

THE JOB SEARCH

A practical guide to finding your next opportunity

A new role can bring excitement, uncertainty and change. Giving yourself time to reflect, prepare and take manageable steps can help you approach your search with greater confidence.

This guide helps you understand what you want from work, recognise the value you offer and build a focused job search. Use the worksheets at your own pace and revisit them as your plans develop.

1. THE SIX STAGES OF A JOB SEARCH

- **Stage 1: Self-assessment.** Identify your strengths, interests, priorities and practical needs.
- **Stage 2: Creating your CV.** Present relevant experience, skills and achievements clearly.
- **Stage 3: Finding opportunities.** Research employers, use suitable job sites and connect with recruiters and your network.
- **Stage 4: Making applications.** Tailor each application to the role and follow the employer's instructions.
- **Stage 5: The selection process.** Prepare evidence and examples for interviews, assessments and other selection activities.
- **Stage 6: Considering an offer.** Review the role, working arrangements and written terms before making your decision.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The main focus is on stages 1 and 3: understanding yourself and finding suitable opportunities. The worksheets also provide material for your CV, applications and interviews.

Your next step: Begin with your priorities on page 2. Keep your completed worksheets and use the action plan on page 10 to turn your ideas into progress.

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2. UNDERSTANDING YOUR PRIORITIES

Before searching, think about the work you enjoy and the conditions that help you perform well. Consider your experience in paid work, volunteering, study, caring responsibilities or other activities.

QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU REFLECT

- Which tasks, subjects or interests hold your attention? What would you like to do more of in your next role?
- What are your strongest skills? Which skills would you like to develop or refresh?
- Do you prefer independent work, teamwork or a mixture? What management style helps you do your best work?
- What matters most to you: stability, purpose, progression, learning, flexibility or something else?
- What salary range do you need? Consider the overall package and practical costs, such as travel or childcare.
- Which hours and working patterns are realistic for you? Consider full-time, part-time, shifts, office-based, hybrid or remote work.
- How far can you reasonably travel? Would you consider relocating, retraining or changing sector?
- What support or adjustments would help you participate in recruitment and succeed in the role? You can discuss your needs with your recruiter or prospective employer.

SEPARATE ESSENTIALS FROM PREFERENCES

My three essentials for the next role

My preferences and where I can be flexible

Your priorities may change. Use these notes as a starting point rather than a fixed set of rules.

3. REVIEWING YOUR EXPERIENCE

Look back at your current or most recent role. If you are starting out or returning to work, use examples from study, volunteering, projects or other relevant experience.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR STRENGTHS

Our view of ourselves can differ from how others experience us. Ask a trusted colleague, former manager or other suitable contact what they see as your strengths and where you could develop. Look for specific examples and recurring themes.

Role, organisation or relevant activity

Main responsibilities and duties

What I do well, with an example

Skills or areas I would like to develop

Tasks and working conditions I would like to keep

Tasks or working conditions I would like to change

Repeat this review for other relevant roles. Use the patterns you identify to guide your choice of jobs and employers.

4. RECORDING YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS

Employers want to understand the difference you made. Record up to five examples using **action + outcome + impact**. Be clear about your own contribution and use figures only where you can support them.

Example: Introduced a shared customer enquiry tracker, reducing average response time from two days to one day over three months and helping the team prioritise urgent requests.

PROMPTS TO GET YOU STARTED

Think about a process you improved, someone you trained, a project you delivered, a problem you solved, a suggestion that was adopted, or time, cost or waste you reduced. Qualitative results, such as positive feedback, can also be useful.

1. What I did, the outcome and why it mattered

2. What I did, the outcome and why it mattered

3. What I did, the outcome and why it mattered

4. What I did, the outcome and why it mattered

5. What I did, the outcome and why it mattered

Keep employer and client information confidential. You can describe results in general terms where exact details are sensitive.

5. TARGETING ROLES AND EMPLOYERS

You may already know your next step, or you may be exploring several possibilities. Use your priorities and achievements to narrow your search to a manageable set of options.

BUILD A CLEAR TARGET PROFILE

- Choose two or three job titles to explore, including alternative titles employers may use for similar work.
- Identify sectors where your skills are useful. Consider transferable skills alongside direct industry experience.
- Research the employer's work, values, size, location, working arrangements and opportunities to develop.
- Compare job descriptions with your evidence. Distinguish essential requirements from desirable experience and note any development gaps.
- Use research to form questions. Employer websites and employee reviews can offer clues, but test your assumptions during conversations and interviews.

Target roles and alternative job titles

Sectors and employers to research

Why these roles suit me: relevant skills and evidence

Questions to ask and any development steps

You do not need to match every desirable criterion. Show how your relevant skills meet the role's needs and be honest about areas where you would need support.

6. FINDING OPPORTUNITIES

Use a mix of sources. Combining advertised vacancies, recruiter conversations, employer research and networking can broaden your view of the market.

JOB SITES AND EMPLOYER WEBSITES

- Search by job title, related keywords, location, salary and working pattern. Review the full advert before deciding whether to apply.
- Set relevant alerts where available, then review them regularly. Adjust searches if the results are too broad or too narrow.
- Check employers' own careers pages and follow their application instructions. Use a talent community or speculative application route only where offered or welcomed.
- Save the advert and person specification before applying so you can refer to them if the vacancy is later removed.

Examples to explore: [Reed](#), [Indeed](#), [LinkedIn Jobs](#) and [GOV.UK Find a job](#). Also look for specialist job sites and professional bodies relevant to your field.

WORKING WITH RECRUITERS

- Choose recruiters who understand your sector, level and location. Share an up-to-date CV and explain your priorities, availability and salary expectations.
- Discuss your achievements and the types of employer you would suit. Let your recruiter know about applications already made to help avoid duplicate submissions.
- Agree which opportunities you want to be considered for and how you would like to stay in touch. Ask where your CV will be sent.
- Ask about the recruitment process, timescales, interview preparation and feedback. Keep your recruiter informed if your circumstances change.

Halecroft Recruitment: Speak with your Halecroft consultant about suitable permanent, temporary, interim and contract opportunities, and the next steps in your search.

Job sites and their features can change. Examples are starting points, rather than endorsements or guarantees of suitable vacancies.

7. DIRECT APPROACHES AND NETWORKING

MAKING A DIRECT APPROACH

A thoughtful speculative approach may help you start a conversation with an employer you would like to work for. Research the organisation first and check whether it welcomes direct enquiries.

- Identify the appropriate contact, such as the recruitment team or relevant department manager, using publicly available business details.
- Explain briefly why the organisation interests you and offer two or three relevant strengths, supported by a short example.
- Make a clear, courteous request: ask about suitable opportunities, future hiring plans or the best way to register your interest.
- Follow the organisation's instructions. If no timescale is given, one polite follow-up after around a week can be reasonable; respect any request for no further contact.

BUILDING AND USING YOUR NETWORK

Start with people you already know, including former colleagues, clients, friends, professional contacts, alumni and people you have met through volunteering. A small, relevant network is a useful starting point.

- Explain the kinds of role you are exploring and ask for insight, advice or an introduction where appropriate.
- Attend relevant industry events, professional groups or online discussions. Show interest in others and contribute where you can.
- Keep your professional profile accurate and consistent with your CV. Check your visibility settings if your search is confidential.
- Ask permission before sharing someone's details or naming them as a referee. Thank contacts for their time and let them know when their advice has helped.

PLAN YOUR CONVERSATIONS

Three people or organisations to contact and what I will ask

Practise a short introduction aloud: your background, the value you offer and the type of opportunity you are seeking.

8. EXPLORING DIFFERENT WAYS TO WORK

A permanent role is one option. Depending on your goals and circumstances, temporary, fixed-term, interim, contract or freelance work may also be worth exploring.

UNDERSTAND THE OPPORTUNITY

- **Temporary work:** Can offer experience across different teams or organisations. Check assignment length, expected hours, pay arrangements and the notice required.
- **Fixed-term employment:** Usually has a stated end date or end point. Ask why the role is fixed term and whether any extension is possible, without assuming it will happen.
- **Interim or contract assignments:** May focus on a defined project, specialist need or period of cover. Clarify deliverables, reporting lines, duration and how the engagement is arranged.
- **Freelance or project work:** Involves providing services for agreed work. Consider how you would find clients, price your work, manage administration and plan for gaps between projects.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE AGREEING

- What work is expected, where will it be carried out and what hours or availability are required?
- Who is engaging and paying me? What rate or salary is offered, and when will payment be made?
- What does the quoted package include? Ask about holiday arrangements, expenses, equipment and any deductions relevant to the engagement.
- What written terms apply, how can the arrangement end, and what support or training is available?

Working arrangements differ. Read the written terms and seek appropriate advice if you are unsure about employment status, tax or other obligations before committing.

Options I would consider and questions I need answered

Compare the whole opportunity: Balance flexibility and variety with your need for predictable income, support, development and stability.

9. SEARCHING SAFELY AND CONFIDENTLY

PROTECT YOUR INFORMATION

- Check the organisation and recruiter independently before sharing sensitive information. Use contact details from the organisation's official website to verify an unexpected approach.
- Be cautious about pressure to act immediately, vague job descriptions, unrealistic pay or requests for upfront payments. Pause and verify the opportunity before proceeding.
- Check privacy and visibility settings before uploading a CV. Keep bank details, identity documents and unnecessary personal information off publicly searchable CVs.
- Employers and recruiters may need identity or eligibility checks later in the process. Confirm who is requesting documents, why they need them and how to send them securely.
- If you suspect fraud, stop the conversation and report the advert or account. If you have sent money, contact your bank promptly. See [Report Fraud: recruitment scams](#) for guidance.

USING AI TO SUPPORT YOUR SEARCH

- AI tools can help you brainstorm search terms, organise examples or practise interview questions. Treat their suggestions as drafts and check them carefully.
- Keep your experience and achievements accurate. Do not invent qualifications, results or responsibilities, and make sure you can explain every claim.
- Remove personal, client and employer-confidential information before using an external tool. Check its privacy settings and follow any employer instructions about AI use in applications or assessments.

LOOK AFTER YOUR CONFIDENCE

Set realistic search sessions and make time for breaks. A delayed response or unsuccessful application does not define your value. Ask for feedback where possible and use what is helpful to refine your approach.

Keep the focus on progress: A useful conversation, a stronger example or a clearer target can all move your search forward, even before you receive an interview invitation.

10. YOUR JOB SEARCH ACTION PLAN

Choose a manageable routine that fits your circumstances. Prioritise relevant, well-prepared applications and useful conversations over a fixed number of submissions.

MY NEXT THREE ACTIONS

1. Action and target date

2. Action and target date

3. Action and target date

KEEP A RECORD OF YOUR PROGRESS

For each opportunity, record the employer, role, source, closing date, date applied, CV version, contact, current status and next action. Use a separate sheet if you need more space.

Employer / role	Applied / closing date	Status / next action / date

CHECK BEFORE YOU APPLY

- Match your examples to the role, check spelling and contact details, and follow the requested format and instructions.
- Review your progress weekly: which sources and approaches are helping, and what will you change?

Further support: [National Careers Service: careers advice](#) and [networking guidance](#). Job search links on page 6 and fraud guidance on page 9 were checked in October 2026.