

Careers in International Development

This publication provides an overview of International Development careers along with advice on how to get into the work. Sources of further information are also included to help you research the field in more detail and find jobs and work experience. For example, 'Working in International Development & Humanitarian Assistance' (Routledge 2015) is available in the Careers Service and is a vital source of information.

International Development Work

The potential careers in international aid and development are numerous and there are lots of different organisations involved which vary in size and nature. These organisations address issues in areas such as:

- Sustainability
- Education
- Health
- Disaster relief
- Technology
- Economics
- Equality, Gender and Human Rights
- The Environment
- Agriculture
- Planning and Infrastructure

The broad activities of staff can be divided into Foreign Aid, Fundraising, Advocating/Campaigning on behalf of key issues/groups, Planning, Project management, Administration, Relief work, and Reporting (researching specific needs and measuring the success of development projects). Jobs and volunteering opportunities arise throughout the world, including in the UK. Staff in developed countries are usually employed in administrative support roles, while those in project-based roles overseas carry out operational and/or management duties. As the range of activities and issues is so diverse, many different specialist and generalist roles exist. Therefore this area of work is open to many degree subjects, but competition is often intense and the route into a career in International Development is not straightforward.

The organisations operating in the sector can be broadly categorised as:

- Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) - operating on a not-for-profit basis, these include charities and other agencies which deliver projects in communities and/or campaign on behalf of particular issues. There are many thousands of such organisations worldwide, and opportunities exist in small organisations as well as the large and often well-known ones.
- National Governments and their agencies. For example, in the UK this is primarily the Department for International Development (DFID).
- Intergovernmental Organisations such as the United Nations and the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). Internships exist with international organisations but competition is strong. These are generally aimed at postgraduates and are often unpaid.
- Specialist consultancies and research bodies, including universities and research institutes ('think tanks'), providing services to client organisations.

A structured career path is unlikely outside of a public sector government department. Instead it is common to have to make career moves between different agencies and locations to develop one's career, so it is important to be willing to move around. Many overseas posts require specialist skills and/or qualifications, with a proven background in the appropriate profession, e.g. engineering, healthcare, economics, or the built environment professions. Consequently, some people have worked in a different sector prior to moving into International Development.

Similarly a career move into administrative and management posts in International Development can follow experience in another sector, e.g. in finance, HR, marketing, IT etc. However, an alternative route could be via an entry-level admin support job in an NGO before moving into posts with increasing management responsibility.



Getting in

The diverse nature of International Development means there is no single route into jobs in this sector. There are very high levels of competition for graduate entry-level jobs, particularly as many other posts in the sector require specialist skills and experience. Vacancies for graduates may ask for overseas experience, a postgraduate degree in a relevant subject, and possibly knowledge of a second language, while posts abroad may also require local knowledge, meaning recruiters often look for candidates who come from the country concerned.

So how do you increase your chances? To show evidence of your commitment and determination to get into the sector, work experience is vital, especially in a developing country. For the vast majority, this is going to be via volunteering, either via a fee-based scheme whereby you pay an agency which organises volunteering opportunities abroad, or by volunteering directly with a charity or similar organisation.

Gaining relevant work experience is essential to demonstrate your motivation, but importantly will help you make contacts and decide which area of development you are interested in. This will help you identify further opportunities and/or select a postgraduate course focusing on your preferred specialism.

Important practical skills and qualities to develop are; understanding of the nature and complexities of International Development issues, cultural knowledge, and language skills. You can add to your experience of these by joining **SIDshare** (see the next section below) and engaging with other cultures through relevant **international social events and societies** at Sheffield. In addition, the University's '**Languages for All**' scheme means any student can learn a new language www.shef.ac.uk/languages/lfa. While knowledge of another language is not always essential for International Development, it is useful. In addition to English, important languages are French, Portuguese and Spanish, with Arabic, Chinese and other Asian and African languages also potentially beneficial.

Other personal skills you will need to develop and show evidence of include:

- relating to and communicating with many different people
- patience, energy and resilience to work under pressure
- practical problem-solving and coping with changing circumstances
- relationship-building in teams and communities and motivating others
- management of people, resources and projects
- ability to learn quickly
- willingness to re-locate and, for overseas work, acceptance of basic living conditions

Top Tips for Finding Work in International Development

Develop a specific area of interest

As International Development work is so varied, you should decide which field appeals to you and seek to specialise in it. This will allow you to then develop experience and knowledge for your CV that is consistent with your chosen roles and organisations. This requires research via reading and networking, as well as analysis of where your own interests lie.

Focus on lesser-known organisations

Everyone is aware of prominent organisations such as Oxfam, the Red Cross, Amnesty International, etc. Consequently any jobs with them attract huge numbers of applicants, and they are commonly targeted by people seeking work experience. So try and find others in your field of interest which are not as well-known, as that might make it easier to get in. To help you, follow online discussions and organisations' social media pages, and subscribe to relevant job lists. See the 'Sources of further information' below for directories of development organisations, e.g. BOND and WANGO, plus other resources.

Know and be known

To get into International Development, you need to develop your network. Start at a local level by becoming involved in SIDshare, the student-led social enterprise which works with a number of partner organisations <http://sidshare.group.shef.ac.uk>.

Check for other networks in your area, for example the South Yorkshire International Development Network <https://syidn.wordpress.com>.

By looking on development organisations' websites, you can get insights into their work, and then contact them for advice. Social media and online forums are also excellent ways of understanding the key issues and adding to your contacts, as well as finding out about events where you can hear from and meet practitioners. All of these will make you more familiar with the terminology used in the sector. Employing this vocabulary in your CV will mean you come across as knowledgeable and informed.

Volunteer to work abroad

As mentioned earlier, work experience overseas is virtually essential to get employment in this sector. You need it to gain insight and practical skills, and show your cultural knowledge and adaptability. Investigate volunteering agencies which offer advice and can arrange a placement in your chosen specialism.

www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/infotree/GapYear.php lists some resources to help find volunteering opportunities. Details of the International Citizen Service (ICS) are included at the end of this publication.

Important: if you are volunteering or undertaking a placement in another country check your finances and insurance are sufficient, and make sure you will be safe. See the travel advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice.

Add to your knowledge and skills

When you've identified a specialist field of interest you can seek relevant training courses and qualifications. This can include master's courses which focus on specific aspects of development, e.g. development economics, health, rural development etc. A postgraduate course is not *essential* for entry-level jobs but can be valued by employers, and is required for some advanced roles. Look for Master's courses which develop skills in a specialist area, e.g. Economics, Sciences, Health, the Environment, or International Development master's that will allow you to work with an organisation as part of your research projects, as this will enable you to develop a working relationship with them. Some courses and PhD research programmes may attract funding through fellowships or bursaries, for example the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan for certain Commonwealth countries including the United Kingdom.

UK Postgraduate courses in Development can be found via The Development Studies Association's Course Directories www.devstud.org.uk as well as general postgraduate course listings such as those on www.prospects.ac.uk and www.findamasters.com.

You can also take short courses on relevant International Development topics. A list of forthcoming courses can be found at www.charityjob.co.uk/Events. Look out too, for events and activities run by SIDshare.

Advice from Sheffield University Graduates Working in Development

'Networking is key. This does not just mean asking people in organizations you are interested in about jobs, it means developing relationships with people, at all levels of many different organizations. Any kind of experience can be useful. You can gain very valuable skills from working in an organization you have very little interest in - think about transferable skills.' **Clemence – BA Politics and Sociological Studies**

'Contact the development organisations and let them know your skills and knowledge. Maybe they are looking for someone like you if you are ready to work hard and mix with people from all walks of life.'

Sayed – MA Town and Regional Planning

'Be ambitious but recognise that most of the jobs you want you won't be able to get straight away. Just make sure that whatever job you do get you do brilliantly. Get yourself noticed in any organisation even as the lowest of admin staff. People will help you to move up and open doors for you, so take the initiative and work beyond your job description.' **Georgina – BA Hispanic Studies and Politics**

'Be enthusiastic - don't think you are 'too good' for a job - opportunities present themselves when you are keen, educated and passionate. Working your way up the career ladder will take a few years (with a History degree at least!) but believe in yourself.' **Heather – BA History**

'.....complete some short courses on poverty or (other specialism) to increase chances of getting a job in the NGO field.' **Mbuso - MSc Health and Social Care Research**

'It is a competitive arena so the earlier you start with activities that distinguish you from the rest, the better your chances of accessing particular jobs. Above all, it is important to be passionate about what you're doing and believe in it. Internships in NGOs, whether local or international, or in UN or Regional bodies is an important route to take after you graduate.' **Elin – BA International, European and Comparative Law**

'Anyone who is interested in getting into international development needs to get field experience and the easiest way to do this is through volunteering!' **Natasha – BA International Relations and Politics**

'Network through people you know or their contacts. Whatever responsibility is offered always ask how you can make an even bigger contribution.' **Annie - BA Modern Languages with Interpreting**

'(Recognise) the importance of foreign languages in a global workplace, I wish I had taken the time to study another language. Get involved in extra-curricular activities (volunteering, representation, campaigning). I was very active in student campaigning at University, and I don't think that I would have got my first job in my current organisation without this campaigning experience.' **Katie – BA History and Politics**

See these Graduate Case Studies in full at <http://careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/casestudies>. Use the filter 'Charity, community and development work' under 'Type of job'.

Sources of Further Information

Many resources provide information on working in International Development and help you find opportunities and possible work experience. The following list is a starting point for your research.

Publication (available on loan from the Careers Service)

Working in International Development & Humanitarian Assistance M Gedde (Routledge 2015)

A comprehensive career guide with advice, information on job roles and different areas of specialisms

Online

Jobsites include www.wse.org.uk, www.devnetjobs.org and www.devex.com/jobs. The latter also has advice in its 'Careers Center'. Note: a fee-based membership subscription applies to access some of the services/features of the sites. Other jobsites include www.mydevjobs.com and www.humanrightsjobs.com.

BOND (British Overseas NGOs for Development) www.bond.org.uk. The UK membership body for NGOs working in International Development with details of member organisations listed at my.bond.org.uk/organisations. Also includes job listing at www.bond.org.uk/jobs.

Charity Job www.charityjob.co.uk Includes Jobs, Volunteer Roles and Training Events in International Development.

Department for International Development (DFID)

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-international-development operates an annual Graduate Development Scheme. As these are UK Government-based jobs, the posts are only open to applicants from certain nationalities.

Directory of Development Organisations www.devdir.org. Lists 70,000 development organisations worldwide, although the latest edition is 2011. Available to download by name of country.

Disasters Emergency Committee www.dec.org.uk. Links to DEC's member charities www.dec.org.uk/member-charities, plus jobs/volunteering at www.dec.org.uk/get-involved.

International Citizen Service www.volunteerics.org. Overseas volunteering programmes for UK/EU/EEA 18-25 year olds. Volunteers normally have to fund-raise a minimum of £800 to contribute to costs. The remaining 90% is funded by the UK Government. Nationals from other countries can apply via ICS programmes exist in their home nation.

Prospects Occupational profile www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/international-aid-development-worker.

Voluntary Services Overseas

www.vso.org.uk. International Development charity with volunteering opportunities *for experienced professionals*. 18-25 year olds can volunteer via the International Citizen Service (see above).

World Association of Non-Governmental Organisations WANGO Use the WANGO Directory www.wango.org/resources.aspx?section=ngodir to find names of NGOs according to their type of activity and/or country. Details of each NGO are restricted to WANGO subscribers', but once you have the name, you can simply search for the NGO's website online.

World Service Enquiry www.wse.org.uk Jobs, information and useful advice on working in development.

Further reading at www.careers.ox.ac.uk/international-development (Oxford University Careers Service).