Introduction

Many students and graduates are keen to investigate the possibility of working in the area of Human Rights. It is important to be aware that there is not one single point of entry or single organisation carrying out Human Rights work. Neither is Human Rights work wholly focused on international issues such as torture and political oppression.

The information in this leaflet is designed to provide a starting point and to help you understand the diversity of opportunities and issues within Human Rights. It will help you clarify the questions which you need to ask yourself and experience you may need to gain before deciding that a career in Human Rights is for you.

It is important to consider which area of Human Rights work will suit your personality, skills, interests, aspirations and motivations. It is also important to consider at which level you wish to enter this area of work. There are two main routes in:

1) Gaining experience by volunteering and internships, getting involved with relevant organisations whilst a student etc, in order to apply for entry-level positions, then progressing upwards.
2) Gaining a professional qualification or professional experience (eg in law, medicine, policy, marketing, accountancy etc) and moving into Human Rights works after some years of experience.

What is meant by Human Rights?

One definition is “The basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled, often held to include the right to life and liberty, freedom of thought and expression, and equality before the law” (source: The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition.)
Main areas of Human Rights activity include:

Civil Rights – Although the UK does not have a civil rights bill, civil rights can be described as those rights belonging to an individual by virtue of their citizenship in a country. Examples include the right to vote, freedom from discrimination, equal protection under the country's laws.

Political Rights – Political Rights allow for full participation in political life and its processes. Examples can be participating in political campaigns, representing a political point of view.

Cultural Rights – Cultural Rights are those that allow people to identify themselves as members of a distinct group within society. These groups may be identified by ethnicity, religion etc.

Social Rights – Social rights refer to what are usually positive rights, which ensure to all people a fair standard of treatment. These include the right to an education, health care, the right to work, etc.

Economic Rights – Economic rights provide the opportunity to seek employment and be paid a wage, to be treated fairly and not be discriminated against on grounds of gender, race, disability sexuality and faith.

Human Rights Issues - ‘Human Rights’ covers a wide diversity of issues on a local, national and international level. The examples below demonstrate the breadth of the areas covered:

- Academic freedom;
- Aids and access to health care;
- Children and Young Peoples rights;
- Counter terrorism and civil liberties;
- Disability;
- Freedom of expression (in the press, via the internet, freedom to protest);
- Lesbian, gay and transgender rights;
- Prison reform;
- Religious freedoms;
- Racial equality;
- Refugees, Torture and abuse;
- Women’s Rights.

What types of roles are available in the area of Human Rights?

What role you carry out will very much depend on what type of work you do. Examples of Human Rights roles include:

“Face to Face” “On the Ground” or “Field Work”
This involves direct delivery of a service to individuals and/or a community – for example on a local level in Edinburgh you could work with refugees needing practical help and advice with their legal, social and economic concerns. On an international level you could work as a doctor, nurse, teacher, water engineer, after having previously qualified and gained experience in these professions.

Advocacy
This can involve a person or organisation publicly supporting or recommending a particular cause, issue, or policy. It can also involve a person or professional representing and arguing a case for someone else. This can be the role of a solicitor, barrister, social or community worker or other related professional.

Policy
Voluntary and charity organisations, political parties, campaign groups and lobbying organisations work to influence and persuade governments and law makers on law
and policy in respect of Human Rights in their area of interest. For example, Stonewall promotes fair and equal treatment for the LGBT community, Amnesty addresses political oppression, Mencap campaigns for laws that protect and promote opportunities for people with learning disabilities. Policy work can also include elements of advocacy work.

Academia/Research
Research, education and training, and development work in different areas concerned with Human Rights is carried on in Universities and research centres worldwide. Examples include Nottingham University which is a leading centre for Human Rights Education and Corporate and Social Responsibility; Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in South Africa; Council on Foreign Relations and Freedom House in the US; The Centre for Democracy and Development in West Africa.

Management Services
Administration, accountancy, marketing and promotion, human resources, legal services etc are all services needed by Human Rights organisations. You may want to train or gain experience in a different job sector, and then move into a Human Rights related organisation.

What Types of Jobs are available?
The range of employment opportunities in the area of Human Rights is as diverse as the organisations involved. Below is a selection of the type of jobs available.

Fundraiser, logistics manager, policy and advocacy coordinator, human rights education manager, audio visual archivist, mobilisation and growth management (business development) worker, adviser on education rights, administrative assistant, EU intern, women’s rights researcher, country researcher, website developer, accountant, youth worker, nurse, public relations officer, lobbyist, solicitor, barrister, campaigner.

Entry level jobs can be difficult to obtain. In many cases you will need a post graduate degree (not necessarily in Law) and/or experience of working in issue-based work in the UK and overseas.

Many students start off by volunteering or gaining one of the competitive intern opportunities that are offered by organisations such as Liberty, Amnesty, Action aid, UNICEF. Use the links referred to at the end of the leaflet to research other opportunities.

You need to be creative in your approach to gaining experience. Teaching in China, working on conservation and education projects in the UK and worldwide can provide useful insights not only about yourself but issues facing people and how they are responding to their immediate environment and concerns. Starting salaries (unless you are a volunteer) will be between 10K – 25K.

Professional-level entry. Some people choose to gain professional qualifications and experience before moving into the Human Rights field. Training, qualifying and practicing as an accountant, then moving into work as a finance manager for an NGO is one example.
Unlike some areas of the private and public sector, Human Rights organisations and NGOs etc are not in a position to offer mass graduate recruitment programmes. They will usually look to recruit experienced people who can make an instant contribution.

**What skills and experience do I need to work in Human Rights?**

Human Rights is a broad employment area, not a specific job – there are many different jobs requiring different skills and experience. Your own personal motivations and values will be important drivers in your decision to enter this area of work in general. The specific roles in Human Rights work which interest you will determine the skills and experience you need. Look at job descriptions to assess what skills and experience are required for these roles. For example, you may require research, writing, analytical, time and project management, team working and public speaking skills to carry out the role of a campaigner, public relations officer, barrister, or policy researcher.

Some Human Rights work will require fluency in other languages – eg international courts predominantly work in English and French. Local languages are often important for field work, as is appreciation of cultural difference and diversity. Any opportunity to work, study and live in other countries and cultures should be considered if you want to demonstrate you have the capability to work overseas.

Irrespective of who you work for and what you do, it is important that you are committed to Social Justice. Do your research on Human Rights declarations and associated statements of intent which define what human rights are and why they are important.

**What questions do I need to ask myself when considering work in this area?**

All career decision-making involves self reflection and self knowledge. Assessing whether Human Rights work is for you is no different. What is different is that unlike other career areas such as Law, Business and Finance etc. there are no clearly defined career entry points and progression paths. Finding these entry points can be much more complicated and problematic. Graduates can face many issues including:

- getting your first paid job working in Human Rights can be difficult
- most job vacancies appear to be looking for people with experience
- the typical “graduate training scheme” does not exist
- personal and financial sacrifice may be required to achieve relevant experience.

You must think carefully about your desire to work in this area and you should ask yourself these questions:

- What am I interested in? (as outlined above, Human Rights is a diverse area.)
- Am I prepared to devote lots of time and energy pursuing a career in this field?
- Do I have a plan/strategy to progress my ideas?
- Am I committed enough – do I care enough about the issues?
- Where do I want to work, both in the immediate future and longer term - am I willing to work locally, nationally or possibly overseas?

- Am I prepared to learn about and understand Human Rights and why they are important?

Your reflections on these questions should help you decide whether to pursue a career in this area.

**How do I find out more?**

Browse the website [www.kent.ac.uk/careers/workin/humanrights.htm](http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/workin/humanrights.htm) - a great resource for human rights information and links - includes links to internships and voluntary opportunities.

Use the Human Rights links on the Careers Service website [www.ed.ac.uk/careers](http://www.ed.ac.uk/careers) (> explore your options > occupations > legal services > law – specialisms) to research organisations working in this area, plus the Human Rights information in the K (Legal) section of the Green careers information folders in the Careers Information Centres.

Human Rights work overlaps with several other areas covered on the Careers Service website, and in the Careers Service information centres. These include:

- Corporate Social Responsibility work, [www.ed.ac.uk/careers](http://www.ed.ac.uk/careers) (> explore your options > occupations > corporate social responsibility), and reference folders in the Orange section of the Careers Service information centres.

- Charity and Development Work, [www.ed.ac.uk/careers](http://www.ed.ac.uk/careers) (> explore your options > occupations > charity and development work) and the ‘N’ reference folders in the Green careers information section.

- Conflict Resolution and Mediation – reference folder in the B section of the Green careers information section.

*(Janet Forsyth, Careers Adviser, July 10)*
Case Studies

1) Human Rights Internship - Reprieve
2) Outreach co-ordinator - Scottish Human Rights Commission
4) Solicitor - Ethnic Minorities Law Centre (EMLC), Glasgow

1) Human Rights Internship

Reprieve

(Reprieve uses the law to enforce the human rights of prisoners, from death row to Guantánamo Bay).

Application Process

I first read about the Reprieve Internship Programme in a Times Student Law supplement in 2005, and knew immediately that it was something I wanted to do. As a law student keen to become involved in human rights work, I felt that there could be no better use of my legal skills then working to defend those facing the ultimate deprivation of their human rights: the death penalty. After graduating from my LL.B in Law and Spanish, I worked for 10 months to save up money before applying. One application form and a nerve-wracking interview later, I was informed that Reprieve was sending me to the Gulf Region Advocacy Centre (GRACE) in Houston, Texas. I left in October 2007, planning to stay for 3 months; in the end, I stayed for 9.

Volunteering at GRACE

The work carried out by interns varies greatly; it will depend on what case you are assigned to work on and what stage that case is at. However, all interns will start out with simple file management tasks in order to familiarise them with the way in which cases are filed and organised. Whilst not being the most exciting task, this is the best way of learning about the way in which capital crimes are tried and for interns to learn how GRACE puts together its client’s cases. From then, interns will generally assist in investigating cases, and particularly in putting together mitigating evidence in order to persuade the jury to choose life without parole rather than death. This involves building up the story of the client’s life, and so interns will search for medical, educational, employment records and may well assist with witness interviews, pulling all the information together into relevant formats. The nature of the work often involves long, repetitive administrative tasks; if 300 pages of records come in then it will be the intern’s task to go through every page, searching for relevant information and organising it according to the GRACE filing system.

I was very privileged to be volunteering at GRACE during and in the run up to a high profile capital murder trial. This involved working 16 hours a day, 7 days a week, carrying out any tasks necessary to ensure that we were ready for trial. Tasks included everything and anything: detailed research into jury selection in Harris County; putting together over 20 indexed ringbinders of evidence for court; picking up expert and lay witnesses from the airport and explaining (sometimes in Spanish as our client was Mexican) what testifying would involve; taking detailed notes during court; buying lunch for 16 hungry witnesses, experts and lawyers whilst avoiding the press; and buying a full set of court clothes for our client, including underwear... and the list goes on. The long hours and hard work paid off in the end as, incredibly, 10 of the 12 jurors chose to spare our client’s life and handed down a sentence of life without parole.
What I learned

Knowing that your work has helped to save a man’s life, particularly when all around you were convinced that death was the only possible outcome in a county which executes more people than any state in the US except for Texas itself, is really an indescribable feeling. Having spent 9 months preparing myself for a death sentence, even now when I look back at the verdict I still can’t quite believe that we actually did it. I went to visit our client a month later, and by chance he had been housed in the prison unit which also contains the Texas death row. The inmate in the visiting booth next to us was being executed the next day; the first execution since the Supreme Court decided in April 2008 that the lethal injection does not constitute cruel and unusual punishment. It was a powerful reminder that Texas has executed over 400 people since the death penalty was resumed in 1974, including 6 people in the first months of 2009 alone, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. There is still a long way to go and a lot of work to be done.

Life after Reprieve

Returning home after a Reprieve internship takes some adjustment; after spending several months of your life completely immersed in the world of capital defence, coming back to a country where the death penalty no longer exists and getting back to old routines can come as a bit of a shock. However, many interns return to their placement offices to volunteer again or as employees, and others become involved with Reprieve’s work in the UK. I am now back in Scotland, completing my Diploma and searching for a traineeship with a law centre. I keep in touch regularly with the interns who were with me at GRACE; living and working together in such an intense environment forges bonds that are not easily forgotten. A Reprieve internship, whilst only lasting a few months, is an experience that you will absolutely remember for the rest of your life.

Reprieve UK: www.reprieve.org.uk
GRACE: www.gracelaw.org

2) Outreach Co-ordinator

Scottish Human Rights Commission

You and this area of Human Rights work

What do you enjoy most about it?

- far removed from ‘legalese’
- real people with real issues
- I never feel bored at work or feel that what I do it futile
- Appreciation from colleagues
- Diversity of tasks – awareness raising, arts/culture promotion, community participation, writing web copy, responding to correspondence, advocating on behalf of a community, monitoring government obligations
What would you do if you were a new graduate trying to start out in this area of the profession?

- gain as much different life experience as you can
- consider voluntary work in Citizens Advice Bureau, Ethnic Minority Law Centre, Strathclyde Law Centre, Govan Law Centre or similar
- read broadly – print media, fiction and non-fiction, listen to the ‘Today’ programme or ‘Good Morning Scotland’
- remain committed in the face of need for perseverance and hard work
- stay positive
- apply for internships to cover periods of unemployment

What are you most excited or concerned about for this area of law in the future?

Concerned:
- budgetary cuts as the role and function of public bodies is scrutinized by parliament
- apathy for human rights/ cynicism as the economic recession forces neo-liberal policy rethinks

Excited:
- Scottish issues gaining greater attention at UN Human Rights Council
- Empowerment of young people into activism to reclaim human rights as their own
- Recognition that poverty (and related housing/ health problems) are human rights concerns

What have been your biggest surprises in this field?

- attention to detail is needed and business management is just as relevant as in private practice
- risks associated with freedom of information
- Scottish public interest in international human rights concerns
- Confidence and knowledge of young people in secondary schools debating human rights concerns

What motivates you to continue in this area of work?

- supportive colleagues
- dependence on role from communities
- fair and common sense approach to work/ life balance (flexi time but work to deadlines where needed)

About the work you do

What are your primary responsibilities?

- coordinate Outreach for SHRC
- draft and manage website content
- edit open-source contributions to website
- promote arts and cultural events
- chair arts and cultural panel
- meet with community groups, listen to concerns and respond
- engage with stakeholders in third sector
- oversee human rights education program
How do you spend your time? (if possible try to quantify rough %s for an average week)

Press and communications: 10%
Business proposals for supporting events: 10%
Meeting with communities (thematic or geographic): 30%
Research mapping and reading: 30%
Website: 10%
Budgeting/reporting: 10%

What prior experience is valuable to help you get into this area of law (e.g. vacation placement, volunteering with CAB etc)
- see answer above for experience

What is the typical career progression for a lawyer in this field?
- nothing ‘typical’!
- demonstrate commitment to human rights – through legal practice, development work, skills based through education training or community participation
- LLM or MA in human rights looks good

Where, when and how do you suggest looking for jobs/traineeships/training contracts?
- Third Force news for voluntary sector jobs, Relief Web for foreign positions, UN Junior Fellowship Program
- Law school notice boards
- Scottish Human Rights Journal

About skills

What skills are most critical to success in this area?
- Communication skills
- Time keeping
- Able to write succinctly
- Delegation
- Advocacy

How do you keep your skills current?
- CPD courses where appropriate
- In-house lunchtime seminars (organised by myself)
- Peer review with other national human rights institutions (UNHCHR is secretariat for a network of over 80 such bodies)
- Obligation to undergo quarterly performance reviews with line manager

What do you read to ensure you are up to date in this area of law?
- not enough!
- Scottish Human Rights Journal
- Broadsheet newspapers (particularly Scottish ones)
- Relevant blogs
Is there anything else you think would be helpful for anyone considering this field?

Stay positive, open-minded and persevere!

3 Immigration Caseworker

Wilson & Co. Solicitors, London

What is your current role?
I work as an immigration caseworker. My role is largely the same as a solicitor but I work under their supervision. I work with both clients wanting to claim asylum and those with other immigration issues i.e. family reunion and people who are in the UK without status.

What are your primary responsibilities?
I attend clients and take their instruction on their situation and what work they require the firm to do on their behalf. I then carry out the work on their case. Generally in my position this work involves taking detailed statements from clients and other parties which will benefit the case, completing immigration forms and making representations to the Home Office. An element of preparing a client’s case involves instructing experts and compiling objective evidence to support the case. I often have to prepare the bundles for appeals and bail hearings. I also have to book barristers for hearings, liaise with barristers and attend conferences between them and the client. On several occasions I make visits to detention centres in order to meet clients.

What do you enjoy most about this area of work?
The part I enjoy most is the face to face client work. I meet people from such varied backgrounds that I really learn a lot about different cultures, which I find very interesting. I particularly enjoy working directly with people as opposed to looking at a computer all day. There is also a huge amount of satisfaction to seeing a completed application to the Home Office or an appeal bundle that I have prepared myself from the beginning for a client. The best part is when a client gets status in the UK or is allowed to bring their family members to the UK.

What is your educational background and career path to date?
I have my LL.B from Glasgow, which included a year abroad in Maastricht and then a LL.M in international Human Rights Law from the University of Essex. I am just about to do my GDL to convert from Scot’s to English law. This is my first paid position that has required my law degree, however I did voluntary work for an asylum advice centre while doing my masters which I think was beneficial to my career.

What would you do if you were a student or new graduate trying to start out in this area of the profession?
I would really recommend doing an LL.M after undergrad - this was invaluable to me. The course gave me a real understanding of the law but also introduced me to a wide group of contacts working in the field. This in turn has opened me up to various job
and training opportunities. Having contacts working in the same area is such an asset, it was in fact through an Essex contact that I heard about the job I am currently doing. I also think it is very important to have done relevant volunteer or training placements. The field of Human Rights is very competitive and doing as much of this as possible will definitely help to set applicants apart. It is effective to have experience in a particular area, such as immigration, rather than several placements in different areas of human rights.

**What prior experience is valuable to help you get into this area of law - eg vacation placement, volunteering, etc?**
The firm I currently work for were very keen that applicants have experience working within the field of immigration. I was an active member of Student Action for Refugees during both my Undergrad and Masters courses which I think was an asset. I had also volunteered for an asylum advice centre which helped. I would recommend getting relevant work or voluntary placements as it helps develop a greater understanding of the issues involved in the work which benefited me personally but it also shows the employer a commitment to the cause. My employers really wanted someone who could show a passion for human rights and the application of these rights.

**Is there anything else you think would be helpful for anyone considering this field?**
I think it is really important to choose as many human rights based courses at undergrad as possible to gain a full understanding of the working of the law. Also doing a Masters is really useful. I think it is also helpful for someone to decide which area of human rights they are interested in working in and focus their academic and volunteer work towards that.

### 4 Solicitor

_Ethnic Minorities Law Centre (EMLC), Glasgow_

I work as a Solicitor for the Ethnic Minorities Law Centre (EMLC). EMLC was founded in 1991 as a joint venture of the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde in recognition of the fact that there was a significant unmet legal need amongst the black and minority ethnic communities in Glasgow. Over the years the law centre has developed into a centre of expertise in the fields of immigration and nationality law, asylum and refugee law, human rights law and discrimination law. The law centre has also developed beyond the City of Glasgow. It now provides a service to those in Glasgow and most of the outlining local authority areas. We also have a branch office in Edinburgh and now provide a service to individuals living across the Highland local authority area.

For as long as I can remember I have had a passion and interest in working in the field of human rights. What I enjoy most about working in this field and in particular my role as a solicitor is the opportunity to work with people who are suffering injustice and in some way, however big or small, to help improve their situation. Whilst there is an incredible amount of job satisfaction there are frustrations in equal measure. Working with asylum-seekers is particularly frustrating and upsetting because of the injustice of the asylum system. The successes though are enough to keep my passion and motivation alive.
If I were a new graduate trying to start out in this area of the profession the best advice I can give is to seek out volunteering opportunities as early as possible. I started as a volunteer at EMLC in my fourth year at university and remained with the organisation until the completion of my Diploma. Being a volunteer with the organisation was key to me securing the opportunity to do my traineeship there. You must prepare yourself for challenges in finding a volunteer placement. Most organisations working in this field are doing so with very limited resources and recruiting, training and supporting volunteers often takes a lot of time. This means that volunteer placements can sometimes be hard to find. The best advice is simply to persevere and be patient. It was about 4 months after I applied to volunteer at the law centre that I was invited to an interview and offered the placement.

My primary responsibilities are first and foremost to provide legal advice and representation to individuals in our specialist areas of law. This covers a wide range of different scenarios. Examples of typical cases include assisting clients who wish to claim asylum in the UK, assisting individuals in obtaining visas to come to the UK and in applications to extend or vary their visas once here, representing clients in their appeals before the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal against decisions of the Home Office and pursuing human rights applications for clients who for various reasons have no leave to remain in the UK. In relation to discrimination law we advise clients on their rights under discrimination law across the 6 equality strands of race, religion/belief, disability, gender, sexual orientation and age. We assist in cases of discrimination in employment as well as claims against public authorities and cases concerning the provision of goods, facilities and services. Our primary role is to advise clients on UK discrimination law, assist in obtaining evidence to help prove that discrimination took place and then represent clients in discrimination claims before the employment tribunal and occasionally the Sheriff Court.

In addition, most of our solicitors work on specific projects in the law centre and this brings with it project management responsibilities. This includes preparing monitoring and evaluation reports for our statutory funders, meeting with funders and partner organisations, community development work, training and awareness-raising activities. I spend about 75% of my time on client casework and 25% on other activities like report writing, delivering training sessions and community development work.

It is difficult to set out what the career progression is for a lawyer in this field because most organizations are fairly small, which means there is not a large career structure as you may find in the commercial sector. It is, however, much more likely in this sector that after completing your traineeship you would be kept on as a qualified solicitor. In EMLC we do not follow the traditional practice structure of assistant, associate and partner but there are promotion opportunities available once qualified. Although this sector is small it is a specialized sector so once you have qualified there are definitely opportunities for career progression available.

It is important to point out that the earning potential in this field is not what it is in the commercial sector but the salaries are very competitive when compared with other small practices. There are also better terms and conditions of employment in this sector than in the private sector, for example, better annual leave entitlement, flexible working arrangements and generally a good work/life balance. In my experience traineeships are rarely advertised in advance in this field of work. Because of the precarious nature of statutory funding organisations cannot always plan in advance as to when they will be in a position to recruit a trainee. This may mean leaving applying to the last minute or holding back until opportunities are advertised. This
can be daunting but it is fairly unpredictable as to when traineeship opportunities will arise.

There are a range of skills that contribute to success in this area. An interest and ability in legal analysis is important as the law is constantly changing in these fields. The legal concepts are complex and it is crucial to keep up to date with the changing caselaw. It is also equally important to have strong interpersonal and communication skills. We are often working with clients who are extremely vulnerable and it is important to be able to build a rapport easily and communicate sensitively and compassionately. Working in this field also helps to develop new skills, for example, learning how to work with interpreters and in developing an awareness of cultural sensitivity. Like for all lawyers attention to detail and good organizational skills are crucial but perhaps more so in this field when the consequences of making an error can be a matter of life and death to some of our clients. Above all, patience and perseverance will serve you well working in this field. Often it is simply not possible to achieve what we would like for our clients as we have to work within the law and the legal system, which itself is full of injustice. With perseverance though it really is possible to help change lives – and that, without doubt, makes all of it worthwhile.

(Case-studies contributed by the Agcas Scotland law Advisers Group, 09)

We are happy to make this publication available in an alternative format. Please contact your careers adviser, reception or the information desk.

July 10