

Career options after an economic and social science doctorate

Hints and tips

Vitae resources: developing the
skills and careers of researchers

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Career options after an economic and social sciences doctorate

The broad range of skills and highly specialised knowledge developed during a doctorate appeal to employers in a fantastic array of sectors and occupations. While a doctorate is traditionally viewed as the first step on the academic career ladder, many doctoral graduates in economic and social sciences develop careers outside academia, so your options are truly open.

This sheet aims to present you with a brief overview of popular career sectors, and to point to the best resources for finding out more about them. It is not a substitute for talking to a Careers Adviser or someone working in a field that interests you. For advice on networking, getting the most from your University Careers Service and other relevant information, see the Vitae website: www.vitae.ac.uk

What are my options with an economic and social sciences doctorate?

This information sheet splits the wide range of careers available into three areas:

- Academic research and teaching
- Public and private sector management
- Looking further afield.

Academic research and teaching

What is it? Many academic careers begin with two to five years of research as a fellow or research associate, but in the economic and social sciences, fixed-term teaching assistant posts are also common, and it is also possible to secure a lectureship directly after a doctorate. A lectureship includes a balance of teaching, research and administration. Competition for lecturing posts is fierce, so a fellowship may be a way to boost your publication record and demonstrate your ability to secure funding – both of these factors are central to academic career success.

Where is the work based? To some extent, location depends on your subject and research interests, but opportunities are available worldwide. Research fellowships are awarded to individuals, who are usually allowed to conduct their research at any location with suitable facilities. If you have the freedom to work overseas, you will have access to more funding opportunities (the European Commission is particularly keen to encourage researcher mobility) and more opportunities to research. Additionally, in some areas, overseas research experience is likely to boost your chances of future success in academia – talk to researchers in your field.

Vacancies are advertised in the national press (commonly Times Higher Educational Supplement and The Guardian), on the web at specialist sites (particularly www.jobs.ac.uk) and on university vacancy pages. Identifying relevant bodies who fund fellowships can be time-consuming, so seek advice from experts in your institution (ask for advice from the Research Office or Graduate School) or look at the Higher Education and Research Opportunities website (www.hero.ac.uk).

To find out more, talk to academics and researchers in your field about your interest as they may have other suggestions or contacts.

Public and private sector management

What is this? Managerial roles are available in all employment sectors, and the skills which economic and social science researchers develop as part of their research (such as analysing and understanding complex data, understanding problems and drawing conclusions, and interviewing people) are particularly relevant in business roles. If your research has involved political study, local or national government may also appeal.

Higher education administration is another area where doctorates can thrive and make the most of their research qualification. Familiarity with academic life and pressures and academic credibility can give doctoral applicants an advantage. Universities are not just educational establishments – they are also huge organisations with multi-million pound turnovers and thousands of staff operating in a commercial, competitive market.

Where is the work based? Across the country, although some Civil Service departments are in specific regions. Commercial organisations vary in size, so if you are restricted to a certain geographical area remember that small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) employ more graduates than large companies.

Vacancies are advertised in the national press (with public sector jobs usually appearing on specific days), through careers services, on www.jobs.ac.uk (for academic posts) and the local press (for local government). The Civil Service Fast Stream website (www.faststream.gov.uk) carries information on careers and recruitment. Academic management opportunities are available in a wide range of areas – if this kind of career appeals, talk to university administrators about their jobs and find out about requirements and recruitment procedures.

To find out more look at the occupational profiles on www.prospects.ac.uk and visit your Careers Service. They will be able to advise you about local employers and different management roles.

Looking further afield

A background in social science or economic research does not have to mean a future in it! At the end of your doctorate it is not unusual to recognise that a career in academia or research will not suit you. Many other doctoral graduates feel the same way and every year they find interesting careers to pursue. Your career options are diverse, so whatever you are considering (counselling, conservation or chartered accountancy!) you will be able to find out more about it by visiting your Careers Service. The range of responsibilities and activities that you have engaged in during your doctorate (teaching, editing, writing, supervision) will have developed a wonderful portfolio of skills to promote to potential employers.

Whatever your career interests, you will find information about the career destinations of recent economic and social science doctoral graduates at <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/Vitae-WDRD-by-subject-Jun-09.pdf> including links to other relevant reports and information.