



Move forward with confidence

A practical guide to your next career steps



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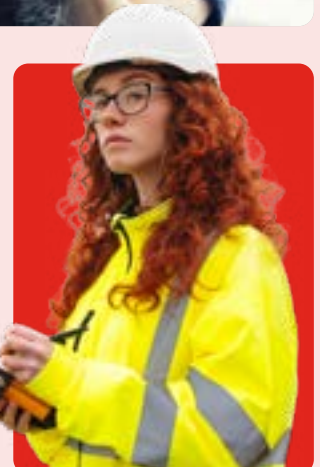


Introduction

You've put time and effort into building your skills, and that's something you should be proud of. Whether you've been studying engineering, construction, hair and beauty, hospitality, health and social care or another hands-on vocational role, you've built real skills that matter.

But many people find that after training ends, confidence doesn't always catch up straight away. It can leave you with more questions than answers. You might feel unsure about your next move, how to talk about your skills or what potential employers expect next. And that's completely normal.

That's where this guide comes in. It's here to help you move from uncertainty to clarity, and from clarity to action. It's practical, straightforward and specifically designed to support you as you think about what comes next in your career after you complete your training. You'll find helpful tools, clear guidance and honest prompts to help you understand where you are, articulate what you can do and take your next step confidently.



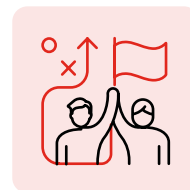
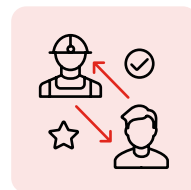
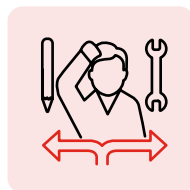


Your journey at a glance

This guide takes you through five steps, and by the end of it, you should feel clearer about your next steps, more confident about what you can do and ready to take action (even if you don't have everything figured out yet).



This guide is for everyone, no matter your starting point. Not sure which stage you're at?



Here's a quick way to find your fit:

Starting out:

You're just entering the workforce for the first time. You want clarity on your first steps and the confidence to go for it.

Changing paths:

You're switching tracks. You've got experience, now you just want to apply it in a new direction.

Ready to progress:

You're ready to go further. You want to plan your next move and make a real impact.





Where you are right now and *how to progress after training*

Understanding your starting point

People choose to go into training at very different stages of their working lives and before you can plan where you're going, it helps to get clear on where you are. But it's not always easy, especially when you're thinking about what to do next.

We've got three common career stages that people can often relate to. Find the one that fits you best and use it to focus on the advice that's provided throughout this guide.



Starting out

(new to the working world, building confidence)

You might already be working part-time, supporting a team, assisting in a salon, kitchen or workshop or finishing an apprenticeship.



What you're probably thinking:

'I've finished my training. Now what? How do I turn this into a career?'

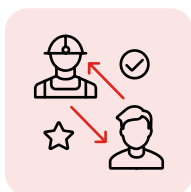
Your focus now is:

- Understanding entry-level jobs in your sector
- Getting help moving from training an apprenticeship into full-time employment
- Understanding work-readiness and showing employers that you're reliable, keen and capable
- Making the most of an organisation that you already know, such as moving from placement, assistant or apprentice into a permanent role

Finding out if a job in an industry is actually something you want to pursue is a big hurdle. **Carlyle, a previous City & Guilds student** just starting out in his trade states:



'I took a chance. I researched what was local and thought just try it. You can always try for a few days to see if you like it... I asked if I could come in for a few days, just to help out for free and see what it was really like. That's how I got my foot through the door.'



Changing paths (bringing past experience into a new direction)

You may be retraining after time in another role or industry.

What you're probably thinking:

'I've done this before, just differently. How do I make people see that my past experience is still valuable?'

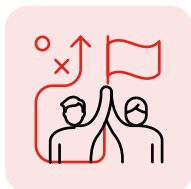
Your focus is often:

- Mapping previous job experience to a new vocational sector (e.g. retail to hair and beauty or office to trades roles)
- Understanding how entry routes work in your chosen sector
- Building confidence that your career change makes sense

Katie Cranes underwent a career change, moving away from her degree and a sales role and into construction:



'It was the best thing I've ever done. I became more confident, more capable and just happier. Nothing before this felt like a career. This did.'



Ready to progress (stepping into greater responsibility or leadership)

You may already be experienced in your role and thinking about progression.

What you're probably thinking:

'I know I'm capable of more. I just need to make a clear plan and be taken seriously.'

Your focus is often:

- Gaining recognition for your experience
- Taking on more responsibility or leading others
- Planning long-term career development

James McClean worked his way up from apprenticeship to managing director:



'I started with a mechanical engineering apprenticeship. That training gave me the foundation for everything that came after. Even when the factory closed and I was made redundant, I used that training to move forward. That training helped me get to where I am today.'



Strengthen *your professional brand*

Turning your qualification into a visible, confident presence

You've earned your qualification. Now it's time to make sure the right people know it. And that's where your professional brand comes in.



Your professional brand is how people understand what you can do. In vocational hands-on careers, this often matters more than having a perfect CV. You just need to know what you've done and how to communicate that clearly.

'Confidence and articulation are skills: and you can learn them.'

In our survey, people repeatedly said they value practical help that shows employers what they can actually do, not long or complex explanations¹. So here are some top tips, that you can easily implement, to do exactly that.

1

Keep your profile simple and up to date. Focus on platforms that make most sense for your role e.g., CV, LinkedIn for business skills, Checktrade for trade platforms or social media for a visual portfolio.

2

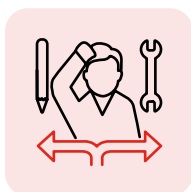
Lead with your certificates, showcase what you've learnt from your training and the practical skills you gained. Action verbs are ideal here e.g., 'completed', 'delivered', 'built', 'managed' and 'supported'.

3

Add digital credentials or certificates where possible as they help employers quickly verify your skills. Add them to your LinkedIn profile, CV, email signature or portfolio.

4

Use clear, honest language. You don't need to jam buzzwords in there to sound professional.

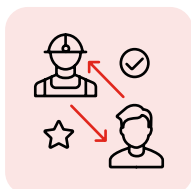
**Starting out:
Build your evidence**

You might not have years of paid experience, but you have practical evidence. Shout about it.

- Take photos of projects, finished work or practical assessments (think haircuts, workshop builds, finished dishes or installations). These are portfolio gold.
- Describe your course placements as work experience. List the tasks, the settings and what you learnt.
- For practical sectors (hair, hospitality, construction), Instagram or a simple portfolio site can be your best job application.

**You might find these platforms useful:**

- [Get My First Job](#)
- [My First Job](#)
- [Prospects](#)
- [Instagram \(ideal for creative sectors\)](#)

**Changing paths:
Reframe your story**

Your earlier experience is an asset, especially as most skills are transferable. The key here is helping new employers see the connection.

Here's a quick before and after: Your CV summary

Before:

'Former retail assistant looking for work in the trades.'

After:

'City & Guilds qualified plumber with five years' experience in customer facing environments. A strong communicator with a proven track record of managing client expectations under pressure.'

This reframes your experience as:

- Customer service to client communication on site
- Admin and organisation to job planning and scheduling
- Team management to leading on-site crews





**Ready to progress:
Quantify your impact**

At this stage, it's not enough to say you're experienced. You need to show the impact of that experience.

- Replace 'managed a team' with 'led a team of six across two sites, improving on-time competition by 20%'.
- Use LinkedIn actively. Post about your qualification, share insights from your sector, connect with your training assessor.
- Reference your new qualification in the context of leadership ambition: 'I completed my ILM Level 5 Operational Leadership and Management Skills qualification to build on my seven years of site supervision'.

You might find these platforms useful:

- [Skills for Careers](#)
- [Apprenticeships \(gov.uk\)](#)
- [Find an apprenticeship \(gov.uk\)](#)
- [Bark](#)



'I worked in a kitchen before plumbing, and weirdly that helped a lot. Knowing what to do first and what takes longest, it all transfers.'

Transferrable skills snapshot – *everyday strengths you need to hone*

Why transferrable skills matter more than ever

Alongside the technical skills that you've mastered, employers value the strengths that help work run smoothly and these are the ones that AI and technology can't replicate, such as: Problem-solving under pressure, handling difficult conversations with customers and keeping standards high during a busy shift. Building trust with a client in the first five minutes. Keeping a team steady when things go wrong on site.

These are your transferable skills, and they go with you everywhere. But just how important are they?

92%

of talent acquisition professionals consider soft skills to be as important as hard skills, or more so, according to LinkedIn's Global Talent report².

² https://business.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/business/en-us/talent-solutions/resources/pdfs/global_talent_trends_emea.pdf



The skills that cross every sector:



Communication

Explaining a technical job to a customer in plain language. Giving clear instructions during a shift. Writing a handover note.



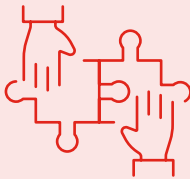
Teamwork

Working alongside others in a workshop, on site or in a care team. Sharing tasks fairly. Covering for colleagues under pressure.



Reliability

Turning up on time. Completing tasks to the required standard. Following through on commitments without being chased.



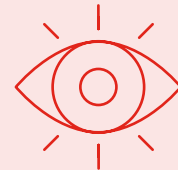
Problem-solving

Finding a fix when the job doesn't go to plan. Adapting when materials or conditions change. Thinking on your feet.



Time management

Scheduling jobs across a day. Prioritising when you have multiple tasks. Meeting deadlines without cutting corners.



Initiative

Spotting something that needs doing before being asked. Suggesting a better method. Taking ownership of a task end-to-end.



Project management

Planning a job from start to finish, sourcing materials, coordinating people, managing the timeline, reporting back. This is a real and valuable skill. Consider a **PRINCE2® course** if you want a formal way to recognise it.



What these skills look like in practice

The same skill shows up differently depending on where you are in your career. Here's how communication, teamwork and project management play out across various stages.



Communication

Starting out or Changing paths:

Explaining to a customer what you've just done and why, in plain language, even when the job was technical. Your ability to keep someone calm and informed on their first interaction with you is skill employers actively look for.

Ready to progress:

Giving clear instructions during a busy shift. Writing a handover that actually gets read. Knowing when to step in, when to delegate and how to deliver difficult feedback without losing trust.



Teamwork

Starting out:

Working alongside others in a workshop session or group practical. Taking your role seriously so your team can rely on you. Asking for help when you need it and offering it when someone else does.

Changing paths:

Bringing maturity and perspective from your previous workplace. You've worked in different environments, you know how to read a room, manage conflict and get things done, no matter who you're working with.

Ready to progress:

Supporting less experienced colleagues during busy periods or complex tasks. Setting the standard without making it about job role status. The best team players at this stage make everyone around them better.





Project management

Starting out:

Planning and completing a practical task from start to finish, including sourcing what you need, following the steps in the right order, checking the outcome. That's project management. You've already done it.

Changing paths:

Drawing on your past workplace experience to organise tasks in a new setting. Knowing that a job needs a plan before it needs action. Spotting what could go wrong before it does: that's hard-won experience.

Ready to progress:

Supporting or leading the planning of a whole job or service including coordinating people, managing timelines, reporting upwards are an excellent way to do this.



How to talk *confidently about your skills*

Knowing what you can do and being able to talk about it clearly are two very different things

Many people find that even after multiple courses or years of experience, they struggle to put their skills into words, especially in interviews or when meeting a new employer for the first time.

That's not a knowledge problem. It's a confidence problem. And it's one that you can fix with some guidance.

Here are some practical tools and prompts to help you describe what you can do, clearly and without feeling like you're showing off.

Tell your story with this simple formula

The most powerful thing you can do in an interview or conversation with an employer is tell a short, clear story about something that you've actually done. The STAR method is a simple way to structure that story every time.

Here's how it works:

1 **S**

S: Situation

Set the scene briefly. Where were you and what was happening?

2 **T**

T: Task

What were you responsible for in that moment?

3 **A**

A: Action

What did you actually do? This is where your skills live, so be specific.

4 **R**

R: Result

What happened because of what you did?



'I ended up speaking at events, writing articles and even going to Parliament to talk about apprenticeships.'

**Here's an example:**

'During my training placement, our team was short-staffed on a busy Friday afternoon **(Situation)**. I was asked to cover two sections of the restaurant instead of one **(Task)**. I reorganised my workflow, kept communication clear with the kitchen, and checked in with customers regularly **(Action)**. Every table was served on time and I received positive feedback from my supervisor at the end of the shift **(Result)**.'

See – you don't need a dramatic story. A clear, honest one works every time.

How to talk about your strengths without feeling awkward

Lots of people, especially those who are new to job searching, can feel uncomfortable talking about what they're good at. It can feel like boasting. So, here's a different way of looking at it: you're not showing off. You're giving the employer the information they need to make a good decision. That's helpful, not arrogant.

If you're not sure where to begin, try these sentence openers:

- *'During my training, I was responsible for...'*
- *'One thing I'm confident in is...'*
- *'In my placement, I showed that I could...'*
- *'My course taught me to...'*
- *'I've had direct experience of...'*

Pick one from the list above, finish the sentence clearly and honestly, and you're on your way.

Write your sentence here...





Match your language to the job

When you read a job description, pay attention to the words it uses. If it asks for 'a reliable team player who communicates clearly,' use that language when you talk about yourself. This isn't about copying; it's about showing the employer that you understand what they're looking for and that you can deliver it.

AI tools can help you understand job descriptions, organise your thoughts and prepare for interviews, but they work best as a support. It's not a replacement for your own experience. Always use your real examples and your best judgement to make sure what you say sounds like you.

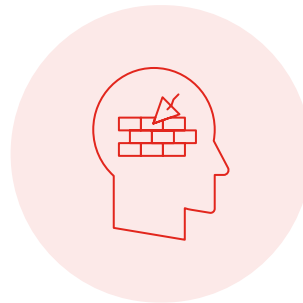
Before any job interview or application, try this:



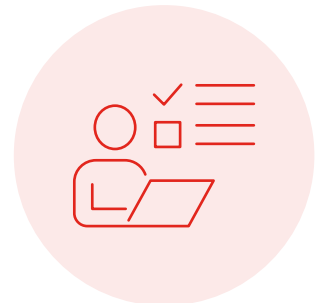
Read the job description carefully



Highlight three to five skills or qualities that they mention



Think of one real example for each from your own training or experience



Use those examples in your answers

Use confident language and words that carry weight

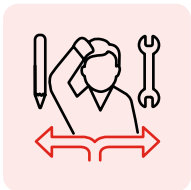
The words you choose matter. So swap vague phrases for active, specific ones.

Instead of this...	Try this
'I helped with...'	'I supported / contributed to...'
'I was involved in...'	'I led / managed / delivered...'
'I did some...'	'I completed / built / achieved...'
'I tried to...'	'I successfully...'

Some strong action verbs that you could use include: *achieved, built, completed, coordinated, delivered, developed, improved, led, managed, organised, resolved, supported, trained.*



'Using mock interviews and feedback helped me secure a degree apprenticeship.'



Interview prompts and practice questions

You can use these questions to get some practice in before an interview, or to think through how you'd answer them in a written application. Where possible, use the STAR method we discussed earlier in this section to structure your answers. Again, you can use AI tools like ChatGPT or Claude to help you build your answers.

Starting out

Practice questions:

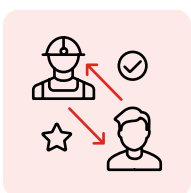
- Describe one practical assessment you completed. What skills did it prove?
- What tool, technique or method did you learn, and how did you apply it?
- How did you work with others on your course?

A good answer might start like this:

'During my training, I was asked to (describe the task you were asked to do). I approached it by (describe the outcome or what you learnt).'

Questions you can ask an employer:

- 'What opportunities are available for me to move into a full-time role now that I've completed my training?'
- 'Based on my performance during my placement, could we discuss progression or a pay review?'
- 'Are there additional skills you'd recommend I build to progress here?'



Changing paths

Practice questions:

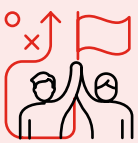
- What did you learn in your previous job that applies directly to your new role or sector?
- Can you explain why you're changing direction in one confident sentence?
- Describe one hands-on task you've learned recently and what it showed about you.

A good answer might start like this:

'My background in (your previous sector) gave me strong (name a transferable skill). In my recent training, I applied that by (describe what you did). I'm now looking to bring both together in (the new role you are applying for).'

Questions you can ask an employer:

- 'How does the team typically support people who are new to this sector?'
- 'What would a strong first three months look like in this role?'



Ready to progress

Practice questions:

- Describe a time you supported a less experienced colleague. What did you do and what was the outcome?
- When have you solved a practical problem under pressure? Walk me through it.
- How does your experience help you to lead or influence others?

A good answer might start like this:

'I've been working in (your current sector/role) for (insert number) years, and in that time I've (describe your key achievement or responsibility). My recent qualification has helped me to (describe what it's added to your skills and abilities).'

Questions you can ask an employer:

- 'What does the path to the next role level look like here?'
- 'How does the organisation support ongoing professional development?'

You might find these platforms useful:

- [National Careers Service: Skills Assessment](#)
- [BBC Bitesize Careers: Interview Tips](#)



Build your next step with *our planning tool*

Reading your way through this guide is one thing. Writing things down makes them real and achievable.

This planning tool is designed to help you move from thinking about your next step to actually taking it. It'll help you to get a clearer view on where you want to go, what you need to build, and who can help you to get there.

Work through each part in order. You don't need to have all the answers just yet. Just write down what feels true to you right now.

1

Part 1: Your 12-month vision

Where do you want to be in one year from now? Don't overthink it, just write down the first honest answer that comes to mind.

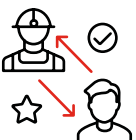
My one-year goal is...



Starting out:

What's the one entry-level role you want to aim for? (e.g. trainee electrician, salon junior, kitchen assistant)

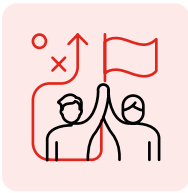
The one entry-level role I want to aim for is...



Changing paths:

What part of your new trade do you want to feel fully confident in by this time next year?

I want to feel fully confident in...



Ready to progress:

What leadership or senior responsibility could you realistically build towards?

I want to build towards...

2

Part 2: Skills to build

Start with what you have, and then identify what to add next.

Skills and strengths I already have are...

Three skills I want to build or develop...

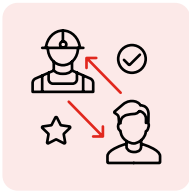
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



Starting out:

Focus on building confidence with the core tools, equipment or techniques from your course. What's the one you most want to master?

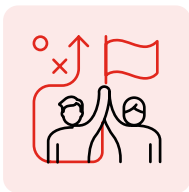
The one I most want to master is...



Changing paths:

Identify the key practical skills used in your new trade that you haven't fully used yet. What licences or certificates would be worth working towards?

The licences or certificates I want to work towards are...



Ready to progress:

What advanced technical skills would make the biggest difference in your current role? Are there digital tools for planning, reporting or leadership, that would help you to progress?

Skills and tools that will help me progress are...

3

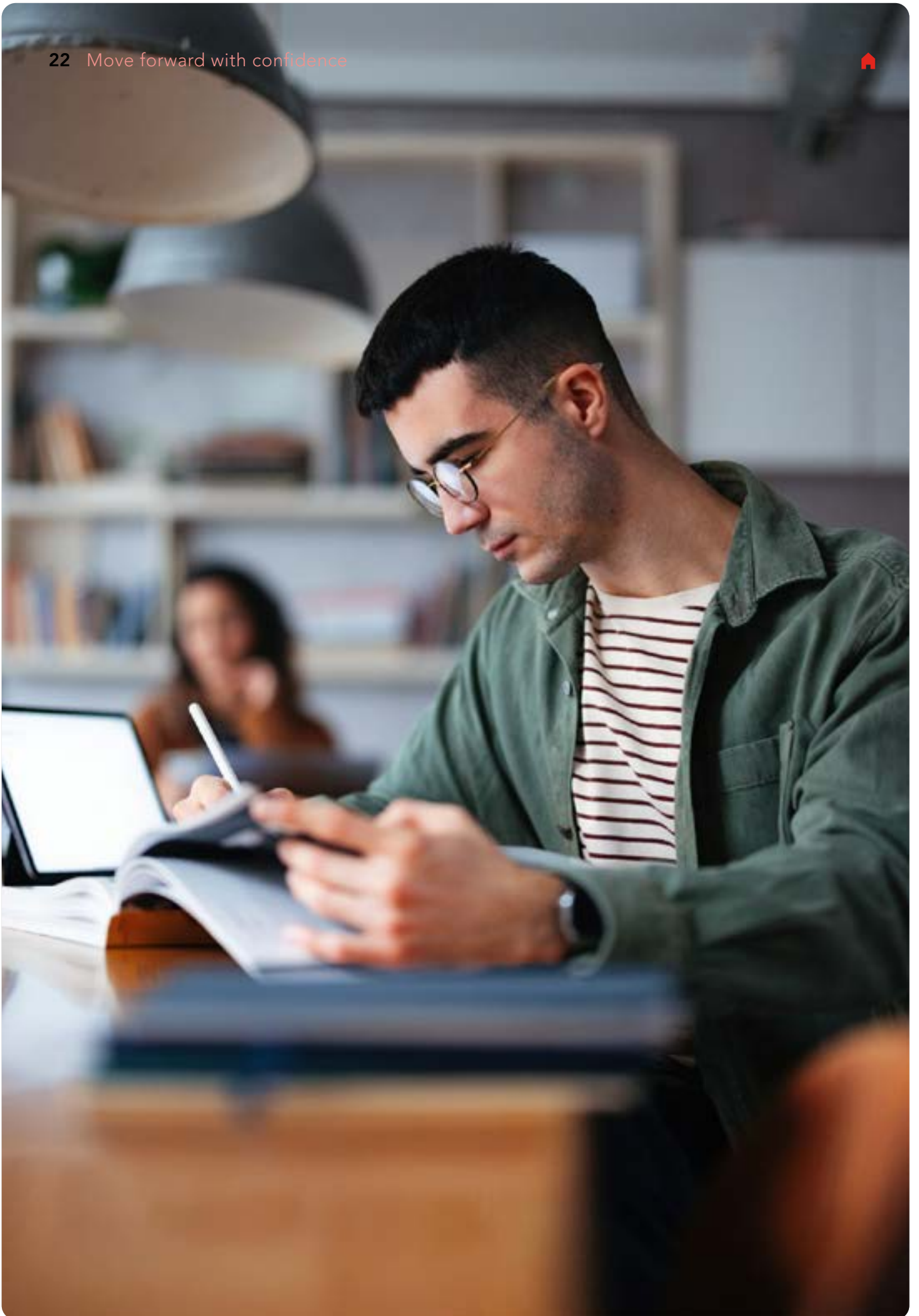
Part 3: Your support map

You don't have to do this alone. Write down the people and resources that can help you move forward.

People and resources to help me move forward are...

Who can support me? (Think about: a manager, a mentor, a tutor, a colleague, a careers advisor or someone in your network)

The people who can support me are...





Free resources I can use:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Communities or professional groups I could join:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Asking for support isn't a sign that you're struggling. It's a sign that you're serious about where you want to go.

You might find these platforms useful:

- [National Careers Service](#)
- [Jobcentre Plus](#)
- [Trade associations directory: Skills for Careers](#)
- [Salary checker: Glassdoor](#)
- [City & Guilds further training and qualifications](#)





One-week *action plan*

Reading this guide is a great start. But the real shift happens when you take one small action to get things moving. So before you close this guide, pick one thing you're going to do in the next seven days. Just one. That's how the momentum starts.

1

Step 1: Choose your focus

Where do you most need clarity right now? Pick and tick one:

- My CV or professional profile needs refreshing
- I want to explore what my next career step looks like
- I want to get better at talking about my skills confidently
- I need to connect with someone who can support me
- _____

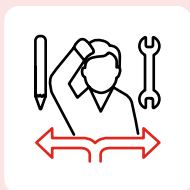
2

Step 2: Pick one action

Choose one specific thing you'll do this week. Here are some ideas:

For everyone:

- Update your CV or LinkedIn profile with your new qualification
- Book a 15-minute conversation with your line manager, mentor, or tutor
- Write down three things you can do now that you couldn't before your training
- Sign up for a careers newsletter or follow a relevant industry account



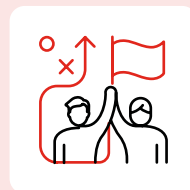
Starting out:

Apply for one job or apprenticeship, even as practice. The process itself can build confidence.



Changing paths:

Reach out to one person already working in your new sector. Ask them one question about how they got started.



Ready to progress:

Block out 30 minutes to map out your next 12 months using Part 1 of the planning tool.



My action this week is...

3

Step 3: Commit to a date

I will complete this by...

Write it down. Tell someone. Put it in your calendar. Small commitments, kept, build the habit of moving forward and keep that momentum going.

4

Step 4: Remind yourself why it matters

Tick the one that resonates most with you:

- This will help me feel more prepared
- This will bring me closer to my goal
- This will build my confidence
- This will show me what's possible
- _____



Helpful links for your next steps

Looking for more inspiration to keep you moving forward? Here's everything you need in one handy place. Bookmark this page and come back to it whenever you need help with your next step.

City & Guilds and partner organisations

- [City & Guilds: qualifications and apprenticeships](#)
- [The Oxford Group: leadership and management development](#)
- [ILM: leadership and management qualifications](#)
- [PeopleCert](#)

Job search and roles

- [Indeed UK](#)
- [Reed](#)
- [Totaljobs](#)
- [Get My First Job](#)
- [Prospects](#)

Trade-specific platforms

- [Checkatrade](#)
- [Rated People](#)
- [My Builder](#)
- [Hair and Beauty Jobs](#)
- [Skills for Care: care sector jobs](#)
- [Bark.com: freelance and self-employed](#)

Salary research

- [Glassdoor](#)
- [National Careers Service: job profiles and salaries](#)
- [Totaljobs Salary Checker](#)

Further training and development

- [Skills for Careers](#)
- [OpenLearn — free courses from The Open University](#)
- [FutureLearn](#)
- [Gov.uk: apprenticeship applications](#)
- [Jobcentre Plus](#)
- [Electrical Training & Electrician Courses Nationwide UK](#)
- [Railway Training Courses - PTS Training](#)
- [Gen2](#)
- [Apprenticeships.gov.uk](#)
- [National Careers Service](#)



About City & Guilds

City & Guilds is the global skills partner, empowering people, organisations and economies to develop the skills they need for growth. With almost 150 years of trusted expertise, we support people into work, help them develop on the job and move into the next job.

We work with Governments, employers, training providers, colleges and industry stakeholders to design and deliver high-quality training, qualifications, assessments and credentials that lead to meaningful career progression. We understand the life changing link between skills development, social mobility and success. Our solutions span critical sectors including construction, engineering, transport, energy and electrical, serving over 1 million learners annually.

Through our comprehensive portfolio of brands and trusted global network, we set industry-wide standards for technical, behavioural and commercial skills to improve performance and productivity. We believe you can achieve your potential - and we're here to help make it happen.

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