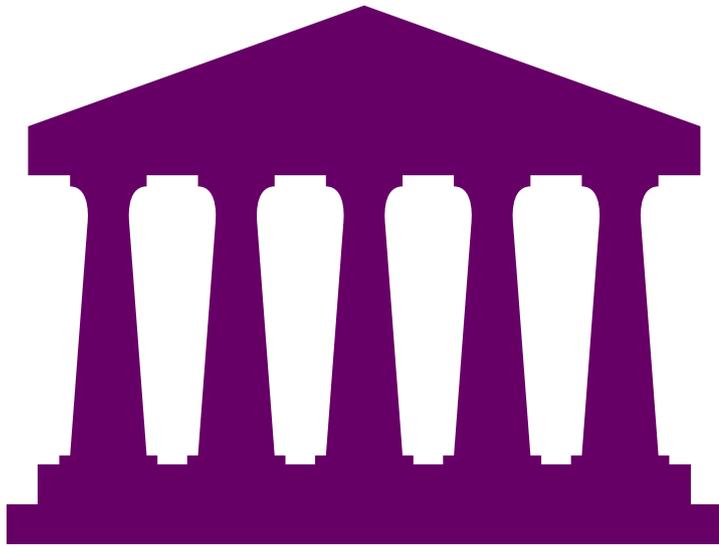


Getting into...

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.

What's in this guide?

Part One Exploring Your Options	1
Part Two Getting Industry Ready	3
Part Three Finding Opportunities	8
Part Four Resources	12

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 Impact: The Local Government Graduate 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 flexible 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

Keeping your finger on the pulse of what is happening in politics and the relevance for any organisation you speak to is vital. Stay current via politics blogs, podcasts, a variety of news sources, parliamentary websites and any events you can get to. Some examples are mentioned below. When applying for jobs or networking with employers demonstrate your interest in government and politics by showing awareness of the latest news stories, key political figures and recent election strategies and coverage. Understanding an organisation's role within the overall political landscape and how local, national and international politics can affect their activities is known as 'Commercial Awareness'.

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!

Volunteering

We know your time is scarce and paid work may be a priority, but volunteering can be one of the most effective and flexible ways to gain insight, experience and contacts in a policy area or environment. Queen Mary has a close relationship with Think Tank Chatham House who annually recruit for event ambassadors if you are interested in foreign policy, or volunteering for a local political party or MP can get you a foot in the door for Parliamentary roles. Many national and local charities rely on volunteers to support their campaigning and some head office functions and will enable you to understand their work, make invaluable contacts, potentially secure a reference and demonstrate your interest and skills. See the Resources section for suggestions for local and national volunteering search engines. Also look out for opportunities to volunteer for local council projects or consider approaching [local councillors](#) to enquire about work experience.

Charities & NGO Internships

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. For smaller charities it is always worth approaching them directly to see if they need help & could potentially offer some form of work experience.

Civil Service Summer Internship Programme

The [Summer Internship Programme](#) is a paid internship lasting two months for those in their final two years (not Yr 1) from a lower socio-demographic background. Note that eligibility criteria have been tightened this year so please check carefully, and if this is not an option for you there are direct apply internships and work shadowing opportunities available. Speak to a Careers Consultant if you would like support to explore these alternatives.

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 political parties, your local MP, NGOs (e.g. @savechildrenuk or @Shelter) and identify politics influencers and groups online that share opportunities like [ihaveavoice](#), [Patchwork Foundation](#). Many individual work experience opportunities will often simply be posted.

Attend events

Attend any events you can that interest you or give you an opportunity to hear from and meet employers, develop your understanding of the industry and make new contacts who may be willing to advise you or even offer work experience. [Careers & Enterprise](#) host annual events with the Civil Service and local government graduate programmes, professional services firms and many more and other events such as 3PLabs panels, Mile End Institute talks and Alumni Speed Networking will be promoted via the [PIR Careers page on QM+](#).

Careers and Enterprise Support for 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 & Enterpriser 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

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

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. Please check the [Civil Service Nationality Rules](#) if you are unsure about your eligibility

The programme recruits high performing graduates every October into many areas of Government activity, allowing them to select up to four areas of interest such as: Policy, Social Research, Diplomatic & Development 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 if you are already working in the Civil Service, with many making several attempts. Note this is a highly competitive programme so good preparation is key for the initial online tests and the majority of graduates find roles by applying directly (see below).

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.

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.

Impact: The Local Government Graduate Programme

[Impact](#) is a centralised recruitment programme for graduate roles in local government which allows you to choose which Local Council you would like to work for. Applications open early October until early January and extensive guidance to support applications is available on their website.

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

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 if you know anyone who might work in an area you are interested in or might know of people who do, for example lecturers, family contacts, employers from an event you have attended or recent alumni from your course. Make sure to sign up as an alumni to the [Queen Mary Alumni Linked In group](#) which will enable you to direct message any other member, and research alumni from your course on the main Queen Mary [University Linked In page](#).

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.

[Smart Thinking Think Tank Directory](#)

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

For Politics related internships & graduate roles including policy, think tanks, research, public affairs try:

- [Civil Service Summer Internship Programme](#)
- Non graduate scheme [civil service jobs board](#) (including internships & entry level roles)
- For local government internships & jobs <https://jobs.localgov.co.uk/>, [LgJobs](#), [Local Government Graduate Development Programme](#)
- For MP and other parliament related roles the key site is <https://www.w4mpjobs.org/> , they also have a great guides on how to secure roles in parliament and recommend other job sites <https://w4mp.org/jobs-listings-events/jobs/other-places-to-look-for-jobs/>
- For think tanks <https://smarthinkingjobs.co.uk/interns-graduates/>
- For public affairs <https://www.publicaffairsnetworking.com/public-affairs-jobs.php>
- Social Mobility Charity Patchwork Foundation for politician masterclasses, Labour & Conservative summer internships and Party Conference Programme <https://patchworkfoundation.org.uk/our-work/>

For international relations / international development & security roles:

- [How to get a job in political risk & list of employers](#)
- [10 Paid Internships in Human Rights, Humanitarian Aid and Development](#)
- [UN Online Volunteers](#)
- [UN Careers](#)
- Int Development Jobs board Dev Ex <https://www.devex.com/jobs/search>
- Directory of worldwide social impact focused jobs boards <https://probablygood.org/resources/job-boards/>
- Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ) <https://www.gchq-careers.co.uk/our-careers/early-careers.html>

For charity roles:

- <https://www.charityjob.co.uk/>
- <https://jobs.thirdsector.co.uk/jobs/>