

Careers in Social and Market Research

Introduction

Social/Market researchers carry out research to help their employer or their client make informed business, political, social or economic decisions. To do this, they collect, analyse and organise information and data, which they then present in written reports and/or presentations.

Methods such as interviews, questionnaires and focus groups are used to investigate the views and/or experiences of samples of the population on specific issues. Market researchers may collect information on people's buying habits, or their opinions on issues, products and services, which organisations then use to make investment and marketing decisions. Social research projects typically examine the impact (or potential impact) of public sector policy relating to a range of issues, for example migration; education; healthcare; unemployment; and social services. The results may be used to formulate new policies or to examine the effectiveness of existing policy.

Researchers tend to specialise in either quantitative or qualitative research. Quantitative research involves working with statistics, using methodological approaches to collecting and analysing data. Qualitative research involves interacting with people to obtain and explore their opinions, identifying the 'reasons' behind the data. Other specialist roles can include Data Processing staff, Data Analysts, or back-office 'operations' staff who help ensure the research activities take place efficiently.

Work in social research is varied and roles can be found in many different organisations, from private research companies and institutes, the public sector, the third / non-profit sector, and academic institutions. You may be employed directly by an organisation to research information relating to your employer's activities (sometimes known as 'client-side'), or employed by specialist marketing / research agencies (the so-called 'supply side') which conduct research projects on behalf of their clients.

To explore the various opportunities in social and market research, you should use occupational profiles and job descriptions; careers advice on specialist websites; and lists of social and market research organisations. The following is a summary of some important resources to help with this:

Occupational profiles and job descriptions:

Social Researcher careers profile

www.prospects.ac.uk/social_researcher_job_description.htm

Market Researcher careers profile

www.prospects.ac.uk/market_researcher_job_description.htm

An academic career

www.academiccareer.manchester.ac.uk

Professional Associations:

Social Research Association <http://the-sra.org.uk>

Careers information section at http://the-sra.org.uk/sra_resources/careers

The Market Research Society (MRS) has careers pages at www.mrs.org.uk/careers plus a careers brochure at <http://goo.gl/rqCUHI>. The MRS offers discounted membership rates for full-time students and has a directory of UK and Ireland social and market research firms at www.theresearchbuyersguide.com

continued overleaf:-



The Association of Qualitative Research

www.aqr.org.uk lists research organisations in its Directory of Member Businesses www.aqr.org.uk/dir (mainly UK organisations with a small number in other countries). You can search The Directory for companies offering 'Graduate Training' (see link in left-hand menu). In addition, a download 'Graduate Pack' is at www.aqr.org.uk/jobs/gradpack.shtml

Social Research careers in the UK Civil Service

Information on the Government Social Research profession can be found at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/civil-service-government-social-research-profession (NB: Provides details of the Government Social Research sandwich and summer placements for students)

General careers profile for Government Social Researcher
www.prospects.ac.uk/government_social_research_officer_job_description.htm

Social Research in Local Government

<http://goo.gl/G6hPDu> (PDF information sheet from The Local Government Association)

Finding jobs:

As well as using the vacancy listing on Career Connect and on general graduate careers websites, you can find jobs and internships on the following sector-specific job listings:

www.researchjobfinder.com (Provided by The Market Research Society);

<http://the-sra.org.uk> – see 'Jobs' link from the Social Research Association homepage;

www.jobs.ac.uk (Jobs in academia)

www.mrweb.com (MrWeb Market Research jobs)

Other links:

The Academy of Social Sciences

<https://acss.org.uk> The Academy promotes social sciences in the UK.

There is a list of member societies covering the different social sciences disciplines at <https://acss.org.uk/mem-soc>. Many learned societies offer special membership rates for students, with benefits including conferences, access to publications and other opportunities to network and potentially develop your research or career interests.