



**Professional Services Career
Development Guide: For Staff**
Your career as built by you

Introduction

This guide to developing your career at Queen Mary University of London is intended to help you understand and support your personal journey at the University. It is an important part of our Mission and Values to empower you to be proactive about your career.

From Our Mission:

“To create a truly inclusive environment, building on our cherished cultural diversity, where students and staff flourish, reach their full potential and are proud to be part of the University.”

From Our Values:

Inclusive: *Maintaining our tradition of nurturing and supporting talented students and staff*

Ambitious: *We...will foster innovation and creativity...and respond with imagination to new opportunities to further our vision, mission and academic ambitions*

This guide aims to help you in 4 key areas:

- 1 Why it is important to engage with your career development.
- 2 Understanding the different types of career journey.
- 3 Tools and ideas to help you develop your own career plan.
- 4 What support you can expect from your manager and the institution.

An academic career tends to have a predefined promotions pathway within the particular field. There tend to be fewer opportunities as someone rises through the ranks, with a career path that is often described as a pyramid. Those unable to get to the next step will most likely find themselves looking to leave academia.

In contrast, pursuing a career in Professional Services – which may have one or two routes up the hierarchy that seem obvious – will lead you to develop skills that can be valuable across different aspects of the establishment.

You might have heard the phrase ‘transferrable skills’. A lot of opportunities are available to move into new roles, not because of years of service in a particular area, but due to the underlying skills needed to get great outcomes. This means that career paths in Professional Services can look more like lattices. This can create opportunities for you by not having to follow specified paths, and increasing your motivation and results in the process.

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Engaging with your career

Why is it important to engage with your career development?

Planning is a normal activity that we do as part of our jobs. It helps us anticipate what lies ahead and allows us to prepare appropriately. Similarly, being proactive about your career development has a number of benefits to you.

Career development can have a wide range of goals: it isn't always about the climb from promotion to promotion. For some it is an opportunity to learn, explore and grow; for others, it is a way to support their family. It could be about being driven by the purpose of what you do. Most likely, it's a combination of multiple factors.



Identifying options and having something to aim for (a specific job role, skill, department or employer) increases enjoyment of work, **increasing your sense of purpose**.



Working towards these goals is likely to lead to you **enhancing skills**, which in turn will increase options/prospects and the quality of future applications.



Where career progression is less obvious, or not available, it can help you **minimise uncertainty** as you are actively identifying alternative options. This can also help when you feel 'stuck'; after all, you probably don't want to stay in the same job forever!



You can't always rely on a path to open up before you, or for someone else to champion your career, so being proactive means that you can **take charge of your own development and ensure continuity**.



Increased sense of purpose, goals to work towards and control of your career development can all add up to **reduce stress and increase your work-life balance**.



It can help you with **planning for retirement**.

Career development and Our Values

We can also link your engagement in career development to Queen Mary's Values:

Inclusive: At Queen Mary, we...

- Open ourselves up to opportunities and help others with their journeys.
- Explore and support the diverse objectives that we and others have for our careers.



Proud: At Queen Mary, we...

- Build our skills to achieve our goals in our work.
- Recognise our strengths, and communicate, build and nurture them.
- Hold ourselves individually and collectively accountable for our commitments.

Ambitious: At Queen Mary, we...

- Expect ourselves to seek high standards and focus on results.
- Seek opportunities for continuous improvement.
- Focus on outcomes rather than processes.

Collegial: At Queen Mary, we...

- Work with others and build connections, not only to enhance our work but also to create opportunities for career progression and professional development. Colleagues who help others are often highly valued in organisations.
- Work collaboratively, building strong partnerships across Queen Mary and beyond, to resolve major challenges.
- Actively support and endorse each other's work and being committed to each other's success.

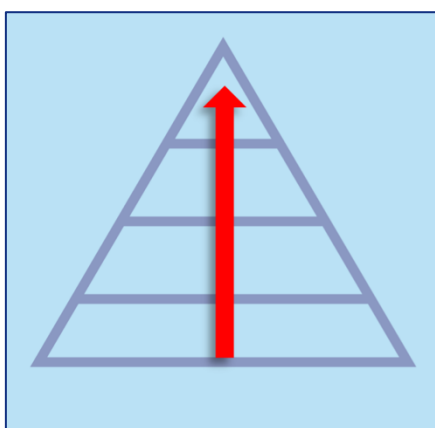
Ethical: At Queen Mary, we...

- Seek out, implement and champion good practice.
- Help out those that seek our help.

Different career journeys

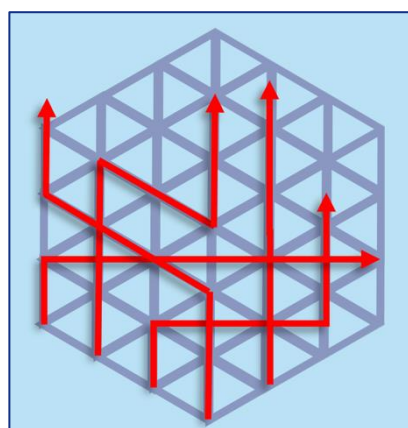
A career journey is not going to look the same for everyone, as we will want and need different things from our work. Some people seek promotion from one level to the next, while others are happy to develop their skills and look for opportunities throughout an organisation or beyond. Circumstance, environment and life situation can mean that you will change your approach to adapt accordingly and so, your journey is going to be *uniquely* yours.

It is useful to be aware of the different ways that you can approach your career development, to give you a sense of how to move forward. What follows are the major themes in this area to show you a variety of approaches, but you might find your own variation or combination of these that work best for your journey.



Ladder progression

A linear career journey focused on vertical progression






Lattice pathways

Flexible progression that is based on applying skills and interests to diverse opportunities

Types of career journeys




1. Linear/Ladder

A steady progression through a series of roles that link from one to another, e.g. progressing through the grades in your area or discipline.

	<p>Why this might be right for you: Easy to see the next step.</p>
	<p>Opportunities: Usually a pre-defined hierarchy of roles.</p>
	<p>Challenges: Roles become increasingly scarce as you progress.</p>




2. Continuous preparation for opportunity

A commitment to learning, self-assessment and exploration to allow you to recognise opportunities for progression which aren't always obvious. Allowing you to be ready, or show potential, to take on new opportunities which arise. This lends itself well to the more flexible 'lattice' style approach to progression.

	<p>Why this might be right for you: You don't have a predefined idea of what your career journey should look like. You are creative. You want to explore different roles.</p>
	<p>Opportunities: Found through networking; making your manager (and others) aware of your ambitions/interests; regularly reviewing and evaluating roles that are advertised.</p>
	<p>Challenges: Possibility of frustration while waiting for opportunities. Not always easy to see what the next step should be.</p>




3. Lateral moves

Applying your skills and experiences to different roles at a similar level to where you are now. There can be some trial and error, or experimentation, as part of this approach.

	<p>Why this might be right for you: You would like opportunities to develop new skills. You want to try something different, while maintaining your level of progression to date. Another area that you could apply your skills to might offer more opportunities for progression.</p>
	<p>Opportunities: Found through networking; discussing lateral moves with your manager; regularly reviewing and evaluating roles that are advertised.</p>
	<p>Challenges: You might feel that you are making slow progress. Lateral moves aren't immediately obvious as they are based on your skills rather than job title.</p>

4. Confident persistence

Staying in your role because that is the right choice for you. Building and ensuring the quality of the work that you do and supporting your area of work as it develops over time.

	<p>Why this might be right for you: You are looking for stability and a level of predictability in your work. You have other life priorities that mean you are happy with your level of work at present. You enjoy what you do!</p>
	<p>Opportunities: Keep your eyes open for interesting projects within your area which can both stimulate you and grow your skills. Let your manager know what kinds of projects would be of interest to you.</p>
	<p>Challenges: Keeping your skills up to date with the changes in your area of work. You might be unprepared for the impact of fundamental structural changes. Staying interested in your work.</p>

Influences on your career journey

Whatever your journey looks like, it will be influenced by lots of different factors that you should consider as you work on your career development. Some of these might be out of your control, so make sure you have time to reflect on how they may affect your planning and progression.

- **Your skill levels.** Are they appropriate to the kinds of roles you are interested in, or the way your area is developing? Are you willing and able to develop those skills?
- **Your knowledge.** Are you aware of, and have, the appropriate knowledge for the role?
- **Your preparation.** How well prepared are you to make the next step? Both in terms of ability and in terms of practical factors such as CVs, evidence of ability, and interview skills. Also, in terms of how much effort you have put into identifying opportunities.
- **Opportunities.** Sometimes, the opportunities in the areas that we are interested in are scarce. Do you have alternative options? Have you identified what makes you different to your potential competition?

Real stories

[Here](#) you'll find interviews with staff across Professional Services functions at Queen Mary. Read their stories of how they've developed within the university and what they've learned from the experience – they may inspire your own career journey!

Developing your career plan

In this section we will introduce a simple and effective method of developing your career plan. There are some practical exercises included to help you get started. This is applicable to all journey types, and what you do with the information will change depending on the path you are on and the stage which you are at.

There are 4 stages of planning and action as part of this method. They are intended to guide you through a deliberate process to help you develop your thinking. This could be simply your next step, or a view much further forward than that.

There is not a set timescale for you to complete your planning; you should go at the pace that is appropriate to you and your journey. If you find yourself getting stuck at any of the stages, ask for the input of others. An external perspective can help you see and consider things that you hadn't before.

The method is presented below, and you will see that it is shown as a cycle. This is intended to show that career planning is an ongoing process. Your skill set and priorities will change over time; your plan might not work out as you'd hoped, or perhaps you have taken a new direction and need to think about how this affects your vision of the future.



1. Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is all about understanding what is important to you in your career; what factors will influence the direction you'd like to go in; and the roles that you would choose.

It also involves recognising which skills you are strong in and which you are developing, with a view to what you can offer in a future role. This is still valuable even if you plan to stay within your existing role for now. The aim is to help you identify good quality matches for your next step or future direction.

Career Values

The first exercise in this section is to look at 'career values'. These are factors which are important to you and will have an influence on your career decisions. For example: money, types of colleagues or location. The following worksheet will offer career values for you to consider, but it is by no means an exhaustive list.

You could consider these to be things that you are looking to receive from the work that you are interested in.

Once you have your list of values, it can help you in a few useful ways:

- Creates criteria with which you can evaluate your current role.
- Helps you identify possible future roles. Share the most important values to you, as well as your core skills or job role that you are looking for, and then ask others to suggest roles/departments/employers that are a good match.
- Creates criteria you can use to evaluate roles you are interested in.
- Gives you points for discussion when investigating job roles or working with someone to identify possible career directions.

Try asking yourself 'why?' something is a value to help you learn more about what is important to you.

Career Values Worksheet

On the following pages are some of the common factors that people find are important to them when asked **why** they do their job. There are spaces at the bottom to add anything not listed that you would like to add.

- For the first column ("Free choice") tick all the values that are important or desirable to you.
- For the next column ("Half"), cut the number of values you have chosen by half, discarding those of less importance.
- For the final column choose only your "Top three" essential values.

Career Values Worksheet

		Free choice	Half	Top three
Using your abilities	Not feeling like the job is “easy”. Stretching yourself. Using your skills.			
Accomplishment	Feeling that you achieve something. You have clear goals. You can see a result for your efforts.			
Being busy	Not having stretches of time when you have nothing to do. You have a buzz of activity.			
Being responsible	Taking charge of your own work and the work of others. Being accountable.			
Variety of task	Every day is not the same because you do different things.			
Variety of environment	Every day is not the same because you are in different places.			
Variety of contact	Every day is not the same because you are interacting with different people.			
Adventure	You regularly take risks and have feelings of exhilaration or danger.			
Prestige environment	The place where you work is held in high regard as a major player in the field.			
Advancement	There are opportunities to be promoted to higher positions.			
Money	You earn or have the potential to earn a larger than average salary. You have perks, such as a company car, etc.			
Development	There are opportunities to enhance, expand or develop your role and learn new things.			
Recognition	When you perform well, your efforts are acknowledged or rewarded by praise, promotion or money.			
Authority	You get to tell people what to do. You give direction to others.			
Social status	You feel proud when you tell people what you do for a living. People think your job is interesting or glamorous			
Colleagues	The people you work with are easy to get on with or interesting. There are opportunities for socialising with colleagues.			
Helping individuals	You are involved in providing aid and assistance to people directly.			
Helping society	You are doing something which contributes beneficially to society.			
Caring	You are involved in showing support, empathy and love to others.			
Justifiable	What you are doing fits in with your moral value system.			
Fairness	You and other workers are treated fairly by your employer. You have good conditions of employment.			

		Free choice	Half	Top three
Spirituality	Your work allows you to express or explore your faith.			
Management	You have a good working relationship with your boss. Your manager's way of working fits in well with your own.			
Training	Structured opportunities for learning are provided and supported.			
Creativity	You get to generate new ideas or solutions to problems. You get to innovate and be original.			
Decision making	You get to make some of the choices that affect your work.			
Autonomy	You have some freedom to do things when you want and how you want.			
Being expert	You have the opportunity to gain and use an in-depth knowledge of a subject. You are sought for advice in this area.			
Competition	You get the opportunity to test your abilities against others.			
Subject	Your work is enjoyable because you have a strong interest in the subject matter you are dealing with.			
Aesthetics	You deal with ideas or things that are beautiful and require appreciation.			
Quality	You work in situations in which precision and attention to detail are important, or where there is little room for error.			
Security	You have security of employment. It is not likely that you will lose your job or have to find another job regularly.			
Stress-free	You do not have to work under high levels of stress. The pressure of work is not too high and there is little conflict.			
Health	Your work positively contributes to your physical and psychological wellbeing.			
Stability	Work routines and duties are largely predictable and not likely to be subject to sudden or unforeseen changes.			
Hours	You do not work more than average or irregular hours. Your job does not impinge on your family or social life. The patterns of work suit your lifestyle.			
Resources	You have the materials, equipment and money you need to do the job. You are not expected to produce great results without the right tools.			
Workspace	The place where you work is comfortable and suited to your working style and personal preferences.			
Supportive	The organisation you work for is open and tolerant. Your views are sought and respected during decision making.			
Co-operation	Your work requires operating as part of a team and interacting with others to achieve a goal.			

Skills and strengths

The second exercise is to reflect on your skills and strengths. You could think about these as what you have to offer in your current and future role. This can also help you identify future options, by asking yourself (and others) what roles need these skills.

You might already be evaluating your skills as part of your annual appraisals. As with all the exercises presented in this guide, similar reflection you are doing elsewhere can be integrated into your career planning.

Skills will fall into three categories:

- 1) Skills that are usually acquired or learned as a result of work-related activities. These might be technical skills, such as how to create databases, or process-oriented skills, such as how a finance system works.
- 2) Professional skills, also called competencies. Examples are teamwork or planning and organising.
- 3) Strengths, which can be defined as activities/skills that an individual finds energising. These are commonly used naturally, frequently and to a good standard.

In order to measure your skills, you need to consider what it is you are measuring, and in what context.

- For technical and process-oriented skills, there are often measures that will indicate the level of your ability. For example, a PRINCE2 qualification will indicate that you understand best practice for project management. Successful projects and the size of these will suggest your skill level. Similarly, in finance you could look to an ACCA or CIMA qualification and measurable outcomes in your work, which could include volume of savings made, or the size of accounts you are responsible for. As you can see, there are some formal indicators, and then the measurable outcomes in your work that show how good your skill is.
- For professional skills, an example of using that skill in practice can help you assess the quality of that skill. However, you also need to consider context. So, if you are great at managing people, you might want to consider what type and size of team you have experience of managing? This helps you establish opportunities which might need your skill set at that particular level or it might help you identify areas of growth needed to show promise for an opportunity that you are interested in.
- One example can show multiple competencies in action. Take time to record some examples of your achievements, so that you can use them when you are spending time on your career development planning.
- Another way to assess your skills and qualities is to get feedback from someone else. Sometimes they can see things that we miss. You can ask them directly, or you can share some of your examples and ask for them to reflect back the skills they hear are being used.

At this point, it might be a good idea to refresh your existing evaluations or have a go at the 'Skills and Strengths Evaluation Worksheet'.

Skills & Strengths Evaluation Worksheet

- 1) In the table below rate your confidence in each of the skills from 1 to 5:
1 = very low confidence – 5 = very confident
- 2) If you are unsure how to rate yourself, just choose the score that feels right in the moment; you can always change your mind later once you start thinking about examples.
- 3) State examples of each behaviour that evidence your confidence and competence in each area you have scored 4-5. This will be useful for reflecting on how to further use these skills and strengths in your current role as well as for updating your CV and preparing for interviews for future roles.
- 4) State what actions you could take that might help you improve your confidence/competence in those areas scoring 3 or less.

The skills listed here are a set of common competencies that you might choose to evaluate. It is not a definitive list, and if you want to add your own, you should do so.

Skills	Personal rating	Examples/Evidence	Action points
Planning, organisation and project management			
Written and oral communication			
Analytical skills, problem-solving and creativity			
Self-motivation, initiative and drive			

Skills	Personal rating	Examples/Evidence	Action points
Results/quality orientation			
Resilience, ability to bounce back from adversity			
Staff management and leadership			Look at the Leading Together webpage and self-assessment tool, as well as Pathways to Leadership , a suite of development programmes to support you at each stage of your management career.
<i>Add your own here...</i>			

Curiosities

The final part of self-assessment is to look at curiosities. These prompt you to think freely and generate a list of things that are interesting to you. These can sometimes hold clues to directions that could be a good match for you.

- What work have I enjoyed the most?
- What roles have I seen that I am interested in?
- What is the most interesting part of my work?
- What work am I doing when I lose track of time or am totally absorbed in my work?
- What roles have I seen that I am interested in?

You could follow any of these questions with the question 'why?' to help you further understand the curiosity.

2. Career Exploration

The career exploration stage takes all the self-assessment that you have engaged in and gets you thinking about which roles/departments/employers might be a good fit or would be attractive to you.

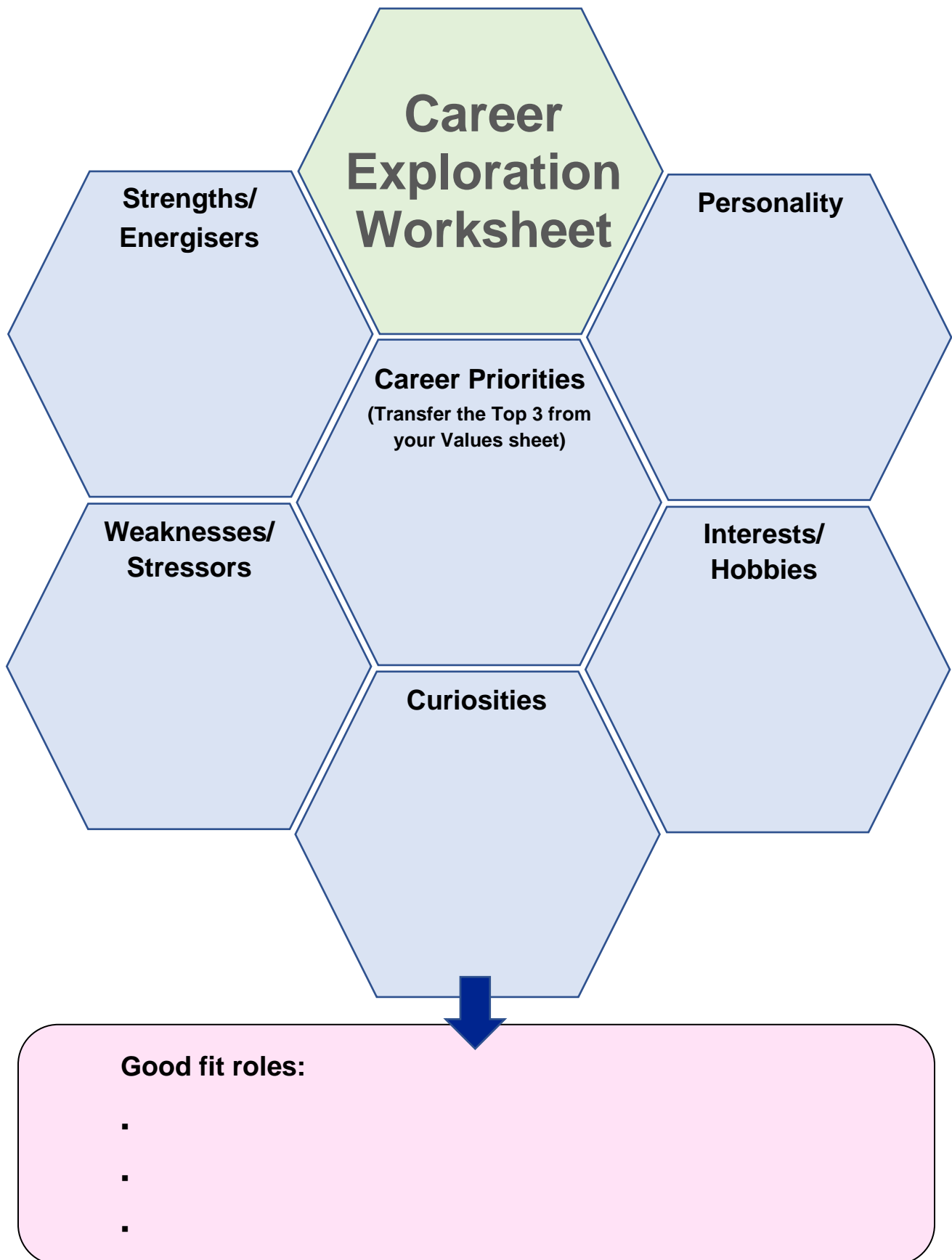
What roles would be a good fit for you? In your direct path? Outside of your path? What experiments could you try to find out more?

To help with this, the 'Career Exploration Worksheet' contains 6 categories for you to make notes on, and then encourages you to consider what roles might be a good fit based on the information you have put into the worksheet. The categories are:

- Your values/career priorities
- Strengths and work that you find energising
- Weakness and work that you find stressful
- Curiosities
- Personality. What are the characteristics of your personality? These might hold clues as to what work you would be well suited to. You can use one of the variety of personality type tests out there, or simply use your own assessment/judgement.
- Interests and hobbies outside of work can also hold useful insights for where you might like your career development to go. It is not necessarily about turning interests and hobbies into your career, but it might help you spot some insights that weren't present elsewhere.
 - What skills do you use in those hobbies and interests?
 - Which elements are most absorbing?

For example, do you take a leadership role in charity work in your spare time? Perhaps you could consider leadership opportunities at work.

Do you like playing strategic board games with your friends? Perhaps taking up some strategic opportunities at work could be appealing to you.



3. Decision Making

Having identified possible options, the next step is to decide which ones you will investigate further and take specific actions on. Where you have a lot of options, you will need to prioritise where you dedicate your attention as you do not have a limitless amount of time and energy.

There is no rule for how you decide. After your investigation, you may simply have a really good feeling about one direction or another. If you are more analytical, you may have scored the options to help you decide.

A couple of useful points to consider are:

- What roadblocks might you encounter on this path and how would you overcome these?
- What skills might you need to develop in order to move in the direction that you are interested in?

You may need to do some further investigation if you realise that you are still uncertain.

Once you have got a sense of a direction that is appealing to you, the next step is to take action.

4. Next Actions

When reaching the point of setting actions to help you progress on your journey, it will depend on what decisions you have made as to what next actions are appropriate. Here are a few things that it might help to reflect on:

- Who could help you identify next actions?
- Who could you talk to in your area/s of interest?
- What connections could you build that would help you move towards areas of interest?
- How often would it be helpful for you to review?
- Who could you share your goals with in order to help keep you accountable and on track?
- If this feels too big or overwhelming, what is the smallest manageable chunk you could do next?
Tip: Breaking down goals into manageable steps and setting deadlines for each task can help you maintain momentum.
- What will you do if things don't go to plan? This can help you maintain momentum in your journey when there are moments when things don't work out like you had hoped.

It may be helpful to use the SMART goals acronym (which you have likely seen before) as a guide:

Specific	Being specific helps you take deliberate actions in your career journey. Goals and actions which are not well defined have the habit of not getting done!
Measurable	How will you know if this action has been useful/successful?
Achievable	Is this something that you will be able to do, even if you need help?
Relevant	Will this be helpful to your career goals and planning?
Timebound	Setting a deadline can help prevent the career actions slipping down your to do list. If it remains in a 'someday/maybe' category, then it is likely that you'll never get round to it.

Next steps and support

Careers are very much a journey and a learning experience. There will be change, roadblocks, successes and disappointments along the way. Each will have an effect on your goals, whatever those may be. Some of them will be within your ability to control and some will not.

Remember that your career development should be an ongoing process and that you should consider your career development as a cycle where you regularly review your progress and check in on your values, skills and curiosities (amongst other considerations) and see how they are affecting your personal vision for your career. Think of it like a check-up with your doctor or dentist!

Support

Your manager can help you with all the different stages of your career journey. You may choose to do this as part of your appraisal or by having specific discussions about your career development. It can help you to build momentum and explore or access what opportunities are available to you. Wherever you seek support, remember that you own the process as it is your career.

Getting the most of career discussions with your manager

- Bring along any self-assessment exercises or notes that you have made ahead of the session.
- Think about what you would like your manager to help you with.
- Talk through your career thoughts and ideas with a trusted friend/colleague/coach or mentor/family member so that you can clarify ideas ahead of the meeting to increase the focus.
- Try to create some ideas for what you would like to do next, whether that is a career development or a skill development. Your thoughts here can help your manager better understand your needs and support you more effectively.

What kind of support is available?

At Queen Mary, there are various support options to help you grow in your career. Everyone's journey is different, so it's important to explore the opportunities that best suit your goals. Below are some key ways you can take charge of your career development and get the support you need.

How you can help yourself

Your career is in your hands, and there's a lot you can do to move towards your goals. Here are some ideas of things you can do yourself to get started:

- **Regularly reflect on your skills and goals:** Take some time to think about what you're good at, what excites you, and where you want to go next – the resources in this guide can be a good starting point. This will allow you to get a sense of direction and identify areas for growth and development.
- **Seek feedback and track your achievements:** Regular feedback from colleagues, mentors, or managers can help you understand your strengths and areas for improvement. Keeping a record of your achievements – whether it's successful projects, training completed, or positive feedback – will also come in handy when you're looking to take the next step.

- **Build your network:** Making connections within and outside your department and Queen Mary can open up new possibilities. Attend events, join industry groups, and reach out to colleagues – you never know where a conversation might lead!
- **Step outside your comfort zone:** Growth usually happens when you challenge yourself, so look for opportunities to take on new responsibilities, work with different teams, or explore secondments and project placements. Stepping outside your comfort zone may feel unfamiliar or even a little uncomfortable at first, but it's also where you'll gain new experiences, develop skills, and build confidence. Queen Mary offers a range of resources to support you on this journey (see below), but taking the first step is up to you.

How your manager can help you

Your manager can be a great support in your career development. Here's how they can assist you:

- **Have regular career conversations:** Appraisal conversations are a great opportunity to discuss and review your development and career ambitions with your manager. However, you shouldn't stop there – use your one-to-ones to regularly review your progress towards goals, explore new opportunities and adjust your plans as needed to keep your development on track, get the right support, and make the most of the opportunities available to you.
- **Connect you with opportunities:** Whether it's introducing you to colleagues in other departments, suggesting projects to work on, or recommending training, your manager can help you explore ways to get to where you want to be.
- **Help identify areas for growth:** Based on your performance and interests, your manager can suggest ways to develop your skills in line with your career aspirations.
- **Encourage you to play to your strengths:** Knowing what you're good at can help you feel more engaged and effective at work. Your manager can help you find ways to use your strengths in your current role or in new projects.

How Queen Mary can help you

The university offers a wide variety of resources to help you grow and succeed in your career. These include:

- **Coaching and mentoring:** [Coaching](#) and [mentoring](#) are supportive relationships that can empower you to make informed and proactive choices about planning your future and building your career.
- **Training and development programmes:** The OPD team is dedicated to supporting your professional development with a diverse range of training and development opportunities. These include [leadership and management](#) as well as [professional effectiveness](#) courses, e-learning with over 5000 courses on [LinkedIn Learning](#), [qualification programmes](#), and many more opportunities. Find out more [here](#).
- **Project placements and job shadowing:** Taking on a [part-time project in a different department](#) or [observing a colleague in a role you're interested in](#) allows you to “test out” possible career options and can give you valuable insight and experience.
- **Secondments:** A secondment offers the opportunity to temporarily take on a different role, either within Queen Mary or with an external organisation. It's a valuable way to broaden your skill set, gain new perspectives, and deepen your understanding of areas that are relevant to your current or future role.
- **Wellbeing support:** Growing your career often means stepping outside your comfort zone, which can feel challenging at times – especially when balancing this with your day-to-day role. To support you on this

journey, Queen Mary offers a range of [wellbeing support and resources](#) to help you manage stress and maintain a healthy work-life balance as you work towards your career goals.

