

Getting into...

Charities and International Development



Currently, there are around 170'000 registered charities in the UK. Charities often operate similarly to businesses, and have many of the same functions and teams, as they need to create profit in order to bring about social change. This means they too can have employees focused in areas like IT, marketing, and finance.

The charity sector is often referred to as the 'voluntary' or 'third' sector. As well as the large well-known charities, there are many smaller local ones, covering a range of issues relating to social, political, health and environmental concerns, both locally and overseas. It is likely you will be able to find an organisation that aligns to your interests and values.

What's in this guide?

Part One Exploring Your Options	1
Part Two Getting Industry Ready	4
Part Three Finding Opportunities	8
Part Four Resources	9

Exploring Your Options

In this section we highlight the types of roles that exist within the industry, and where you might expect to work. Many roles and employers won't be covered here, but these are some popular examples you can use as a starting point when exploring your options.

Keep in mind that in smaller organisations you could be responsible for a number of the areas listed below, whereas in a larger organisation you are likely to have a bigger team and so focus on a particular area of work. Whilst there are many roles suitable for new graduates within charities, it is also common to gain experience in the private sector and then move to a more specialist or senior role within a charity.

Typical roles

Charities

Fundraising

This area of activity is responsible for generating the funds needed to keep the charity's services running through fundraising activities, with income generated being monitored against targets. You might fundraise through events, community fundraising, corporate sponsorship or cash appeals.

Creativity is important when developing innovative ways to gain donations, stand out from other charities, and retain supporters. This was particularly evident during lockdown, where online fundraising activity was vital to ensure a charity's survival. This is a common entry position into the charity sector for graduates, and can lead to account manager roles or to other roles within the organisation.

Typical job titles include: Fundraising Officer, Community Fundraiser, Supporter Engagement Administrator, Individual Giving Assistant.

Communications, Public Relations and Campaigns

This is the managing of internal and external communications. You might work on writing for or updating websites, advertising campaigns or social media platforms. The use of data to create targeted marketing campaigns, and social media as a 'free' medium to engage supporters, are huge growth areas in this sector. See also our Getting into Marketing, Advertising and PR guide.

Typical job titles include: Campaigns Assistant, SEO and Social Media Officer, Marketing and Communications Assistant, Email Marketing Officer, Digital Engagement Coordinator.

Policy/Research

Work in this area will vary depending on the focus of the charity. You might be developing new forms of treatment for diseases or studying the provision for homeless people, for example. The results of this work will steer the charity's goals, and where they place their efforts.

Typical job titles include: Research and Insights Officer, Research Associate, Research and Policy Administrator. Policy and Public Affairs Assistant.

Business Support

Another common entry route for graduates, these are roles which help the smooth day-to-day running of the charity and include HR, administration, operations and IT. See our relevant 'Getting Into...' industry guides for further details about these areas.

Other areas of work (and there are many!) include: programme delivery (getting the funds or support to the intended recipients), lobbying, monitoring and evaluation (demonstrating impact and proof of use of funds, which is important after recent scandals about charities misusing funds) and volunteer management.

International Development

International Aid/Development Worker

Work with developing countries to set up long-term, sustainable solutions to problems relating to issues such as education, health and agriculture. Work can involve the administration, research, planning and evaluation of projects and is often based in the UK (or the organisation's 'home' country) and not necessarily where the project is taking place.

Programme/Project Support

Applies project management and administration skills in the planning and delivery of development projects. This includes monitoring project implementation, performance and finances, liaising with stakeholders, evaluating risk and ensuring compliance.

Technical Specialist (commonly in engineering or health)

This is found in humanitarian and emergency relief work and is often based at the project location.

Typical employers

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

Independent not-for-profit organisations, often with a focus on international development issues.

Social enterprises

Profit-driven businesses with societal and environmental aims. They often reinvest their profits back into the business or local community. Examples are the Big Issue and the Eden Project.

Private Sector

There are an increasing number of roles in the private sector which involve working with the voluntary sector, where companies have a corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy, demonstrating a commitment to supporting social and environmental issues. Examples are marketing agencies who develop fundraising campaigns, or retailers who donate a percentage of their profits to a particular cause.

Other fields in which you might find relevant work include: international organisations, national government agencies, think tanks and development consultancies.

Find out more about the charity sector by taking a look at [Prospects' Overview of the UK Charity Sector](#) page and [Bright Network's Charity Career Path Guide](#).

Getting Industry Ready

What employers are looking for will vary depending on the role, but below is a general overview of key areas to consider. Always read the job description for a role carefully to learn exactly what the job responsibilities are, and what skills and experiences are required.

What employers want

Qualifications

Previous volunteering experience, motivation and understanding of the industry are extremely important to work in the charity sector, but you do not need to have a specific degree. Postgraduate qualifications can be an added advantage, particularly if you are keen to work within international aid agencies. You might also need a professional qualification (e.g. from the Chartered Institute of Marketing or Institute of Fundraising) to help you progress into more senior positions later on in your career.

Skills

Below are some key skills many employers in this sector are looking for. As mentioned before, always read the job description for the role you are applying to in order to fully understand exactly what the job responsibilities and skill requirements are. This will help you to create a targeted application, where you can use examples to show why you are the best fit for the position.

- Creativity
- Written and verbal communication
- Planning and organisation
- Research
- Analysis
- IT skills
- Digital proficiency

Commercial awareness

Commercial awareness is about understanding the industry and is highly valued by employers. Don't think that the word 'commercial' means that this does not apply to charities. Knowing about how the charity is run, how it is funded, who its competitors are and its key challenges, are all ways to show your interest and enthusiasm for the role, organisation and sector.

For example, at interview you could be asked what challenges are currently facing fundraising, or to talk about your favourite charity campaign. Get a sense of issues affecting the sector by following relevant organisations and professional associations on social media. Signing up to email alerts on the [UK Fundraising](#) website gives you a daily digest of news, which you can use to inform your answers at application and interview.

How to gain relevant skills and experiences

Here are just a few ways in which you can develop the above mentioned skills while at university. There are of course many other ways you can develop skills, but you can use these as a starting point if you are stuck for ideas.

Take on responsibility

Take on positions of responsibility, whether voluntary or paid. This could be a Team Leader at work, or a committee member for a [university society](#).

Read job descriptions

Find out what skills recruiters are looking for by reading job adverts. If there are areas you are missing, think about how you can fill these gaps.

Follow organisations online

Use social media to see what organisations are doing and build commercial awareness and your network. You can also take a look at industry magazines and join professional associations.

Attend events

Attend [university 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.

Get application ready

Update your CV and have a speculative letter ready to adapt should you need to apply for an opportunity at short notice. [Book an appointment](#) to get it checked by Careers and Enterprise.

Practice your interview technique

Employers don't always give much notice before being invited to interview. See our resources on [how to prepare for interviews](#), including a list of sample questions and an online interview simulator.

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 to opportunities.

Appointments

We run one-to-one appointments with expert career consultants who can talk to you about a variety of topics including your CV and applications, as well as give you career guidance and advice surrounding making career decisions. You can also book [Practice Interview appointments](#) to test your skills, for when you have an upcoming interview

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, Careers & Enterprise is home to the [Aspire Programme](#): Queen Mary's Student Career Development Programme. These programmes take place alongside your degree, allowing you to gain vital employability skills to add to your CV, as well as raise your commercial awareness. Please note: Eligibility requirements apply.

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 CareerSet](#)), practice for a psychometric test ([Graduates First](#)) or practice for a video interview ([ShortlistMe](#)).

Make the most of work experience opportunities

Once you have found a work experience opportunity, it is important to make the most of it! Here are some things to keep in mind before, during and after the opportunity.

1. Discuss your expectations with the employer at the start, so that 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 and could lead to more opportunities.

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 and expanding your network.
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

Think about your motivation for working in the sector and identify causes you are interested in, to help you on your search for opportunities.

Explore local charities

You could start by exploring which charities are in your local area or field of interest. Use resources such as your local Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) online or visiting the [Charity Commission](#) website.

Speculative applications

As well as applying to advertised vacancies (for work experience or full-time work), making speculative applications to organisations (sending a CV/cover letter and enquiring whether they have any opportunities available) is common in the sector.

This is particularly beneficial if you are sending it to a contact that you have met before (known as a 'warm contact') at an industry event or through networking. By doing this, you are showing the initiative and drive employers often look for.

Build your online profile

Create or update your profile on LinkedIn, and follow charities, groups and professional bodies ([Institute of Fundraising](#) for example) that interest you on social media. Your online presence will not only enable you to learn what is happening in the sector and develop your commercial awareness, but promote yourself by contributing to conversations, or even blogs and newsletters.

Networking

Keep in touch with anyone you meet through work experience or at events via social media or email. You never know when people you meet while networking might be able to help you. If you meet someone interesting, follow up an initial meeting with a short email afterwards, as this helps to make sure they remember you.

It's unlikely you will secure a charity role from networking alone, but it does become much more important as you progress within the sector, where there will be more opportunities to attend events, workshops and training, and meet colleagues from other organisations.

You can also find opportunities on [LinkedIn](#). HOWEVER, it should be noted, that vacancies with recruitment agencies over 3 days old will most likely have been filled AND, vacancies with employers should be cross referenced on the employers' website and on LinkedIn. If you can reach out to the recruiter to have a chat about the role this will increase your chances of potentially being shortlisted.

Resources

Charities

[CharityJob](#)

Contains regularly updated charity, not-for-profit and NGO jobs, at all levels.

[Charity Choice](#)

A directory of UK charities, searchable by category. A good resource for browsing.

[Charity Commission](#)

Find annual accounts, reports and statistics from any UK charity. Useful for interview preparation.

[Global Charity Jobs](#)

A range of charity jobs based in countries across the world. Always check via requirements before applying.

[Institute of Fundraising](#)

Contains news and information within the sector, plus industry guidelines and responses to media stories.

[National Council for Voluntary Organisations \(NCVO\)](#)

Contains latest news, particularly on policy and research, for interview preparation.

[Third Sector](#)

Latest news from within the sector, plus jobs board and regular event updates.

[UK Fundraising](#)

Daily fundraising news and blogs to develop commercial awareness, plus events and vacancies.

International Development

[Bond](#)

International development opportunities in NGOs both in the UK and abroad.

[Department for International Development \(DFID\)](#)

Civil Service department for international development. Offers a graduate scheme and entry level roles.

[DevEx](#)

International development jobs worldwide. Select 'entry-level' box for jobs suitable for recent graduates.

[Development Worker](#)

In-depth resource for researching international development, and how to find job opportunities.

[Institute of Development Studies](#)

A good resource for news and developing your commercial awareness.

[World Service Enquiry](#)

Information and career advice for working in international development, including voluntary work

Human Rights

[Amnesty International](#)

Campaigning organisation working to protect human rights worldwide.

[British Institute of Human Rights](#)

In-depth information and resources on human rights.

[Human Rights Careers](#)

Global Human Rights news, and information on working in the sector.

[Human Rights Watch](#)

Internships and entry level vacancies available worldwide.

[Ministry of Justice](#)

Responsible for the Human Rights Act and the development of human rights policy in the UK.

[The Commonwealth Secretariat](#)

A voluntary association of 54 countries that work towards shared goals in democracy and development.

[United Nations Human Rights](#)

Information on UN bodies, issues around human rights, international tribunals and other resources.