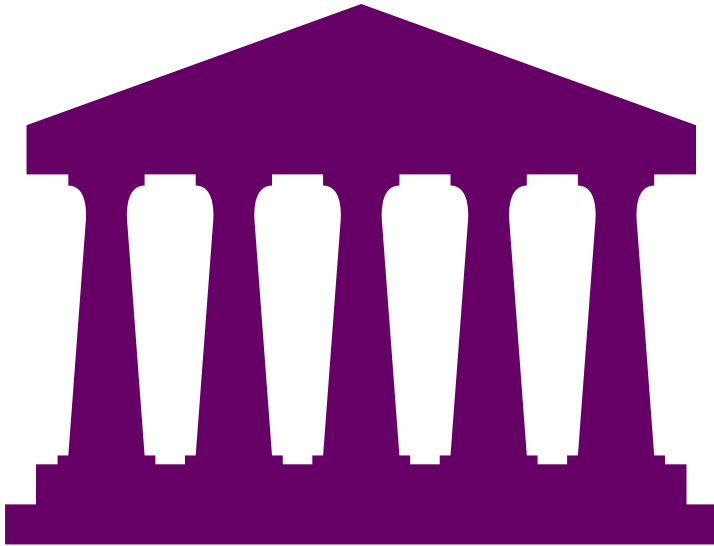


Getting into...

Politics, Think Tanks and Government



Opportunities in this area are open to students from all degree subjects. Roles available vary greatly and include many sub-sectors. You could work for an NGO, a pressure group, trade union, political party and more.

It is important to consider where you would like to work. Politics operates at international, national, regional and local levels. While public affairs consultancies are mostly based in London, charities, businesses and other organisations across the country often have lobbying roles.

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Exploring Your Options

In this section, we will be talking about the areas that exist within the industry, and where you might expect to work. There will be many roles and employers that we don't cover here, but these are some popular examples that you can use as a starting point when exploring your options.

Typical areas and employers

Central Government & Civil Service

About a fifth of jobs are based in London, with broadly two sorts of opportunity: An 'operational' role managing the provision of public services and other government projects, or a 'policy' role carrying out research/analysis and developing policy. **Entry-level job titles might include terms such as:** 'advisor', 'administrator' or 'assistant'.

Parliament

Parliament offers roles in many different departments. In The House of Commons, you could work as a clerk or in administrative roles. MPs employ staff both in their offices in London and their constituency offices. Lords also employ parliamentary staff. **Example job titles:** Parliamentary Assistant and Administrative Assistant.

Regional Government

The Scottish Parliament (Edinburgh), the Welsh Assembly (Cardiff) and the London Assembly have opportunities to work directly for elected representatives or the central organisation. **Example job titles:** Parliamentary Assistant and Administrative Assistant.

Local Government

Jobs exist across the country in a wide range of categories including: social care, housing, education, leisure, environment, and policy creation and implementation. Entry-level positions are either through the National Graduate Development Programme or directly with individual employers. **Entry-level job titles might include terms such as:** 'advisor' or 'assistant'.

Public Affairs

Public affairs consultants (lobbyists) work in-house for an organisation (e.g. a charity, pressure group, trade union, business, or professional association), or a consultancy acting on behalf of a range of clients. Experience of how Parliament or EU institutions work is invaluable in getting into the sector. **Example job titles:** Account Executive or Policy Advisor.

Think Tanks and social research organisations

Think Tanks and other social research organisations conduct research and publish on a range of domestic or international policy issues, some specialising in particular areas. There are many think tanks throughout the UK and abroad. They offer an opportunity to research in great depth, but they do not have very clear career paths. Search for careers tagged 'think tank[s]' on jobs boards.

It is important to be flexible when thinking about your entry point into this industry. There will be a lot of crossover between roles, so your first graduate job may not be entirely relevant to the job you want to end up in, but can still help you get there.

Take a look at Prospects' [Public Service and Administration](#) page to find out more.

Getting Industry Ready

In this section, we will talk about the kinds of skills and experiences employers might be looking for within this industry, and how you can go about gaining them yourself. What employers are looking for will vary depending on the role, but below is a general overview of key areas you might like to think about. It is important to always read the job description carefully to see exactly what the job responsibilities are. You can also look at requirements for roles you might like to apply for in a few years to see what skills and experiences you should work towards.

What employers want

Qualifications

While postgraduate study is not essential to getting a job in this area, due to the competitive nature of this sector it can help your chances, especially in specialist areas such as social research, economics and legal. Postgraduate courses in most subjects will build your research and communication skills, which are highly regarded within this industry.

Some universities have links with Parliament and can provide experience as part of a masters in politics. Once employed, further study for professional qualifications or to improve your skills is generally supported if it is related to your current role. Some government departments and local authorities offer financial support and/or study leave.

Skills

Here are some key skills many employers within this sector are looking for when hiring graduates. As was mentioned before, it is important to always read the job description carefully to see exactly what the job responsibilities are, and what skills and experiences are required for that particular role.

Communication skills

Researchers and policy officials need to explain complex issues clearly and simply to the public, politicians and journalists. Political assistants need to be able to communicate clearly with constituents and the press.

Writing skills

Working in government, NGOs or think tanks will require you to produce clear, succinct briefing material for stakeholders, as well as well-written correspondence.

Research skills

Political and government researchers need to be able to obtain up to date information and data and use this to create policy, press stories and challenge the government.

Organisational skills

As a political assistant you often need to manage diaries, as well as political events and campaigns. Working in government you will need to be able to manage and deliver operational projects, including research projects and budgets.

Interpersonal skills

As a political assistant, you may have to deal with constituents, lobbyists and journalists, and sometimes stand in for the politician at meetings and events when they are not available.

Negotiation skills

Essential for lobbyists trying to persuade government and politicians, also for political assistants working with the press to gain positive coverage for the politician. Researchers also need to be able to present their research findings persuasively in order to influence policy.

Ability to be flexibility and cope under pressure

Working for an MP can involve working unsociable hours and weekends, and travel, especially during campaigns or conference season. Working within politics and the media, deadlines – and sometimes tempers – are often very short.

Technical skills and languages

For some jobs, more advanced research and IT communications skills can be necessary. If you want to work internationally then language skills may be required. If there are any skills that you feel you need to develop, try to gain some work experience or volunteer where you can use that skill so you can add it to your CV.

Commercial awareness

Building commercial awareness is incredibly important. When applying for jobs or networking with employers you need to demonstrate your interest in government and politics. Achieve this by talking about the latest news stories, key political figures and recent election strategies and coverage. Understanding an organisation's role within the overall political landscape is vital.

In addition to the professional bodies' websites above, use the links below to get informed. Websites listed in the 'Finding Opportunities' section also provide political and industry news. For information about specific government organisations or offices, see their respective websites.

How to gain relevant skills and experiences

Use your time at university to develop the skills mentioned above. Remember that part-time work, volunteering and involvement in clubs and societies are all opportunities to do this!

Charities & NGOs

Larger organisations are likely to offer work experience/internships within policy and/or public affairs, which is usually unpaid. For example, [Cancer Research UK](#) now offer paid summer internships in public policy and public affairs each spring. Make a long list of the charities/NGOs or other organisations that interest you and just keep checking their websites for opportunities.

Volunteering

Volunteer in areas that will give insight into policy areas that interest you, for example, health, housing or human rights. [QMSU Volunteer](#) has great volunteering opportunities that you can take part in throughout the year. Your local area will likely have a central hub for volunteering, such as [Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets](#).

Civil Service Summer Diversity Internships Scheme

The [Civil Service Summer Diversity Internships Scheme](#) is a paid internship lasting 6-9 weeks, placing talented undergraduates and new graduates into a work placement in a government department. As a successful applicant, you'll get an insight into the broad range of opportunities available across the Civil Service. They open for applications in the previous autumn, so keep an eye out from early October.

Write

Write, write and write some more. Write or edit for [campus media](#), consider creating a newsletter or blog for your department/club/society and contribute articles to external magazines and websites. This will help you build up a portfolio of work & experiences, allow you to build a network of contacts and develop your writing ability/understanding of different audiences.

Build administrative skills

Either through a regular part-time job or a holiday job, gain experience in an office/administrative role (even in a totally different industry) to build relevant skills for entry-level roles in Politics, Policy or Public Affairs. You can build administrative skills through temp work, office work, working for the NHS, and even working on phone campaigns such as the annual [Queen Mary Telephone Campaign](#).

Follow organisations online

Use social media to see what organisations are doing and build commercial awareness and your network. Follow the work of a political party (e.g. [@UKLabour](#), [@LibDems](#) or [@Conservatives](#)) or NGO (e.g. [@savechildrenuk](#) or [@Shelter](#)) that interests you, and get involved with online discussions. Many individual work experience opportunities will often simply be tweeted.

Attend events

Attend [Careers and Enterprise](#) or external events to hear from recruiters, develop your understanding of the industry and make new contacts. You can ask these contacts for advice, or even for an opportunity to shadow them in their role.

How can Careers and Enterprise help you?

There are a number of ways Careers and Enterprise can help you build skills and prepare for applying for opportunities.

Appointments

We have a range of one-to-one appointment types with expert careers consultants. These include [Career Guidance appointments](#) where you can talk about your options and ideas, [Application Advice appointments](#) where you can have an application or CV checked before submission and [Practice Interview appointments](#) where you can practice for an interview you are invited to.

Events

We hold a range of [careers events](#) throughout the year where you can learn more about an industry, network with employers and find out what people look for in a graduate.

Programmes

If you are looking to develop your skills, we have several [skill-building programmes](#) that you can apply to and complete alongside your studies.

Online Resources

Our bank of [online resources](#) is a great place to go for careers support. We have guides (such as this one), templates for things like CVs and applications, as well as tools that you can use to build or improve a CV ([QM CV Builder](#)), practice for a psychometric test ([JobTestPrep](#)) or practice for a video interview ([Interview Stream](#)).

Make the most of work experience opportunities

1. Discuss your expectations with the employer at the start, so you have the same understanding of what the experience will involve.
2. Always be polite, motivated and interested. Work experience can involve boring tasks, but being flexible, helpful and willing to get involved will make a good impression.
3. Be inquisitive and learn everything you can about the way the organisation works. How do they hire? What key skills are they looking for? What are the main issues affecting the organisation at the moment?
4. Talk to people who work at the organisation and find out what they do and how they got there. You might uncover job roles and employers that are new to you as well as pick up some helpful tips. Keeping in touch with people you meet can be a great way of finding out about future opportunities.
5. Ask for feedback at the end of the placement to identify your strengths and the skills you need to develop further.

For more information on where you can develop your skills and experiences, see the Resources section.

Finding Opportunities

Political experience of some kind is often crucial in this field. It builds your skills, convinces future employers of your dedication and enhances your understanding of the sector and different job roles. It can even lead to offers of permanent employment. Due to the competitive nature of this sector, work experience is highly valued but often unpaid.

If you are struggling to gain relevant work experience, you can focus on gaining transferable skills in another area, such as admin. This will give you experience that will appeal to those recruiting for political work experience opportunities and will make you stand out when applying in the future.

Graduates Schemes

Civil Service Fast Stream

The [Civil Service Fast Stream](#) is currently available to individuals who satisfy both the Nationality and Right to Work/Immigration requirements. You are eligible to apply if you are a British citizen or a European Economic Area (EEA) citizen.

The scheme recruits high performing graduates every October into many areas of Government activity, allowing them to select areas of interest such as: Diplomatic Service, Policy, Government Communication Service and Houses of Parliament. The Civil Service often visit Queen Mary University of London and run workshops and events to help students with applications. You can apply in your final year, once you have graduated and even for several years after you have graduated. You can also apply multiple times.

HM Treasury

HM Treasury runs a [Policy Advisors Scheme](#) every year, with applications usually opening from mid-October to mid-November. They recruit from every discipline, but have a particular interest in students from the Humanities.

The House of Commons' highest profile social mobility scheme is the [Speaker's Parliamentary Placement Scheme](#). It offers a nine month paid (full-time) internship working in the office of a Member of Parliament as a Parliamentary Assistant. The scheme is aimed at talented individuals who are underrepresented in Parliament, and who have the skills, passion and potential but not the connections. The scheme usually recruits in February or March for participants to start in October.

Cabinet Office

In recent years, the Cabinet Office has advertised in the spring for a large number of graduate interns (12 month contract) to work across all areas of their activities. These fixed-term contracts are great for relevant experience and put successful candidates in a strong position to secure further roles within government or politics.

National Graduate Development Programme

The National Graduate Development Programme is a programme for entrants into local government. This usually opens for applications in September of the year before the scheme starting. The Houses of Parliament Graduate Development Programme typically advertises in the autumn of each year. This programme provides the opportunity to work for Parliament, with many different MPs or Lords on a variety of issues across the political spectrum.

NHS Health Policy Fast Track Scheme

The NHS Health Policy Fast Track Scheme is separate from the Civil Service Fast Stream. This scheme is an opportunity for graduates ‘to develop an understanding of the political environment and gain hands-on experience of how health and social care policy is developed and delivered by Government, in an unprecedented time’. The scheme recruits in the autumn for the following year.

Working in Policy (Direct Entry)

Policy Advisor Jobs in the Civil Service

The Civil Service recruits policy advisors to specific government departments all year round. Queen Mary graduates have great success in these applications – usually entering into Policy Advisor roles at HEO (Higher Executive Officer) or EO (Executive Officer) levels.

Outside of central government, there are entry-level policy jobs available across all parts of the public sector such as the devolved government institutions, NGOs, charities, housing associations, cultural organisations, industry bodies and unions. Any organisation that looks to influence policy within the area in which it operates will have policy staff.

Entry-level roles exist in politics within the central organisations of each of the political parties, working directly for MPs in either Westminster or their constituencies and within devolved institutions such as the London Assembly and Scottish Parliament.

It is important to be able to demonstrate a passion for and knowledge of UK politics, so try to build experience through internships, paid work, volunteering or taking an active role in Queen Mary political societies. The ‘go to’ resource to find roles with MPs (and other interesting roles) is W4MP. The political parties, Houses of Parliament and devolved institutions will have their own online jobs boards.

Working in Politics (Direct Entry)

Working in Public Affairs (Direct Entry and Graduate Schemes)

You can find jobs in public affairs agencies and corporate communications consultancies, as well as working in-house within medium to large organisations across all sectors. These organisations are all trying to shape the agenda within the sector that they operate, as well as stakeholder opinions about what they do. Some consultancies and large charities may take new graduates on as part of a graduate scheme, but many graduate-level roles will be posted as direct entry roles, usually with room for career progression within the organisation.

Agency vs. In-House

In a public affairs or corporate communications agency, there is usually the opportunity to work with a number of clients at once, and there is greater potential for rapid promotion as you build skills and take on responsibility. This is a client-focused business area, where client service is key and a willingness to build relationships is essential. The agenda is generally driven by clients, and you need to be happy working under pressure with a rapidly changing workload.

Working in-house for one organisation means that you will become an expert in a particular area of public affairs work, as well as gaining experience in the breadth of public affairs tasks. Promotion tends to be slower, as the opportunity for promotion may mean waiting for your boss to move on, with the exception of larger organisations where the team is bigger. Therefore, it is more likely you may have to change organisations to get a promotion.

Create your own opportunities

In addition to experiencing the workplace through internships and placements, gain practical experience in other settings to develop your skills and boost your CV. Get involved in a political party, a grass-roots movement or a campaigning charity that interests you. There might be opportunities to volunteer locally in council projects.

You could start or contribute to a political blog, start a petition or campaign about university or national/international issues. You could even stand for Parliament or the local council yourself! Keep up with political and current affairs, as employers will ask you about this at interviews. If you can talk passionately about these things at interview this proves your interest in the sector to future employers.

Speculative Applications

You can always write to a local politician/political party, or an NGO or think tank that interests you asking about any opportunities that might be available (see [speculative applications](#) resources). These opportunities might be unpaid, but will allow you to gain experience. Many political volunteering roles will become available around a national or local election.

Networking

Consider who you know and how they might be able to help you (your professional network). You can use social media and your digital presence to strengthen your search since more and more employers are using Facebook and LinkedIn to recruit (make sure to follow the Queen Mary Alumni LinkedIn page to connect with alumni now working in your chosen area).

A number of the organisations that list vacancies also run networking events that you can attend. Also, make the most of opportunities at Careers and Enterprise events to meet employers and other people in the industry who could help you find that first work experience placement.

Think outside the box

Don't forget that the Government need all of the same functions that businesses need e.g. finance, human resources and marketing. This opens up lots of different routes into politics, particularly if you have an existing interest and/or experience in a particular area.

Resources

Getting Industry Ready

Here are some resources that you can use to learn more about the industry, and begin searching for organisations to which you could send speculative applications. This list is by no means extensive, but you can use it as a starting point.

[Parliament website](#)

Stay up-to-date with UK politics, and find out more about different areas of politics that you might like to go into.

[Civil Service World](#)

Forums, blogs and news regarding the Civil Service.

[Guardian Guide to ThinkTanks](#)

List of UK's major think tanks with brief background information and political allegiances. These may offer internships or job opportunities.

[World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations \(WANGO\)](#)

An international organization uniting NGOs worldwide in the cause of advancing peace and global wellbeing.

[Political Studies Association](#)

Political news and analysis from around the world.

[Public Affairs Networking](#)

A range of news, events and online resources related to public affairs.

Job Profiles

[Civil Service fast streamer](#)

[Public services and administration](#)

[Civil Service administrator](#)

[Diplomatic Service officer](#)

[Public affairs consultant](#)

[Local government officer](#)

[Politician's Assistant](#)

[Trade union research officer](#)

[Social researcher](#)

Finding Opportunities

Jobs Boards

Here are some jobs boards for you to take a look at when searching for opportunities. Remember many organisations will post their jobs directly to their own website or social media platforms, so make sure that you are also looking there.

[Civil Service Gateway](#)

[Local Government Jobs](#)

[Jobs Go Public](#)

[Work for an MP](#)

[Government Communications Headquarters \(GCHQ\)](#)