

# The Older Worker's Portfolio Pack

The Centre for Work and Learning, University of Kent at Medway.  
It can be freely downloaded from [web address]

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### **The Fairplay Skills Assessment Pack**

These materials include some sections from the Fairplay Skills Assessment Pack, which was developed by the Fair Play for Older Workers Project. The Fairplay pack provides a toolkit for older workers to help them when applying for jobs, and this pack is designed to be used alongside it or on its own. The Fairplay Skills Assessment Pack is available from [www.fairplaypartnership.org.uk](http://www.fairplaypartnership.org.uk)



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# **Section 1. Getting to know yourself**

# What is the Portfolio Pack?

This Portfolio Pack has been developed to help you to think about your future career, set goals and plan how to achieve them. As an older worker you will have developed a wide range of knowledge, skills and experience that can be used in a variety of jobs. You will have gained some of your learning formally through training courses, or adult education classes or further or higher education. However, you will have learnt the vast majority informally ‘on the job’ or simply through your experiences outside work, for example through family responsibilities, voluntary work and social activities.

The materials in the Portfolio Pack will help you to:

- ‘Unpack’ the knowledge and skills you have acquired over the years
- Make informed choices about your future career
- Document your knowledge and skills so that potential employers can assess them
- ‘Make the case’ if you decide to go on to further study and want to claim credit for your existing knowledge and skills at an appropriate academic or professional level
- Find out what skills or knowledge gaps you may need to fill.

## How to use the Portfolio Pack

It is up to you how you use the Portfolio Pack. You may want to work through it from beginning to end, or you might simply choose to go through the sections that are most helpful to you. Whichever you decide is fine –

the most important thing is to do what works best for you.

Some sections of the Portfolio Pack include activities and case studies to help you to explore your priorities, needs and options for your future career.

This first section aims to help you to recognise the knowledge, skills and qualities you have developed throughout your life that will be attractive to potential employers. They may also help you to gain academic credit for courses of study, which can enable you to be exempted from part of the course if you can demonstrate that you already have the knowledge or skills it covers.

Section 2 looks at different values that might be important to you in work, and some areas of work these might apply to. It aims to give you ideas about new career directions you may be interested in. It then gives you an opportunity to conduct a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis to gain a clearer picture of any steps you need to take to help you move in the direction you want. Once you have gained a clearer idea of the direction you may like to pursue and any action you need to take, Section 3 explores how you might approach developing a learning portfolio to help you to achieve this. It also examines how you can present your knowledge, skills and qualities in your learning portfolio to help you with either job applications or applications for academic credit. Section 4 contains further information including a list of useful websites.

# Exploring your life experience

This section aims to help you to look at yourself and your aspirations by examining your life and the influences on it, and taking a step back to look at yourself through other people’s eyes. It also offers you an opportunity recognise your key skills and qualities and identify work areas in which you might use these.

## CV writing

A curriculum vitae (CV) is simply a record of your education and employment experience. These can be used for different reasons but are most commonly used to support job applications – they are an ideal way to set out

your knowledge, skills and experience to potential employers. Although your CV is a factual account of your life, it is up to you how much you reveal or conceal. There is no reason why it cannot provide a unique account of 'you' and stand out from all the rest that an employer will receive.

To help you produce a good CV we have included details of some techniques that will enable you to look back over your personal and working life and identify some of the skills and knowledge you have developed. They will also help to identify experiences that were and remain significant for you. In turn, this will help you to set out your future career and educational goals – and work out how to achieve them. If you enjoy using the internet, you can also get free online guidance in developing your CV by registering with the Career Change Centre at: [www.careerchangecentre.org.uk](http://www.careerchangecentre.org.uk).

The following activities are designed to help you take stock of your experience and act as a valuable trigger to memories and past learning experiences. They then enable you to look at yourself more objectively, as other people might see you, and at how you can give yourself the best chance of achieving your goals.

## Taking stock of your life experience

Activity 1 will help you to 'plot' or represent your life in a way that will help you to get an overview of important experiences and where you have developed knowledge and skills. It will also enable you to identify significant events or interests you may wish to explore in the future. Your life story will be personal to you – the activity can take as long as want – don't feel you have to rush it. The life story is something that people often return to as they develop a portfolio of their learning: it should help you to learn more about yourself and identify key influences. Activity 2 enables you

to identify the people who have had a significant influence on your life, as this can tell you a lot about yourself and the type of person you are. Activity 3 helps you to look at yourself through other people's eyes, to highlight areas, while Activity 4 enables you to recognise your key qualities.

### Activity 1. Telling your life story

On a piece of paper, try to tell your 'life story' – the 'headlines' that have made you what you are. Do this in a way that has most meaning for you. You might choose to note down important stages and landmarks along a line that represents your life, for example showing when you left school, changed jobs, met important people in your life or experienced events that had a major effect on your life. You can draw shapes and use different colours to reflect different aspects of your life, such as work, family and leisure. You might include places, objects, people and ideas that have influenced you. Some people prefer to describe their life using colourful drawings, while others prefer to draw simple lines and to write notes of key events and influences. The important thing is to tell your personal life story.

Now spend time looking and thinking carefully about what you have produced. Try to identify things that had particular significance for you, and how they affected your life. You might have included a particular event that you had long forgotten, but is clearly significant. What does your life story tell you about yourself – the type of person you, what you like to do and what you are good at?

## Activity 2. Significant influences in your life

The person you are, and the values you hold are often influenced by your family and other people you meet, and your relationships with them. Identifying the people who have had the greatest influence on your life (either in the past or present), therefore, can tell you a lot about yourself.

This exercise is designed to identify the people who have had a major influence on your life.

In the space opposite write in pencil the eight people who you think have had the most influence on your life. Don't worry about how accurate your first attempt is – you can rub out and change the names at any time. Remember: some people can assume enormous importance at a particular time in your life, and then disappear from it. However, it can be useful to remind yourself why a person might be important – and whether they share any characteristics or skills with other people who have been important to you. It doesn't matter in what order you add people to the list – it might be in order of importance, of the time you met them, or simply the order that they occur to you.

Now think about the key people you have identified:

- Are any of them a surprise?
- Have you included anyone you have recently (or currently) worked with as an influence? If so, why?
- Think about each of the people you have identified and make a note of any specific characteristics or skills they have that you value.

### Key people in my life

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

### Activity 3. Seeing yourself through someone else's eyes

When applying for jobs, we spend so much time thinking about ourselves and our skills, we forget to think about how we might appear through the eyes of a potential employer.

This activity is designed to help you to take a more objective view of yourself – and identify things you might not have seen before.

#### **Write yourself a reference**

Write a short reference for yourself – as if it were someone else describing you. Your reference should be fair and honest – giving justice to your strengths, while at the same time suggesting your weaknesses. Writing about yourself in this way means you can really present yourself in a positive way – and value your skills and knowledge without feeling self-conscious. And since this is for your eyes only, you can be totally honest about yourself.

#### **A reference from a colleague's perspective**

Now write a paragraph about yourself from the perspective of a colleague. This can be either someone with whom you

have recently worked, or are currently working. It's a good idea to choose someone working at roughly the same level and with similar responsibilities. Again, try to write a fair and honest account – including an accurate picture of the 'type of person' a colleague might describe you as being at work.

#### **Other perspectives**

There are many other references you could write about yourself. If you find this activity useful, try writing a reference about yourself from one of the following perspectives:

- A manager
- A client
- Someone who is managed by you.

#### **What have you learnt?**

Look at the references you have written and ask yourself:

- What do these references reveal about you?
- Have they highlighted aspects of yourself (your character and/or your behaviour) that you had not thought about before?
- What have you learnt about yourself?



## Activity 4. Recognising your key qualities and skills

Understanding key qualities and skills you possess will help you with applications to go on courses or to gain academic credit to exempt you from part of a course, and to understand how you can make yourself attractive to potential employers.

The tables on the following pages help you to identify these key qualities and skills in yourself, and to think about how you have used them. The accompanying information sheets show you how to recognise where they are included in job advertisements. The sheets also list questions employers might ask you that will enable you to demonstrate each quality or skill. Identifying them in yourself and in job advertisements will help you to identify jobs that require the qualities you already possess, or which ones you may need to develop in order to move into a profession you would like to join.

The qualities can be transferred to many different fields of work, while technical skills may be more specific to a particular area or job.

Once you have identified your key qualities and skills you can summarise them to provide an easy reference to help you to prepare for course or job applications or applications for academic credit.

The activity covers the following qualities and skills:

- Communication
- Coping with pressure
- Flexibility
- Interpersonal skills
- Organisation
- Problem-solving
- Teamworking
- Technical skills.

## Identifying your key qualities and skills: Communication

	Very easily	Easily	Not very easily	With difficulty	Examples of how you have used this ability – where, when, how, in what way
<b>1</b> I can talk to all sorts of people					
<b>2</b> I can listen carefully for long periods					
<b>3</b> I can explain complicated ideas simply					
<b>4</b> I can change my views after discussion					
<b>5</b> I can write things so other people can understand them					

Add any further examples of communication skills you have:

## Identifying your key qualities and skills: Communication

Words used in job adverts that indicate a requirement for this ability:

- Communication skills
- Presentation skills
- Listening skills
- Customer service
- People management
- Negotiation skills
- Written skills.

Questions employers may ask to gain evidence of your experience of this ability:

- Give me an example of a time you had to communicate a complex idea or complex instructions to others
- Tell me about a time when you have persuaded others to adopt your point of view
- Tell me about a time when you have needed to understand a set of instructions

Describe a situation when you had to write something complex and make it clear to people without specialist skills in this area:

Record a sentence that describes your communication skills (this can be used as part of the Personal Profile section of your CV)

Record as many examples as you can (making use of the above questions) of situations when you have used this ability. These can be used in your written job application and during the job interview.

## Identifying your key qualities and skills: Coping with pressure

	Very easily	Easily	Not very easily	With difficulty	Examples of how you have used this ability – where, when, how, in what way
<b>1</b> I can cope under pressure					
<b>2</b> I can concentrate on one thing for a length of time					
<b>3</b> I can deal with difficult situations					
<b>4</b> I can handle problems					

Add any further examples of coping skills you have:

## Identifying your key qualities and skills: Coping with pressure

Words used in job adverts that indicate a requirement for this ability:

- Ever-changing environment
- Rapidly growing company
- Broad range of objectives
- Exciting role
- Pressurised role
- Challenging role.

Questions employers may ask to gain evidence of your experience of this ability:

- Tell me about a time when you have changed your priorities to meet others' expectations
- Describe a time when you altered your behaviour to fit a situation
- Tell me about a time when you had to change your plans to take into account new information or changing priorities.
- Tell me about a time when you have worked under pressure to meet tight deadlines.

Record a sentence that describes your ability to cope with pressure (this can be used as part of the Personal Profile section of your CV):

Record as many examples as you can (making use of the above questions) of situations when you have used this ability. These can be used in your written job application and during the job interview.

## Identifying your key qualities and skills: Flexibility

	Very easily	Easily	Not very easily	With difficulty	Examples of how you have used this ability – where, when, how, in what way
<b>1</b> I can adapt to new situations and changing demands					
<b>2</b> I can deal with more than one thing at a time					
<b>3</b> I can recognise and accept differing interests and needs					
<b>4</b> I can handle new tasks and challenges					

Add any further examples of when you have been flexible:

## Identifying your key qualities and skills: Flexibility

Words used in job adverts that indicate a requirement for this ability:

- Rapidly growing company
- Wide and varied role
- Broad range of objectives
- Must be adaptable
- Willing to work flexibly.

Questions employers may ask to gain evidence of your experience of this ability:

- Tell me about a time when you had to change your point of view or your plans
- Tell me about a time when you have taken on new challenges
- Tell me about a times when you have 'juggled' different tasks.

Record a sentence that describes your ability to be flexible (this can be used as part of the Personal Profile section of your CV):

Record as many examples as you can (making use of the above questions) of situations when you have used this ability. These can be used in your written job application and during the job interview.

## Identifying your key qualities and skills: Interpersonal skills

	Very easily	Easily	Not very easily	With difficulty	Examples of how you have used this ability – where, when, how, in what way
<b>1</b> I can work with people of other cultures					
<b>2</b> I can motivate people					
<b>3</b> I can manage others					
<b>4</b> I can offer and accept constructive feedback					

Add any further examples of your interpersonal skills:



## Identifying your key qualities and skills: Interpersonal skills

Words used in job adverts that indicate a requirement for this ability:

- Client relationships
- Team skills
- Customer service
- Dealing with a broad range of clients
- Role involves dealing with people on all levels.

Questions employers may ask to gain evidence of your experience of this ability:

- Describe a situation in which you have developed effective relationships with colleagues or clients
- Tell me about a time when you relied on a contact in your network to help you
- Give me an example of a time when you deliberately attempted to build a rapport with a colleague or customer.

Record a sentence that describes your interpersonal skills (this can be used as part of the Personal Profile section of your CV):

Record as many examples as you can (making use of the above questions) of situations when you have used this ability. These can be used in your written job application and during the job interview.

## Identifying your key qualities and skills: Organisation

	Very easily	Easily	Not very easily	With difficulty	Examples of how you have used this ability – where, when, how, in what way
<b>1</b> I can convert objectives into action					
<b>2</b> I can work to a deadline					
<b>3</b> I can collect information and analyse it					
<b>4</b> I can use my time effectively					

Add any further examples of your organisational skills:

## Identifying your key qualities and skills: Organisation

Words used in job adverts that indicate a requirement for this ability:

- Organisational skills
- Planning skills
- Resource management
- Time management
- Management
- Tight deadlines.

Questions employers may ask to gain evidence of your experience of this ability:

- Tell me about a time when you had to manage large workloads and how you prioritised these
- Tell me about a time when you were asked to undertake a task which conflicted with existing priorities;
- Tell me about a time when you had to meet a very tight deadline on a particular task.

Record a sentence that describes your planning and organisational skills skill (this can be used as part of the Personal Profile section of your CV)

Record as many examples as you can (making use of the above questions) of situations when you have used this ability. These can be used in your written job application and during the job interview.

## Identifying your key qualities and skills: Solving problems

	Very easily	Easily	Not very easily	With difficulty	Examples of how you have used this ability – where, when, how, in what way
<b>1</b> I can deal with difficult situations					
<b>2</b> I can develop new ideas					
<b>3</b> I can turn solutions into actions					
<b>4</b> I can take responsibility for getting things done					

Add any further examples of your problem-solving skills:

## Identifying your key qualities and skills: Solving problems

Words used in job adverts that indicate a requirement for this ability:

- Problem-solving
- Project management
- Change management
- Using your initiative
- Continuous improvement.

Questions employers may ask to gain evidence of your experience of this ability:

- Tell me about a time when you analysed a problem and identified a solution
- Tell me about a time when you identified a better way of doing things
- Tell me about a time when you set and achieved a goal
- Describe something you have done to improve the performance of your work unit.

Record a sentence that describes your problem-solving skills (this can be used as part of the Personal Profile section of your CV)

Record as many examples as you can (making use of the above questions) of situations when you have used this ability. These can be used in your written job application and during the job interview.

## Identifying your key qualities and skills: Technical skills

	Very easily	Easily	Not very easily	With difficulty	Examples of how you have used this ability – where, when, how, in what way
<b>1</b> I am able to apply my technical knowledge directly to the roles I am interested in					
<b>2</b> I am able to use IT/computer packages					
<b>3</b> I can quickly acquire technical knowledge relevant to the role I am undertaking					

Add any further examples of your technical skills:

## Identifying your key qualities and skills: Technical skills

Words used in job adverts that indicate a requirement for this ability:

- Strong IT skills
- Professional
- Qualified
- Technical role
- Complex role
- ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence) qualification
- CLAIT qualification.

Questions employers may ask to gain evidence of your experience of this ability:

- Employers are likely to ask direct questions relating to the technical skills required in the role. These will be designed to test your specialist knowledge in a particular area
- It is also likely that you will be given some form of practical test to establish your level of knowledge (particularly for IT skills). You should be advised of this before you attend for interview.

Record a sentence that describes your specific technical skills (this can be used as part of the Personal Profile section of your CV). If IT skills are relevant to the role it is always helpful to include any qualifications or levels of proficiency in software programs (e.g. EDCL/CLAIT qualifications or record BASIC/INTERMEDIATE/ADVANCED)

Record as many examples as you can (making use of the above questions) of situations when you have used this ability. These can be used in your written job application and during the job interview.

## Identifying your key qualities and skills: Teamworking

	Very easily	Easily	Not very easily	With difficulty	Examples of how you have used this ability – where, when, how, in what way
<b>1</b> I can bring my strengths and interests into the group					
<b>2</b> I can compromise for the sake of what we are trying to do					
<b>3</b> I can support others in the group					
<b>4</b> I can accept different views					

Add any further examples of when you have worked as a team:



## Identifying your key qualities and skills: Teamworking

Words used in job adverts that indicate a requirement for this ability:

- Working as part of a team
- Team skills
- Friendly environment
- Team spirit
- People orientation.

Questions employers may ask to gain evidence of your experience of this ability:

- Tell me about a time when you worked successfully as a member of a team
- Describe a situation where you were successful in getting people to work together effectively
- Describe a situation where you were a member (not a leader) of a team and a conflict arose within the team
- Describe a time when you have needed to change your approach to take account of someone else's view.

Record a sentence that describes your ability to work as part of a team (this can be used as part of the Personal Profile section of your CV)

Record as many examples as you can (making use of the above questions) of situations when you have used this ability. These can be used in your written job application and during the job interview.

# Where can I use my qualities and skills?

Activity 4 helped you to identify particular qualities and skills you can offer to potential employers. The list below identifies the main qualities and skills required in a range of work areas. This may help you to identify what type of work might suit you.

## Accountancy

- Coping with pressure
- Organisation
- Problem-solving
- Technical skills

## Customer service / hospitality / retail

- Communication skills
- Coping with pressure
- Flexibility
- Interpersonal skills
- Teamworking

## Health / medical / social

- Coping with pressure
- Communication skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Teamworking
- Technical skills

## Human resources

- Communication skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Organisation
- Problem-solving
- Technical skills

## IT/internet

- Coping with pressure
- Organisation
- Problem-solving
- Teamworking
- Technical skills

## Legal

- Communication skills
- Coping with pressure
- Flexibility
- Problem-solving
- Technical skills

## Management

- Coping with pressure
- Flexibility
- Interpersonal skills
- Organisation
- Problem-solving

## Manual / production

- Coping with pressure
- Flexibility
- Problem-solving
- Teamworking
- Technical skills

## Office work / clerical

- Communication skills
- Flexibility
- Organisation
- Problem-solving
- Teamworking

## Sales / marketing / media

- Communication skills
- Coping with pressure
- Flexibility
- Interpersonal skills
- Teamworking

## Secretarial / PA / administration

- Coping with pressure
- Flexibility
- Interpersonal skills
- Organisation
- Problem-solving

## Training

- Communication skills
- Flexibility
- Interpersonal skills
- Organisation
- Teamworking

## **Section 2. Finding your direction**

# The right job for you

Finding the right job for you involves narrowing down the range available to find the ones that suit your skills and qualities, as you did in Section 1. However, it is also important for your job to suit you personally, and to give you the things you want from working.

In this section you can move on to look more specifically at what is important to you about the type of work you do. Understanding your values about work will help you to gain a better idea of what type of job may suit you.

Once you have done this, you have the opportunity to look at factors that may help you to move in the direction you have identified, and actions you may need to take to improve your chances. You may then want to obtain further advice from a careers counsellor or other source of help and information, to help you to move in the right direction for you.

## Activity 1. What's important to you in a job?

Below is a list of 17 values that relate to work. Some will be more important to you than others. Rank the values in order of importance for you (1 being most important, 17 being least important). You may find that you change your mind as you work through the list.

**Acceptable working conditions**

Working in a particular environment that suits you

**Appreciation**

Having your skills and knowledge recognised and appreciated; being taken seriously and given credit for a job well done

**Autonomy**

Being able to make decisions; to have maximum control over your day-to-day work

**Being a practitioner**

Practising a profession; working with clients and others

**Convenient hours**

Working hours to suit your needs and interests (this might include weekends, full-time, part-time etc)

**Free time**

Having the time to pursue interests outside of work

**Fulfilment**

Working in a job that supports values that are important to you

**Helping people**

Enabling others to improve the quality of their lives

**Job security**

Having a job that does not carry the threat of redundancy

**Learning opportunities**

The chance to learn new skills and knowledge, both outside and within the context of work

**Managerial responsibilities**

Managing and organising the work of others; developing policies and implementing procedures

**Money**

Earning a reasonable salary; having the opportunity to earn money through overtime and outside of work if necessary

**Promotion prospects**

Having the opportunity to excel in your job and to be promoted

**Recognition**

Carrying out work that others will admire you for

**Stress-free work**

Doing work that is free of pressure, anxiety and deadlines

**Variety**

Having a job that offers the chance to do different kinds of work, and develop new skills and work in different ways

**Working relationships**

Working as a team; working well with others; developing friendships with colleagues

Now spend some time looking through the list. What factors may affect the way you approach looking for a career change or development? You may find it useful to consider how much your current job fulfils your values and what changes you would like to make in a future career.

# Your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Thinking about applying for a new job can be daunting. Many older workers feel they are ‘past it’ and have nothing to offer employers. But the opposite is often true. Older workers have more experience than their younger colleagues, and often have a wide range of experience and knowledge to bring to the workplace. And since their lives tend to be more settled and established, they also tend to be far more ‘stable’ employees than younger people, less likely to stay only for a short time. A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis is a good way to help you start assessing your skills and knowledge. If you have not done this before, it’s a straightforward process that will help you think differently about yourself and your future job.

Think about yourself in relation to each of the four areas strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. You will probably have identified some of these in Activity 4 of Section 1. The SWOT analysis enables you to look carefully at how they might affect you.

## Your strengths

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As an older worker you will have many strengths upon which to build. They may be characteristics: ‘I am a good listener’, ‘I am good at motivating people’; abilities: ‘I am good at prioritising work’, ‘I am good at working to deadlines’, skills: ‘I can drive an HGV’, ‘I am good at designing things’ or knowledge: ‘I have considerable knowledge of computing’, ‘I know the stationery market well’. Remember you are writing this list for your eyes only: you don’t have to be modest! The aim of this activity is for you to identify your strengths. Here are some areas for you to think about in order to identify your strengths:

### Skills

Don’t just think about what you have done at work, but the skills you have gained more broadly – like organising a youth club or managing people. It is important to recognise these skills as they are transferable and can be used in a variety of work situations.

### Work experience

Make a note of all the work you have done – including part-time, voluntary and unpaid activities. No matter what type of work it was, you will have developed all kinds of knowledge, skills and work experience – much of which might be transferable to different working environments.

### Qualifications

This includes any formal learning you have done, such as training courses you have attended, or modules you might have completed – even if it wasn’t assessed or examined. Include qualifications you have gained that relate to activities/interests outside of work, such as a First Aid certificate etc.

### Attitudes

It’s a good idea to jot down some of the attitudes you hold that might be useful in a working context – for example seeing punctuality as important; valuing colleagues etc.

## Your weaknesses

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We all have weaknesses. Identifying them is useful because it will help you to identify areas for improvement. Again, these could be characteristics ‘I suffer fools badly’, ‘I am impatient if things don’t progress quickly’; abilities: ‘I am not very good at database management’, ‘I find it difficult to work with budgets’, or knowledge: ‘I am out of date in my current practice area’, ‘I’m not very familiar with the area as I haven’t lived here long’. Remember: don’t be hard on yourself – think of these less as weaknesses as areas you can work on and turn into strengths.

Here are some areas you might want to think about:

### **Skills**

Some of your technical skills might be out of date. What new skills do you need to learn? What skills do you think need updating?

### **Knowledge**

Do you think you have sufficient knowledge about your working practice? What new knowledge might you develop?

### **Attitudes**

Have you had problems at work that occurred more than once? These might show aspects of your character or attitudes that other people may find difficult to work with. While it can be difficult to change your character, recognising aspects that can lead to conflict with others can help you to avoid problems. For example, if you recognise that you can be impatient, you might find it useful to take a step back and look at the pressures other people are working under before expressing frustration.

You might want to discuss weaknesses you have identified with an information, advice and guidance practitioner. These people can help you explore what courses are available to you to update and develop your knowledge and skills. Friends can also be helpful, particularly in discussing more 'personal' weaknesses and how you might overcome them.

## **Opportunities**

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Older workers often feel that they have very few career opportunities. However, once you start researching what is available you are likely to be pleasantly surprised. In fact many people say they wish they had thought about their career options earlier!

Think about the networks around you (personal and work-related). Think about jobs you have always wanted to do, such as running your own business: it might not be too late to start a new career. Think about jobs that are available locally, regionally and nationally.

Opportunities come about for a range of reasons including:

### **Advances in technology**

This might be new inventions that lead to completely new businesses, or to radical changes in existing ones. At such times it may be easier to enter the field because everyone will need training and you won't be competing with people who already have lots of experience of the job.

### **Advances in the workplace**

Changes in the way work is organised or services are offered may offer opportunities to move into work that previously didn't suit you. For example, an employer may invest in new equipment that would make it possible for you to do a job that you would not have been able to do before – or make a job more interesting that you would previously not have enjoyed.

### **Changes in government policy**

These include the new legislation to outlaw age discrimination, and the drive to encourage employers to see the benefits of employing older workers.

### **Changes in society**

These include the demographic shift, which means there are fewer young people available to take jobs. Meanwhile, as more people live longer and healthier lives there are more older people who are willing and able to stay in work for longer.

## **Threats**

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Older workers are only too aware of the threats to their working lives. Nevertheless, identifying exactly what threatens yours will also help you to think about how to overcome these threats. What factors will stop you achieving what you want? These factors might be practical (such as the need to earn a certain amount of money, or care for family members), personal inhibition (lack of confidence in your own ability), or other general factors (for example, if you do not hold a relevant qualification). Remember: knowing what you want is one thing. The next

is working out a strategy for overcoming the barriers to achieving your goals.

Ask yourself:

- What are the obstacles to getting a job?
- What are the threats to my current job?
- Do any of my weaknesses threaten my current or future work?
- What changes at work threaten me and my work?

Try to be really honest about any fears you have. Looking at things that might interfere with getting the job you want will help you to overcome them. Try to be as objective as possible – this will make it easier to tackle the problems and issues you have identified.

### **Activity 2. Conducting your SWOT analysis**

Using the guidelines above, conduct a SWOT analysis on yourself, writing your findings in the grid on page 7. Once you have completed your SWOT take time to think about the points you have made in each of the areas described. Can you see any connections?

This activity should help you to focus on your strengths and begin to identify how best to tackle your weaknesses. It will also help you to recognise the opportunities available to you and any threats you face, which will give you the confidence to achieve your goals and the awareness to deal with potential difficulties.

Sections 1 and 2 of this pack have enabled you to look at your life experience and recognise your key qualities and skills. You have then been able to look at the requirements of different areas of work, and to explore the values that are important to you in a job. Having narrowed down the areas of work that may suit you, a SWOT analysis has enabled you to identify factors that can help you to move into your chosen area, as well as areas you may need to address to improve your chances of success. The next section looks at creating a learning portfolio to help you with applications for courses of study or academic credit, or to make you as attractive as possible to potential employers.



**Activity 2. SWOT analysis grid**

*Strengths*

*Weaknesses*

*Opportunities*

*Threats*

# **Section 3. Creating a learning portfolio**

# What is a learning portfolio?

A learning portfolio is simply a record of your experience, knowledge and skills. It can be used in a variety of ways, such as:

- To record any learning experiences you can show are relevant to particular occupational skills or occupational standards
- To provide evidence of your continuing professional development and competence when applying for jobs
- To provide evidence of your learning if you want your knowledge, skills and experiences to be assessed when applying for jobs
- To provide evidence of your learning if you want your knowledge, skills and experiences to be accredited in order to be accepted onto a course/programme of study, or to be exempted from a part of it.

In this section you will find practical advice on how to produce a learning portfolio. It includes information on how to write clear statements of competence to support examples of what you can do, together with advice on how to put a portfolio together. The aim is to help you to design and create a portfolio for the different purposes identified above.

The section looks at what you may want to include in your portfolio, how you might structure it and the steps you might need to take to construct your portfolio.

## Developing a portfolio for credit

The accreditation of prior learning (APL) is the process through which someone else can look at what you have learnt and decide whether it can be used for academic credit. This means you may be allowed to skip part of a course because you can prove that you have already learned it. The system works by dividing courses into credits at different academic levels – for example a course may consist of three modules, each of which is worth 60 credits and level 2. An APL claim may allow you to take only two modules to gain the qualification, if you can show that you already

have the knowledge and skills taught in one of the modules.

The APL process is not always easy and each college or university will have its own way of processing APL claims, and its own rules on how much credit students can be given through APL. This means it is important to check with the college or university you wish to study at before submitting a claim.

APL is used to describe different types of learning, which are described briefly below.

### **The accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL)**

This is the process of looking at how to give academic credit for learning you have acquired through formal study. For example, you might have completed a module of an Open University course, or studied short courses through your job, which can be counted as part of a particular academic course you would like to undertake. It doesn't mean that your learning has already been accredited, just that you have learned in a structured, or formal way. So, you might have simply attended a course and can prove what you have learned from it.

### **The accreditation of prior experiential learning (AEL)**

This is the process of giving credit for learning you have acquired through your experience, often informally, and unintentionally. We learn all the time, as we go through life. We learn from the jobs we do, the people we meet, our life and social situations. It is now possible to get this learning accredited through AEL. It is a lengthy process, because, you will need to begin by reflecting upon your past and identifying what you have learned, and then make a case to get this accredited. AEL is most commonly used if you do not have the appropriate entry qualifications when applying for a course, or, if you want to show an employer the wealth and depth of your experience. For example, the skills and knowledge you have gained through your working life.

## Accreditation

When you are making an APL claim you are usually asked to produce a portfolio. This is simply a collection of evidence which will support your claim for credit. Before producing a portfolio you will need to be clear about:

- What to put in it
- How it will be assessed
- What it will be assessed against.

This information should be available from the college or university where you are sending your portfolio. Indeed, before you even consider submitting an APL claim it is usual to get guidance from an APL professional based at either a further education college or university, who will be able to help you clarify your reason for making the claim. The APL professional will also be able to advise you what's involved in making an APL and support you in producing your portfolio.

Once you have decided on the course you wish to study, telephone the college or university where it is offered and speak to the

Admissions Officer for the course. The officer should be able to give you detailed information about APL, including how much credit you may be able to claim. Often this information is also available on college and university websites.

## Developing a portfolio for job applications

If you do not need to undertake any study to move into your chosen area of work, your learning portfolio can help you to make yourself attractive to potential employers. Gathering all the relevant information together in one place means you can easily refer to it when filling in job application forms. This is also helpful if you have to provide copies of documents such as qualification certificates. You can also store items you may wish to show to potential employers, such as examples of previous work and references or testimonials.

# Deciding what to include in your portfolio

The hardest part of writing a portfolio is getting started. This is mainly because the 'content' of the portfolio is you, and your working life. Deciding what to include in a portfolio, and structuring it properly depends upon its purpose – and you will have plenty of freedom to decide what should go into it.

Whether you are constructing your portfolio to help you with job applications or to be assessed or for access onto a course or to gain academic credit, you need to think about the following criteria:

**Breadth:** Providing a range of evidence to show that you possess the qualities and skills that you claim

**Authenticity:** Ensuring you have direct evidence that you really know and can do what you claim – this means including direct evidence that relates to you, such as qualifications

**Quality:** Ensuring that the qualities and skills you are showing are at the appropriate level for the job or course you are interested in

**Currency:** Your knowledge is 'up to date' with recent developments

**Quantity:** There is enough evidence to show sufficient proof of learning

The most important guiding principle in constructing your portfolio is that it is up to you to make claims to have your knowledge and skills recognised and to support them with appropriate evidence.

One of the purposes in producing a portfolio is to provide evidence that you have acquired the learning you are demonstrating. What counts as evidence will depend on what you are seeking your learning to be assessed against. For example, someone making a claim for credit against an engineering course support it by showing a piece of engineering they have

produced. A claim to knowledge in computing might be accompanied by work produced using a computer package. If you are applying to join a music course you might make a claim for credit by writing and playing a piece of music. So evidence may take many different forms.

However, regardless of your purpose in producing a portfolio, it will be assessed against two types of evidence: direct and indirect.

## Direct evidence

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This refers to evidence you have directly created. It might include a report you have written, the assessment of your practice, or a work-based experience. In most cases direct evidence is most effective in showing that you really do know and can do what you are claiming. Direct evidence can include a wide range of materials such as:

- A report you have written
- An article you have written
- A presentation, talk or training event you have carried out
- A manual you have produced
- Drawings or graphs you have made
- Records of on-the-job training
- Critical incidents
- Leaflets, information, references
- Evidence of learning from your experience

- Your CV
- Photographs.

This list is not exhaustive and you might think of other things to include. However, in all forms of direct evidence you need to show that the work really is yours, or demonstrate the part you played in its development.

## Indirect evidence

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This refers to evidence from others about your claim to learning. It can take the form of:

- A testimonial from someone with expertise in the field (for example, from a supervisor or manager)
- Letters written on your behalf by colleagues; a letter might also come from a professional association or an organisation with whom you have carried out voluntary work
- Completed project work
- Awards you have received
- Certificates or attendance at courses and workshop

Avoid evidence that might suggest bias, such as a letter from a family member or close friend. Also avoid letters about events in that were involved, but which do not mention you specifically or fail to highlight what you did or the skills you used.



# Developing a structure for your portfolio

Once you have collected your evidence together, you need to decide how to structure your portfolio. You can do this in whatever way makes sense to you. Below is an example of how you might break it up.

## Work-related information

This is an important part of your portfolio and will include all the information related to your past work experience. Much of it will be direct evidence such as:

- Your CV
- Evidence of any professional development or training you have undertaken
- Copies of reports you have written or contributed to
- Project work you have undertaken
- Attendance certificates for conferences, workshops or specialist training you have attended
- Awards you have received.

## Your key skills and qualities

You will certainly want to show evidence of your strengths and qualities, which might include:

- Evidence of teamwork and people skills
- Problem-solving, management, planning, time management, self-discipline, enthusiasm, motivation, responsibility; dependability
- Care of your family (teaching, caring for siblings, planning responsibility; raising a family; running a household; time management)
- Keeping fit (being a member of a sports team, motivation persistence; teamwork).

Once you have decided what to put in your portfolio, you need to set yourself a schedule for the task. This will help you to think about what you need to do and how long it will take you. It is important to give yourself enough time to do this – although you may find you have a deadline – particularly if you need to submit an application for a course or academic credit by a specific date.

### Activity 2. Developing an action plan to complete your portfolio

Draw up an action plan for completing your portfolio, with times for each stage. The first step is to work out what you need to do and how you can achieve this. How long you take to complete your portfolio will depend on what you want to use it for. Using it to gain accreditation for your learning will take much longer to prepare than if you are developing a portfolio to apply for a job. The amount of time it takes to complete your portfolio is completely up to you – you can spend as little or as much as you need – as long as you are happy with the finished result. The plan on page 7 is simply provided as an example of a schedule for someone who can begin to apply for jobs – yours might be completely different, depending on how you want to break up the task and how you want to use your portfolio.

# Portfolio schedule

## 12 April

– Write up my life story

## 14 April

Look at the influences on my life

## 15 April

Look at myself through other people's eyes

## 21 April

Identify my key qualities and skills and compare with areas of work. Think about what's important to me in a job

## 28 April

Do my SWOT analysis

## 1 May

Talk to a careers advisor about how to move into my chosen work area

## 5 May

Draw up a rough structure for portfolio – depending on whether I need to do a course first or can start applying for jobs

## 6 May

Start collecting my evidence for my portfolio

## 8 May

Buy a ring binder to use as my portfolio. Put evidence in as I collect it.

## 10 May

Begin writing portfolio to support evidence of my skills and knowledge required by the job

## 19 May

Organise my portfolio to suit me

## 21 May

Send off for job details and application form. Make a note of skills and knowledge required

## 23 May

Identify specific knowledge, skills and experience I have that relate to those required by the job

## 24 May

Send off job application

Having worked through this Portfolio Pack we hope that you have developed a clear idea of where you would like your career to go, and what actions you need to take to help you

with this. Section 4 lists a range of resources and useful websites that you may find helpful in deciding on your career direction and putting together a portfolio.



# **Section 4. Resources and websites**



