the CareersGroup
University of London

Teacher & Careers Leaders' guide:
Mini course in career decision-making

Introduction

This mini course aims to support learners to make the decision they're facing right now (which could be about subjects, courses, routes or destinations) while gaining the skills and insight to enhance both this choice and their life-long career decision-making.

This guide is for Career Leaders or Teachers with responsibility for delivering careers content. Here you'll find an at-a-glance overview of the course content, course aims, learning outcomes and learning design, as well as suggestions for how you could use material from the course in your school or college.

What's in the course?

Possible selves workbook

1/6

Content

1) Describe current strengths and weaknesses (5 mins)

2) Draw and annotate the 'you' that you hope to become, that you expect you'll become, and that you really don't want to become (15 mins)

3) Answer reflection questions about these three selves (10 mins)

4) Option to share on Padlet (anonymous, closed comments) (5 mins)

Learning outcomes and impacts

LO1 Appreciate the value of learning how to make career choices

➔ Increased **motivation** ('worth doing')

➔ Increased **insight** (self-awareness)

Decision-making myths workbook

2/6

Content

1) Recognise what you believe about career decision-making – 20-question questionnaire (5 mins)

2) Read and complete exercises in guidance sections for each belief you felt was true (5-10 mins per section)

3) Write a revised version of each belief you felt was true (5 mins per belief)

Learning outcomes and impacts

LO2 Recognise unhelpful beliefs about career decision-making

LO3 Revise unhelpful beliefs about career decision-making

➔ Increased **motivation** ('do-able')

➔ Increased **insight** (self-awareness)

➔ Increased **skill** (task approach)

What stage am I at? workbook

3/6
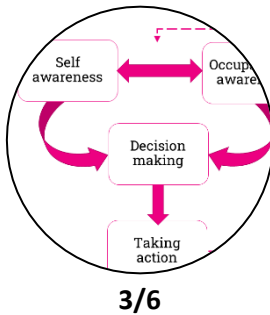
Content

1) Learn about the DOTS model: a description and annotated diagram to read (10 mins)

2) Magazine-style quiz to analyse what stage you're at (5 mins)

3) Pick one or more of the suggested activities to try based on your result (15 mins per activity)

Learning outcomes and impacts

LO4 Apply the DOTS model to own career decision-making

➔ Increased **insight** (career decision-making process)

➔ Increased **motivation** ('do-able')

➔ Increased **skills** (task approach)

Decision-making styles workbook

4/6

Content

1) Learn about decision-making styles: short summary to read (5 mins)

2) Spot decision-making habits – 11 question scaled quiz (10 mins)

3) Guided reflection for each of 11 areas – explanatory text, score, and a chance to state if this is habit that you'd like to change, and what you're going to try (15 mins)

4) Summarise your new approach – open text box (5 mins)

Learning outcomes and impacts

LO5 Analyse own decision-making habits

LO6 Generate intended approach to career decision-making

➔ Increased **insight** (self-awareness)

➔ Increased **insight** (career decision-making process)

➔ Increased **skills** (task approach)

Overcoming obstacles workbook

5/6

Content

1) Questionnaire with 3 yes/no questions for each of 10 categories of obstacles (10 mins)

2) Adding up scores for each category in questionnaire to identify any obstacles to decision-making (10 mins)

3) Choosing one of the suggested exercises to try to work on a relevant obstacle. (15 mins)

4) Rate the exercise that was tried out either 👍 or 👎 on Padlet (optional) (5 mins)

Learning outcomes and impacts

LO7 Identify obstacles to career decision-making

LO8 Choose actions designed to help overcome obstacles to career decision-making

➔ Increased **insight** (self-awareness)

➔ Increased **skills** (task approach)

➔ Increased **motivation** ('do-able')

Goal setting and action planning workbook

6/6

Content

1) Learn about goal setting – looking at the pros and cons of setting goals for the future (5 mins)

2) Generate a goal – a positive statement about what you want to happen (5 mins)

3-5) SMART career goals, an example, an example to reorder, then using SMART on your own (15 mins)

6) Well-formed goal setting – 10 stage exercise thinking your goal through before you put effort into it (10 mins)

7) Learn about action plans – key tips to improve action planning (5 mins)

8) Building your own action plan – template provided (15 mins)

Learning outcomes and impacts

LO9 Construct a SMART career goal and evaluate it using the well-formed outcome technique

LO10 Assemble an action plan to pursue a career goal

➔ Increased **insight** (career planning process)

➔ Increased **skills** (task approach)

➔ Increased **motivation** (do-able)

Timings are based on a Key Stage 5 learner working through the workbook with little or no distractions. Different environments, learner abilities and contexts mean that these timings are very much rough approximations! For many areas of the course which encourage reflection, it is quite possible to profitably spend longer. Full course design is available (UCL Learning Designer tool).

Course aims

The course aims to give Key Stage 4 and post-16 learners the skills, insight and motivation to make choices, set goals and plan for their future.

The University of London is a signatory to the UK Social Mobility Pledge and the course was developed as a resource for particular use with schools and colleges in areas of deprivation. It is available to all online.

It is a **career guidance** resource designed to be used directly by learners, who may or may not have access to in person, professional career guidance.

What do we mean by **career guidance**?

…good career guidance means linking different activities together to form a coherent whole.

– 'Good Career Guidance' (2014), Gatsby Foundation[i]

Career guidance describes activities which support individuals to learn about education and employment and plan for their future lives, learning and work. These activities contribute to social mobility, helping people to discover and access opportunities that might exist outside of their immediate networks. They also encourage individuals to challenge their pre-existing assumptions about what they are capable of and to develop practical strategies to operationalise their aspirations.

- 'Advancing Ambition' (2014), The Sutton Trust[ii]

This career guidance resource *links together* a series of six workbooks to create a course that, with around 3-4 hours of study time, can leave a learner with the skills, insight and motivation to make great choices. It does this by *encouraging individuals to challenge their pre-existing assumptions* and *develop practical strategies to operationalise their aspirations*.

This course particularly supports learners making decisions about post-16 or post-school/college.

Learning Outcomes

LO#	Learners are able to…	… by doing this …	… and evaluated using…
LO1	Appreciate the value of learning how to make career choices	Exploring different possible future selves (Workbook 1)	Completed reflection questions in Step 3
LO2	Identify unhelpful beliefs about career decision-making	Decision-making myths questionnaire (Workbook 2)	Completed columns 1 and 2 in Step 2
LO3	Revise unhelpful beliefs about career decision-making	Completing related guidance section exercises (Workbook 2)	Completed columns 3 and 4 in Step 2
LO4	Apply the DOTS model to own career decision-making	What stage am I at? questionnaire (Workbook 3)	Completed results table in Step 2[1]
LO5	Analyse own decision-making habits	Decision making habit quiz (Workbook 4)	Completed table in Step 3
LO6	Generate an intended approach to career decision-making	Guided reflection tool (Workbook 4)	Completed summary in Step 4
LO7	Identify obstacles to career decision-making	Obstacles to career decision-making quiz (Workbook 5)	Completed table in Step 2
LO8	Choose actions designed to help overcome obstacles to career decision-making	Selecting suggested exercises for relevant obstacle areas (Workbook 5)	Completed tick selections in Step 3
LO9	Construct a SMART career goal and evaluate it using the well-formed outcome technique	Goal setting exercises (Workbook 6)	Completed exercises in step 5 and 6
LO10	Assemble an action plan to pursue a career goal	Action plan guidance and template (Workbook 6)	Completed action plan (Step 8)

Theoretical basis

The design of the course draws an evidence base from a range of research and theory.

Supporting motivation is Markus and Nurius' construct of 'possible selves'[iii] which introduced the motivation learners gain from a elaborating on their ideas about what they might become (expectations for the future), what they would like to become (hopes for the future) and what they don't want to become (fears for the future).

The theoretical basis for supporting decision learning is based on a triangulation of some of the work of Dr Bill Law (DOTS model (with A.G. Watts[iv]), Career Learning Theory and new-DOTS[v], CPI model, and work diagnosing career learning needs[vi]) and Prof. Itamar Gati and his colleagues (taxonomy of Difficulties in Career Decision-Making[vii], career decision making profiles[viii]).

The basis for the final workbook on goal setting and action planning comes from the 'well-formed outcome' models of Day and Tosey[ix] (building on the NLP approaches of Dilts et al.[x]), and the work around the impact of career planning on outcomes by Shury et al.[xi]

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[1] To assess deeper application of the DOTS model you could invite learners to record reflections on Step 3 exercises.

How could you use the mini course?

Context	Use	Gatsby Benchmark (detail from Gatsby Toolkit for Schools[xii])
A whole cohort making choices about the future	Incorporating the mini course into the annual careers programme for this cohort. This could involve: • **Signposting** to the course on a VLE or website • Using the content directly in a series of **PSHE classes** timed appropriately for the decision-making window. • Using the suggestions below in **How could you help learners get more out of the mini course?** to enhance or adapt the content in a class or cohort context.	**Gatsby 1 – A stable careers programme** '…A stable careers programme enables young people to make well-informed decisions about education, training, apprenticeship and employment opportunities…'
An individual learner struggling with career decision-making	Using the material to support individuals at point of need (which might occur at any time): • Direct the learner to https://london.ac.uk/career-planning-resources-for-schools and encourage **independent use** of the workbooks • Include a **link to the course** on a VLE or website • Ensuring that **staff awareness** of the resources among colleagues who individual learners turn to for advice (e.g. guidance counsellors, form tutors, head of sixth form, careers staff)	**Gatsby 3 – Addressing the needs of each pupil** '…Students have different careers guidance needs at different stages. Opportunities for advice and support should be tailored to each of these stages, with diversity and equality embedded in the school's careers programme… … It recognises the scope of improving social mobility by identifying the student's barriers to overcome and the bridges of support they need to maximise their life chances.'
Provision of personal career guidance appointments for learners	Using this guidance resources to enhance the impact of single career guidance appointments (with the involvement of the professional involved): • Using **workbook 1 as preparatory work** could help individuals gain more motivation to engage in the guidance process. • Using **workbooks 3 and 5 as preparatory work** could help individuals begin their appointment with a clearer picture of where they're at, and any obstacles they face. • Using **workbook 6 to enhance action planning** – often the 'output' of a guidance appointment, using the workbook could help provide a place to jot down next steps, as well as additional material for the learner to work through to support goals and actions that there wasn't time to cover.	**Gatsby 8 – Personal Guidance** '… …'Every student should have opportunities for guidance interviews with a Careers Adviser, who could be internal (a member of school staff) or external, provided they are trained to an appropriate level. These should be available whenever significant study or career choices are being made. They should be expected for all pupils but should be timed to meet their individual needs….'

How can you help learners get more out of the mini course?

Making it manageable

We know that the courses as a whole is quite long! Breaking content down into manageable chunks (a workbook at a time or even a step at a time), and setting timings that suit your learners will help make the content 'do-able'. Going slow is also really beneficial, as it builds in more thinking time, and thinking and reflection are what decision-making is all about.

Beyond that obvious point, we can look at the aims of the course. The course aims to give Key Stage 4 and post-16 learners the **skills**, **insight** and **motivation** to make choices, set goals and plan for their future.

Those three aspects can each be enhanced further by how the content is delivered by teaching and careers professionals.

Increasing motivation

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985)[xiii] lists three key factors which influence whether or not people do things:

1. Their attitude towards the behaviour - whether it's felt to be worth doing (using our downloadable certificate of completion could help here too).
2. Their perceived behavioural control - whether they think it's going to be do-able
3. Subjective norms - whether everyone else is doing it

The first two feature in the course already, but, the last - a sense that thinking about and making career decisions is what those around are doing – could be enhanced by doing some of the following (in roughly increasing impact/effort):

- **Encouraging use of the optional Padlet elements.**

- **Converting the quizzes to surveys** and sharing the (anonymous) results (e.g. for workbook 2, seeing what myths were most common within the group; for workbook 3, seeing what stage everyone else is at too etc.)

- **Encouraging class discussion and sharing** – particularly in order to affirm positive statements (e.g. the revised versions of decision-making myths in workbook 2, or the intended approach to decision-making in workbook 4, or the SMART goal in workbook 6).

- **Converting some activities into 'pair and share'** to encourage peer to peer reflective discussion (e.g. the 'possible selves' drawings in workbook 1, the reflections on decision-making habits in workbook 4, the practice SMART goal exercise in workbook 6).

- **Converting some activities into group work**: in particularly groups of learners who find themselves at the same stage (workbook 3) could investigate different suggested activities as a team and pool their findings before reporting back. A similar approach could be taken with learners facing similar obstacles (workbook 5).

- **Creating a decision-making festival (!)**: going beyond the classroom and making a calendar-linked period of choice making into a school/college event with a thematic link to other curricular or extra-curricular activities.

Increasing skill

The main skillset in focus here is 'task approach' skills: learning techniques that are more likely to support the task of informed and clear decision-making.

Honing a skill means **practicing** it, and you can help this happen by doing some of the following:

- **Highlighting the longer-term relevance of core skills** as they're encountered, pointing out key skills that we use here which can have a positive impact on career decision-making for life. In workbook 1, this is *visualising the future*, in workbook 2, this is *learning to view our assumptions more critically*, in workbook 3, it is *following the DOTS model* (or at least, not trying to make decisions or take action without thinking about what we're like and exploring our options), in workbook 4 it is *reflection and intention*, workbook 5 is *learning to acknowledge and explore obstacles*, and in workbook 6 it is the *SMART, well-formed outcome* and *action planning* techniques.

- **Revisiting the learning** – before beginning the next workbook, supporting students to summarise the main approach from the previous one and in particular revisiting the core skills encountered (as above).

- **Creating opportunities to practice skills**– building on the content (which has very little repetitive practice included) to create more opportunities for practice. For example, you could:
  - Turn the three possible selves from workbook 1 into nine – the same three prompts but for each of three different 'roles' that they hold (e.g. their three 'career selves', three 'family selves', three 'community selves' – although the three 'selves' they choose might be different for individuals depending on which roles they see as important. Some other possible selves might be 'athletic self', 'entrepreneurial self', 'creative self', 'academic self' or 'social self').
  - Play a careers video from iCould and ask the group to see if they notice any decision-making myths from workbook 2 that were relevant to the subject of the video.
  - Set an exercise to write a leaflet for younger pupils making an earlier choice based on the DOTS model from workbook 3.
  - Set a challenge to spot the most significant decisions they made in week and review how they made them on the 11 scales in workbook 4 (and how they would change their approach the next time they make that kind of decision).
  - Set the action plan activity in workbook 6 as weekly activity with a small prize for students with a fully ticked off week's career action plan.

Increasing insight

The course is designed to support learners' understanding of themselves and the beliefs, processes and realities of career decision-making. This occurs through guided reflection and metacognition (thinking about thinking), two activities which can be challenging in certain learning environments! You can support the thinking and reflection required by this course by **allowing the work to occur in an environment conducive to thinking and reflection**.

In practice, this could mean:

- Where possible, using a venue which feels more spacious, uncluttered, aspirational or quiet - or, even better, where other forms of reflective work tend to occur. A library, art room, hall, study space or even an off-site venue might work particularly well. Encouraging quiet or silent work for reflective elements could be very useful.

- Helping learners to feel safe enough to be honest in their responses. This could be supported by clarifying whether or how their work might be assessed (there is no suggested assessment criteria other than completion of exercises: see **learning outcomes**). Awareness that some learners may feel uncomfortable with their answers being read by other people might lead you to allow learners to choose their seats, encourage the group to spread out in a larger room or find their own space for reflective elements.

- Setting a reflective 'mood': emphasising that this isn't about rushing through the content, but thinking as you go. Perhaps adding a starter or lead-in reflective activity which helps to set the tone. An example for the first workbook might be to encourage the group to close their eyes and imagine one of their possible selves with some verbal prompts from the teacher/facilitator ("Imagine you've suddenly jumped five years into the future, into the middle of a work day. What do you see/hear around you…?")

- Encouraging students to do the more reflective or metacognitive steps at home – particularly if the alternative is a busy or noisy environment with little opportunity for privacy!

Further information

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