A TOOLKIT
for Soft Skills Development for Young People

ADAPTABILITY SKILLS

ADAPTABILITY SKILLS

What they are and why they're important

- Have you been in situations where you feel that the world around you is changing?
- Or have been surprised by an unexpected event that required an immediate reaction?
- How do you deal with these unexpected changes?

Life can seem like a rollercoaster ride, full of ups and downs. In all parts of our life we come across change – in personal relationships, in our school or college life, and in getting and sticking to a job.

Learning how to react to these changes is important in your relationships with other people and it takes time, thought and practice to become adaptable. Sometimes you need to realise that if a situation cannot change – you can! Even the smallest adjustments in your actions or attitude can result in higher satisfaction from your life and relationships.

In order to be adaptable, it requires a flexible attitude combined with the ability to change. To be adaptable also means to be creative.

How to use this toolkit

You can either use the sections of the toolkit on your own or as part of a group. Your tutor/mentor/ support worker will help decide which approach is better suited to meet your individual needs.

If you have not done so already, then read the 'Introduction and Guidance' section which gives an overview of how to get the best out of your use of the UMJ toolkit.

If you need more space to write down your thoughts or actions then use additional sheets of paper.

ADAPTABILITY SKILLS

Learning Outcomes

In this section, you will:

- Reflect on one of the realities of modern life – dealing with changes.
- Think about how you can recognise situations where you need to react and be flexible.
- Plot out your own abilities to adapt to change, and decide how you might need to improve these.
- Identify a situation or task you are involved in, and plan to apply some adaptability techniques whilst involved in this.
- Evaluate how your skills have developed as a result of this activity, and how you plan to keep on developing your adaptability skills.

Remember! Your skills won't develop overnight. You will need to give some time to work through these activities. Go away and try out your skills, then come back and see how much your skills have improved.

If you need help, ask someone to work through this section with you. This could be a teacher, youth worker, coach, mentor or employment advisor, or someone in a similar role who knows you well.

You're on a journey, and in this stage of the journey, you'll develop some adaptability skills in some situations you might find yourself in. But first, let's see where you're at before you start this stage of the journey. It's time to take a skills check.

You may find this chart helps you to plan and track your progress through your journey:

Aspect	Date started	Date finished	Your notes
Initial skills check			
Development activities			
Action planning			
Developmental activities			
Reflection, evaluation and 2nd skills check			
Moving on			

BEFORE THE JOURNEY – SKILLS CHECK

Look at these pictures.
What changes can you see between then and now?
What has changed over the last 100 years?

Think about changes over the last 100 years. You could think about…

- The types of jobs people do
- Poverty and wealth
- Roles for men and women
- Transport and communications
- Leisure and entertainment
- Food and diet
- Clothes and fashion
- The education system
- Democracy and political participation

Choose at least one of the aspects of life above, and make some notes below.

Area of change:

What's changed over the last 100 years:

Now, complete the Skills Check.

Step 1:

Indicate the places on the chart which best represents where your skills are at.
You can shade or colour in the grid, or mark with a X and then draw a line to plot out your skills.
You can do this by yourself if you want to. If you're not sure how to complete this, ask for help.

		Emerging		Consolidating	Established	
		Never – I struggle with this	Hardly ever	Sometimes	Usually, but not always	Always – no problem!
	Example: *I view change as an inevitable part of life*	1	2	3	4	5
1	I view change as an inevitable part of life	1	2	3	4	5
2	I see changes as opportunities to learn and experience new things	1	2	3	4	5
3	I don't blame myself or other people when circumstances change	1	2	3	4	5
4	I am open to new ways of seeing the world and viewing situations	1	2	3	4	5
5	I pay attention to situations to recognise when a change may be needed	1	2	3	4	5
6	I am prepared to change my approach if what I am doing is not working	1	2	3	4	5
7	I try to overcome setbacks and barriers to progress	1	2	3	4	5
8	I have respect for and consider the impact of changes on other people	1	2	3	4	5
9	I am open to other people's suggestions about how I might do things differently	1	2	3	4	5
10	I support others when they are dealing with a change	1	2	3	4	5

Shade in the box which indicates your overall adaptability skills level.

Overall, my adaptability skills are:	Emerging	Consolidating	Established

Emerging = your skills are starting to develop.

Consolidating = you're practicing and developing your skills, but you're not quite there yet.

Established = your skills are well developed, and have become part of how you naturally do things.

Step 2:

Ask someone who knows you well to shade or mark the spaces which best represents where you're at. This could be a teacher, youth worker, mentor or employment advisor, or someone in a similar role. They must not look at your answers!

Peer reflection carried out by:		Emerging		Consolidating		Established
Relationship:		Never – I struggle with this	Hardly ever	Sometimes	Usually, but not always	Always – no problem!
	Example: *Views change as an inevitable part of life*	1	2	3	4	5
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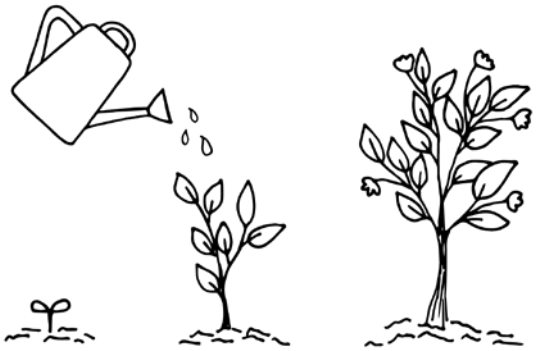
3	Doesn't blame themselves or other people when circumstances change	1	2	3	4	5
4	Is open to new ways of seeing the world and viewing situations	1	2	3	4	5
5	Pays attention to situations to recognise when a change may be needed	1	2	3	4	5
6	Is prepared to change my approach if what they are doing is not working	1	2	3	4	5
7	Tries to overcome setbacks and barriers to progress	1	2	3	4	5
8	Has respect for and considers the impact of changes on other people	1	2	3	4	5
9	Is open to other people's suggestions about how they might do things differently	1	2	3	4	5
10	Supports others when they are dealing with a change	1	2	3	4	5

Shade in the box which indicates their overall adaptability skills level.

Overall, their adaptability skills are:	Emerging	Consolidating	Established



Emerging = your skills are starting to develop.

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Step 3:

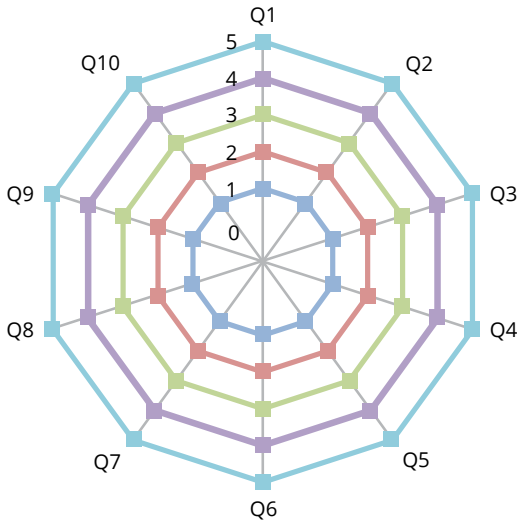
Next, plot your answers on the spider web diagrams below.

Q1 - Q10 represents the questions. On each question, if you answered 5, circle the blue cross. If you answered 4, circle the purple cross. If you answered 3, circle green; 2 circle red; 1 circle dark blue.

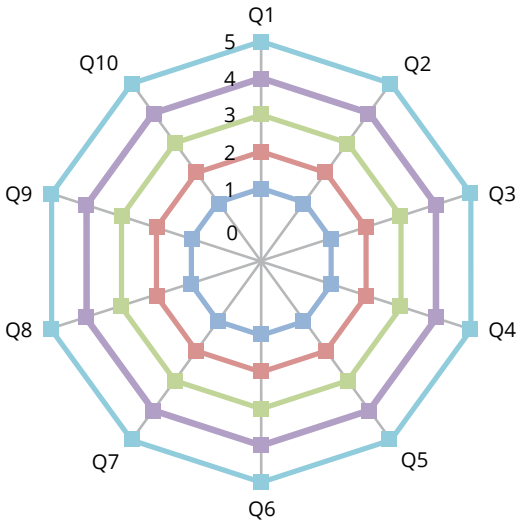
When you have circled all the crosses, right around the web, you should join each cross with a black line. The final diagram should look something like a spider's web and can be lots of different shapes depending on your answers.

If you need more help, look in the **Instructions and Guidance** section for how to do this.

My responses:



The other person's responses:



Discuss your different grids.

- Are your finished diagrams the same or different?
- Do other people see you the same way you see yourself?

Decide together what your strong and weak areas are, and make sure you both agree.
List your strengths and weaknesses below.

What are your three **weakest** areas?	What are your three **strongest** areas?
Area 1:	Area 1:
Area 2:	Area 2:
Area 3:	Area 3:

Your strongest areas might be adaptability skills you're good at, but you can always improve. Your weakest areas are definitely areas you should think about improving.

Remember that the levels are personal to you and reflect your habits, knowledge and experience and cannot be compared with other people who will have different backgrounds.

YOUR NOTES

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Thinking about Adaptability

You're already on a journey, because you're already involved in some kind of activity or project which means that you will come across having to deal with changes. You can now start to identify the tasks and activities which can help you strengthen your adaptability skills.

Think about the following events. If they happened to you, how would you need to adapt?

Read the suggestions below, and rate the different adaptability strategies by shading in the stars.

Challenge 1: Leaving your college course	Challenge 2: Moving to a new town, city or village	Challenge 3: Failing an important exam
How could you adapt to deal with this?	How could you adapt to deal with this?	How could you adapt to deal with this?
See the change as an opportunity to do something new	*Make plans to discover new places and find out about the local area*	*Find out when I can resit the exam*
Give myself time to plan my next steps	*Plan a trip back to my old place - but not for a few months*	*Remind myself every day that everybody fails sometimes - it's natural*
Make an effort to keep in contact with college friends in case things get tough	*Join a new sports club or social group*	*Think about what I should do to improve my chances of passing next time*
Keep looking forwatds instead of backwards	*Make a list of 5 things I like about your new place every evening*	*Get support from friends and family*

Have you ever faced these situations? If so, how did you adapt? Write some notes below:

Adaptability Skills in Context - 10 Actions for an Adaptable & Flexible Life

As we all journey through life we inevitably encounter change. Sometimes these changes can be welcome and exciting, whilst other changes can be scary or even terrifying. Learning to successfully adapt to change is important for living a full and happy life. It won't always be easy, but the following might help.

Action 1: View change as a natural part of life. However much we resist change, nothing stays the same forever. The seasons change, and humans are born, grow old and die. In fact, change is the only thing which is constant, and if we don't learn to adapt, we won't be able to 'go with the flow' of these changes, and we'll become stuck. The most important thing is to keep an open, curious mind about change. However, this doesn't mean blindly accepting every change enthusiastically, especially when we feel morally compromised. It's possible to be true to your beliefs and adaptable to situations at the same time – you don't have to question your integrity when you change.

Action 2: Deal with setbacks. People who are resistant to change often start moaning as soon as they find themselves in a difficult situation. This is understandable when the change is big, such as losing a job. However, it can make it even more difficult to deal with a setback, and at some point, the reality of change has to be confronted. Instead, focus on solving the problem. Learn from your mistakes, and move on as soon as possible. You'll develop the confidence to deal with setbacks, and your fear of change will subside.

Action 3: Understand your 'behavioural script'. We all carry 'scripts' around with us which we have learned previously, and which cause us to respond automatically to situations. The problem comes when we rigidly apply a script even though it doesn't quite fit the situation. As an example, when people protest that 'I've always done it this way!' they may be blocking out the signals which point to the need for change. Understand your reactions to change, and if they get in the way, change the script. Accept that script as important at one time, but let it go. You might need support to achieve this.

Action 4: Look forward. When things change, we often get nostalgic about how they used to be. This is natural, but we often forget what was bad about a past situation, and only focus on what was good. In any case, the past is gone, and can't be changed, so it's useless dwelling on it. When you're riding a bicycle, you don't keep looking behind you – you look ahead! Instead, think about what you can do now, and what changes you can make in the future. Think of alternative plans and scenarios, since your first approach may not always work. Set realistic goals and you will never feel like you have failed.

Action 5: Build a balanced life. Linked to this, trying to succeed in all aspects of life is great, but you risk ending up feeling miserable in case of failure. Create a balanced life instead. After all, it's impossible to adapt to all changes in all aspects of life, no matter how strong you are. Take each change one step at a time, and avoid blaming others for change. If you feel you might struggle with this, you should work especially on your time and energy management skills, and your positive thinking skills.

Action 6: Create support networks. Instead of dwelling on the unpleasant changes, take time out and spend time on things which help to relax and rejuvenate you. When you face significant changes, examine your life, and figure out which aspects you are either neglecting or paying too much attention to. Talk to friends, family and colleagues and see if they can offer a different perspective on the change. Learn from them, because they might have faced similar changes themselves.

Action 7: Stretch yourself. The most adaptable people welcome the opportunity to flex their 'adaptability muscles'. There are easy ways to do this, such as taking a different route to work each morning, or regularly trying new and unusual food. Challenge yourself to step outside of your comfort zone. Think 'why not?' instead of 'why?' Learn to break through any limitations you may

have set for yourself. If you do this, you'll learn to see every change as an opportunity for learning and growth.

Action 8: Thrive rather than survive. Some people don't just adapt to change, they function best when they face challenges, and they're learning something new. A good way to think about dealing with change is the **Thrive Cycle of Resilience: Survive, Adapt, Recover and Thrive**. Firstly, we survive a change by dealing with the immediate practical aspects. Secondly, we accept the change and adapt to it. Thirdly, we recover from the change, and start to see it as 'normal'. Fourthly, we thrive, and we wonder what on earth we did before! If you aim to work through all four stages you'll become extremely resilient and adaptable.

Action 9: Grab opportunities. Whilst you can't control those changes which are imposed on you, you do have control over how you respond to them. Not only that, you can also go out and find change, rather than wait for change to happen to you. Stop waiting for the right time, right place, right people... When it comes to adaptability, there's no 'right moment'. Grab opportunities when they arise, and say 'yes' more often than you say 'no'. You might never get the chance again.

Action 10: Stick at things. Being adaptable doesn't mean jumping from one thing to another. Some changes require time, effort and determination before you realise their importance. If you make a decision to respond in a certain way, and it's working, see it through to the end. A fruit tree will take years before it matures and grows its best fruit. If you can do this, then change, development and growth will feel as natural, as inevitable, and as welcome as the changes in the weather.

Read '10 Actions for an Adaptable & Flexible Life' again, and do the exercise below.

Which of these 10 Actions are completely new to you?

Choose 3 Actions to start implementing immediately.

Think of a recent change you faced. Which of these strategies did you use?

Think about the following quote.
Is this a useful way to think about adaptability?

You must be shapeless, formless, like water.

When you pour water in a cup, it becomes the cup.

When you pour water in a bottle, it becomes the bottle. When you pour water in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Water can drip and it can crash.

Become like water, my friend.

Bruce Lee, Chinese/American actor

YOUR NOTES

ACTION PLANNING

Who would you rather be?
Look at these two reactions to the same situation.

Your group are on a trip to another city. You've had a great time, and are ready to come home.

You were due to catch a train at 10am, but there is a train drivers' strike today. There won't be any trains until 10pm. You have 12 hours to kill and you've already checked out of your hostel.

What a nightmare! Those were the worst 12 hours of my life. There was nothing to do and I was so bored. Those train drivers absolutely ruined our trip.

I got a really bad headache, and the situation made me argue with my girlfriend. Well, she was trying to help, but she said I was being an idiot, and then left me on my own.

The whole thing could have been avoided!

Yeah, it was a bit of a nightmare, but we got through it. These things happen, and you just have to deal with it. For all I know, the train drivers might have had a good reason to strike, anyway.

I started to get angry, but then I realised that would be pointless, so I called my flatmate to tell her I'd be arriving back in the early hours of the morning, then I went to find a nice café to finish some coursework.

I also asked a few others to go back to a place we really liked. We had great fun. In the end, we had extra time on the trip! My boyfriend was angry and frustrated, though. I tried to help him through it but he just wasn't adaptable.

Think about some key tasks or activities you're going to take part in.

Once you've identified this, think about something that could go wrong. This is your chance to think about what strategies you can put in place to adapt. The unexpected often happens!

Could these things go wrong for you?

- You become ill and can't participate.
- You have a big argument with your best friend, colleague or collaborator.
- Other people aren't as committed as you think they should be – you're the only one who's serious.
- Things are taking far too long, and you'll be late or miss a deadline.
- You really disagree with someone else's approach.

Choose one thing which could go wrong for you, and write it here:

Write down two different approaches to this situation. Imagine that you are telling someone about how you dealt with this afterwards. One approach is rigid and unadaptable, the other is flexible and adaptable. You can use the examples on the previous page to help you.

Rigid and unadaptable:

Flexible and adaptable:

Read your 'flexible and adaptable' text again.

Did you show that...

- You view change as part of life? ☐
- You see change as opportunities to learn and experience things? ☐
- You don't blame other people? ☐
- You're open to new ways of viewing a situation? ☐
- You recognise when you might need to change your reaction? ☐
- You can overcome setbacks? ☐
- You respect how change can affect other people? ☐
- You listen to other people's suggestion about how you can change? ☐
- You help and support others through change? ☐

Write down your 'flexible and adaptable' approach in the space below.

Cut it out, and keep it in your wallet or notebook, or you could also copy this.
If what you imagined does go wrong, you'll be able to remind yourself how to adapt well to this situation!

I am a very flexible and adaptable person!

REFLECTING AND EVALUATING

How did it go? Here's your chance to reflect on how you've improved your adaptability skills. Fill in each arrow below with your results and thoughts.

What task/activity did you complete?

Did you follow your own advice on adapting to change? How?

Can you now adapt better to change? How?

What new skills in adapting to changes will you take with you and develop further in the future?

AFTER THE JOURNEY – SKILLS CHECK

You've almost completed this stage of your soft skills journey. You've used this part of the journey to think about your adaptability skills. Now it's time to see how much distance you have travelled in your adaptability skills journey. Indicate in the spaces which best represents your skills now.

		Emerging		Consolidating		Established
		Never – I struggle with this	Hardly ever	Sometimes	Usually, but not always	Always – no problem!
	Example: *I view change as an inevitable part of life*	1	2	3	4	5
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4	I am open to new ways of seeing the world and viewing situations	1	2	3	4	5
5	I pay attention to situations to recognise when a change may be needed	1	2	3	4	5
6	I am prepared to change my approach if what I am doing is not working	1	2	3	4	5
7	I can overcome setbacks and barriers to progress	1	2	3	4	5
8	I have respect for and consider the impact of changes on other people	1	2	3	4	5
9	I am open to other people's suggestions about how I might do things differently	1	2	3	4	5
10	I support others through a change	1	2	3	4	5

Shade in the box which indicates your overall adaptability skills level.

Overall, my adaptability skills are:	Emerging	Consolidating	Established

Emerging = your skills are starting to develop.

Consolidating = you're practicing and developing your skills, but you're not quite there yet.

Established = your skills are well developed, and have become part of how you naturally do things.

Again, ask the same person who knows you well to indicate on the chart the spaces which best represents where you're at. They must not look at your answers!

Peer reflection carried out by:		Emerging		Consolidating		Established
Relationship:		Never – I struggle with this	Hardly ever	Sometimes	Usually, but not always	Always – no problem!
	Example: *Views change as an inevitable part of life*	1	2	3	4	5
1	Views change as an inevitable part of life	1	2	3	4	5
2	Sees changes as opportunities to learn and experience new things	1	2	3	4	5
3	Doesn't blame themselves or other people when circumstances change	1	2	3	4	5
4	Is open to new ways of seeing the world and viewing situations	1	2	3	4	5
5	Pays attention to situations to recognise when a change may be needed	1	2	3	4	5
6	Is prepared to change my approach if what they are doing is not working	1	2	3	4	5
7	Can overcome setbacks and barriers to progress	1	2	3	4	5
8	Has respect for and considers the impact of changes on other people	1	2	3	4	5
9	Is open to other people's suggestions about how they might do things differently	1	2	3	4	5
10	Supports others through a change	1	2	3	4	5

Shade in the box which indicates their overall adaptability skills level.

Overall, their adaptability skills are:	Emerging	Consolidating	Established

Emerging = your skills are starting to develop.

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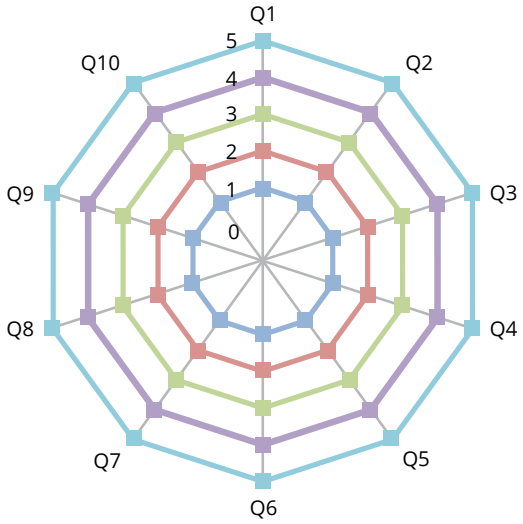
Next, plot your answers on the spider web diagrams below.

If you need more help, look in the **Instructions and Guidance** section for how to do this.

My responses:



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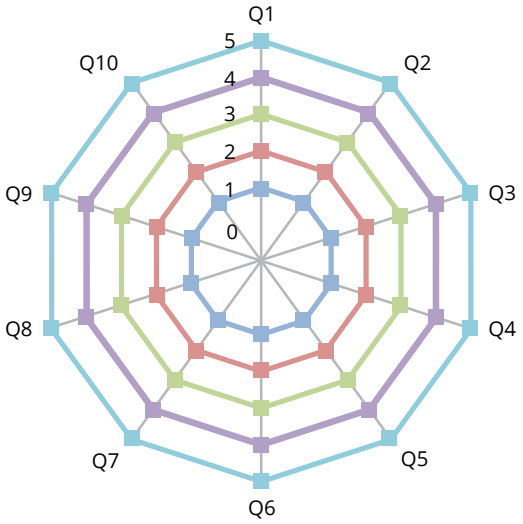
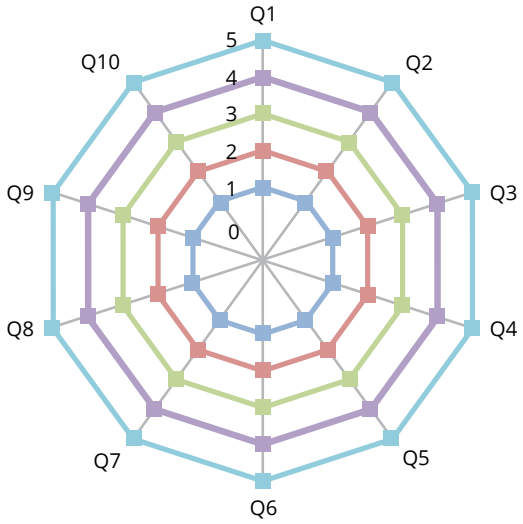


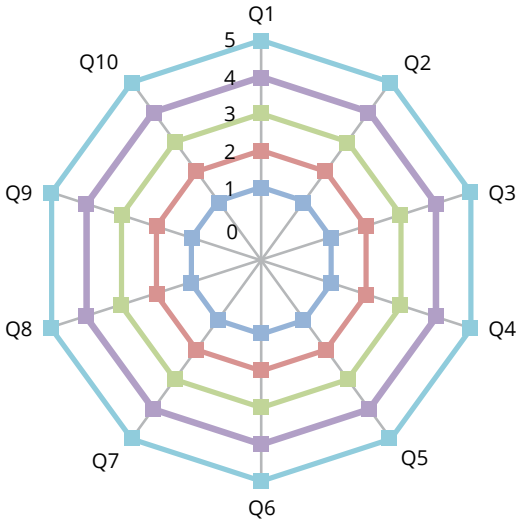
If your spider's webs look the same, that's fine. Go to the next stage.
If they're different, work together to produce a single spider's web you can both agree on.

Plot out two diagrams – your skills before, and your skills now.

My skills before:



My skills now:



Are your 'before' and 'after' diagrams different? How much progress have you made?
If they're the same, don't be disheartened. Sometimes we slip backwards, or we need more time to develop our skills. This is part of the journey!

Remember that the levels are personal to you and reflect your habits, knowledge and experience and cannot be compared with other people who will have different backgrounds.

MOVING ON

This part of the journey is almost over. It's time to prepare for the next stage.

1. How are you going to continue developing your communication skills?

I am going to continue developing my adaptability skills by:

2. You've applied for a job or training course, and they want to know what experience you have in adapting to a range of different circumstances.

What examples can you now give in your written application?

3. They liked your application, and they want to invite you for an interview.

What further examples of good adaptability skills should you mention in your interview?

You are now ready to move on to your next skill.

YOUR NOTES