

Your future starts now

Have you really thought about the sort of job or career you'd like to have in say three years time? Despite the recession, it needn't be more of the same; with some extra training or 'up-skilling' your prospects could be very different. For career ideas and an idea of what different jobs involve and what pay you can expect go to the National Careers Service.

<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk>

You don't have to study for years, be a full time student or move away from your home and work. You can study locally so it's worth doing some research to see what your local colleges and universities offer for people who want to start, change or develop their career.

Skills for Life courses

These are designed to plug gaps in your basic education and help you develop the skills you use in everyday life, such as reading, writing, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). They can also help you boost your CV or move on to further study. Find out what your local college is offering. Courses are available from entry level up to level 2 (GCSE level) for anyone who:

- is over 16 years of age
- has left compulsory full-time education
- doesn't have an up-to-date English or maths qualification at level 2 on the National Qualifications Framework (such as a GCSE)

Leisure Courses (formerly part of Adult Education provision)

Designed to be fun, these courses also show how easy it is to pick up new skills. A range of language courses can take you from holiday Spanish to A level Spanish. Art courses cover everything from traditional Chinese brush techniques to contemporary design packages. There are dance classes, creative writing workshops and ideas for decorating your Christmas cake. Learning comes in all shapes and sizes, and doing a course like this can give you the confidence to move on to a more work-related course or qualification later on. Keep an eye on the local paper and look at the websites of your local college and local council.

Building up job qualifications

Further education courses allow you to explore new career options in bite-sized chunks so that you can gradually move up the academic levels. Look at the prospectus of your local college. Here are some ideas:

- You might start with an Introduction to Digital Photography and develop a more focussed interest in Multimedia and Graphic Design.
- Just twenty weeks on a level 2 Counselling Skills course could lead you on to a fully recognised qualification.

- After spending one afternoon for seven weeks on an introductory Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) course you could progress to a Professional Diploma or Certificate in Marketing.
- And if you ever wondered about becoming a Personnel Manager, a one day a week course for a year would give you a CIPD Certificate in Personnel Practice and from there you could do the full training with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

Access courses

Another way of changing direction is via an Access course. These literally give you access to Higher Education even if you have few other qualifications. Most courses start in September and last a year (or two years if done part-time) and most introduce you to an area of work such as Health, Education, Business, or Science. Look at: www.accesstohe.ac.uk

Foundation Degrees

A Foundation Degree is good alternative if you want to work while you study at university level. Increasingly universities are offering degrees that are not only based partially or entirely in the workplace, but are jointly designed with employers. These are equivalent to the first two years of an honours degree. Look at Foundation Degrees in the South East: www.foundation-degrees-in-the-southeast.org.uk

The Open University

The OU is probably the biggest provider of short academic courses which provide an excellent introduction to studying at a higher level.

The 10 credit points 'Openings' courses are designed for mature students who may not have studied for a long time (or not at all!). These courses are part-time, last up to 20 weeks, and start 4 times a year in March, June, September and November. The available subjects include health, management, the arts, the environment, psychology, sport and understanding children.

www.open.ac.uk/openings

The 30 credit points 'Working and Learning' (BU130) part-time course lasts 6 months and is designed to underpin further work based learning by developing effective performance at work.

www3.open.ac.uk/courses/bin/p12.dll?C01BU130

A short course might be a good introduction to the '2 plus 2' scheme where a student will study for 2 years with the OU by distance learning and then join a participating university for the final 2 years of full time study.

www.open.ac.uk/2plus2