

GETTING TO WHERE YOU WANT TO BE

A DIY guide to professional development planning for writers and literature professionals

Jude Page

We asked a number of writers and literature professionals to trial this guide for us and you'll find their generously frank feedback on how they found the process featured in italics throughout it.

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Professional Development Planning is about exploring where you want to get to professionally in a structured way. The process involves looking at

- Where you are now
- Where you want to be
- How you might move from point a) towards point b)

WHY DO IT?

Professional Development Planning provides the opportunity to:

- Pause and reflect on what you've achieved so far professionally and what you want to achieve
- Explore what motivates you
- Consider resources that could help you to move forward
- Identify possible obstacles and explore strategies to overcome them
- Create a plan of action to achieve your goals

'Excellent – I found it really useful from a personal point of view, wearing my writing hat, and when I switched to my Adviser hat, I found it was a tool I would refer writing clients to.'

WHO FOR?

Whether you are a writer or a new writing and literature professional, self-employed or employed, working full-time or part-time, juggling a number of different strands of activity or focusing on just one, this guide could help you. What you do and how you describe it doesn't matter as you will be reflecting upon your own development from your own situation.

WHEN?

Taking some time out to think about where you want to get to professionally is useful whatever stage you're at. You may be particularly drawn to this process if you are at a point of change or you are interested in exploring other directions. You may be in a position when you need to think more strategically, for example, if you are putting together a funding application for professional development. You may simply want to take stock.

HOW?

This process is all about you. Use this guide in the way that best suits you. You may choose to complete it on your own, undertake it as a paired exercise with a friend or colleague, or find it a useful process to undergo within a mentoring relationship or staff

appraisal. If you work within literature development, you could use it, either wholly or in part, to help support your one-to-one work with writers, as well as for yourself.

'I did it with my partner as a buddy. It was an excellent way of us discussing together how my rather adhoc career might progress and how we might accommodate it.'

'Working with another person gave insight into how some participants might find it hard to sustain the internal dialogue the toolkit demands and instead revert to the perceived expectations of other people.'

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HOW? (continued)

You may choose to do the entire thing, complete with all the extra exercises. You may want to do the core exercises only. Or adapt some exercises to suit you. You may find it tempting just to do the exercises you are drawn to but the exercises you find most challenging or the least attractive may be the ones that have most impact upon you. Think of this as a work in progress that you can return to at any time and change or add to. It is your process and only you need see it.

'The 'extra' sections helped me to focus when I was struggling with my thoughts.'

Allow yourself the space and time to concentrate fully upon the process. Be aware that you may find some sections quite intense and you may need to take breaks. You may prefer to work through the process in stages, rather than at one sitting, but it's worth trying to complete it within a reasonable time frame so that you don't lose the momentum.

'I found the sections clear and straightforward. However, it required a greater deal of thought and soul searching than I had anticipated.'

The guide is available in electronic and print format and can also be obtained in large print, on audio tape and in Braille on request. As everyone will want to approach the process in their own way, we haven't designed the guide as a form to fill out but you may want a printed copy so that you have the option to write in some of the tables.

HOW LONG?

It is difficult to say how long this planning process will take, as everyone will tackle it differently. As a rough guide, completing just the core exercises would total around 90 minutes. Allow two to three hours if you decide to complete all the exercises.

You may feel that taking this amount of time out of your working hours is a luxury you can ill afford but, in the longer term, the process is likely to produce a far more valuable return. This process is about investing in YOU. After all, you are your main resource!

1 SECTION ONE

Where am I now?

Core Exercise 1

How would you describe what you do as a writer and/or new writing and literature professional to someone who's never met you before?

Try to do this in three sentences. Don't think about this too much. **Be instinctive.**

'It was very interesting to write down what it is I do. I found that what I actually do, and what I think I do, are not necessarily the same thing.'



2 SECTION TWO

Where have I been?

Core Exercise 2

What would you say are the key milestones of your professional journey so far?

What are the key achievements, significant events, high/low points?

You may also want to consider when you have most enjoyed your work. When have you been most committed/creative/productive? When have you achieved despite the odds stacked against you? Again, don't think about this too much. If it helps, limit yourself to five to ten minutes to establish the main points (exercise continues on next page).

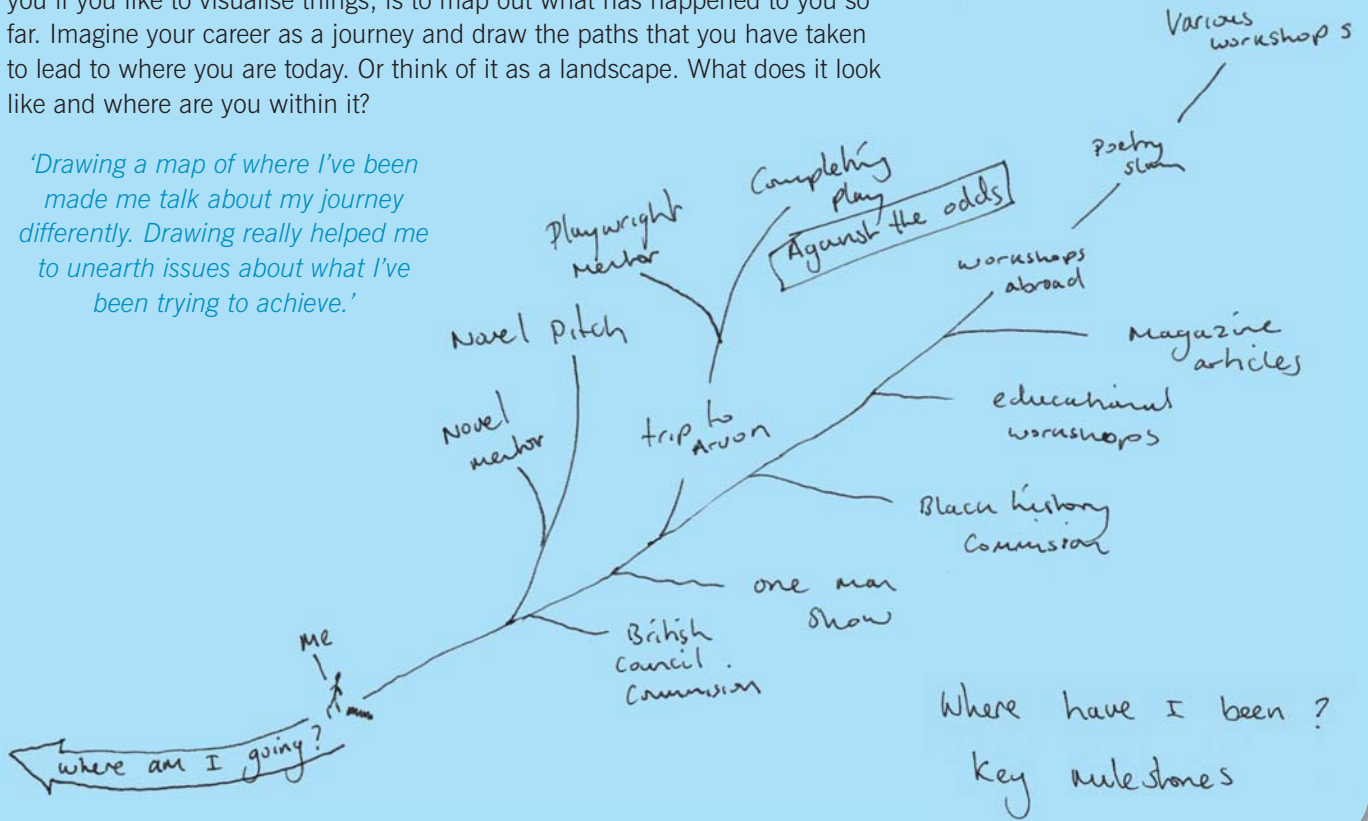
'I found that the things I was proud of weren't necessarily the things I was supposed to be proud of which was interesting.'

'A chance to remember good experiences and relive what made them special.'

Core Exercise 2 (continued)

Another helpful way to reflect upon your development, which may appeal to you if you like to visualise things, is to map out what has happened to you so far. Imagine your career as a journey and draw the paths that you have taken to lead to where you are today. Or think of it as a landscape. What does it look like and where are you within it?

'Drawing a map of where I've been made me talk about my journey differently. Drawing really helped me to unearth issues about what I've been trying to achieve.'



EXTRA!

Past Journey

You may find it helpful to look in more detail at your past journey. Who or what has helped you and what has hindered you? You may want to work through specific situations or make a note of the general helps and hindrances you have experienced. Can you spot any trends emerging?

Here are a couple of examples of specific situations mentioned by the writers and literature professionals who trialled the guide. (All the names are fictitious throughout – drawn from the list of last year's top UK baby names!)

'Looking at helps and hindrances helped me to identify patterns of what works and when it's worked, even in apparently dissimilar situations.'

Olivia

Milestone

Getting back to work after having a baby

What helped me

Keeping up with my literature contacts
Listening to advice

What hindered me

Lack of self-confidence
Challenge of balancing freelance working with being a mother

Grace

Milestone

Getting a short screenplay made into a film

What helped me

Winning a place on a short film scheme with intensive workshop development programme

What hindered me

Lack of further exploitation of film via distribution, film festivals etc

And here are some of the general helps and hindrances that were cited:

Helps

- Support from colleagues
- Maintaining networks and contacts
- Editorial support from my publishers
- Establishing contact with a local playwright – this provided me with invaluable advice and guidance, widened my networks and led to employment
- Setting deadlines for rewrites – helped me to keep focused

Hindrances

- Being over-ambitious in trying to combine part-time study with full-time work
- Making my funding application for professional development cover too many bases
- Disappearance of editorial support
- Change of personnel at my publishers

It's important not to overlook all the skills and strengths you already have. What is special about you?

- 1 List your main skills, strengths, experience, qualifications. You can either use the headings below to help start you off or adapt them so that they are meaningful for you.
- 2 Make a note of any areas you would like to develop. If it helps, give each area a confidence rating e.g.
 - ✓✓✓ Very confident
 - ✓✓ Satisfactory
 - ✓ Less Confident
 - * Area I would like to develop

'It's helpful to recognise what you can already do, as a starting point for thinking about what you realistically can do next.'

'Very useful in a general sense – it'll help me to update my CV too!'

You may like to enlist the help of a friend or colleague with this exercise to add an outside perspective.

Skills

Business
Communication (oral/written)
Creative writing
Financial
Fundraising
Interpersonal
IT
Leadership
Marketing
Networking
Organisational
Planning
Project management
Research
Supporting the development of others
Teaching
Team-working
etc

Strengths

Commitment
Creativity
Drive
Flexibility
Focus
Initiative
Passion
Persistence
Resilience
Self-Belief
Self-Management
Self-Motivation
Sense of Direction
etc

Experience

Book trade
Giving readings
Making presentations
Managing projects
New writing and literature sector
Teaching
Tutoring
Workshops
Working in partnership
Working in different settings (community, schools, health care, prisons etc)

Qualifications

Academic
Teaching
etc

TOP TIP! MOTIVATION

Understanding what motivates you is key.

- What spurs you on most? Is it: Personal fulfilment? Being asked to do something? Being paid? Seeing something as a means to an end?
- What encourages you to keep going in the face of setbacks?
- What kinds of reactions from others galvanize you the most?

'I thought this exercise was very insightful into why people launch themselves on apparently illogical quests.'

3 SECTION THREE

More about where I am now

Core Exercise 3

a) What's your present situation?

Take some time to reflect on what you currently do. Think about the key areas of your professional and personal life. Now list all the different strands of activity involved. (You may prefer to draw a circle and subdivide it.)

Is there anything else coming up on the horizon you need to include?

b) Issues arising?

Does this highlight any issues? For example, the number of small, rather fragmented pieces of work you're doing or the impact of personal issues on your professional life.

How do the strands of activity balance out against each other in terms of the time you spend on them, the income that they may generate and the value you derive from them?

(See the EXTRA! exercise if this is an issue for you.)

c) What's important to you?

What is of high priority for you at the moment? For example: a good work/life balance, earning more income, developing new work, establishing a higher profile.

'I found this exercise very useful. At the moment I'm busy on rewrites of a novel and am itching to start the next so it was very nice to take a step back and see where I am.'

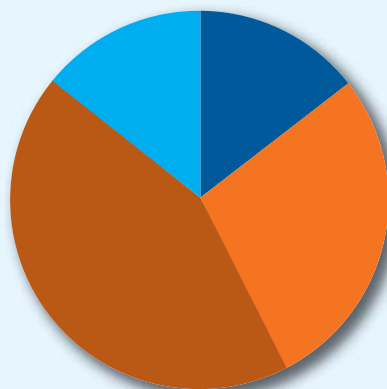
EXTRA!

Time/income focus

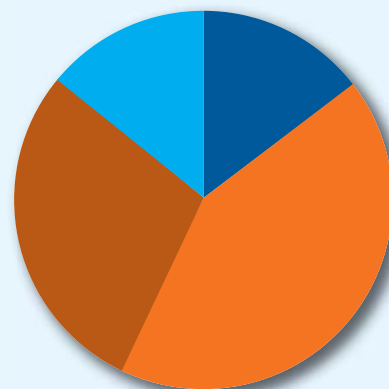
This can be a powerful exercise if you have a number of varying strands of income. (Don't be put off. If it looks too challenging, this might be just the exercise for you!)

- 1 Draw a circle.** This represents the amount of time you have available. Subdivide the circle to show how your time is currently apportioned between your various activities. (You may find it comes more naturally to you to work with percentages rather than circles – the most important thing is the idea of working within a finite amount.)
- 2 Draw another circle.** This represents the amount of income you currently generate. Subdivide the circle to illustrate how you earn your income. From which activities do you earn the most/least?
- 3 Compare the two circles.** What strikes you?
- 4** You may wish to repeat the process above but this time **look ahead** and subdivide the circles according to how you would like to be apportioning your time in the future and how you would like to see the income balance out.

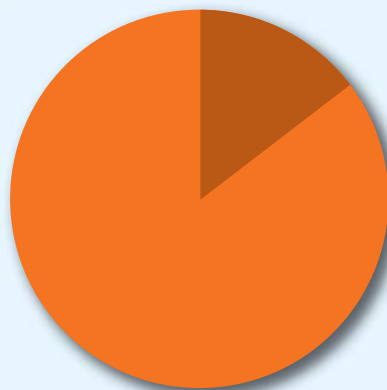
■ COMMISSIONED FEATURES/REGULAR COLUMN
 ■ SPECULATIVE WRITING
 ■ VOLUNTARY WORK
 ■ TIME OFF



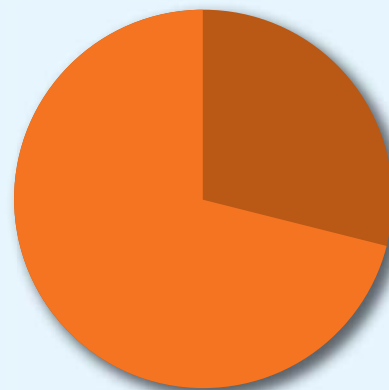
TIME – NOW



TIME – FUTURE



INCOME – NOW



INCOME – FUTURE

The segments above were worked out on a seven day week

EXTRA!

Time/value focus

This is a useful exercise to do if you have conflicting demands on your time.

List every activity to which you currently commit your time and score each on a scale of 0 - 3 (where 3 is highest) in terms of the value you derive from them e.g. financial reward, creative/professional satisfaction, personal fulfilment. (Feel free to change these headings to reflect your own values.)

What do you notice?

Activity (list below)	Value derived from activity (Score 0-3)		
	Financial Reward	Creative/ Professional Satisfaction	Personal Fulfilment

EXTRA!

How do you like to learn?

People like to learn in different ways. Do you prefer to learn by yourself or in a group? Do you enjoy formal or informal learning most or a mixture of the two?

Tick which of the following learning styles you identify most with.

- Learning by doing
- Knowing the theory first
- Having time to think
- By myself
- With others in a group
- With one other person
- Formal learning
- Informally at home and at work
- A mixture

Can you identify recent examples of when you have experienced these different learning contexts? Completing the table may help you to gain a clearer understanding of the time, place, pace and manner in which you learn best. Score them according to how effective each style is for you (0 as least effective, 3 as most).

Learning Style	Recent Example	Score (0-3)
Learning by doing e.g. coming to grips with a new computer software programme		
Knowing the theory first e.g. reading a 'how to' book		
Having time to think e.g. when travelling		
By myself		
With others in a group e.g. workshop		
With one other person e.g. buddying		
Formal learning e.g. short course		
Informally (at home)		
Informally (at work) e.g. networking at a conference		

4 SECTION FOUR

Where do I want to go?

Core Exercise 4

a) Where next?

Where would you like to be professionally in three years' time? Write down a list of your key goals (aim for a limit of three to five). State them in the positive (not what you don't want).

Try and be:

- Ambitious
- As specific as you can

If you find this difficult, you may find it helpful to **begin** by identifying what you **don't** want.

Alternatively, **look back** from a standpoint of three years. What achievements do you want to see?

If the timescale seems too short to you, change it to a longer period, say five or ten years.

b) Reality check

Check back to see if your goals are grounded in possibility while still being ambitious. Aim for a blend of the idealistic but attainable – working with what is possible without limiting yourself.

goals will be affected by external circumstances which are to some extent out of your control. For example, getting an agent or a part-time post. Again, try to work with what seems ideally attainable.

'I found this a really tough exercise to do. I think it has been an advantage and sometimes a hindrance to have been involved in the book trade as I have an understanding of the realities of writing and publishing as a business – I think perhaps this leads me to be too cautious at times.'

NB You may well need to take into account that achieving some of your

'One of my issues is that I always hold myself back by telling myself my dreams are unrealistic.'

c) Prioritise!

Now prioritise these goals. Which is most important? Which could wait till a later date?

Here are some of the three year goals identified by the writers and literature professionals who trialled this guide.

Jack

- 1 To balance my three day a week contract with other freelance literature development work
- 2 To build a portfolio of clients in the region where I live
- 3 To put together a funding application to the Arts Council for some time for my own professional development and research visits

Thomas

- 1 To create the time over an 18 month period to explore my own relationship to writing
- 2 To complete my current writing project and fundraise for its performance
- 3 To develop my relationships with theatres as a creative
- 4 To find a part-time position which enables me to work regularly as part of a team

Jessica

- 1 To build a relationship with a large national publisher for my next novel
- 2 To earn enough from writing to reduce the amount of time I spend on what is currently my main source of income
- 3 To have made steps in exploring other forms of creative writing, especially in theatre and/or screenplays

TOP TIP! SETTING PRIORITIES

The more we focus on the priorities in our life, the more likely we are to reach our goals. Successful people are usually very focused – they recognise their own priorities and leave or delegate the rest. If you can, avoid getting side-tracked by unimportant (yet seemingly urgent) activities that can take over your day-to-day life.

**TIRED?
TAKE A
BREAK!**

5 SECTION FIVE

Exploring the territory

Core Exercise 5

a) Goal-setting

In the left hand column, list the goals you identified for yourself in Section Four. Place these in order of priority with the most important first.

Goals	Gaps / Hurdles	Supports
1		
2		
3		
4		

b) Gaps/Hurdles – What's stopping me?

Look at your first goal. What's holding you back? For instance, a lack of time, a skills gap, lack of experience or confidence. Is the main barrier finance and the challenge of securing an income from what you do? Other hurdles may be more to do with external factors – what's happening in the wider professional landscape. Work through each goal in turn in the same way. Write anything and everything that occurs to you.

'I found this difficult as where I want to go depends to some extent on the willingness of others to let me achieve these goals. I am also keen on exploring other forms of writing as possible ways of generating income but am not really all that sure how to go about it.'

c) Supports – Who or what could help me on my journey?

Now turn this around and think about how you could jump the hurdles or bridge any gaps that you have identified. Work through each of them in turn and list all the possible forms of support you can think of in the right hand ‘Supports’ column. Think broadly. Some supports may be general and address a number of your goals.

What can you do yourself? Can you make any changes in your working practice that would help you to achieve your goals? Do you have any particular strengths that you are not making full use of? You may find it helpful to refer to the exercise on ways of learning in Section Three when thinking about how you can address skills gaps.

Who else might help? Is there a particular person you could approach for support such as a family member,

friend, a fellow writer or literature professional? Do you have a mentor or buddy or, if not, would it help you to seek one?

Where could you go to for support? Who can give you the information and advice you need? What are the main sources of funding? Think about all the different types of resources that are available to you such as organisations, networks, groups, websites, publications, magazines, information bulletins. At this point, you may like to visit the literaturetraining website at www.literaturetraining.com which acts as a first stop shop for information on courses, workshops, mentoring, critical appraisal services, conferences and events, jobs, commissions, residencies, competitions, organisations, networks, training providers, books, magazines,

and funding for professional development. A useful starting point is literaturetraining’s info sheet entitled National Resources for Writers and Literature Professionals in the UK. It’s packed with useful contacts and is available as a free download from the site and in print format. literaturetraining also operates a free information and advice service.

‘I like the emphasis throughout on exploring the different kinds of support and advice available. It’s really liberating to figure out that you don’t need to wait around for a formal career structure and an expensive training course – you can go out and find your own shadowing, mentoring, buddying etc with help through literature networks.’

Here are some examples drawn from our triallers:

Ruby

Goals	Gaps / Hurdles	Supports
To improve narrative techniques	Lack of critical feedback Lack of knowledge about craft	Identify suitable writers groups/ creative writing courses/mentoring schemes/a writing buddy Read more well written novels

Joshua

Goals	Gaps / Hurdles	Supports
To explore organisational governance and finance (so that I can consider more senior roles)	Lack of experience Sense of feeling a bit daunted	Training course in finance for non- financial managers Research into boards (role, structures, responsibilities etc) Mentor, organisational Director, NALD (advice on training)

6 SECTION SIX

A plan of action

Core Exercise 6

The final stage – the most challenging part of the process perhaps but also the most rewarding!

Drawing up a plan of action will help you to focus on what you need to do next and give you things to aim for in the short and longer term. It will help you to break down daunting tasks into manageable steps and to identify the resources you need to move on. And you can gain a sense of achievement when you complete each stage (and maybe reward yourself in some way!)

'This forced me to think about my goals and how I can attain them – what I need to do to get there, the timescales I am thinking of.'

'This is the most daunting for me... having to really plan. I am quite blocked around some of my goals, so I've had to write it, and then break it down again, and look at what steps are missing.'

Goals (include a target date for completion)	Actions (tasks involved)	Time-Scale to complete actions	Resources What/who can help?	Progress Made? (record and date of achievements/progress)

- 1 Draw up a table with the above headings (a copy is included on the next page if you wish to use it).
In the left hand column, list your first main goal as identified in the previous sections.
- 2 Record when you would like to have achieved this by.
- 3 Next, in the ACTIONS column, list the steps that you need to take to work towards achieving it.
- 4 In the next column, set a target date for completing each of the listed actions. Be realistic about what you can achieve and how much time you have available. Set yourself up to be able to succeed.
- 5 In the RESOURCES column, make a list of who or what can help you to achieve your goals. It may help to refer back to Section Five.
- 6 Repeat the process in turn for each of your goals. Leave the final column for now.

You may also find it helpful to refer back to the tips on motivation in Section Two. What can you do to help keep yourself motivated and on target with your action plan? For instance, if you find that encouragement from someone else helps, could you get a friend or colleague involved in the process? Perhaps they could keep a note of key deadlines and provide a supportive but timely prompt? What other encouragement or incentive could assist you?

TOP TIP! MANAGING YOUR TIME

Are you at your sharpest first thing in the morning or are you more of a night owl? Get to know your body clock and manage your work accordingly. Try to get your highest priority work done when you are at your peak. Keeping an activity log (noting everything you do and when you do it) may help you to identify when you are at your most productive (and when you are wasting time on trivial tasks!)

For more time management tips see www.mindtools.com

'Ending up with a concrete plan – can't over-estimate how helpful this is in moving from fuzzy yearnings to a clear plan.'

'A brilliant way to end – a clear exercise with immediate benefit. I found I was ringing people as I was filling it out in order to complete certain tasks!'

PLAN OF ACTION

Goals (include a target date for completion)	Actions (tasks involved)	Time-Scale to complete actions	Resources What/who can help?	Progress Made? (record and date of achievements/progress)

7 SECTION SEVEN

How is it going?

Core Exercise 7

It is important to review your plan at regular intervals so that you can check the progress you are making towards your goals. This also allows you to celebrate your achievements. Identify a timescale that seems workable to you. A review after around six months, and again in a year, can work well. You might like to schedule an annual review around the start of the calendar or financial year. The important thing is for you to allocate a future space in your diary NOW to review your plan and then ensure you honour this.

'I enjoyed it and found it useful. I will certainly be reviewing my plan in future.'

- 1 At the review stage, look back over your plan (Section Six).
- 2 What progress have you made? Are there any actions that you can tick off? Record these in the final column.
- 3 Do you need to revise parts of your plan to reflect any changes that have occurred in your circumstances?
- 4 Have any issues arisen for you in relation to your chosen path?
- 5 If you haven't done all you intended, reflect on the reasons for this. Were your goals or timescales unrealistic? Did other more important things intervene?
- 6 Have your goals changed at all?
- 7 If you have achieved what you set out to do, what next?
- 8 Make any amendments to your plan. Repeat parts or all of this DIY guide as necessary.

FURTHER READING

The Artists' Way, Julia Cameron (Tarcher)

Becoming a Writer, Dorothea Brande (Macmillan)

Is there a book in you? Alison Baverstock (A & C Black)

The Learning Styles Questionnaire: 80 item version, Peter Honey & Alan Mumford (Peter Honey Publications)

A Manager's Guide to Self-Development, Mike Pedler, John Burgoyne and Tom Boydell, 2001 (McGraw Hill)

Make it happen! Your Personal Learning Action Plan (Campaign for Learning)

On Writing, Stephen King (New English Library)

Power Up Your Mind : learn faster, work smarter, Bill Lucas (Nicholas Brealy)

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful lessons in personal change, Stephen R Covey (Simon & Schuster)

THANKS

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