



The University of Edinburgh

Careers Service

Where do I start?

Policy Work

Introduction

Policy work is a growing sector, with 'officers' employed in a wide variety of settings in the public, private and voluntary sectors. There are very many opportunities for graduates, but the popularity of this work ensures that it is a competitive sector to enter. Employers include: central and local government, political parties, think tanks, pressure groups, political strategy and public affairs consultancies, and charities.

Policy officers in the public sector research, plan and develop services, and also have an advisory role, for example in advising elected members and senior management on their options relating to policy, planning and development. Policy workers in think-tanks and consultancies will aim to influence and inform policy, and will require to build relationships with government and clients. For those involved with pressure groups passion for the cause is extremely important.



expanding horizons

www.ed.ac.uk/careers

Graduates interested in pursuing a career in this field must have an in-depth understanding of multi-level democracy and public policy in the UK, or further afield, e.g. Europe, and how public policy is formulated. They must be able to provide research and information in support of their remit, and synthesise this in a manner that is understandable to policymakers.

Routes into policy work include:

- **fast-track graduate routes** in local and national government, including the Civil Service Fast Stream, the Government Social Research Fast Stream and the Local Government NGDP (National Graduate Development Programme).
- it is also possible to gain direct entry to local and national government work **at a lower level and work your way up** to policy positions. This can also be the case for other types of employers, e.g. charities.
- **graduate entry** positions are found in PR, public affairs consultancies and pressure groups, e.g. the CBI Graduate Programme.
- many think-tanks offer **internships**, e.g. the Adam Smith Institute.
- routes into other areas tend to be through **voluntary work**, leading to paid work in research/information positions, which in turn lead to policy positions, e.g. working for an individual politician or political party.
- **recruitment agencies** recruiting for the public sector, e.g. Pertemps.

Finding out about...

Web

The **Occupations** section of the Careers Service website contains a wealth of information and links to many **information, employer and vacancies websites**, including all those discussed in this document:

www.ed.ac.uk/careers > *Explore your options* > *Occupations...*

...Policy Work and Public Sector, choose *Administration*

...Political PR, Public Affairs Consultancies and think-tanks, choose *Advertising, public relations and marketing*

...Charity and Voluntary work, choose *Charity & development work*

...Research, including roles in Politics and Trades Unions, choose *Research and management services*

Information folders

- Green folder (L) *Policy Work* - information in this folder includes a comprehensive introduction to policy work, what the work involves, who employs policy workers, sector news and job profiles, including: **Policy Officer; Research Officer; Policy Development Officer.**
- Green folder (L1) *Administration - Central and Local Government*
- Other useful Green folders are: (G2) *PR* ; (N1) *Charities and Voluntary Organisations*; (O3) *Research Services*; (O5) *Trade Union Work*

Reference books (the brackets refer to which Careers Service office holds them)

- *Lobbying: the art of political persuasion* (c)
- *Politico's Guide to Local Government* (c)
- *Politico's Guide to Careers in Politics and Local Government* (c)
- *So you want to be a Lobbyist* (c)
- *Working for a Better World (case study for a Policy & Campaigns Officer)* (c)

Journals

- *Opportunities*: <http://opportunities.co.uk> - online version of the weekly public sector recruitment magazine.

Connect.ed

The Connect.ed database is an informal and confidential opportunity for you to gather occupational knowledge from former University of Edinburgh students currently working in the area you are interested in. You can access Connect.ed from the Careers Tab in MyEd (3rd years upwards).

Getting work experience

Even for graduates with excellent relevant degrees it is likely that some work experience will be a requirement for most jobs. Even where it is not, having relevant experience may be what gives one candidate the edge over the others, so helping to secure that all-important first post.

Internships, often unpaid, are sometimes advertised, but a lot of work experience in this field is found through speculative applications and networking. If you need help with this approach look at the information in the red **Job seeking strategies** folder, visit the *Looking for work* section on our website: www.ed.ac.uk/careers > *Looking for work*, or speak to the Careers Service.

- For finding organisations to whom you could speculatively apply use the Occupations section at: www.ed.ac.uk/careers > *Explore your options* > *Occupations*
- Use **MyCareerHub**, accessible through the Careers Service website www.ed.ac.uk/careers. It is also worth looking at the expired vacancies to find organisations who have advertised vacancies with us in the past, and who may be worth approaching speculatively.
- **Voluntary work** for a registered charity is an excellent way of getting work experience. As these organisations usually have few staff, volunteers are often given lots of responsibility, which is great for your CV. Volunteering for a political party or an individual MP/MSP whose portfolio or campaigning interests are in sympathy with your own is also a great way of gaining experience in the research and development of policy. For information on finding voluntary work, visit the *Volunteering* section of the Careers Service website. www.ed.ac.uk/careers > *Explore your options* > *Volunteering*
- **Work shadowing** is another way of gaining experience, especially if you are unable to get paid work experience. With work shadowing you spend time with a professional, observing their day-to-day activities and finding out first hand what the job involves. It is also a good way to see if you are really suited to this type of work.
- Getting involved in **university societies** can provide many opportunities to take on real responsibilities, such as organising campaigns, so developing skills and knowledge that you can demonstrate to future employers. Career-related societies can also be an excellent way of networking. For a list of societies visit: www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/societies
- For details of relevant events held during semester visit the *Events* section of MyCareerHub.

Further study

- You must first consider whether postgraduate study is necessary as it is expensive and there are very few funded places available. Some employers will require relevant qualifications either at undergraduate or postgraduate level, but others will focus more on work experience.
- If you do decide to pursue further study there are lots of policy work postgraduate courses to choose from, at Diploma and Masters level. Distance Learning options give you the opportunity to obtain professional qualifications while working. Some courses also have a work placement component and links with employers.
- To find postgraduate courses use the *postgraduate study course* search option on Prospects Web:
www.prospects.ac.uk and **www.targetcourses.co.uk**
- Speak to a Careers Consultant about the options available to you.

How to find a job

- **MyCareerHub**, accessible through the Careers Service website, regularly carries adverts for research assistants and policy workers, and for local and central government policy positions.
- Use the Occupations section of the Careers Service website for links to jobs boards and organisations which advertise vacancies (including internships) and/or have directories of potential employers: **www.ed.ac.uk/careers** > *Explore your options* > *Occupations*
- There are some **recruitment agencies** that specialise in the recruitment of public sector staff, which may include policy work. Use the resources in the Careers Service to identify relevant agencies and see our advice on how to approach them. This information is also available in the *Looking for work* section of our website: **www.ed.ac.uk/careers** > *Looking for work*

Times & dates

- For those wanting to work for the **Civil Service** we advise you to **research the available routes & apply as early as possible** to avoid disappointment.

Considerations

- Entry is competitive. Can you demonstrate the skills and experience sought by employers? Policy workers must have excellent research skills and the ability to analyse, synthesise and communicate complex information. They must also be highly organised, confident team players, who are numerate, able to use IT effectively, and with well-developed powers of persuasion.
- Think carefully about the area of policy work that best suits your interests, skills and motivation. Are you interested in the process of government or passionate about a cause? Are you keen to use your skills to influence a variety of agendas?
- Gain as much work experience as you can and use all available opportunities to develop your skills.
- Remember the importance of networking.
- Consider all the different entry routes, and the different types of employers. Are you prepared to take a lower level post and work your way up? Remember, this is also a flexible sector. You can move from the public sector into the voluntary sector, and from the voluntary sector into the private sector, e.g. a consultancy.
- **And finally** - if you need any help or have any questions you can speak with a Careers Information Adviser (no appointment necessary), or use MyCareerHub to book an appointment with a Careers Consultant. For further information about how Careers Service staff can help you please visit our website:
www.ed.ac.uk/careers > *Using the Careers Service*

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The Careers Service aims to be accessible to all users. If you require support to access any of our events or facilities, please let us know. We are happy to make this publication available in an alternative format. Please phone 0131 650 4670 or email careers@ed.ac.uk to alert us to your needs.

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FOR YOUR NOTES



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Careers Service

MyCareerHub

- job adverts
- insider information on employers and interviews
- exclusive information resources
- booking for appointments and events
- features you can personalise
- access anywhere, any time

www.ed.ac.uk/careers

You can access MyCareerHub via the Careers Service website and log in using your EASE/MyEd username and password.