



Your future in... **Policy work**

Introduction

Policy work is about influencing opinion and advocating ideas, providing information in a way that supports your organisation's remit. It involves consultation, research, report-writing and promotion. Although entry is competitive, there are a lot of opportunities in this field, across a very wide range of employers, including: central and local government, political parties, charities, think tanks, pressure groups, political strategy and public affairs consultancies.

What's it like?

You'll need to be a highly organised, confident team player, with well-developed powers of persuasion, a sound understanding of political systems and a wide-ranging grasp of current affairs. You should be good at analysing, synthesising and communicating complex information. Excellent research and numeracy skills and the ability to use IT effectively are also important.

The focus of your work will depend on the type of organisation, as well as your actual role. Think about which area of policy work best suits your interests, skills and motivation.

- Do you want to be involved in the process of government? Look into public sector roles, especially central and local government, where you'll be researching, planning and developing services, and advising elected officials such as MPs on policy, planning and development.
- Are you committed to advancing a particular cause? Look into roles with charities, campaign groups and pressure groups, where you'll be aiming to influence and inform opinion, and building relationships with government and the media.

The routes into this field are many and varied and there is a lot of mobility. As your skills and interests develop, and your expertise grows, you will be able to move between employers and even change the focus of your work: from the public to the private sector, from a consultancy to a think tank, from UK to international policy.

How can I get work experience?

Most jobs will require relevant work experience. Gain as much as you can to increase your chances.

- Many think-tanks offer **internships and work experience** opportunities, e.g. the Adam Smith Institute, and a number of public policy think tanks based in Edinburgh including the Centre for Scottish Public Policy and Reform Scotland. Find links to these, and other organisations, on our website.
- **Voluntary work** for a charity, a political party or an individual MP or MSP is also a great way of gaining experience in the research and development of policy. This work experience can open up routes into





other areas, leading, perhaps, to paid work in research or information positions, which can in turn lead to policy positions.

- **Work shadowing** a professional gives you chance to observe their day-to-day activities and find out first-hand what the job involves.
- **Speculative applications and networking** are key approaches to finding work experience in this field. See our advice on how to do this:
 - www.ed.ac.uk/careers/finding-unadvertised

Skills development

- Getting involved in **university societies** can provide many opportunities to take on real responsibilities, such as organising campaigns, which develop skills and knowledge that you can demonstrate to future employers. Career-related student societies can also be an excellent way of developing your networking skills.
 - www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/societies
- The **Buchanan Institute** is a student-led think tank. As a member you could be researching and writing policy proposals, leading projects, lobbying and disseminating information, as well as joining in events and activities.
- For details of relevant **employer events** held during semester visit the Events section of MyCareerHub.
- It's essential to know how to use **social media** effectively for your careers research and networking, and it's also a key aspect of a range of different jobs. If you're not sure about using social media see our advice here:
 - www.ed.ac.uk/careers/social-media

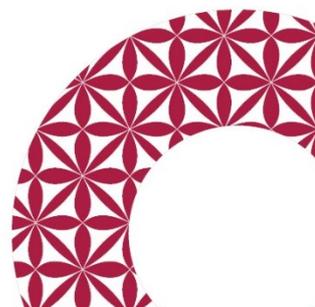
Postgraduate study

- A postgraduate qualification is not always required, and many employers will be more interested in your work experience.
- If you do decide to pursue further study, there are lots of courses to choose from. Use the postgraduate study course search option on Prospects Web and Target Courses:
 - www.prospects.ac.uk:
 - www.targetcourses.co.uk

Job hunting

Recent Edinburgh graduates have secured policy jobs with a very wide range of employers, both locally and internationally:

- **Politics and government** : Political Research Intern - Embassy of Peru; Policy Officer - Department for International Development (DfID)
- **Human Rights**: International Human Rights Policy Intern - German Institute for Human Rights; Assistant Policy Coordinator - Amnesty International
- **Charities**: Policy Researcher - Barnardo's; Policy and Public Affairs Manager - British Heart Foundation





- **Campaign groups:** Research and Policy Assistant - Jubilee Scotland
- **Public Policy Consultancies:** Policy Researcher - Policy in Practice

These examples also highlight the many different job titles used in this sector, so be sure your job search parameters are wide enough, and read the detail of adverts.

- Check the Opportunities section of MyCareerHub. Recent adverts for relevant positions include: research intern, political communications intern, campaigns researcher, and policy advice officer.
- Fast-track graduate routes into local and national government can lead to specialising in policy work, e.g. the Civil Service Fast Stream, the Government Social Research Fast Stream and the Local Government NGDP (National Graduate Development Programme).
- Considering entering local or national government work at a lower level and working your way up to policy positions.
- This approach may also be effective for other types of employers, for example charities.
- Graduate entry positions are found in PR, public affairs consultancies and campaign groups or pressure groups. The CBI Graduate Programme is an example.
- Some recruitment agencies specialise in the recruitment of public sector staff, which may include policy work. For advice on using recruitment agencies see www.ed.ac.uk/careers/recruitment-agencies

Find out more

Save yourself some time by visiting our webpage on Policy Work. Information includes links to all the **essential sites**, including those mentioned above.

- www.ed.ac.uk/careers/policy-work

Policy Work Job Study – these summaries from policy work professionals tell you more about the work, who the employers are, how to get into the field etc. Search the Resources on MyCareerHub to find them.

Policy workers are employed in many sectors; our website tells you about them::

- **Advertising, PR and Marketing** – information about Political PR, Public Affairs Consultancies and think-tanks
- **Charity & Development Work** – for roles in charity and voluntary work
- **Research and Management Services** - including roles in Research, Politics and Trades Unions

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