Brief Contents

Introduction: Help! Where do I start? 1

Part I: FINDING YOUR WAY

1 Understanding employability and career planning 7
2 Choosing a role 14
3 Planning your journey 24

Part II: THE STEPPING STONES

4 Experience and internships 33
5 Effective networking 43
6 Further study 53
7 Taking time out 63

Part III: GETTING A JOB

8 Searching for graduate jobs 77
9 Promoting yourself effectively 87
10 Targeting your CV 99
11 Tip-top application forms 118
12 Cover letters that open doors 134
13 Impressing at interviews 142
14 Psychometric tests 165
15 Passing assessment centres 179
16 This job’s for you 192

Part IV: ENTREPRENEURSHIP

17 Becoming an entrepreneur 203
18 Getting your business started 211
19 Troubleshooting 227
Contents

Preface xiii
Acknowledgements xiv

Introduction: Help! Where do I start? 1
So, what now? 1
What ‘career’ means to you 1
Are you sitting comfortably? 2
Then let’s begin (using this guidebook) 2
The companion website 3

Part I: FINDING YOUR WAY 5

1 Understanding employability and career planning 7
   Taking control 7
   What is employability? 8
   What about career planning? 8
   The guidance model used in this book 11
   Finding out more 12
   What to do next 12
   Summary 13

2 Choosing a role 14
   The world is your oyster 14
   Graduate jobs 15
   Daring to dream 16
   Researching your options 17
   Personality types 18
   Finding the perfect fit 19
   But I still haven’t found what I’m looking for 20
   Finding out more 21
   What to do next 22
   Summary 22

3 Planning your journey 24
   Taking control 24
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What’s involved?</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When to start planning</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researching what’s required</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your personal journey</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfecting your approach</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding out more</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What to do next</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part II: THE STEPPING STONES</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4    Experience and internships</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why experience is important</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making the most of your experience</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gradually moving on up</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities at university</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding your interests</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid employment</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internships</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What suits you?</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding out more</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What to do next</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5    Effective networking</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why networking is important</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who do you know?</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who do they know?</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six degrees of separation</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How your contacts can help</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What you can do for them</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An effective strategy</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking online</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your online presence</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding out more</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What to do next</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6    Further study</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it right for me?</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a course</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Choosing a course 58
Funding 58
Applying 59
Making the most of the course 61
Finding out more 62
What to do next 62
Summary 62

7 Taking time out 63
Finding perspective 63
Making the most of the experience 64
Where to go and what to do 65
Options at home 66
Options abroad 67
Finding work 71
Where to stay 72
Visas 72
Promoting what you’ve learnt 73
Finding out more 73
What to do next 73
Summary 74

Part III: GETTING A JOB 75

8 Searching for graduate jobs 77
What are graduate jobs? 77
Where you’ll find vacancies 80
If at first you don’t succeed 84
Finding out more 86
What to do next 86
Summary 86

9 Promoting yourself effectively 87
Putting your best foot forward 87
What employers are after 88
Proving your skills 89
Proving your commitment 91
Proving your knowledge 91
Proving your experience 92
Targeting specific jobs 92
Some quick English revision 94
Drafting and checking 96
If you have a disability 97
Finding out more 97
What to do next 97
Summary 98

10 Targeting your CV 99
What is a CV? 99
What is a good CV? 100
When to use a CV 101
Rules and conventions 101
What to include 102
The two main CV formats 104
Alternative CV styles 105
Digital CVs 106
Putting your CV together 107
Example CVs 107
CV checklist 116
Finding out more 116
What to do next 117
Summary 117

11 Tip-top application forms 118
Why employers use application forms 119
Questions about you 119
Questions about what you know 119
Questions about what you’ve done 119
Questions about your skills 120
The STAR method of proving your skills 124
Questions about your commitment 125
Personal statements 127
Questions about your referees 131
Online applications 131
Getting your work checked 132
Finding out more 132
What to do next 133
Summary 133

12 Cover letters that open doors 134
What are cover letters? 134
When to use cover letters 135
What to include 135
Are you ready? 135
### Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formatting your letter</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speculative letters</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example cover letters</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding out more</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What to do next</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 13 Impressing at interviews</h2>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>So, you have an interview</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why employers use interviews</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s in it for me?</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of interview</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What employers want to know</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing effective answers</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills-related questions</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment-based questions</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions about your knowledge</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multifaceted questions</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-the-wall questions</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick case questions</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions for them</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking good and sounding sharp</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning for the big day</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with your nerves</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the interview</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding out more</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What to do next</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 14 Psychometric tests</h2>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What they are</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who uses them, when and why</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal reasoning tests</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeric reasoning tests</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract reasoning</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal/numeric logical reasoning</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality profiles</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s the pass mark?</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common problems and mistakes</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving your performance</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table of Contents

**Finding out more**  
**What to do next**  
**Summary**  

### 15 Passing assessment centres
- **What they are**  
- **Learning the ropes**  
- **On the big day**  
- **Group exercises**  
- **Group discussions**  
- **Presentations**  
- **In-tray exercises**  
- **Social occasions**  
- **Case studies**  
- **Finding out more**  
- **What to do next**  
- **Summary**  

### 16 This job’s for you
- **What’s in a job offer?**  
- **Your response**  
- **Negotiating the deal**  
- **Balancing multiple offers**  
- **Preparing for the big day**  
- **Day one and induction**  
- **Making a success**  
- **Moving on up**  
- **Moving on?**  
- **Getting back in the game**  
- **Finding out more**  
- **What to do next**  
- **Summary**  

### Part IV: ENTREPRENEURSHIP

### 17 Becoming an entrepreneur
- **Enterprise and entrepreneurship**  
- **The pros and cons of entrepreneurship**  
- **The skills you’ll need**  
- **Is it right for me?**  
- **Coming up with ideas**  

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FINDING YOUR WAY

This guide is for all students and graduates who are wondering what to do once they leave university, especially those who are completely lost and don’t know where to turn (you are not alone!).

This section of the guide helps you determine what you want from a career and identify the route you need to take to get there.

Part I: FINDING YOUR WAY

1 Understanding employability and career planning
2 Choosing a role
3 Planning your journey

Part II: THE STEPPING STONES

4 Experience and internships
5 Effective networking
6 Further study
7 Taking time out

Part III: GETTING A JOB

8 Searching for graduate jobs
9 Promoting yourself effectively
10 Targeting your CV
11 Tip-top application forms
12 Cover letters that open doors
13 Impressing at interviews
14 Psychometric tests
15 Passing assessment centres
16 This job’s for you

Part IV: ENTREPRENEURSHIP

17 Becoming an entrepreneur
18 Getting your business started
19 Troubleshooting
Understanding employability and career planning

“Never look back unless you are planning to go that way.” Henry David Thoreau

Contents
- Taking control
- What is employability?
- What about career planning?
- The guidance model used in this book
- Finding out more
- What to do next
- Summary

What you will gain from this chapter:
- Decision making: An awareness of the key decisions involved in career planning.
- Opportunity awareness: An appreciation of the key skills required by employers.
- Transition learning: An introduction to what’s involved in finding work.
- Self-awareness: The foundations of personal career reflection.

Taking control

This chapter defines employability and career planning and establishes a theoretical foundation and framework for the rest of this guide. You will quickly see that the career journey is both an intellectual and an emotional process, which everyone can master by getting out there and taking control.
What is employability?

‘Employability’ means your ability to get a job and keep it. In the words of Hillage and Pollard (1998), it is:

the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers.¹

Therefore, employability is down to three factors – your knowledge, commitment and especially your skills. Whether you want to be a publican or a politician, you need an understanding of what you’re doing, the desire to succeed and the ability to perform. You can develop these qualities throughout your experience and qualifications. All experience gives you a chance to promote yourself but paid employment is especially attractive to employers because the knowledge, commitment and skills you gain are easily transferable. You will need both technical competencies related to your specific post and transferable abilities that can be used in a range of fields. These classifications are outlined below.

Technical skills

These are specific competencies related to particular jobs and are therefore fundamental to your success, so relevant experience is highly regarded. Technical skills required in one job/industry are not generally very transferable. For example, an ability to make cocktails may help you get a job in a posh bar but probably won’t help you become an automotive engineer!

Transferable skills

As the name suggests, these are skills/competencies, such as teamwork and organisation, that can be used in a wide range of roles. They are highly prized by graduate employers because they are a crucial element of success in every industry. There are numerous transferable skills and every industry/recruiter will have unique requirements, but the table below lists the most common competencies that are required. You should certainly be proficient in each of these areas. You can identify what’s involved in each of these skills on the companion website where there are also more details on the skills required in specific industries and roles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common transferable skills required by employers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Enthusiasm and self-reliance</td>
</tr>
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<td>• Numeracy</td>
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<td>• Teamwork</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Organisation</td>
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<td>• Leadership</td>
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<td>• Management</td>
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<td>• Creativity</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• IT</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Commercial awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Customer service</td>
</tr>
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</table>

What about career planning?

Career planning can be seen as a subcategory of employability. It comprises a set of metacognitive competencies which enable you to reflect on your commitment, knowledge
and skills, identify appropriate roles and take control of your next steps in life. Various theories have developed over the last century to describe how individuals go about finding and choosing appropriate careers. It’s worth quickly running through these to gain a useful understanding of the specific model of guidance used in this book.

**Trait and factor theories**

Vocational guidance theories were first established at the start of the last century. In 1909, Frank Parsons introduced talent matching by linking students with particular qualities to supposedly appropriate roles. In the 1930s, Edmund Williamson built on this pioneering work to develop a full-blown trait and factor theory. This model focused on testing students to identify their unique capabilities and potentialities (traits) so they could make rational vocational choices. In the early 1970s, Professor Alec Rodger developed a trait and factor working framework, which was widely adopted in the UK, called the Seven-Point Plan. This was used to build personal profiles of clients according to their:

- Physical makeup
- Attainments
- General intelligence
- Special attributes
- Interests
- Disposition
- Circumstances

**Personality theories**

Personality-based occupational theories emerged in the 1950s; these were largely based on the work of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). In the late 1950s, Anne Roe, and also John Holland, stressed the importance of early childhood experiences. Holland’s Theory of Career Choice postulates that people find fulfillment in jobs by searching for work environments that fit their personality types. He categorised these as follows:

- Realistic
- Investigative
- Artistic
- Conventional
- Social
- Enterprising

Try the exercise below to reflect on your own abilities and aspirations.

**Self-assessment: What are you like?**

Describe your personality in three words and consider some relevant careers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You in three words</th>
<th>Some relevant careers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Keep these ideas in mind for the next chapter on choosing a career role.
Developmental theories
Shortly after the Second World War, much of the research into career planning and development focused on the process of personal development. In 1951, Eli Ginzberg concluded that people decide on occupations in three stages as they get older. Thirty years later, Donald Super moved this theory on by demonstrating that people gradually develop their vocational maturity in five clear stages as follows:

1. **Growth** (from birth to 14 years of age): When we become increasingly conscious of who we are and what’s involved in the world of work.
2. **Exploration** (from 15 to 24): When we try out new experiences at school/university/work and during our hobbies.
3. **Establishment** (from 25 to 44): At which point we perfect our skills and establish ourselves in our roles.
4. **Maintenance** (from 45 to 64): When we focus on promotion and moving up in our field.
5. **Decline** (65 years of age and over): As we reduce output and prepare for retirement.

Post-1968, K. Roberts refined Ginzberg’s and Super’s development theories with an ‘opportunity structure’ model which highlights the restraints on young people in freely developing occupational choices because of difficulties connected to their home lives, environments, educational institutions, peer groups and the job market. For example, you may find the whole process too daunting, have limited aspirations or drink too much.

**Self-assessment: What’s holding you back?**

Identify what’s holding you back in your career and what you could do about it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What’s holding you back in your career?</th>
<th>What can you do about it?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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Keep these reflections in mind for Chapter 3 on planning your career journey.

Recent viewpoints
Two more recent theories are John Kumboltz’s Theory of Planned Happenstance and the narrative theories developed by Michael White, David Epsom and Gregory Bateson. These theories relate particularly well to university students and new graduates. John Kumboltz’s theory propagates the benefits of putting yourself in beneficial situations and taking full advantage. He stresses the need for curiosity, persistence, flexibility, self-reflection, openness to feedback, networking and a positive attitude. Narrative theories stress the advantages of taking a step back from your life and interpreting your own career through the stories of others which give you the necessary perspective to trace a logical and fulfilling path.
The guidance model used in this book

In recent years a number of career guidance models have been developed to represent the various strands and theories of vocational choice within educational programmes. This guide broadly follows the DOTS/New DOTS model first postulated by Bill Law and A. G. Watts in 1977 and then updated in 1999, because it encompasses elements of trait and factor, personality and development theories, and is very flexible in order to account for diversity.

What’s involved?

DOTS stands for the following four skills and understandings that Law sees as being at the heart of successful career planning and development:

- **Decision making**: Choosing suitable career options and navigating the appropriate route to get you where you’re going.
- **Opportunity awareness**: Appreciating your full range of job options and the possible stepping stones to your destination.
- **Transition learning**: Understanding the job market, finding jobs and making successful applications.
- **Self-awareness**: Assessing your skills, commitment and knowledge.

The DOTS diagram portrays career planning as a constant lifelong process of ‘sensing, shifting and focusing on’ each of the four elements of personal growth outlined above. The four individual strands of development are interwoven in the diagram to demonstrate that this is not a straightforward cycle where you sequentially make decisions; learn about your opportunities; transit into a new position; and then learn more about yourself. It is, in fact, a dynamic, ongoing process in which each of us constantly and simultaneously addresses and readdresses each of these four core elements that drive our journey. This fluid DOTS model...
forms the backbone of this guide, so, by the end of the book, you will have a valuable skill that will help you throughout your life.

Practise your DOTS-related career reflection now by listing some of the key problems you have with each of the model’s four elements of growth so you can look back at your answers when you’ve finished the guide and see if they have all been addressed.

**Self-assessment: Your DOTS problems?**

What are your key problems with each aspect of the DOTS model?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The DOTS architects of growth</th>
<th>Where you struggle with each one</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Decision making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Opportunity awareness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Transition learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Self-awareness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Finding out more**

**In this guide**
- Choosing a role – Chapter 2.
- Planning your journey – Chapter 3.

**On the companion website**
- Skills linked to a wide range of graduate occupations.
- Examples of how and where you can develop specific skills.

**On the web**

On the companion website you will find up-to-date links for the websites of:
- The careers centres at Bradford and Kent Universities, which have excellent resources on employability skills.
- Careers New Zealand, which has a good summary of career development theories.
- The Open University’s pages on the DOTS model of career planning as used in this guide.

**What to do next**

The following chapters of the guide show you how to use the guidance model to develop your employability and secure fulfilling positions. Start by focusing as clearly as possible on the specific career path you want to take, as this will help you systematically plan your next steps.
Summary

- Employability is your ability to get a job and keep it, so it's down to your skills, commitment and knowledge.
- Career development theories have developed over the last century, focusing on linking traits and factors, personality and personal development.
- This guide employs the DOTS model of career planning, which focuses on decision making, opportunity awareness, transition learning and self-awareness.
abilities, see skills
ability tests, see psychometric tests
action planning
   choosing a role, 17
   planning your journey, 25, 229–31
adverts for jobs
   finding vacancies, 80
   responding, 92
application forms
   answering the questions, 119
   online forms, 131
   personal statements, 127
   promoting yourself, 88
   STAR approach, 124
   what employers are after, 87, 119
assessing yourself, 1, 18, 89, 102, 119, 120, 125
assessment centres
   case studies, 189
   group discussions, 181
   group exercises, 180
   in-tray exercises, 188
   psychometric tests, 165
   social occasions, 188
attributes, see skills
body language, 160
business ideas, 207
business plans, 221
business structures, 216
career
   definition, 1
   development, 7, 31
   planning, 8, 24, 229–31
career change, 197, 230
career development theories
   developmental, 10
   narratives, 10
personality, 9
planned happenstance, 10
trait and factor, 9
career fairs, 47, 162, 180
career goals, 16, 19, 24, 28, 34, 50
career interests, 1, 9, 18–22, 35, 46, 103–17, 205
career motivations
   further study, 54–6
   personal, 1, 19–21
   your own business, 205–6
career options, 14, 17
careers education, 11
case study exercises, 189
changing your path, 24, 197, 230
choosing a role, 14–22
commercial awareness, see skills
communication, 47, 60, 95, 118–15, 129–40, 146, 147
competencies, see skills
cover letters, 134–41
cultural capital, 16, 44
CVs
   academic, 105
   alternative, 105
   chronological (traditional), 104
digital, 106
   education, 102
   employment history, 102
   examples, 107
   interests, 103
   personal profiles, 103
   references, 103
   skills based, 104
   what to include, 102
decision making, 11, 18, 205, 227
disabilities, 36, 97, 177
DOTS model, 11, 227, 229, 232
elevator pitch, 135
emails, 81, 102, 135
employability
  definition, 8
  modules, 35, 39, 67
employers
  finding vacancies, see job hunting
  further study, 53–5, 73
  graduate employers, 79
  graduate training programmes, 78
  impressing, 15, 34–40,
  networking, 46
  networking online, 49
  what they’re after, 87, 119
  where they are, 15
employment experience, 33–43, 64, 92, 102, 119, 197, 230
English lessons, 94
entrepreneurship, see setting up your own business
Extraversion or Introversion (E/I), 18
extra-curricular activities, 19, 25, 32, 35, 157, 206
Facebook, 50
Feeling or Thinking types (F/T), 19
frequently asked questions, 229
further study
  academic CVs, 105
  applying, 59
  choosing, 53–9
  Masters, 56
  PhDs, 57
  vocational courses, 57
gap year, see time out
Ginzberg, Eli, 10
goal setting, see career goals
graduate employment
  graduate roles, 14, 77
  graduate training programmes, 78
  the scenic route, 80
group exercises, 181
Holland, John, 9
induction (for a new job), 196
informational interviewing, 46
interests, 17–21, 35, 103, 206
Internet
  application forms, 131
  choosing roles, 16–18
  the companion website, 3
  CVs, 101, 107
  emails, see emails
  further study, 56,
  in-tray exercise, 188
  looking for jobs, 37, 38, 81–4, 208
  networking, see social networking
  psychometric tests, 166, 173, 177
  setting up your business, 208, 213–15, 221
  volunteering opportunities, 36
internships, 37–40
interviews
  commitment-related questions, 152
  knowledge-related questions, 144
  multifaceted questions, 156
  off-the-wall questions, 158
  presenting a good image, 160
  questions for them, 159
  quick case questions, 159
  skills-related questions, 145
  types of interview, 143
  in-tray exercises see Internet
Intuition or Sensing types (I/S), 19
job descriptions, 92, 102, 118–17, 120
job hunting
  agencies, 37, 71, 80, 83
  creative job search, 80, 84, 229–31
  degree-relevant jobs, 14
  employment experience, 37–40
  graduate vacancies, 14, 77, 80–4
  graduate training programmes, 78
  on the Internet, 37, 38, 81–4
  the scenic route, 80
  time out, 67–73
job offers, see negotiating job offers
Judging or Perceiving types (J/P), 19
Kumbolz, J., 10
Law, Bill, 11
LinkedIn, 50
market research (your own business), 214
MBTI® (Myers Briggs Type Indicator), 18
motivations, see Career motivations
Index

nannying/au pairing, 69
negotiating job offers, 193
networking
  making contacts, 44
  online, see social networking strategy, 46
  your online presence, 51
occupations, see choosing a role
online, see Internet
opportunity awareness, 11
organisation skills, see skills
personal reflection, see assessing yourself
personal specifications, 92, 116, 120, 128
personal statements
  for jobs, 125, 127
  further study, 60
personality career theories, see career development theories
personality tests (profiles), 172
personality types, 18
plan B (your back-up), 26, 27, 85, 86, 229–31
portfolio careers, 21
problem-solving skills, see skills
professional development, 197
promoting yourself
  application forms, 118
  CVs, 99
  cover letters, 134
  interviews, 142
  networking, 43
  personal statements, 60, 125, 127
  proving your attributes, 87
psychometric/selection tests
  abstract reasoning, 171
  numeric reasoning, 168
  personality profiles, 172
  verbal/numeric logical reasoning, 171
  verbal reasoning, 166
questions for employers (at interviews), 159
recession, 16, 40, 207, 230
recruitment
  agencies, see job hunting
  procedures, 14, 88, 100, 119, 143, 166, 180, 229–31
  references/referees, 102, 131
reflection see assessing yourself
relaxing, 2, 20, 24, 63, 163, 229–31
Roberts, K., 10
self-assessment, see assessing yourself
self-awareness, 11
self-employment, see setting up your own business
Sensing or Intuition types (S/I), 18
setting up your own business
  business plans, 221
  business structures, 216
  choosing to do it, 205
  financial planning, 220
  glossary of terms, 223
  ideas, 207
  marketing your business, 212
tax/National Insurance, 217
skills
  commercial awareness, 8, 89, 115, 120, 146
  organisation, 8, 103, 111, 124, 137, 146
  problem solving, 8, 118, 123, 137, 145, 146–8
  teamwork, 8, 60, 89, 90, 103, 115, 121, 145, 147, 152, 183, 185
  technical, 8, 89, 90, 97, 102, 127, 145, 150
  transferable, 8, 24, 33, 90, 102, 103, 124, 145, 147
slashers, see portfolio careers
social networking
  Facebook, 50
  LinkedIn, 50
  Twitter, 51
spelling and grammar, 94
STAR technique, see application forms
starting out, 1, 7, 14–22, 77, 129–31
starting work, 196
student societies, 35, 47, 189
summer camps, 37, 71
taking control, 2, 16, 24
targeting
  applications, 118–33
  cover letters, 134–41
  CVs, 99–117
teaching English, 67
team roles, 183
teamwork skills, see skills
technical skills, see skills
telephone interviews, 143
Thinking or Feeling types (T/F), 19
time out, 63–74
transferable skills, see skills
transition learning, 11
Twitter, 51

unemployment, 84
unemployment rates, 15

vacancies, see Job hunting
vocational training, 57
voice modulation (in interviews), 160
voluntary work, 36–41, 48, 68–70, 80

Watts A.G., 11
weaknesses, 102, 158, 184, 195
web/websites, see Internet
when to apply, see recruitment procedures
work experience, see employment experience