morrisby Guidance Adviser. She has worked with a wide range of clients from pre-university students, undergraduates and researchers through to senior academics and company directors.

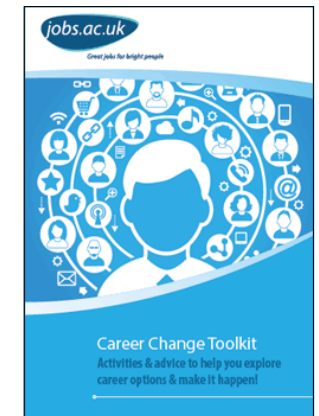


Further reading

[Interactive CPD Toolkit](#)

[Career Development Toolkit for Higher Education Professionals](#)

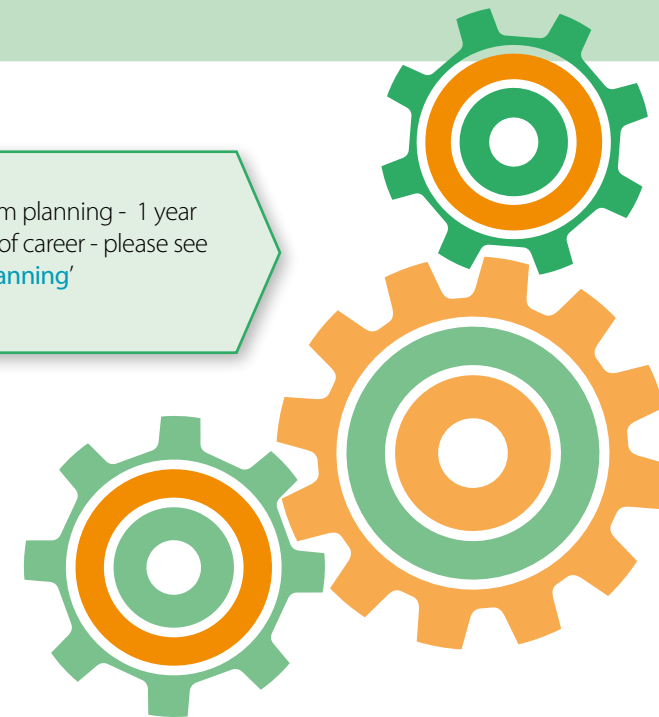
[Career Change Toolkit](#)



Important Tip:

For tips and advice on longer term planning - 1 year ahead, 5 years, 10 years and end of career - please see '[Long Term Academic Career Planning](#)'

by Dr Catherine Armstrong





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