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ABOUT THE CHOICES PACK

This pack is designed to be a self help guide for people who want to make better decisions about their future. Many people move from education to higher education or work in a haphazard and disorganised way, often feeling later on that they may have made the wrong choice about what to do.

The exercises in this pack will enable you to look more closely at your abilities, your personality and values, and help you to start thinking positively about the future. A critical self assessment is an important starting point when deciding on a career or change in lifestyle.

The assessment sheets in this pack include:

- z **APTITUDE** - what you are naturally good at
- z **DISPOSITION** - what suits your personality and interests
- z **VALUES** - what is important to you
- z **SKILLS** - learned abilities
- z **AMBITION** - what you strive to achieve

When considering the exercises in this pack you should be aware that there are no right or wrong answers. Everyone has different desires and ambitions about the future and different thoughts on how to achieve them. Also, remember that there are no prizes for finishing first. The exercises are designed to be open ended which means that they are never finished. You may go back to them in the future and revise or confirm your original thoughts.

Although the pack is presented as a whole, you may find that some parts are more relevant for you than others. It is up to you how to approach them and how long to spend on them. The main aim is to encourage you to think who you are, what you want to achieve in the future and how you will do it.



DESCRIBE YOURSELF 1

2

Consider whether and how the list below describes you as a person. Some of the words may describe you to yourself exactly, whilst some of the words may remind you of yourself some of the time. You may feel that some words are not relevant at all in describing you. Mark the words 1 to 5. 1 means that the word least describes you whilst 5 means that it describes you well. After completing the exercise ask a friend or someone who knows you well to complete it as well. Remember that they should not comment about themselves but about YOU. Compare the results of both exercises. If they are different, what does this tell you about yourself? If they are roughly the same, does this satisfy you?

	1	2	3	4	5
COMPETITIVE					
ARROGANT					
SENSIBLE					
HELPFUL					
AGGRESSIVE					
SHARING					
HAPPY					
ANGRY					
CARING					
PRACTICAL					
RELAXED					
SERIOUS					
COMMITTED					
SLEEPY					
IMPULSIVE					
BLUNT					
NERVOUS					
IMPATIENT					
MODERATE					
REALISTIC					
SHOCKING					
SHY					
A LONER					
MODEST					
UNFEELING					

DESCRIBE YOURSELF 1

2

Are you the sort of person who would rather play in a team than play on your own? Are you very confident and outspoken, or do you prefer to listen to others? It is important for you to consider these types of questions seriously because the type of person you are will greatly influence the choices you will make in the future.

EXAMPLE

If you are very competitive you will not be very happy working as a junior clerk!

If you don't like animals you would not want to work on a farm.

You should maximise your own chances of choosing your future correctly by looking closely at the sort of person you are, and whether other people see you as you see yourself.

EXERCISE

In a group of four or five people write down the name of each group member on separate small pieces of paper. A teacher or facilitator should then collect and redistribute the sheets making sure that no one gets their own sheet back.

Five minutes are allowed for members of the group to write about the person whose name they have been given. Each person should write down five words which describe the person in question, choosing from words below (or similar one word descriptions).

COMPETITIVE	HAPPY	COMMITTED	PRACTICAL
SHARING	SERIOUS	IMPATIENT	IMPULSIVE
RELAXED	NERVOUS	A LONER	REALISTIC
BLUNT	SHY	MODERATE	UNFEELING
SHOCKING	SENSIBLE	MODEST	...CHOOSE OTHERS
ARROGANT	ANGRY	AGGRESSIVE	YOURSELF

At the end of the five minutes the facilitator should collect the sheets. Selecting at random, one sheet should be presented to the group by the facilitator. The task of the group, (except the one who wrote it), is to guess which person is being described. Sometimes the exercise is very easy and everyone guesses immediately who is being described. On occasion it is difficult for the person being described to recognise themselves whilst others may find no difficulty. What does the reaction of the person to the description of them tell us about that person?

The facilitator should continue with the sheets until all the participants have been described. The last one, of course, will be obvious.

It is very often the case that there are various pressures on you to work to the expectations of others or to consider the future from a pre-defined perspective. People may tell you that you are good at just one thing, or two, in particular, or teachers may feel that you can only succeed in certain fields because of your exam results or school/college work.

It is important for you to think about what you really want to do in the future, whether it be in a job, sport, hobby, family or personal life.

The life essay is a fantasy opportunity. You can ignore what other people say to you, ignore their expectations and advice. This is an opportunity for you to say what **you** really feel. Consider in detail what you really feel about your life situation, about your hopes and dreams, what you would really like to do, and be.

There are no rules to this essay. Write as long or as short an essay as you like. If you want, you can dwell on the past before you write about the future or you may write only about the future and ignore the past completely.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS EXERCISE?

It is very easy to be carried along in a direction which you do not really want but at the same time you do not really object to that much. This is an opportunity to step out of that situation and take time to really think about yourself. After this exercise you may find that you are completely satisfied and happy with your present situation. If you find that you are not really happy, this exercise will have helped you to look at the issues which are really important to you and could be a point from which you can start to change things.



SKILLS

Consider the skills headings on the left hand side of the page. In the second column write down the skills which you have in these areas, and in the third column write down which skills you use frequently and which ones you enjoy.

SKILL	MY SKILLS IN THIS AREA	THE SKILLS WHICH I USE
ORGANISATION Could be organising events, sports, or voluntary work.		
WRITING Could be creative writing, school/college magazine etc.		
PRACTICAL Could be making things as part of a hobby, or being good with your hands.		
VERBAL Could be public speaking, acting, singing etc.		
MECHANICAL Could involve fixing cars, machinery etc.		
ANALYTICAL Could be good at solving problems, thinking of ideas.		
MATHEMATICAL good with numbers etc.		

The purpose of this exercise is to help you to identify the skills which you have, and the ones which you use. It is possible to begin to identify where your strengths lie. Show the completed exercise to a friend who knows you well. Do they agree with your description of yourself? Can they think of any more skills which you may have but forgot to include?

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE?

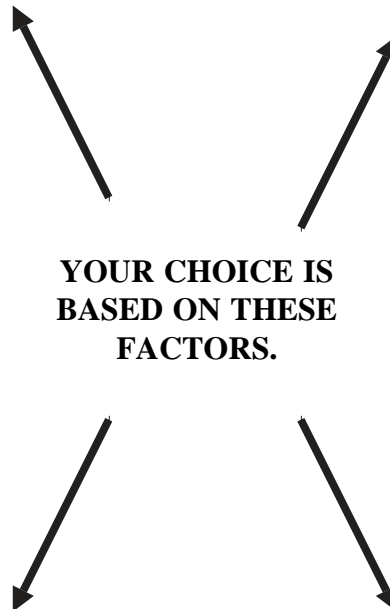
6

I LIKE...

You may want to choose something which you like. If you like it you will probably have a greater chance of succeeding because it is something you are already comfortable with.

I NEED...

You need to do something, have to make a choice. There are factors like money to consider, and the need to succeed at something.



I AM GOOD AT...

Do you like the same things that you are good at? Are the things you are good at going to secure a good future for you?

THE PRESSURES...

Parents say...
Teachers say...
Friends are going to do...
Exams...
What do I really want?

In the exercises on the next four pages list the things you like doing best, the things you need to do, the things you are good at, and the pressures which you face. The value to be gained in completing these exercises is that they will encourage you to logically assess the four main factors which influence your decision making. Try to relate your responses with education or work options in mind. Consider the following examples as an indication of how to complete the exercises.

'I LIKE' EXAMPLE

I LIKE	SKILLS GAINED	I CAN USE THESE
1 COMPUTERS	Keyboard skills. Knowledge of software.	As a computer programmer and in many other jobs. In leisure activities.
2 ANIMALS	Understanding needs of animals. Taking part in animal charities and voluntary work.	I could work with animals. I understand how charities work. This could be useful in many work areas.

'PRESSURES' EXAMPLE

THE FIVE GREATEST PRESSURES ON ME ARE	WHY ARE THEY DIFFICULT?	HOW CAN I RESOLVE THEM?
1 To get a good job when I leave school/college.	It is very hard to find ANY job. I am unsure where to look. I don't know if I can get a job or if I will like the world of work.	Visit Careers Officer. Be clearer as to what I want and then find out where to look and how to apply. Ask friends and relatives about different types of work.

I LIKE

FIVE THINGS I LIKE BEST	SKILLS I HAVE GAINED	I CAN USE THESE SKILLS
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

THINGS I NEED TO DO

FIVE THINGS I NEED TO DO IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS	HOW WILL I DO THEM?	WHAT OPTIONS ARE OPEN TO ME IF I FAIL?
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

I AM GOOD AT

FIVE THINGS I AM GOOD AT	SKILLS I HAVE GAINED	I CAN USE THESE SKILLS
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

PRESSURES

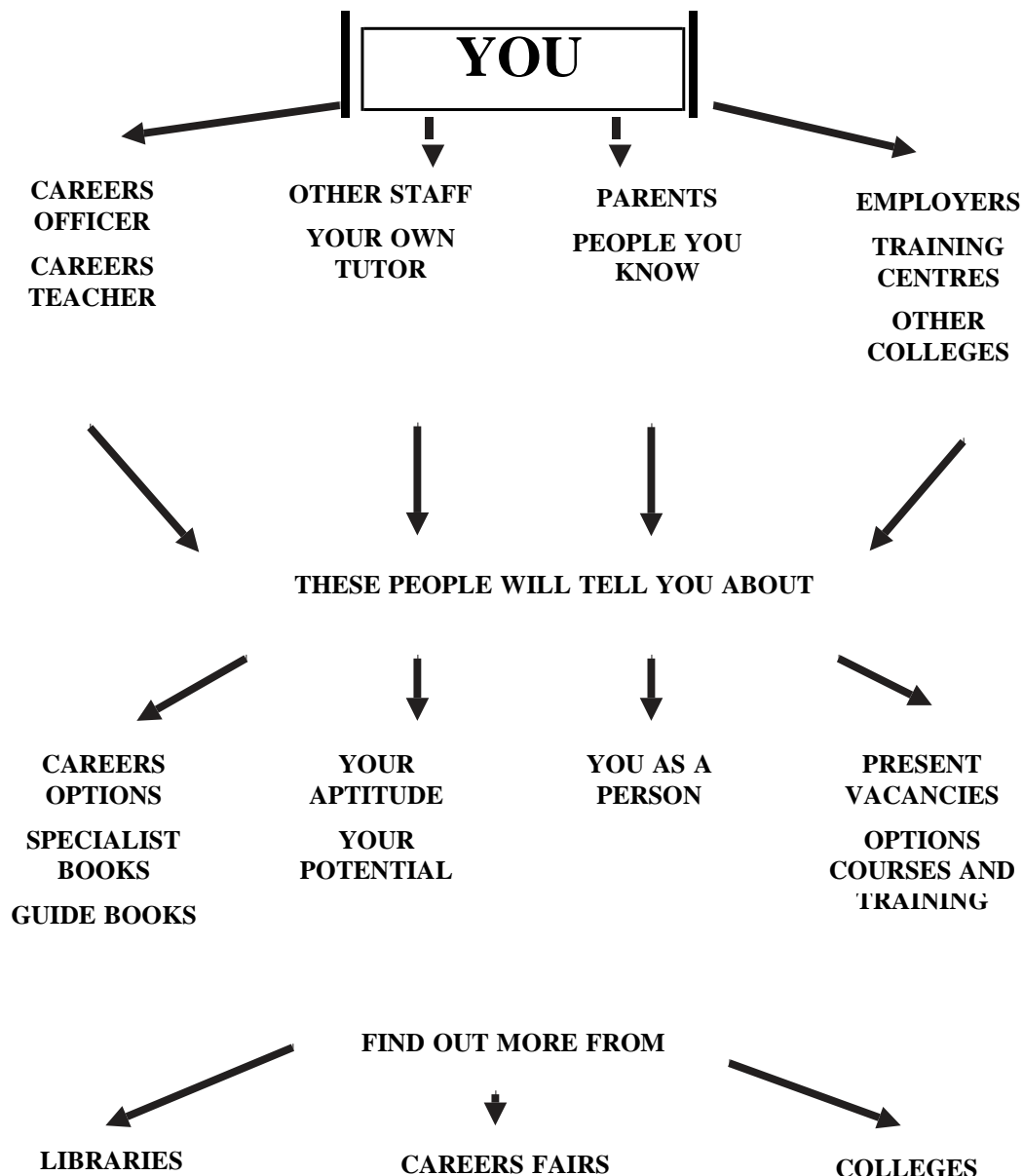
THE FIVE GREATEST PRESSURES ON ME ARE	WHY ARE THEY DIFFICULT?	HOW CAN I RESOLVE THEM?
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

FINDING OUT AND GETTING HELP

Making decisions about anything can be quite difficult because by deciding to follow one path it is necessary to close other options down, sometimes permanently. Often you will not know whether something is good for you until you have already committed yourself to it and burned your other bridges in the process. It is for this reason that seeking help is vital.

Some people feel embarrassed when asking for help or feel that it is a negative comment on their lack of knowledge and inability to solve their own problems. This is not true. Realising that you need help and then proceeding to take advantage of the help and advice on offer is a sign of maturity and understanding.

Always ask more than one person. It is in your interest to spread the net as wide as possible so that you end up with a balanced and more complete picture.



If you decide to choose to continue your education it is important to look at the reasons for this. There are positive and negative reasons why people make these choices. Make sure that you are making a decision for positive reasons.

POSITIVE REASONS

You want to follow your intellectual interests. You may be particularly good at a subject and want to follow it up at a higher level.

You want to increase the level of your qualifications. You realise that in order to follow the career of your choice you need to gain higher qualifications.

Job prospects. You realise that if you gain higher qualifications you will be able to secure a better job, or enter your desired profession at a higher level.

Independence. You may feel that if you get the opportunity to go to university you will become a more independent and confident person.

NEGATIVE REASONS

Impressing others. Choosing to go into higher education simply to try to impress others is a bad idea.

The wrong course. Choosing a higher status course in order to be better than other people is very foolish.

Following the herd. Just because many of your friends are going to make the higher education choice does not mean that you should automatically follow them.

Following a friend. Choosing the same options as your best friend might be a good idea for the first few weeks but in the long term it is a very poor reason.

Nothing else to do. If you choose to continue your education just because there does not seem to be any other option it might be a good idea to stop and think again.

You may be able to think of other positive and negative reasons for choosing to enter higher education. The important point to remember is that the choice requires a commitment of at least one year from you and up to three or more years for some courses. Before committing yourself you must be sure that you are making the choice for the right reasons.

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT A HIGHER EDUCATION COURSE.

When you are trying to decide which higher education course you prefer there are several questions which you should ask yourself. The following exercise is asking you to consider each question individually and to actually find the answer by researching the course you are interested in and what it has to offer.

Have you studied the course already at a basic level?

Did you find it easy or hard?

Is the course you are thinking of choosing an easy course?

Why are you interested in the course?

Which parts are you particularly interested in?

Are the other parts going to be boring?

How many subjects will you study?

Do you need to study any other subjects as well?

Are any of the subjects completely new to you?

Is the course practical?

Will the course offer work or 'hands on' experience?

What chance will you have of getting a job at the end of the course?

In employment terms how useful is this course?

Will the course prepare you for a narrow or wide scope in employment?

In personal terms, how useful is this course?

What attendance is required?

What is the year by year structure of the course?

How is the course assessed?

What other facilities does the college offer?

What sort of reputation does the college have?

What do other colleges offer which is better than this choice?

Let's look at the positive and negative reasons for choosing to enter employment.

POSITIVE REASONS

Enough education. You may feel that you have reached a stage where you are happy with the level of education which you have attained.

A good job offer. You have a job to go to which is a job you want to do and are suitably qualified for.

Other job offers. You have been offered a job which is not ideal but you will take it because you need to work.

NEGATIVE REASONS

Enough education. You feel that you have spent enough time in education and cannot see why you bother to do it. Perhaps you have the wrong attitude or are doing the wrong courses. Try a re-think about your position.

I would rather work. You feel you want to work but are unsure why. It seems that it is time for a change.

A job to go to. You have been offered a job which you do not like much and which you know in your heart you will not be able to stick for long. But it's something to do, isn't it?

In the space above continue with the list which has been started. Do any of the negatives ring true for you? How can you turn negatives around to make them more positive?

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK IF YOU CHOOSE EMPLOYMENT

Some people who choose employment simply jump head first into the first job which comes their way. This is understandable if they have been out of work for a long time or if their circumstances dictate that they need to work. In the long term, however, it is better to make the right decisions about which work area and job you go for because it will lead to greater satisfaction and stability. Consider these key questions about employment.

What sort of job do I want?

What is the best I can hope for?

What is the bottom line below which I will not go?

Are the types of jobs I want readily available?

Where should I look for vacancies?

When are these jobs advertised?

What are the duties of the job?

What are the hours of work?

How much will I get paid?

What are the prospects of promotion?

What are the prospects of earning more money?

What are the long term prospects of the company?

If I wanted to change my job what else would I be able to do?

How much re-training and re-skilling would I require?

Where will I be in three years time?

There are many more questions which could be considered when thinking about entering employment. The questions above outline some difficult questions which you must ask yourself. It is worth remembering that once you make a decision about the type of work you want to go for you are making a decision which effectively closes other options to you. If you work for several years in one type of employment you would almost certainly need retraining before you could enter another area.

APPRAISAL SHEET 1

17

ATTITUDE AND DISPOSITION

EXAMPLE

5 words which describe me best

(from page 2 exercise)

SENSIBLE

HELPFUL

COMMITTED

SERIOUS

MODERATE

3 skills areas which I use most

(from page 5 exercise)

ORGANISATION

PRACTICAL

ANALYTICAL

Things I like

(from page 8 exercise)

WRITING FOR COLLEGE MAGAZINE

VOLUNTARY WORK

SPORTS

I choose higher education to

(from page 13 exercise)

FOLLOW INTELLECTUAL INTERESTS

DEVELOP INDEPENDENCE

DEVELOP SOCIAL SKILLS

Eventual employment aim

SOCIAL WORK

5 words which describe me best

3 skills areas which I use most

Things I like

I choose higher education to

Eventual employment aim

APPRAISAL SHEET 1

17

SKILLS AND PROBLEM SOLVING

EXAMPLE

Skills

(from page 5 exercise)

I HAVE SKILLS IN:

WRITING - ARTICLES AND REPORTS

VERBAL - GOOD PUBLIC SPEAKER

ANALYTICAL - GOOD PROBLEM SOLVER

I am particularly good at

(from page 10 exercise)

ORGANISING EVENTS -

CHARITY AND VOLUNTARY

ENGLISH

MATHEMATICS

SOCIAL SCIENCES

Pressures I am under

(from page 11 exercise)

TO DO WELL ACADEMICALLY

TO GET TO UNIVERSITY

How will I resolve them?

DEVELOP EFFECTIVE PLAN FOR STUDY
AND REVISION

SEEK HELP IF REQUIRED

I choose higher education to

(from page 13 exercise)

FOLLOW INTELLECTUAL INTERESTS

GET A DEGREE

BETTER JOB PROSPECTS

Eventual employment aim

SOCIAL WORK

Skills

I am particularly good at

Pressures I am under

How will I resolve them?

I choose higher education to

Eventual employment aim