

Map my Future.

Supporting Students and Recent Graduates to succeed



See the big picture

Identify ways that your work can impact on the wider world and how external factors can affect your career



Balance career & life

Consider the career-life balance that works for you and know your rights



Start where you are

Reflect on who you are and where you want to go in your career



Create opportunities

Try new things, meet new people grow your network



Explore possibilities

Explore possibilities and learn about recruitment processes and workplace culture



Build your career

Actively develop your career and skills and make decisions that are best for you



Build your career

Actively develop your career and skills and make decisions that are best for you

Guide to career decision-making

We all make decisions every day, from the trivial like what clothes to wear or food to eat, to the more challenging, like choosing the next best step for you in your career. This guide aims to assist with that process, so that you can find tools and techniques that work best for you as an individual.

Let's start with common career decisions many students face. These could include:

Choosing what subjects to major in or drop within your degree

Choosing a gap year after studies or continue studying or find a job

Choosing to leave a course without completing it or changing career direction

Choosing a career path that reflects your interests and values but offers low pay

Choosing to disclose a disability or membership of a minority group or not

Choosing between different job or postgraduate course options





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Guide to career decision-making

If we dig a little deeper, we may find that some themes emerge in our thinking and how we are feeling. These themes can make the decision more complicated.

But you are not alone. A career guidance conversation can support you in your career decision making journey. This is a confidential, impartial and non-directive meeting with a qualified careers consultant with responsibility for your course, who will support and guide you in planning the next step in your career.

Fear of making the wrong decision or delaying a future decision

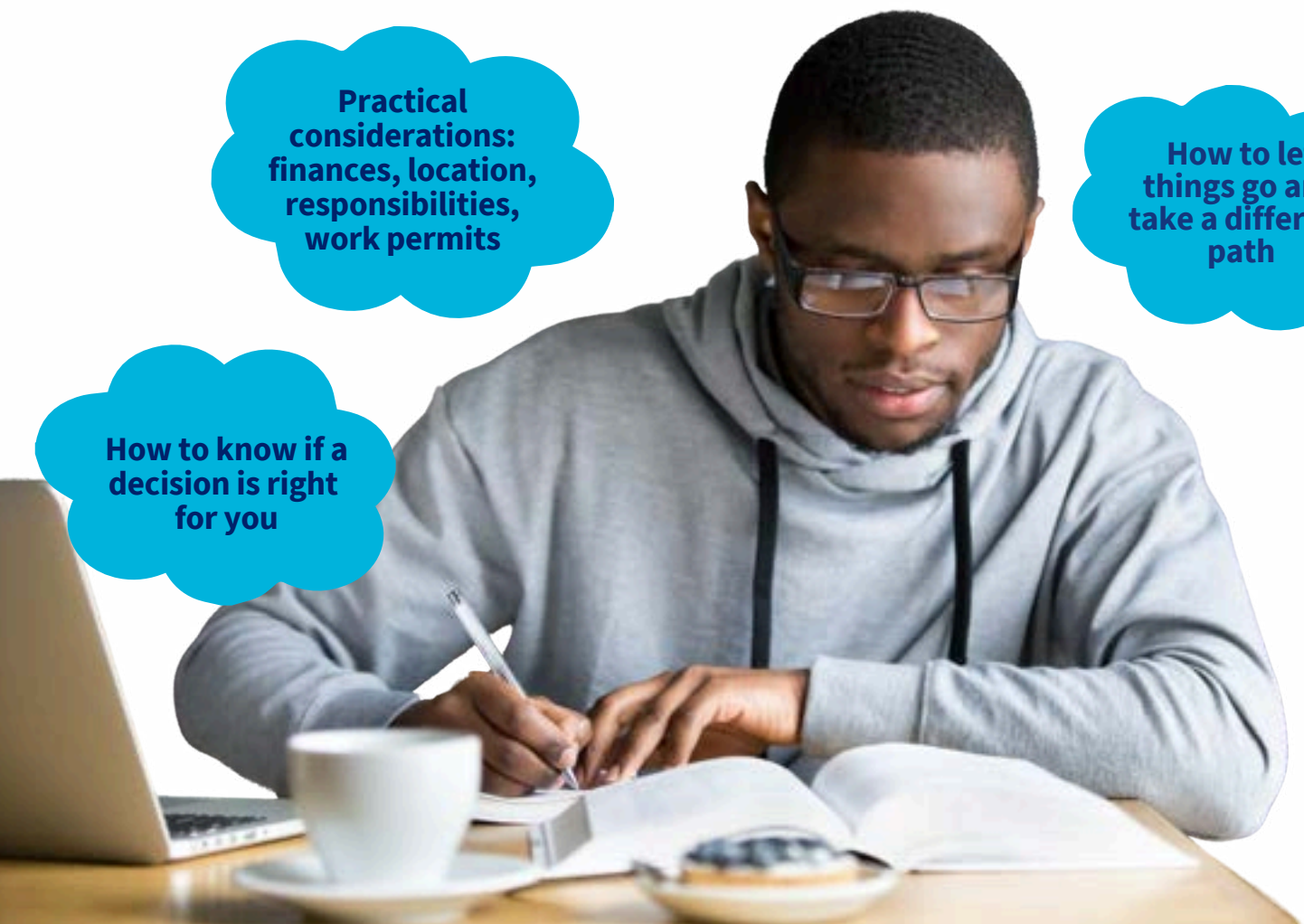
**Prioritising or balancing distinct aspects of a decision
Head vs Heart**

**Navigating different influences around us
e.g. peers, parents, societal**

**Practical considerations:
finances, location, responsibilities, work permits**

How to let things go and take a different path

How to know if a decision is right for you





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Case Study: Choosing whether to do a PhD or not

Paul has enjoyed the academic challenge of completing his undergraduate degree and Masters. He finds research comes to him easily. He found the process of completing his thesis interesting and felt satisfaction at researching the topic in depth. He enjoys academic debate and regularly reads around the field and attends conferences.

He has spoken to several academics in his department and outside of the University and can see himself working as an academic in future. He has been offered a funded PhD opportunity in a research area he would like to specialise in, with a great supervisor in a well ranked University.

What's not to love? When Paul starts to think about whether to accept this PhD offer, he begins to doubt himself: four years is a long time and there is no guarantee of a research or academic role afterwards.

He begins to think that if he spent that time differently, perhaps working in industry, that he would earn more and ultimately have more job security. He also wonders if he will enjoy the experience, if it would be isolating moving to more individual work compared with the classroom experience he is used to.



Guidance:

This decision concerns how to know if a decision is right and balancing competing aspects of that decision. While the interest in doing a PhD seems clear for Paul, he may also benefit from [widening his frame of reference](#).

Instead of asking if he should do this PhD or not, he could ask: "What am I giving up by making this choice?" He will then start to consider the opportunity costs of doing a PhD e.g. lost earnings. and try to balance this with the opportunity cost of not doing a PhD e.g. potentially less intellectually stimulating work. Some time could also be spent [exploring other options](#). Paul could ask himself:

“ **What would be the opposite of doing a PhD?**
Imagine there is no option to do a PhD, what would other options look like? ”



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Spending time considering other options will uncover any assumptions being made -such as working in a lab or taking a consulting role in industry- will free up space to consider what is really important to the student. This student could also spend time [reflecting on what values are most important to them](#) at this time:

- **What motivates and inspires Paul?**
- **What kind of person does he aspire to be?**
- **What way would he like to work?**
- **What does that look like?**



These kinds of questions may help uncover core values which will aid the decision. Finally, [talking to those who have come out the other end](#) is a useful way to get a sense of their thought process and feelings about career decisions in retrospect. This student could talk to a few academics about their experiences, as well as other professionals in the other identified fields of interest.

What is important here is to ask open questions, such as “why did you choose to pursue this career path?” “how did you know it was the right path for you at the time?” or “what have you enjoyed and what have you found most challenging along the way?”





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Case Study: Choosing what to do after college

Alice is in her final year of her undergraduate degree. She has enjoyed the degree so far but is feeling a bit stressed at the thought of planning what to do next year.

Many of her classmates seem to know what they are applying for or already have something secured. She is considering a graduate programme or maybe a Masters degree.

Part of her also feels a bit drained and she would like some time out to travel or gain some work experience. She feels overwhelmed with choice.



Guidance:

This example centres around a fear of making the wrong decision and perhaps also a fear of being 'behind' a peer group. Alice is feeling overwhelmed by the amount of choice available to her.

Sometimes this feeling can involve a fear of regret, as every choice involves a loss. This fear of regret or making a mistake can sometimes then lead to a feeling of being stuck, of decision paralysis, when no decision is made.



One strategy that can help is to [lower the expectation to be perfect](#). No choice is perfect and it may help the student to consider what choice makes the most sense, right here and right now. Aiming to make a 'good enough' decision that she is happy with will reduce pressure.

In our work as Career Consultants, we often encourage students to think about a decision as the next possible best step for them, not a decision that will impact on the rest of their working life. This way we remain open to new possibilities and adaptations at each step of our career journey.





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Case Study: Choosing what to do after college

Alice could also try to [limit the amount of choice](#) available to her. Some of this may be for practical reasons e.g. not having the funds for postgraduate study.

She could reflect on what really interests her and spend time and energy on researching those options.



For example, if marketing is an area of interest, Alice could research graduate programmes in this area and also how to gain initial work experience combined with travel. Talking to people who have pursued these career options would also be an informative, and enjoyable experience.



[Trinity Alumni Online](#) is a great way to connect with Trinity alumni working in a range of careers for advice and mentoring. Another approach might be to [think about a past decision that worked out well](#) for her. This could be any decision e.g. choosing where to go on holiday. Alice could then consider:

“ **What process did I use to make that decision?**
Is it worth using a similar process again in the context of career? ”

Finally, it would help if Alice tried to [avoid comparing herself with others](#) in a similar situation. Each student is on their own journey.

Sometimes others may seek to project an image of having everything decided, but if they were honest with you, they may feel unsure of their choices. It's best to make a choice that fulfils your own values.





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Case Study: Choosing a different career goal

Rishab has always wanted to work in commercial law. He is in his final year of an undergraduate law degree in a top university and has spent time gathering work experience through competitive internships, is involved with College societies and has completed voluntary work in the field.

He has applied for training contracts in several commercial law firms and has not been offered a place. His family would like him to continue applying and pursue a Masters in law to further specialise.

Rishab feels this is the logical next step, but something stops him filling out the postgraduate application forms: he is tired. He is tired of feeling rejected but more importantly, he is doubting his motivation to pursue commercial law in the first place.

When he completed voluntary work in a free legal advice centre, he remembers feeling energised at the act of helping clients in a practical way. He felt empathy for their situation and is now wondering if social work would be a better fit.



Guidance:

This decision is about how to move on in life. Rishab has focused on the pursuit of one career goal for many years and is now considering the possibility of aiming for something different. This can be a scary place to be. Rishab could benefit from moving away from a fixed mindset towards more of a [growth mindset approach](#).

Sometimes when we are focused very intensely on one option, we may become blinkered to see other, equally attractive career options. He could start by focusing on what he can change and what new possibilities this might bring.





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Case Study: Choosing a different career goal

Rishab may also benefit from developing **positive self-talk**. It can be tempting to listen to negative thoughts when moving on from one career direction. Spending time reframing unhelpful thoughts may enhance resourcefulness and self-compassion in this situation. For example, he could rephrase the following thoughts: “Failing to secure a traineeship is all my fault”. Rephrase to:



“ I feel rejected but I did my best. What can I learn from this situation? ”

“I can’t handle all the work required to research and pursue a career in social work”.
Rephrase to:

“ This is challenging but I have the capacity to do this, one step at a time. ”



There is also a **change in identity** involved here. Allowing time to grieve the loss of one path and eventually embracing another will help Rishab to move forward with enthusiasm. This could be through talking with friends, writing down his thoughts or seeking out College supports. This will allow him to understand what he feels about the decision and may uncover insights, such as the role family pressure may have played in his choice to pursue commercial law.

Focusing on his true motivations may also help clarify his career choices. Rishab can reality test this new career path and may find clarity in a new identity and a better fit for his values and interests.



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References and Resources

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Perfectionism reading:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ie/basics/perfectionism>

Perfectionism podcast: <https://www.apa.org/news/podcasts/speaking-of-psychology/perfectionism>

Are You Too Hard on Yourself?

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ie/blog/intimacy-a-path-toward-spirituality/202307/are-you-too-hard-on-yourself>