INTRODUCTION

This workbook is aimed at students who will graduate this academic year. We’ve provided all the core careers information in one place and designed some activities to help you explore your ideas.

No matter what stage of career planning that you are currently at, this workbook will help you take the next or first step to plan for your future career. We’ve divided the content into four main parts …

PART 1 (Page 3–6)
Understanding the Graduate Recruitment Timeline and identifying what you want

PART 2 (Page 7–12)
Using your skills and experiences to match yourself to opportunities

PART 3 (Page 13–18)
The Application Process – what assessment can I expect to face?

PART 4 (Page 19–25)
Time to get practical – researching and targeting organisations

This workbook will also supplement our brand new online course, Career Smart! Hosted on FutureLearn, this course aims to support students with the transition to work after graduation.

You’ll learn more about the graduate recruitment process, how to get started and what actions you’ll need to take in order to secure a great graduate role. You will also have the opportunity to hear from Careers Consultants, recent alumni and a number of graduate recruiters.

If you have not yet joined us on Career Smart, register your interest today at: bit.ly/getcareersmart

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3 What are my options?
4 When I graduate …
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9 Showcasing your skill set to employers
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15 Creating engaging content for your CV
17 Using the STAR technique for competency-based questions
19 How to research your target organisations
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24 Developing your action plan with SMART goals
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**WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?**

Graduate Schemes
A graduate scheme is a structured training programme run by an employer to develop future leaders of their organisation. They will usually last for 1–2 years and are generally offered by larger organisations. The scheme can be focused on a specific job role or could be split into time-specific rotations, which may involve working across various areas.

Schemes have a set period for accepting applications, which can start as early as August before you start your final year. Whilst a number of graduate schemes will recruit throughout the year, some will close as early as the beginning of October and the majority will close before the end of December. There are a few that will also close when they have received enough applications – so, it’s key to apply early. If you miss out on the application process, you may not get another opportunity to apply for that scheme or employer until a year later.

Graduate schemes are competitive and therefore have a range of assessments in the applications process. This could include application forms, online tests, video interviews, assessment centres etc. You’ll hear more about these types of assessments later in the workbook. Successful candidates will start their roles following graduation in around August or September.

**Graduate Entry-Level Jobs**
Whilst around 10% of students will be employed through a graduate scheme, the majority of students will begin their career in a graduate entry-level role. You could be employed directly into an individual position with a large or small organisation, although it is probably more common with SMEs & charities. This role is likely to have a permanent contract and will involve a wide range of tasks.

These opportunities are advertised all year round but you shouldn’t apply until you are two to three months away from being available for full-time work, which in most cases will be from March. However, starting early can help you to identify what you want to do in order to target your job search. To apply, you’ll generally be required to complete an application form or submit a CV/covering letter. If you are shortlisted for the position, you will then be invited to interview.

Not all organisations will promote their opportunities in the same way, so it’s useful to extend your search widely. Try searching on LinkedIn to get started, but you could also use company job boards, professional bodies linked to the area that you are targeting or more specialist job websites – use the sector information and job profiles on the Prospects website to help you find these. As well as the roles that are advertised, a large number of opportunities will never be promoted – this is referred to as ‘The Hidden Job Market’.

**PG Study**
Whether you want to continue to study an aspect of your subject in more detail or if you want to gain a vocational/conversion qualification to give you more credibility, undertaking a postgraduate qualification can be a great option. There will however be lots of things to think about including: what course to choose, what funding is available, when to apply and how etc. For many postgraduate courses, there are no closing dates but it is worthwhile starting your preparation early (during autumn term) as some providers will work on a first-come, first-served basis. There are also likely to be deadlines for securing funding and accommodation and popular courses will fill up quickly. You will, generally, apply directly to the institution and will need to write a personal statement and CV as part of your application.

Taking Time Out
Taking time out is attractive to many students as a break between study and starting your working life. Whether you want to stay in the UK or go abroad, there’s a vast range of opportunities. Find out more about potential activities you can consider the employer view via the link below...

student.reading.ac.uk/essentials/careers_and_professional_development/finalists/getting-started/available-options.aspx

**Self Employment**
If you’re interested in starting your own business or picking up some freelance work, there’s a lot of useful information on how to get started on the link below.

Students thinking about self-employment will need to be creative and self-motivated, as well as having a great business idea. You may also want to look through the activities and information offered by the Henley Centre for Entrepreneurship.
prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/self-employment

**WHEN I GRADUATE...**

Whilst it may seem a while away, it won’t be long until you’re in your graduation robes and with this in mind, we’d like you to start thinking about what it is you want when you graduate. The more clearly you can paint this picture for yourself now and in the future, the easier it will be to make good choices. To help get you started, you might want to consider some of the following points...

**Route**
- Direct entry
- Graduate scheme
- Postgraduate study

**Motivations**
- Company values
- Location
- Responsibility
- Salary
- Stability
- Variety
- Work environment
- Working hours
- Work / life balance

**Work Task**
- Being creative
- Business development
- Helping others
- Managing people
- Marketing
- Project management
- Research and analytics
- Seeing clients
- Working as part of a team
- Working individually

**Organisations**
- Big organisations
- Charities
- Non-profits
- Public / private sector
- Small / medium sized enterprises (SMEs)
- Start-ups

**Sector**
- Charity
- Consulting
- Creative arts
- Education
- Environment
- Finance
- Government
- Health
- Investment
- Media and publishing
- Real estate
- Science and research
WHEN I GRADUATE...

Before you make any decision about a chosen career path, it is worth exploring what you want in detail. Here are some questions and statements that you can start to reflect on...

• The job satisfaction must be...
• The skills I mainly want to use are...
• The natural behaviours I want to incorporate are...
• The interests I want to cover are...
• The practicalities it must cater for are...

Now, using the template on the next page, we’d like you to start exploring some of these ideas and think about what it is you want from your future career. Once you’ve done this, have a go at producing a list of five organisations that interest you and explain your reasons for selecting these...

Remember, other learners and educators will be interacting with you on the Career Smart course. Share this initial career idea in full in Career Smart Discussion step ‘When I Graduate…’

WHAT DO I WANT?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To use my degree</th>
<th>Importance of a career path</th>
<th>What interests me?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The people I'll work with</td>
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<td>The changes promotion brings</td>
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<td>Type of role</td>
<td>Working environment</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
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<td>Future proof?</td>
<td>Location of work</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Now, using the template on the next page, we’d like you to start exploring some of these ideas and think about what it is you want from your future career. Once you’ve done this, have a go at producing a list of five organisations that interest you and explain your reasons for selecting these...

Remember, other learners and educators will be interacting with you on the Career Smart course. Share this initial career idea in full in Career Smart Discussion step ‘When I Graduate…’

Employer | Reason for selecting employer
---|---

What am I good at? What do I enjoy?

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What do I want to avoid?

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Share what you want from a job in Career Smart Discussion Step ‘What do you want?’

Share your full list of employers in Career Smart Discussion Step ‘Organisations that interest you’. Make sure to take a look through other learners lists too, as they may have identified organisations that are of interest to you!
WHAT ARE EMPLOYERS LOOKING FOR?

All employers will be looking for a mixture of knowledge, skills and experience. You acquire knowledge through your studies and other activities such as networking. Skills are the things you do and are developed through practice. Experience results from putting your knowledge and skills into action. This experience might be gained from a part-time job, through extracurricular activities, sports, hobbies or something else and you can use this experience as evidence for employers.

In this section, we will be focusing on your skills – we have included an A to Z of some skills below...

**A**
- Ability to build a rapport
- Action planning
- Active listening
- Adaptability
- Adapting your communication style to different audiences
- Analysis skills
- Analyse quantitative data
- Assertiveness

**B**
- Building strong working relationships

**C**
- Careers planning
- Coaching / mentoring
- Commercial social media skills
- Community awareness
- Complaints management
- Computer / IT skills
- Conflict resolution
- Creative thinking
- Customer service

**D**
- Decision making
- Design

**E**
- Emotional intelligence and empathy
- Enterprise and entrepreneurial skills
- Event Planning

**F**
- Flexibility

**G**
- Global awareness

**H**
- Hardworking

**I**
- Independence
- Information analysis
- Initiative
- Innovation
- Integrity
- Interpersonal skills

**J**
- Judgement

**K**
- Kind

**L**
- Leadership

**M**
- Managing
- Multi-tasking

**N**
- Negotiation and persuasion
- Networking
- Numerical skills

**O**
- Opportunity analysis
- Organisation and planning

**P**
- People focused
- Perseverance and motivation
- Presentation skills
- Problem solving
- Project Management
- Public speaking

**Q**
- Quality
- Qualitative
- Quantitative

**R**
- Reflection and evaluation skills
- Research and analysis
- Resilience
- Resource gathering
- Report writing

**S**
- Sales / marketing
- Selling
- Self-assessment
- Self-improvement / personal development
- Self-management
- Self-motivation
- Solutions focused
- Sourcing and summarising material
- Supervising

**T**
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Telephone skills
- Time management

**U**
- Understanding

**V**
- Verbal / oral communication

**W**
- Work to deadlines
- Work with different groups and levels of people
- Work within multidisciplinary teams
- Work with people on a 1:1 basis
- Work under pressure
SHOWCASING YOUR SKILL SET TO EMPLOYERS

Sometimes it can seem as if employers want perfection – someone who is fully ‘up-to-speed’, and able to ‘hit-the-ground-running’. But, generally, they know that students and recent graduates will have lots of potential, but less proven ‘hard’ skills, and will need time to develop. Using the table below, fill in 6–8 key skills you think you possess, with some evidence for when you have demonstrated them. This format will help you start to think about the skills you have, and maybe identify some areas you need to work on. Be specific about the evidence, and include dates. This will help you when it comes to writing CVs! Also, think laterally about when you have used your skills – they don’t all have to be examples from work or education. For example, helping to arrange a musical performance could be a great example of organisation skills.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Evidence for this skill (you can have more than one piece of evidence)</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL SKILLS GAPS

Once you have completed the previous activity, consider the questions below...

- Do the skills you have match the skills detailed on the previous page?
- Do they match the industries and companies you plan to target?
- How strong is your evidence for your skills? What could make it more convincing?
- How can you develop the skills you might need over the coming months?

Thinking about your skills from an employer’s perspective will help you when it comes to applying to opportunities. If you don’t have a clear idea of the skills your target industries/organisations are looking for – try doing some further research. This could involve taking a look at current job descriptions or speaking with someone in that industry or organisation.

What skill(s) do you need to develop further? Share it with us in Career Smart Discussion Step ‘Recognising the Gaps’.

MATCHING YOUR SKILLS TO OPPORTUNITIES

As well as understanding your skills and qualities, you need to understand the skills and qualities that recruiters are looking for. This knowledge helps you make better choices about where to apply and to make stronger applications when you do.

Research some career paths and find out if your skills match by doing one or more of the following:

1. Go to a job site and search a job title that appeals to you. Look at some of the job descriptions – what is it that they are looking for? Does it sound like something you could do?
2. Go back to your list of employers – what do they say about the type of people they like to recruit? What skills do they look for?
3. Network! Speak to someone who is working in the areas you are interested in – this is the best way to research industries, organisations and job roles.

Share your best example with us in Career Smart Discussion Step ‘Skills Employers are looking for’.
BUILDING YOUR LIST OF TARGET ORGANISATIONS

You’ll have already identified some organisations that interest you. Now, take some time to reflect back on these companies and consider why they make it onto your list. Are they there because they are big brands or because you happened to have heard of them?

Based on the last two activities and your own research, now is the time to consider the following questions as you look at how well organisations match your skill set. Use the table to record your thoughts.

• Are they organisations where you are going to enjoy working?
• Are they looking for people like you?
• Do you need to do more research before applying?
• How many other organisations are there where you could be a good fit?
• How many small or medium-sized businesses are there that are looking for people like you?
• What other kinds of organisations might be suitable for you?
• How can you find these opportunities?
• Do you need to take some organisations off your original list?
• Do you need to consider adding some others?

Tell us if, or how, your list is changing in Career Smart Discussion Step ‘Reflecting on your list of organisations’.
A QUICK GUIDE TO ASSESSMENT IN GRADUATE RECRUITMENT

Application Form
This is a tool used by employers to collect relevant information from applicants. All organisations are different, so these forms will vary – some will ask for basic details, whereas others will ask questions to find out more about you. Whatever the form looks like you need to treat this as an important step in the recruitment process as, like any other type of assessment, it will determine whether or not you progress to the next stage of the process. Before you start to complete this form, read the job description carefully and allow yourself enough time to complete it. Try to submit well before the deadline and be sure to keep a copy of what you submit. For any questions that you are asked, keep to the word or character limit for each answer and provide relevant evidence for the employer – be careful to avoid writing too little.

Assessment Centres
A combination of assessed tasks and activities that test your suitability for the job. They will take place at the employer’s office (or similar, e.g., large conference facility etc.) and can last from half a day up to two full days. You’ll typically find that they are one of the final stages in the recruitment process and so the candidates who are invited will be those who the employer thinks has a real chance of being right for the job. Being invited, obviously, does not guarantee you a position so it’s important to make the most of this opportunity.

Cover Letter
Will act as the introduction to your application and should focus on your motivation and fit for the organisation and role. This should be around one page in length and in the layout of a formal letter – where possible, always try to find the name of a person to address it to. This should invite the employer to read your CV and will, therefore, be the first thing that they look at – ensure that this is inviting and indicates your enthusiasm for the opportunity that is being offered.

Here are some ideas of what you could include:
- tell them who you are; explain why you are writing/what position you are applying for; detail why you are interested in this role; show that you have researched the organisation and tell them why you are interested in working there; let them know what makes you stand out from other candidates; describe your future career aspirations.

CVs
In one or two full pages, you should tell the recruiter everything you want them to know by presenting your evidence for the selection criteria. To do this, use the job description and person specification as a checklist to ensure you provide evidence that demonstrates you fulfill their criteria.

Tailoring your CV to each individual role is essential, as each recruiter will be looking for something different. A quality, tailored application is always better than sending multiple copies of the same one. Ensure that you present your Education and Experience in a clear and logical way.

Interviews
During the course of this year, you are likely to have an interview at one stage or another, whether this is in person, over the phone or using video interview software. You can book a Mock Interview with one of our Career Consultants to get individual feedback and support and you can find much more information on our website – including a handy guide to interview question types.

Online Tests
If you apply for a place on a graduate scheme, you’ll probably be asked to take an online test. These are often used early in the recruitment process as a way of filtering through their large volume of applications. These tests could include: Numerical/Verbal/Logical Reasoning, Situational Judgement, Personality Assessments and Games-based assessment. Our top tip for succeeding is to test your suitability for the job. Being invited, obviously, does not guarantee you a position so it’s important to make the most of this opportunity.

You can read more about all of these areas by visiting:
reading.ac.uk/careers/rdggrad20

Personal Statements for PG study
Personal statements for postgraduate study are different from supporting statements. There are two great articles that will help you plan and write these, which are listed below. Remember – you can come in and get this checked by one of our Careers Consultants.

prospects.ac.uk/postgraduate-study/masters-degrees/personal-statements-for-postgraduate-applications
findamasters.com/advice/finding/personal-statement-for-masters-degree.aspx

Supporting Statement
Usually part of an application form (large free text box) that gives you the opportunity to explain why you are the ideal candidate. You’ll need to make sure you know exactly what they are looking for and provide examples that evidence your skills, qualities and motivation.

Make sure that you read the job description and/or person specification thoroughly and address each point in turn – it can often help to group points into themes or headings. Don’t ignore any criteria that you do not have, instead, identify any transferable skills that you may have.

You can read more about all of these areas by visiting:
reading.ac.uk/careers/rdggrad20
CREATING ENGAGING CONTENT FOR YOUR CV

The main purpose of your CV is to get you to the next stage of the recruitment process and you’ll need to display evidence of your suitability for the role. The main content is likely to come from your education and experience sections, as well as any extra-curricular activities that you have done.

You should have already listed 6–8 key skills with evidence in your table on page 9 of this workbook and we’d now like you to complete this activity for as many of these skills as you like – the more that you do now the more you will have that you can use on your own CV. This activity will help to transform your content from generic tasks to engaging content on why you are a great candidate.

To get you started, have a go at generating 3–5 bullet points that showcase your skills on the next page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill: Communication</th>
<th>Evidence: Open Day Ambassador, University of Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Led small groups of prospective students and their parents on a guided tour of the University, responding to their questions in a professional manner</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Delivered a presentation on my student journey so far to over 250 attendees</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Awarded Open Day Ambassador of the month for outstanding customer service</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill: Leadership</th>
<th>Evidence: Course Representative, University of Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Responsible for representing the views of my peers on academic issues within my department, ensuring that the student voice is heard and positive change is made</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Enhanced experience for students on combined honours courses by leading on creation of new events for Part One students during Welcome Week</td>
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</table>

Share your best example with us in Career Smart Discussion Step ‘Start creating content for your CV’.
USING THE STAR TECHNIQUE FOR COMPETENCY-BASED QUESTIONS

One of the most common types of interview questions is ‘competency-based’ questions. You should be able to recognise these questions as they will often start with things like ‘Tell me about a time when...’ or ‘Give me an example of a time when...’ and will ask you to illustrate one particular skill.

Some examples of competency-based questions include:

• Tell me about a time where you have had to demonstrate your initiative ...
• Give me an example of a time when you have had to make a difficult decision ...
• Describe a situation where you have had to solve a problem ...
• Tell me about a time when you learnt from a mistake ...
• How would you go about communicating a difficult topic to a non-specialist audience?

For these types of questions, you’ll need to select one specific example where you have demonstrated the skill that has been referenced in the question. The STAR Technique is an effective way to answer these questions and we have covered each section in detail below:

Situation
Briefly set the scene and explain the situation you were in. Select a relevant example and take any work experience/extra-curricular activity that you have done into consideration.

Task
Tell the employer about what you had to do.

Action
Describe what you had to do in order to achieve your task and why. Detail the skills that you used and explain how you used them. This is the most important part of your answer as you can demonstrate how you have performed the skill in question and why it will be transferable to them.

Result
Explain what the result was of you having used the skill. What happened as a result of the actions you took? What impact did the result have? Would you do anything differently next time?

Now, using the examples given, answer 2–3 of these questions using the STAR technique:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
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<th>Question:</th>
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<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
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</table>

Share your best example with us in Career Smart Discussion Step 'Using STAR for competency-based questions'.
### HOW TO RESEARCH YOUR TARGET ORGANISATIONS

There are many ways that you can start to research these organisations and the approaches generally fall into two categories:

**Primary**
Most powerful, communicating directly with people who work in your target industry
- Attending organisation events or workshops that take place on campus
- Signing up to Professional Events run by professional bodies
- Visiting the place of work that you are interested in
- Getting introductions via your contacts, friends or family
- Following organisations/people on Social Media (e.g. LinkedIn and Twitter)

**Secondary**
Less powerful but gives a broader view …
- Look for an Industry standard/respected niche publication produced by an industry expert
- Read or subscribe to a respected business focussed publication (e.g. Financial Times)
- Find a respected general publication who pride themselves on objective reporting (e.g. BBC)
- Look at the organisation’s website, brochure or any other sources of information

**Top Tip:** Use their time wisely – don’t ask them for information you could easily find online!

### ANALYSING YOUR RESEARCH

Your research is really important and it can help you when you are trying to decide which organisations to apply to and when you are preparing to answer application/interview questions (e.g. why do you want to work for us?).

Creating a SWOT analysis can be helpful because if Strength and Opportunity outweigh Weaknesses and Threats, it is a good indication that they are worth applying to. The Strengths and Opportunities factors are the reasons you can give for wanting to work there.

- **Strengths**
  What are the strengths of the organisation?

- **Weaknesses**
  What are the weaknesses of the organisation?

- **Opportunities**
  Is the organisation well placed to take advantage of opportunities?

- **Threats**
  Are there things out there that will knock, or even bring the organisation down?
# HOW TO PRIORITISE YOUR LIST OF TARGET ORGANISATIONS

Being organised about who you are planning to apply to can keep you in control and reduce the stress you might feel about the process as well as keeping you on top of key dates and deadlines.

To help, we'd recommend using a spreadsheet to capture information about target organisations that you are interested in – you can then sort this by opening date, closing date or the score out of five that you have given them. Aim for 10 organisations to start with...

Once you have your list – think carefully about the organisations you have included and consider the following questions – you should then think about growing your list further.

- How did they end up on your list?
- Were they a considered choice, based on your criteria?
- Is there a mix of large and small organisations?
- Do you have a mix of well-known and not so well-known organisations?
- How well do you really understand what each of the organisations do, and how they do it? What differentiates them from their competitors?
- Does it appear like a logical list, drawn up by somebody who knows what they want from their next step after graduation? Or does it appear like a random collection of organisations with seemingly no connection?

If you are struggling to answer these questions, or it appears as a random collection, you might need to do a bit more thinking about what you want from your career – revisit your thoughts from Part 1 of this workbook or make a careers appointment to talk this through with your Careers Consultant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Date Open</th>
<th>Date Close</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Your Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
**REVIEWING YOUR LIST OF TARGET ORGANISATIONS**

Once you have completed the previous activity, you should be able to respond to the following three statements – try to do this for three of your target organisations below...

- My target organisation is ...
- I want to work there because ...
- I think I am a good candidate for them because ...

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<th>My target organisation is ...</th>
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<th>My target organisation is ...</th>
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**DEVELOPING YOUR ACTION PLAN WITH SMART GOALS**

Now, it’s time to put some of what you’ve learnt into action in order to produce your action plan. Use our template on the next page to help you start this process and think about what actions you need to take to achieve your targets.

When setting yourself actions – keep the SMART acronym in mind...

- **S**: Specific
- **M**: Measurable
- **A**: Achievable
- **R**: Relevant
- **T**: Time-bound

**SMART GOALS**

**Time to PLAN!**

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*Tell us who your top target organisation is in Career Smart Discussion Step 'Reviewing your list of target organisations'.*

If you are struggling to produce answers, or it doesn’t feel genuine – don’t worry. You may need to spend some more time either thinking about what you want from your career, what sort of roles you might be suitable for and researching opportunities that meet your criteria.
MY ACTION PLAN

Research tells us that publicly committing to your next actions helps to ensure that you follow through. Commit to your next three actions in Career Smart Discussion Step ‘Your next 3 steps’.

The actions I need to take to achieve my targets are ...

The obstacles or challenges that I have to overcome are ...

Share at least one obstacle or challenge in Career Smart Discussion Step ‘What are your obstacles?’ See if you can suggest any ideas to help other learners overcome their obstacles.

I need to do more research/would like to know more about ...

WHAT NEXT?

Book a 1:1 careers appointment, careers event or workshop ...
reading.targetconnect.net/student

Access our website for 2020 graduates ...
reading.ac.uk/careers/rdggrad20

Register for a free Graduates First account ...
reading.ac.uk/careers/graduatesfirst

Other useful resources:

Prospects
prospects.ac.uk

Target Jobs
targetjobs.co.uk

All About Careers
allaboutcareers.com

Top 100 Employers
top100graduateemployers.com

UK 300
targetjobs.co.uk/uk300

LinkedIn
linkedin.com

Milkround
milkround.com

Gradcracker
gradcracker.com

Grad Jobs
gradjobs.co.uk

Find A Masters
findamasters.com

Find a PhD
findaphd.com
Get in touch

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1st Floor, Carrington  
careers@reading.ac.uk  
www.reading.ac.uk/careers

Henley Careers  
1st Floor, Henley Business School  
henleycareers@henley.ac.uk  
henley.ac.uk/careers