



THE
READING
AGENCY

Moving on

Everything you need to get that job

LEARNERS' EDITION



Contents

Section 1: Next steps	4
■ Looking for jobs	
■ Understanding job adverts	
■ Using online resources to look for work	
Section 2: Application forms	10
■ Identifying your skills	
■ Describing your skills	
■ Education and qualifications	
■ Employment history	
■ Completing sample forms	
■ Good and bad application forms	
Section 3: CVs and application letters	18
■ Identifying different CV formats	
■ Personal profiles	
■ Selling your skills	
■ Completing your CV	
■ Covering letters	
■ Sending additional information	
■ Speculative letters	
Section 4: Interviews	22
■ Planning something to say	
■ Structuring your answers	
■ Preparing for likely questions	
Section 5: Resources	38

To find out more about UNISON and how to join contact UNISONdirect on **0800 0 857 857**

Textphone users FREEPHONE call **0800 0 967 968**
Lines open from 6am – midnight
Monday to Friday, 9am – 4pm Saturday

Visit our website
<https://learning.unison.org.uk>
Follow us on twitter **@unisonlearning**

Design: **www.the-design-mill.co.uk**
Cover photo: **Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk**

Edited by: **Martin Moriarty**

How to use this toolkit

This booklet is designed to help UNISON members who have to re-apply for their current jobs due to restructuring; who are facing redeployment or redundancy; or those who wish to strike out on a new career path.

The booklet contains details of 17 different exercises to help members look for work, complete application forms, refine their CVs and prepare for job interviews.

What can you do next? UNISON's member learning offer includes workshops that help members cover many of these issues in more depth. The sessions include *Your skills, your future* and *Coping with change*. Ask your regional learning and organising team about when the workshops might be running in your region.

Preparing to look for work

Recruitment methods may well have changed a great deal since you last looked for work. These two exercises will help familiarise you with some key elements of the current employment market.

Exercise 1

Looking for jobs

The object of this exercise is to develop a comprehensive list of places to go for information on job opportunities.

- 1** Make a list of all the ways you can think of to find out about job vacancies, using the table below.
- 2** For each item in your list, make a note of its advantages and disadvantages. For example, national newspaper advertising covers a large area (advantage) but requires basic literacy skills to access (disadvantage).
- 3** When you have finished, identify what you have learned from completing this exercise.

Exercise 1: Searching for job vacancies

Where to look	Advantages	Disadvantages



JESS HURD / REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

NEXT STEPS

Job descriptions and person specifications

Job adverts include the organisation / company offering employment; the title of the job they are advertising and the duties it involves; what sort of person they are looking for; and possibly what qualifications you will need.

They will also tell you the next step to take, such as:

- sending your CV (mostly private sector)
- applying for the job via an application form (mostly public sector and similar organisations).

If you ask for an application form, you will probably receive a job description and a person specification as well.

A job description sets out duties involved in a particular job.

A person specification sets out what skills, abilities, experience and qualifications you will need to do the job.

To secure an interview, you will need to demonstrate on the application form that you have met all the criteria outlined in the person specification. So the person specification is the key document to use when completing the application form and preparing for the interview.

A person specification may also tell you how the employer will measure your application, using common methods of assessment, such as:

- AF – meaning they will judge the criteria from the application form
- I – meaning they will ask you about this at interview
- T – meaning that there will be a test at interview
- P – meaning you will be expected to run through a presentation with the interview panel.

Employers will usually inform you about the topic of your presentation in advance but not always, so be prepared. It is essential that you include examples from your work practice or other transferable skill areas.

Exercise 2

Understanding job adverts

This exercise is designed to help you get clear about the difference between a job description and a person specification – and how the two different documents can help you in a job application.

- 1 Look at the Social Worker job advert (right) and make a list of the duties and responsibilities you think would be included in the job description.
- 2 Draw up an outline possible person specification for this job using the following four headings:
 - (a) qualifications (certificates that a successful applicant would be expected to have)
 - (b) experience (familiarity with the particular type of work)
 - (c) skills (including those that people may have developed outside work)
 - (d) personal qualities.
- 3 When you have finished both parts of the exercise, identify what you have learned from completing it.

Exercise 2: Understanding job adverts

Children's Social Worker

Are you a Social Worker who has a passion for working with and supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families? If so, we want to hear from you. We are looking for both newly qualified and experienced Children's Social workers to join our SEND Social Work Team, to play a central role in delivering high-quality and responsive social work.

Whether you are newly qualified, or looking for a new challenge, we will provide you with appropriate training and support to assist you in making the transition into this highly rewarding area of social work, delivering a statutory social work service to children and young people aged 0-18 years with a disability, as well as a range of support services to enable families to care for their children successfully and in relation to short break support. You can help us to make a positive difference for our children and young people by securing the best outcomes for them through careful and thoughtful planning.

Close working relationships with our health, education and social care practitioners will enable you to successfully bring together and coordinate the team around the child to ensure a multi-disciplinary approach to safeguarding, using the practice framework of Signs of Safety, for which you will be provided with training and support regarding the framework, as required.

You'll act as the lead professional in statutory cases – including child in need, child protection, care proceedings, looked-after children, mental capacity and Deprivation of Liberty work – while undertaking the full range of social work tasks with disabled children, young people and their families. However, additional support will be given to those undertaking their ASYE.

In your first month, we will agree a personal development plan with you, which will include access to our high-quality internal training programme and our Continuous Professional Development framework. We will also provide specialist training, to enable you to become a champion in an area such as autism, palliative care and complex needs or learning disabilities.

You will need:

- a professional Social Work qualification and Social Work England Registration
- experience of working with children, young people with disabilities and their families
- sound knowledge of relevant childcare legislation, including a clear understanding of 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'.
- an ability to build effective relationships with children, young people and families.

In return, you will be part of a small and friendly team where your contribution will be really valued and you will have the opportunity to shape and improve the services we deliver to our diverse community.

Using online resources to look for work

Find your way round some useful online recruitment resources, including the leading social media business networking service LinkedIn.

Getting the most out of LinkedIn

Many human resources and recruitment staff use the professional social networking site LinkedIn to find potential applicants for jobs, so it can be very useful to develop an attractive profile on the site, which has 29 million members in the UK alone.

Users can get the best out of the site by following many of the same rules they would for posting on any social networking site – using photographs to catch people’s attention, not overwhelming people with huge amounts of text and securing positive feedback.

Many of the exercises from later in this booklet will help you develop an effective LinkedIn profile, especially **Exercise 10** (Personal profile) and **Exercise 11** (Selling your skills). In addition, there are many online how-to guides available with useful suggestions about using the site. Use the search term ‘improve your LinkedIn profile’ to find up to date guides.

www.linkedin.com

Top tips

- 1 Choose a descriptive headline.** Avoid a plain, generic headline such as ‘Clerical Worker’. Think of a headline that sums you up and makes it easy for recruiters to find you using keyword searches.
- 2 Include a well-taken photograph.** Many employers will not pay you any attention if you do not include a photograph, and most will expect you to appear as you might for an interview.
- 3 Keep your summary short and to the point.** Don’t fill it up with unnecessary detail that will make it harder to read. Include your key skills and achievements, and focus on where you would like to go next.
- 4 Avoid clichés.** According to LinkedIn’s own UK survey, too many people are using the same keywords on their profiles. Imagine how bored all those recruiters must be when they come across them all the time. To keep them interested avoid: *motivated, creative, enthusiastic, track record, passionate, successful, driven, leadership, strategic* and *extensive experience*.

5 Ask for endorsements. Contact co-workers and union members and ask them to endorse skills they know you have and you list on your entry. A good range of endorsements works like a good feedback score on eBay: it makes recruiters more likely to consider you.

6 Extend your LinkedIn network. Aim for a minimum of 50 people in your network. If you're starting from scratch, don't be daunted by this. Working on expanding your network little and often will get you there.

Using the government's 'Find a job' service

'Find a job' is a free service that enables people to search for and apply for jobs across the UK. It replaced the Universal Jobmatch service in May 2018. <https://findajob.dwp.gov.uk>

The service is one of the largest free job search sites in the UK, with more than 1.6 million registered users, and it's one of the most consistently used online services at gov.uk. 'Find a job' offers jobseekers (and employers) a simpler and more streamlined way to log in and access their information. The site enables jobseekers to search for work 24 hours a day, seven days a week. By creating an account, users can track their activity, create tailored job alerts and store multiple CVs, to ensure their applications are the best they can be when applying for roles.

Top tips for using recruitment agencies

Recruitment agencies work closely with employers. They will match you to a job if you have what an employer is looking for. Agencies offer temporary jobs as well as permanent or full-time jobs. Agencies also offer jobs that have flexible working hours which may suit your situation and needs. Some agencies specialise in certain types of jobs so they may be able to offer you extra support to find a job in a particular line of work.

To make the most out of your recruitment agency, make sure you:

- keep in regular contact with them
- give them all the information they need, including all your contact details and references
- keep your CV accurate and up-to-date
- tell them if there is a particular type of job you *don't* want: be upfront and save time
- listen to any advice from your consultant about improving your CV: they are professionals and they want to help you get a job
- talk to your agency if they are not finding you work: it may be there is none available, so think about other types of work you are willing to do or register with another agency.

Selling your skills

When you are completing an application form, it is very useful to have some ideas about why you are suitable for the job. Having the knowledge to identify your skills and attributes and the confidence to put them across will help you immensely.

When you apply for a job, you need to be really positive in the way you describe your skills and experience. A job application is your own 'shop window': its main purpose is to showcase the skills, qualifications and experience you have that a potential employer is looking for.

But people often forget to include the skills they have, because they take them for granted or don't see them as important. Yet these may be the very skills an employer is after.

These three exercises help you look at different ways of being positive about yourself when applying for jobs.

Exercise 3

Identifying your skills

This is a quick activity to help you analyse what skills you have and how they are transferable from one part of your life (e.g. home) to another (e.g. work).

- 1** Divide a sheet of paper into five columns headed:
 - at work
 - voluntary work
 - at home
 - hobbies and interests
 - any others.
- 2** Spend a few minutes thinking about all the skills you have in the different areas of your life, and list them under the heading which fits best.
- 3** When you have finished, highlight / underline / asterisk which job skills you did not develop at work.

Exercise 4

Describing your skills

This exercise helps you identify the key differences between two ways of saying the same thing.

- “I spent 10 years at home with the children and now I want a change.”
- “I decided to take a 10-year break from paid employment to support my children in their early years. Now they are independent, the time is right for a new challenge.”

- 1 How do these statements differ in tone?
- 2 Which one conveys more information?
- 3 How does the applicant come across in each statement?

Exercise 5

Accentuate the positive

Using words with positive connotations can make all the difference when writing about your skills on application forms.

- 1 Look at the six statements at the top of the next column and the list of positive words on the right. How could you use the positive words to make the statements more appealing to a potential employer?

- I was asked to show new staff how to do the work.
- I had to keep an eye on what stock was needed and place new orders when we were running low.
- The boss always asked me to fill in for people from other departments when they were short.
- I had to sort out the filing system and then show others how to use it.
- I used to do the books for the local playgroup. What you want is probably similar.
- The boss would often leave me to work by myself all day.

- 2 How do you feel about the differences between the original statements and the rewritten versions?

Your choice of positive words

- | | | |
|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| / achieved | / assessed | / capable |
| / competent | / consistent | / co-ordinated |
| / designed | / developed | / directed |
| / dynamic | / economical | / effective |
| / efficient | / encouraged | / expanded |
| / experience | / guided | / implemented |
| / improved | / initiated | / innovative |
| / inspiring | / knowledge | / maintained |
| / managed | / monitored | / organised |
| / participated | / positive | / productive |
| / resourceful | / responsible | / specialised |
| / supervised | / trained | / varied |
| / versatile | | |

Preparing to complete an application form

Make sure you gather all the information you need before you start filling in an application form.

Tips for filling in forms

- **Photocopy the form** That way, you can practise making the information fit in the space you are given. If you can't photocopy it, then write lightly in pencil first. If it's an online-only application form, you can screenshot each page and print them off.
- **Read the instructions carefully and follow them exactly** If an online form sets word limits on answers, make sure your answer is around that length and definitely does not exceed it. If a paper form asks for black ink, use black ink.
- **Read the form through first** This will help you decide what information about you is required, and where best to put it.
- **Gather all the information in notes first** Make sure you have all your dates of employment, addresses of employers, school qualifications and dates, work-related certificates and dates and so on.
- **Make sure of your referees** You will need to give the names and addresses of referees. Make sure you ask them first. They should not be members of your family. It is usual to ask present or previous employers, but you could also use a tutor (if you are on a course) or someone you work for as a volunteer if you are not in paid employment.
- **If there is not enough space** You may not have enough space to include all the information on a paper form e.g. if you have attended several schools or had many different jobs. If this is the case, then write in those that will fit comfortably but leave space at the bottom to add 'see separate sheet' and continue on the separate sheet. Make sure it follows the same pattern as the section on the form.
- **Don't write in spaces that are not for you** Some sections of a printed form may say 'OFFICE USE ONLY' or something similar. Do not write anything in these: they are often used to record information at the interview or after someone is appointed.

Exercise 6

Education and qualifications

List your key qualifications in date order below, starting with the earliest and finishing with the most recent. If you are missing any information, where could you find it?

Date	Place	Address	Qualification	Grade

Exercise 7

Employment history

List everywhere you have worked below, starting with the earliest and finishing with the most recent. Use separate entries for different job roles at the same employer.

Dates	Employer	Address	Job title	Duties

Completing a sample application

Practice makes perfect. Complete this sample application form by using the education and employment information you collated in exercises 7 and 8 and the positive approach to describing your skills and experience you developed in exercises 3, 4 and 5.

Exercise 8

Putting it all together

Completing this sample application form will show you how you can use your answers to previous exercises when applying for a new job.

Notes

- 1 Read through the whole of the sample application form before you start filling in any of the sections. Make a mental note of any instructions such as how you present your employment history or word counts in particular sections.
- 2 Start by filling in the sections on education, training and employment history using the material generated in completing Exercise 6. If an application form asks for your reasons for leaving previous employers, remember to be positive, not negative. No employer is likely to want to interview someone who writes: 'Didn't get on with my boss'. Better to say something more positive, such as: 'Wanted to gain wider experience.'
- 3 Next, refer back to your answers to Exercises 3 and 4 and use that material to complete the section headed 'Experience'.
- 4 Now move on to the 'additional information' section. Sections like this one offer you the chance to tell potential employers a bit more about why you would be suitable for the job, so you should never leave them blank. One option would be to use a section like this to outline all the experience and skills you have that relate to the job, including any gained from hobbies and voluntary work as well as previous work experience. While the sample form includes a section headed 'Additional information,' other forms might have similar sections with more specific questions such as, 'Please tell us about any experience you feel is relevant to the post/job' or, 'Please tell us what you see as the main challenges of the job'. You should always answer the specific question you have been asked.
- 5 When you have completed all the sections of this sample form, think about who you could ask to check it through for grammar and spelling: a second pair of eyes always helps. When completing online applications, it's good to leave yourself enough time for someone with good literacy skills to proofread your answers before you press 'Send' or 'Submit'.

Application for employment (1)

Please type or write your answers in BLACK ink and continue on a separate sheet if necessary.

Post applied for	Reference number
------------------	------------------

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Dr, Mrs, Mr, Miss, Ms	Surname
-----------------------	---------

First names

Home telephone	Mobile telephone
----------------	------------------

Address	Postcode
---------	----------

SECONDARY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Dates (month/year)	School, College or University	Examinations taken	Results

TECHNICAL, PROFESSIONAL OR OCCUPATIONAL TRAINING

Dates (month/year)	School, Institute or Employer	Subjects	Qualifications (if applicable)

Application for employment (2)

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY in reverse chronological order, please

Dates (month/year)	Name and address of employer	Positions held

EXPERIENCE

Describe briefly the nature of your present position as well as any held previously that you consider relevant to this application (no more than 300 words).

Application for employment (3)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please use this space to give any information you feel is relevant but is not covered elsewhere (no more than 500 words).

REFEREES

Name and address	Name and address
Postcode	Postcode

Are we able to approach your referees without contacting you first? Yes / No

Signed	Date
--------	------

Top tips for your CV

A well organised up-to-date CV is a fantastic tool to help find the right job for you in the private sector.

Your CV is a brief, usually two-page, document that tells an employer about you, your experience, skills and qualifications.

When applying for jobs in the private sector, your CV is a vital marketing tool to help you promote yourself. Think of your CV as a brochure about the benefits of a particular service – your time and skills!

When writing a CV, look at it from your potential employer's point of view. Does your CV help you stand out from the other candidates? Does your CV make a manager more or less likely to want to talk to you about a potential job? These are helpful questions to ask yourself when putting together your CV.

Networking and interviewing are essential for your job hunt and your CV is just the first step in the job search (more details on networking on p30). However, a CV will be your first contact with most potential private sector employers and will open the door. If you are invited for an interview, you will then be in a position to explain and expand on what is in your CV.

A CV is an essential tool in your job search:

- When applying for a vacancy in the private sector, you generally have to send your CV to your prospective employer.
- So long as you keep your CV up-to-date, you can also use it as a reference tool when you are filling in application forms. Think back to how long it took you to fill in your application forms: spending all that time gathering information can be avoided if you always maintain an up-to-date CV.

Why you need a great CV

- 1** There are three main types of CV format: chronological (education and employment listed in date order – the most common), functional (focuses on skills, especially transferable skills) and targeted (highlights skills required for a specific vacancy).
- 2** Keep it to two sides of A4 if you can. But don't miss off important information to do this. If you have to use a third page then do so, but try to avoid any more than that.
- 3** The layout should be clear and easy to follow, using headings to separate the different sections of information.



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

- 4** Don't rely on automated grammar and spellcheck tools to catch every mistake. Print the document and check the hard copy: you're much more likely to spot errors on the page rather than on screen. If you aren't confident about your spelling or grammar, ask someone with those skills to cast their eyes over it.
- 5** Make sure you don't miss out important skills and experience and be as positive as you can, but don't lie: you will only be found out, if not at the interview, then once you have started your new job, and you then risk being fired – and you don't want that on your next CV. You don't need to lie to make yourself look as good as possible.
- 6** Keep your CV up-to-date and don't leave any gaps of time. Sending one that is out of date means that you will have missed off skills gained since you last wrote it, and leaving time gaps will mean an employer doesn't have a full picture of what you have been doing.
- 7** You should have a general CV, but you can change it around to suit a particular job. For example, if you have had lots of different types of jobs, you may want to include more details about those that were most relevant to the job you are applying for, and cut out bits where a job was not similar.
- 8** Remember to save a copy on your computer or tablet every time you make any significant revisions, Naming each version by the date you made it is a good way to keep track, such as 'Aisha CV November 2020'. That way you don't have to start from scratch every time you apply for a job.

Choosing your CV format

All CVs used to be chronological. Not any more. There are other options to choose, which may better suit your circumstances.

Chronological CVs

- Use a chronological CV – a list of your experience and education – when:
 - you want to emphasise your employment;
 - you want a general information-based CV that can be used for any application;
 - you have never worked but have excellent qualifications, which can be listed in detail.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME: Elizabeth Covington
ADDRESS: 42 Union Drive, Nottingham, NG14 9CZ
TELEPHONE NO: 07777 123456

PROFILE

I am well organised, very efficient and know how to prioritise competing tasks. I keep a calm head under pressure and manage stress effectively. I enjoy working in teams and maintain warm and friendly professional relationships with my colleagues and my managers.

QUALIFICATIONS

Equality and Diversity Level 2 Certificate, 2019, Leicester College
Diploma in stress management, 2012, Alison.com
Autism awareness CPD workshop, 2003, Open University
Behaviour management CPD workshop, 2001, Open University
NVQ Level 2 Business Administration, 1998, Nye Bevan College, Nottingham
Five GCSEs (English A, maths B, science B, geography C, history C), 1985, Keir Hardie Secondary School, Nottingham

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

2010 – 2020 **Beatrice Webb Sixth Form College** – secretary
 1999 – 2010 **Annie Besant Secondary School** – teaching assistant
 1992 – 1999 **Annie Besant Secondary School** – lunchtime supervisor
 1987 – 1992 **Hardie & Sons Footwear** – office manager
 1985 – 1987 **Bickerstaffe & Co. Solicitors** – office junior

INTERESTS

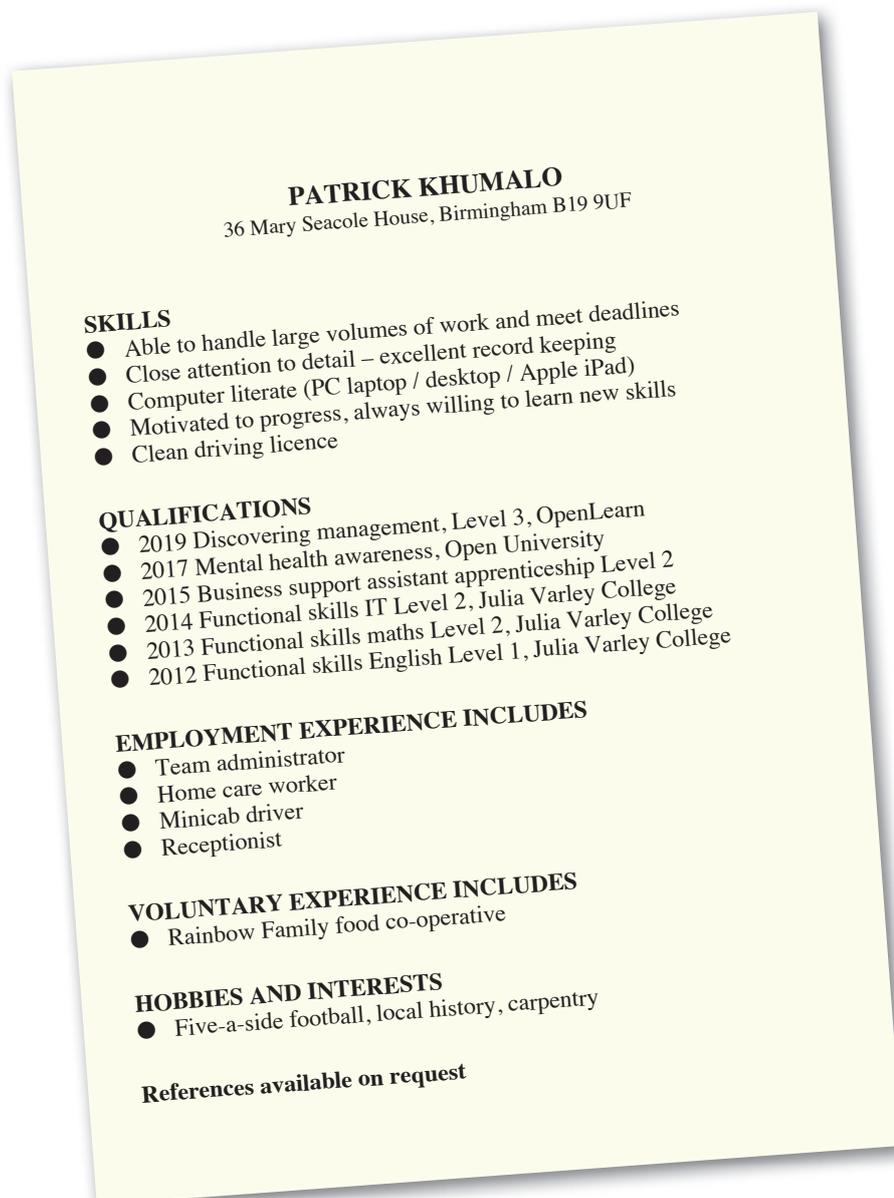
Gardening, yoga, pub quizzes, detective fiction

REFERENCES

Maureen Kennett, Principal, Beatrice Webb Sixth Form College
 Courtney Saunders, Tutor, Leicester College

Functional CVs

- Use a functional CV to list your various skills and experience when:
 - you have had a variety of unconnected jobs from which you have gained different kinds of experience, all of which are selling points to potential employers;
 - you have limited paid work experience, but have done voluntary work or worked in the home, which would be difficult to express in a chronological CV;
 - you have very general skill areas.



CVS AND LETTERS OF APPLICATION

Targeted CVs

- Some job adverts outside the public sector ask applicants to reply with a covering letter and a CV. You can improve your chances of being called for interview if you submit a targeted CV, highlighting the skills and experience you have that are especially relevant to the job.
- The best way of drafting a targeted CV is to identify the key skills and experience in the job description and work them into your CV. This helps demonstrate that you have exactly the skills and / or experience that the employer is looking for.
- Don't write a generic covering letter that suggests your prospective employer simply reads through your CV. Take the opportunity to set out how your skills and experience match the job criteria, making sure the letter does not exceed one side of A4.
- The best way to proofread CVs and covering letters is to print them out. But if you don't have access to a printer, give yourself time to proofread the documents before you email them – or ask someone else if they will do that for you.

SHELTERED HOUSING OFFICER

We are recruiting for a Sheltered Housing Officer to help deliver an excellent service to our residents and ensure our sheltered housing schemes are effectively managed. This role would suit someone who is comfortable working on their own, making decisions and using their initiative. You'll need to have strong inter-personal skills, the ability to build positive relationships with both colleagues and residents and the energy and enthusiasm needed to deliver a great service.

The role includes:

- keeping in regular contact with residents to deal with queries about their properties and all aspects of tenancy management
- working closely with colleagues internally and liaising with them about issues including cleaning, grounds maintenance and repairs
- working with external contractors
- carrying out health and safety checks in communal areas and ensuring the buildings and grounds remain safe and pleasant for residents
- working with the local authority to obtain nominations for empty properties, carrying out property viewings and completing sign-up paperwork with new residents.

Our three sheltered schemes are independent living flats for those over 55. The postholder will be based at one of the schemes but will be required to provide cover and support at the other schemes on a regular basis. The role requires an onsite presence from Monday to Friday.

To apply for this role, please send your CV with a covering letter to jobs@anyhousing.org.uk

Exercise 9

This exercise helps you think about how to write a targeted CV based on the information in a job advert.

- 1 Read through the job advert for a Sheltered Housing Officer (previous page) then look at the targeted CV (right).
- 2 Identify all the ways in which Parminder has highlighted she has the skills and experience the housing association is looking for.
- 3 Would you do anything differently?

CURRICULUM VITAE: PARVINDER KOHLI

23 Desai Road, London, UB1 0WQ
07777 654321

Professional profile

- 18 years' experience in housing sector
- Motivated self-starter
- Track record of positive relationships with residents and tenants
- Committed team player
- Excellent inter-personal skills
- Experience liaising with local council and contractors
- Health and safety qualifications

Employment experience

2015, Home Services Officer, Jack Jones Housing Association: duties included regular communication with tenants about a wide range of issues and working with external contractors.
2010, Sheltered Assessment Officer, London Borough of Camden: duties included working closely with residents 55 and over; worked effectively as part of the team to ensure properties and grounds were maintained to a high specification.
2007, Housing assistant, London Borough of Ealing: worked in partnership with department manager on regular health and safety inspections and action plans; completed health and safety rep training Stage 2
2003, Business Administrator (housing department), London Borough of Ealing; conducted regular health and safety inspections; completed health and safety reps training Stage 1

Courses and qualifications

- TUC Health and Safety Certificate, Stage 2, 2008
- TUC Health and Safety Certificate, Stage 1, 2006
- Three A Levels History, Geography, Politics – 2003, Bill Morris Secondary School, Southall

Hobbies and interests

Running (London Marathon finisher 2019), Zumba, Pilates, cooking

Writing a great personal profile

Many of us don't like writing about ourselves and our achievements. But a short, attractive personal profile will help potential employers get a sense of who you are.

- Your 'personal profile' should be the first thing an employer reads after your name and address. It gives you the chance to instantly impress an employer and encourages them to read on.
- Do:
 - talk about your experience and skills and back up what you say, e.g. mention that you have computer skills, which have been applied in a business setting.
- Don't:
 - talk about things that an employer would take for granted, e.g. that you are honest or loyal: an employer would expect this.
 - include things that cannot be proven.

Exercise 10

Personal profiles

This exercise gives you the tools to write an attractive personal profile.

- 1 Make a list of words you think best describes you at work (e.g. flexible, quick to learn, positive attitude).
- 2 Make a list of specifics about your skills and experience.
- 3 Put the two lists together into a short paragraph that creates your own personal profile.



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Some sample personal profiles

“I am a confident and self-motivated customer service assistant who has experience in various customer service roles within a busy environment. I am an excellent team member who is equally able to work alone relying upon her initiative. I undertake all my duties with a great deal of enthusiasm and possess the ability to communicate effectively with all service users.”

“I am a hardworking individual who has experience of performing a variety of roles within a mailroom environment. I am highly enthusiastic and versatile with the ability to adapt to new situations and learn new tasks quickly and effectively.”

“I am a hardworking and conscientious person who has acquired a variety of skills throughout my life. I am caring and able to listen to others while understanding their needs. I perform all my tasks enthusiastically and enjoy seeing jobs through to a satisfactory conclusion. I am now seeking an environment where I can successfully utilise my wide range of skills.”

The best way to sell your skills

When putting together functional and targeted CVs, it's essential to be able to compile a detailed list of your skills.

Exercise 11

Selling your skills

This exercise builds on the work undertaken in exercises 3, 4 and 5 to help you compile a detailed list of your skills and how you have used them in the workplace or where you have developed them in union or voluntary roles.

- 1** Start by listing all the major tasks you regularly perform at work (e.g. 'Managing budgets').
- 2** For each major task, come up with a phrase that shows the skill it involves (e.g. 'Managing budgets, using advanced maths and digital skills') or where you developed it (e.g. 'Managing budgets as treasurer of local UNISON branch'). The list of positive words in **Exercise 5** will come in handy here as well.
- 3** You can expand the list by working back through your employment history, but you may need to create a table of your own on a sheet of a paper or on a computer / tablet to do this.
- 4** Now move on to do the same for the sections on UNISON (and / or any other voluntary groups you take part in) and your home life.



	Tasks	Skills
Work		
UNISON / voluntary		
Home		

Putting together your CV

This is where you can use all the elements you have already worked up to complete a well-rounded CV that will impress potential future employers.

Exercise 12

Completing your CV

- 1 Start by filling in your personal details.
- 2 Use the profile you developed in **Exercise 10** to complete the Profile section.
- 3 Use the Skills list developed in **Exercise 11** to complete the Skills and experience section.
- 4 Use the Education and qualifications list from **Exercise 5** to complete the 'Education and qualifications' section.
- 5 Use the Employment history from **Exercise 6** to complete the 'Employment history' section.
- 6 Make a list of any interests that show you have personal qualities an employer would be looking for (e.g. mentioning you are a member of your local swimming group could be seen to demonstrate that you are physically active and a 'team player').
- 7 Complete the additional information you will be including in your CV.

Notes

■ Profile

Your personal profile should be the first thing an employer reads after your name and address: it gives you the chance to instantly impress an employer and encourages them to read on.

■ Employment history

Always list your employment history with the most recent first.

■ Education and qualifications

Always list your education and qualifications with the most recent first. You only need go back as far as secondary school.

You can include the grades if they are good passes. If you left school several years ago and have gained a great deal of work experience since then or other qualifications, you may wish to omit your secondary schooling. An employer will be less interested in what you did at school 10 years ago than in your relevant experience and qualifications for the job. Any relevant qualifications gained since leaving school should also be listed, as should short vocational courses that relate to your chosen job.

■ **Hobbies and interests**

Listing your hobbies and interests will give an employer an insight into your personality.

■ **Date of birth**

You don't need to include it but an employer may be able to work it out from your employment history.

■ **Mobility**

If you have a full driving licence, say so – you may be required to drive company transport as part of your job. If you own a car or can get access to a car it's useful to state this as it shows you will be able to get to work even if your employers are in a remote area. If you have a clean driving licence when you first put together your CV, remember to amend that if you later get fined for speeding.

■ **Marital status**

An employer doesn't need to know this.

■ **References**

You can name your referees on your CV. A potential employer will expect your current or last employer to provide you with a reference, although if this is not possible they may accept character references. College or school references are also acceptable. You can simply state that "references are available upon request" – that way you can either supply an employer with written references which you may already have or give them details of your chosen referees. The onus is then upon the employer to contact your referees and you don't have to worry about your current employer being contacted without your permission.

■ **Length**

The most effective CVs are the ones you keep to one or two sides of A4. Anything longer than that will reduce the likelihood of a potential employer paying close attention.

The art of speculative applications

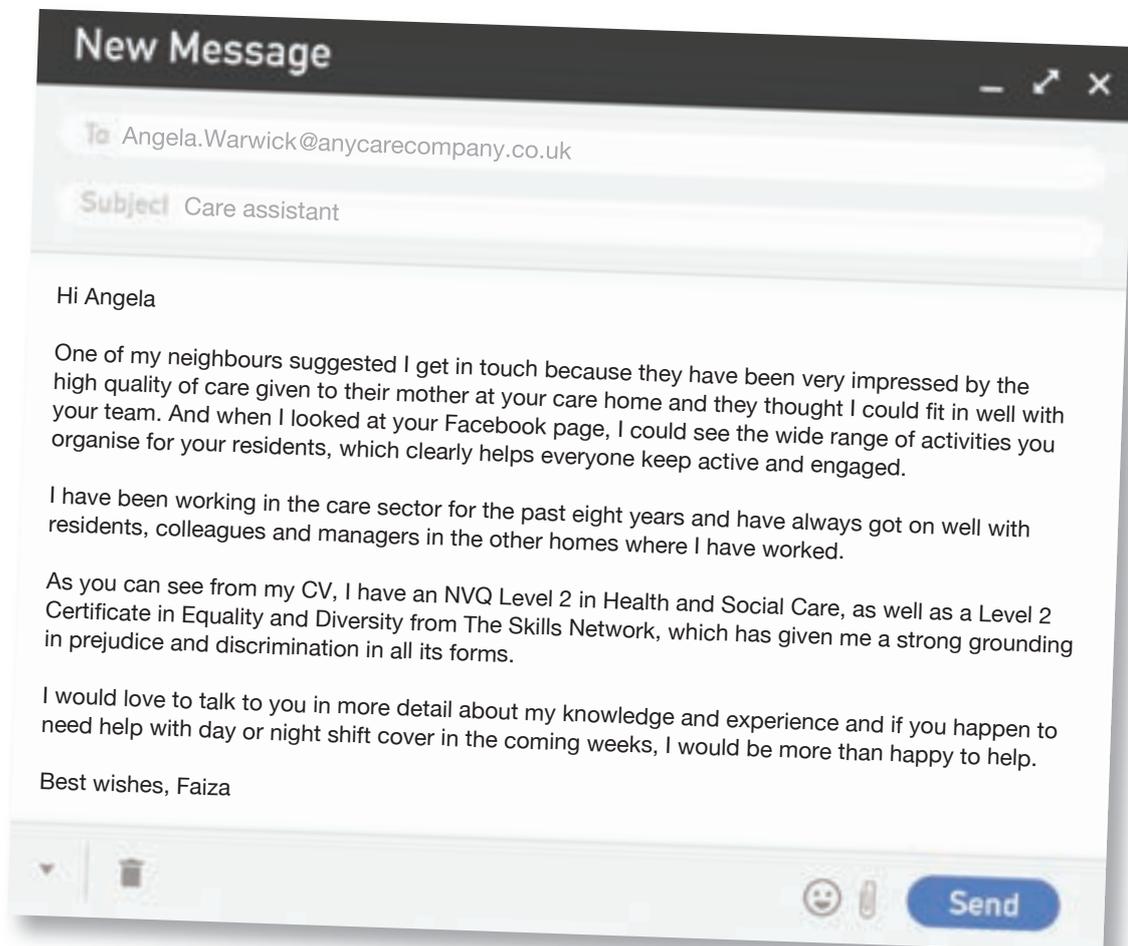
Increase your chances of success when making speculative approaches to potential employers.

Exercise 13

Speculative emails

This exercise should help you draft concise and compelling speculative emails to potential employers.

- 1 Look at the email from Faiza Hussain.
- 2 Identify three key strengths of the approach.
- 3 Is there anything you would change about the overall approach?
- 4 Find the website of an organisation you might like to work for and write a speculative email of your own to a named person about potential work.



Notes

- When you are making a speculative application, you should always email a named person if possible: find the name of the relevant person, their correct job title and their email address by searching the company website, using a search engine or searching LinkedIn – or ring the company directly and ask the switchboard for that information.
- It's important with speculative emails to give the impression that you are only writing to one particular company. This makes an employer think that you have singled them out as the one you want to work for.
- Try to keep it to the point by only including the skills that the employer would be looking for. The employer can find all the other information about you from your CV.
- Give some really positive reasons why you would like to work for the company or employer. Emphasise what you can bring to the organisation, not what they could do for you. Don't construct the email like you're desperate for work – think of it more as an offer to help them solve a problem.
- Always follow up a speculative email with a phone call. Not immediately – that might be irritating! Wait a few days to give the person time to catch up with their emails and then ask if you could fix a time to talk.

The power of networking

It's good to be alert to potential contacts you might come across as you go about your day, like Faiza in Exercise 13. Many people have negative preconceptions about networking. They think it's about using other people, being pushy, or even making back-door deals that circumvent equal opportunities policies.

But sharing information at the school gates, in the gym or, even at union branch meetings – that's networking, even if you don't think of it like that.

That tip you got about a good place to look online for fashion bargains? That was networking. Advice you gave about family-friendly places to stay on holiday? Also networking. The great suggestion for your next book club book? Networking.

There are lots of ways you can apply the same principles in a work, employment and career setting. These are just three suggestions.

Top tips

- 1** You always know more people than you think: family, friends, neighbours, co-workers, former colleagues, parents through your children's school, members of the residents and tenants organisation, people in your book club, community group or gym, dog-walkers ... They all know about opportunities you don't – and you can share information with them about possibilities you've heard about.
- 2** People can only help if they know you're in the jobs market. Talk to people about your employment situation, where you are, where you would like to go. Don't expect anyone else to solve your problem for you. Just make sure people know you're on the lookout. And remember to let other people know about opportunities you have heard of that might be a good fit for them.
- 3** Don't be shy. We feel good when we can help out someone else – whether that's giving directions to a stranger or suggesting a course that another UNISON member could enrol on to develop the skills they need.

Be prepared

The biggest mistake in interviewing is not being fully prepared. Here's how to arrive at your next job interview in the best possible shape.

Exercise 14

Do your research

This exercise will help you turn your research about a potential employer into talking points for a job interview.

- 1 Begin by using your smartphone, tablet or laptop to research an organisation you might be interested in working for. It could be a nearby local authority; an NHS Trust; a local school; an energy provider; or any other potential employer. You could look on their website for pages called things like 'About us'; 'Our history'; or 'Mission statement'. Or you could search for news stories in the relevant specialist press online to identify new contracts they have landed recently, major projects or partnerships they are involved in or future plans they have made public.
- 2 For every document or news story you can find, plan something of your own to say about it. For example, what part of the mission statement most closely aligns with your own values? What projects or plans is the employer developing that you like the sound of?

Notes

- You can use the same approach when you prepare for your next job interview.
- When a potential employer provides a person specification to job applicants, use this as the key document for interview preparation. The

best way to do this is to prepare examples for each criterion from your work practice. It's also important to consider the impact of the Equalities Act for each area.

Exercise 15

Planning something to say

This exercise will help you overcome anxiety about your mind going blank during an interview.

- 1 Start by making a list of five questions you might be asked.
- 2 Now spend five minutes writing a one or two-sentence answer to each question.

Notes

- Interviewing is a skill, which means you will get better at it the more you prepare and the more you practise.
- There's no one 'best' way to prepare for an interview. But there are specific and important strategies to enhance your chances for interview success. Think of every interview as a learning experience: that means what you learn (in preparation and at the interview itself) will help you improve next time.
- Preparing for an interview removes unnecessary stress from a stressful situation. The more you can do to help an interview run smoothly, the more confident you will feel.

Exercise 16

Structuring your answers

This exercise introduces you to the STAR technique for structuring interview answers.

- 1 Everyone needs to have an answer prepared to the standard interview question: “Give me an example of when you solved a problem that had a successful outcome”.
- 2 Many interviewers expect to hear answers to this standard question broken down into four parts using the STAR technique: (Situation, Task, Action, Result).
 - **Situation:** detail the background and the context – where did this happen and when?
 - **Task:** describe the challenge – what needed to be done?
 - **Action:** describe what you did – be specific.
 - **Result:** describe what you accomplished – include positive feedback from clients, customers and/or managers.
- 3 Look at this example of the STAR technique in action:

Situation: A patient rang up to complain they had never received the results of a set of blood tests taken a fortnight before.

Task: I had to address the patient’s concerns and find out what had happened to their results.

Action: I apologised to the patient, confirmed their address and promised to call them back later the same day. I then checked our database and discovered we were using an out-of-date address, which I corrected before re-sending the results. I was able to ring them back within an hour to explain what had happened, and what I had done.

Result: The patient was relieved and my supervisor thanked me.

Three-part preparation plan

- 1 **Need to know**
 - Find out all you can about the employer and what the job would involve.
 - Prepare for possible questions.
 - Don’t forget your personal specification information.
- 2 **Dress code**
 - Decide what you will wear well in advance. Look smart – even if you know that everyone wears jeans to work at this workplace.
 - Give yourself enough time to get your clothing dry cleaned or washed, dried and ironed – or replaced with something new, if necessary. Don’t wait until the evening before.
- 3 **Getting there**
 - Make sure you know where you have to be and how you will travel there.
 - If you can, do a trial run to see how long it will take.
 - If your interview is online, make sure you know your way round the platform the company is using.
- 4 Now identify an incident at work that you could use to answer this question.
- 5 Next, compose an answer to this question using the STAR technique.
- 6 Finally, make sure your answer contains each part of the STAR technique.

Refining your answers to key questions

Questions that are designed to understand your behavioural traits, personality and longer term ambitions come up time and time again, so it's wise to prepare responses ahead of time.

Exercise 17

Preparing for likely questions

Make sure you have something to say if you're asked one of these standard interview questions.

- Q1 Tell me about yourself ...** This is usually the opening question and, as first impressions are key, one of the most important. Keep your answer to under five minutes, beginning with your current role and what you have achieved.
- Q2 Why do you want this job?** Try to answer positively – as if you see this job as an opportunity to use your skills in a new environment ... or to try something different.
- Q3 What are your strengths?** Ensure that these are relevant to the job. Try and relate your strengths back to the person spec and give examples of why you're strong in these areas.
- Q4 What's been your most significant success at work?** This is about your personal achievements and contribution. Interviewers aren't interested in the great team you work with. If you have limited work experience, you could talk about achievements outside work. But relate them to the job you are applying for.
- Q5 What's the biggest mistake you ever made?** We all have one, but what's important is how you dealt with your biggest mistake and what you learned from the experience.
- Q6 What's the greatest challenge you have ever faced?** Keep it relevant to the job and be positive. Again, interviewers want to know how you met the challenge and what you might do differently, with the wisdom of hindsight, in a similar situation.
- Q7 You've changed jobs three times in the past five years, why should I think you are more serious about this one?** Great opportunities came your way and you would have been foolish to turn them down. Or, you took a job to achieve a particular goal and, having succeeded sooner than you expected, it was time to move on.
- Q8 What do you do outside work?** You want to appear active but not so busy that you could not get to work on time or stay late occasionally.

Plus one more ...

Do you have any questions? You will also be given an opportunity to ask questions of your own. Think about something you want to know before you go. Since employers nowadays expect staff to commit to the ethos of the organisation, choose a question or questions that demonstrate you are interested in working there.

Ending on a good note

Your interviewer(s) may tell you during the course of the interview when you should expect to receive a decision from the organisation on the outcome of the interview, and what the next stage of the process will be if you are successful.

If these points have not already been covered, it is good to ask for this information at the end of the interview. It will not only clarify the next stage for you, but will also indicate to them that you are organised and methodical.

Remember to thank the interviewer(s) and reiterate your enthusiasm for the job for which you have applied. Always end the interview on a positive note.



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Ten tips for interviews

Finally, ten things to think about to guide you through your next interviews. When a job attracts many applicants, or the interviewers might have trouble choosing between the best two or three people, getting the small things right can make all the difference between success and rejection.

- 1** Start smiling before you get there – you don't know who might notice you complaining in the car park or putting out a cigarette in the flower pot.
- 2** You may be interviewed by more than one person. Make sure you look and smile at all of them.
- 3** Wait until they ask you to sit down.
- 4** Remain aware of your body language and non-verbal communication throughout your interview. Don't obsess about it or let it distract you from answering the question. Just remember that what you say is important, but how you come across is also going to play a part in how you are assessed. For example, sit comfortably in the chair but don't slouch. (This can look as if you're bored or don't care). Find more detailed suggestions online by using the search terms 'non-verbal communication' and 'body language'. There is a good introduction on the Mind Tools website: <http://bit.ly/3qSzn18>
- 5** Avoid any habits like playing with your hair or tapping your foot as these can be distracting.
- 6** Remain formal and polite – it helps you concentrate and gives a good impression. Speak slowly and loudly enough to be heard clearly. Look at the person who has asked you the question, but don't forget to glance round at the others occasionally.
- 7** If you do not completely understand any of the questions, say so – do not waffle.
- 8** Towards the end, you will be asked if you have any questions. Usually, they will also ask if there is anything further you wish to say. If they don't ask and you know there are things you haven't had the chance to tell them, say something like, "May I just mention one or two things?" Then, make them brief.



9 When the interview is over, collect your things and leave with a smile for everyone, saying “Goodbye and thank you,” however badly you think it has gone. You may be surprised. Don’t blow it now!

10 Wait until you are well away from the place before you breathe a sigh of relief, or whatever else you do to unwind.

After your interview

- Always keep a diary or spreadsheet of interviews you have attended, and make notes of your thoughts about the job and the company. Do this as soon as you get home, while your memories are fresh. If you think you could have performed better in one part of the interview, there could be resources from UNISON Learning to help you do better next time.
- If you have been told you will be contacted by a certain date, you should not chase them for information before then. However, if you have not heard anything from the organisation by the date they stipulated, it is good to contact the resourcing or HR team by phone or email to enquire about the status of your application. There may simply be a delay in their procedures and your enquiry will show that you are still enthusiastic and have kept the timeframe in mind.
- Some employers may offer feedback to unsuccessful candidates. If this is the case, always take them up on the offer – it is a really useful way of finding out how you come across and what skills you need to develop further.
- If you think you have been discriminated against or unfairly treated in the recruitment and selection process, please contact your UNISON representative, who can advise you about raising a complaint through the appropriate procedures.

Acas, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service

www.acas.org.uk

Offers a range of resources to help people deal with redundancy at work.

www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=747

Citizens Advice

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Offers advice on work and employment rights, benefits, tax and money management.

Create Your Own Future

www.unionlearn.org.uk/create-your-own-future

Create Your Own Future is a digital tool that helps learners prepare for new jobs and different careers. With the help of a virtual mentor, you can identify your transferable skills, gain new skills and match yourself with a wide range of job opportunities and training options. Create Your Own Future is hosted on the unionlearn website.

FutureLearn

<https://www.futurelearn.com>

Wholly owned by The Open University, FutureLearn offers a diverse selection of courses from leading universities and cultural institutions from around the world. They are delivered one step at a time, and are accessible on mobile, tablet and desktop. Many courses in the business and management section could help you develop your career, covering subjects such as effective networking, online CV writing and writing effective job applications.

Learn My Way

www.learnmyway.com

Learn My Way is a website of free online courses for beginners, helping people develop digital skills to make the most of the online world. It's owned by the Good Things Foundation, the charity that to promote digital skills for everyone in the UK. Relevant short courses to help you develop your career include *Job hunting online*, *Jobs and interviews* and *National Careers Service website: a how-to guide*.

Money Advice Service

www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/

Free and impartial advice service set up by the government to help people manage their money. The 'work and redundancy' section of its website offers advice on understanding your employment rights, what in-work benefits you might be entitled to and how to handle redundancy.

National Careers Service

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

The National Careers Service provides information, advice and guidance across England to help people make decisions on learning, training and work opportunities. The service offers confidential and impartial advice, supported by qualified careers advisers.

Redundancy – the next steps

help.open.ac.uk/redundancy-your-next-steps

Useful online resource developed by The Open University (OU). The short podcasts, links to training options and advice about wellbeing are all aimed at helping you face the challenge of being made redundant and turning it into a positive opportunity to make a change that works for you.

PEARL

<http://pearl.open.ac.uk>

PEARL (Part-Time Education for Adults Returning to Learn) is a website focused on supporting adults, particularly those who may be looking to identify their first steps towards improving their long-term career prospects. UNISON was one of the national organisations that helped The Open University launch the resource in 2016. PEARL currently offers six new, free, online courses that cover introducing practical healthcare; supporting children's development; caring for adults; starting your small business; taking part in the voluntary sector; and planning a better future.

Value My Skills

www.unionlearn.org.uk/value-my-skills

Digital tool by unionlearn that helps you identify and rate your skills, keep reflection notes, design an action plan and record your progress. Available in 10 European languages, including Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish and Romanian.

WorkSmart

www.worksmart.org.uk/

TUC website with advice both on rights at the workplace, including redundancy, and how to find a job or build skills for work. Includes excellent advice on making your CV stand out, tailoring each job application and signposting about where to get help with developing your digital skills.

