

Considering...Human Rights

Introduction

Human rights careers incorporate a diverse area covering civil, political, social and economic rights in this country and overseas. Consequently the roles within this sector are extremely varied, for example you could be a human rights lawyer, representing political prisoners; a PR professional, promoting the work of a water charity; a research assistant working for the United Nations....

Is this the right sector for me?

- Think about your motivation. What do you understand by human rights work? Research human rights declarations and statements of intent. The United Nations' definition of human rights provides a helpful summary of the issues involved:

'Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.'

[UN: What are human rights?](#)

- When considering a career in this field you may like to consider how committed you are to social justice in all its aspects. Do you care about such issues as: freedom of conscience and expression; the right to life, liberty and security; inhuman or degrading treatment; freedom from discrimination? Another useful website to learn more about the sector is [each other](#) (includes news, features and resources)
- How can you demonstrate your commitment? You could get involved with a human rights organisation; sign up for newsletters; follow relevant campaigns and activists on twitter; be active in campaigning yourself; support events; join [People and Planet](#) – a student action organisation.

Researching the sector

There are no well-defined career entry points or progression routes for a career working in human rights, so carrying out extensive research is vital so that you can be flexible in your approach to finding opportunities.

- Find out about the variety of organisations in which working to promote or uphold human rights is part of, or central to, the role. Examples include: government bodies (local, national and international), charities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), legal firms, Think Tanks, campaigning groups and academia. Also consider organisations who protect human rights, e.g. working in defence or [The National Crime Agency](#).

- Research the variety of roles within these organisations. These include: fundraising, finance, administration, lobbying, policy making, education, legal work, research, marketing, advice and advocacy work. The [Amnesty International](#) website gives a selection of jobs and volunteering opportunities. Looking at job vacancies can give you more insight into what the work could involve, eg [Human Rights Watch](#). The UN also has a useful [careers section](#) where you can view vacancies and also see career pathways.
- Find out about the qualifications, experience, personality and skills needed for each of the roles which interest you. Examining job descriptions and person specifications for advertised jobs may help you to identify some of the requirements which are common to many roles, e.g. research skills; work experience/internships. Think about how you can develop and articulate skills gained through your time at university (eg through involvement in societies or volunteering, as well as your degree course)
- Keep up-to-date with changing legislation and current issues. The following websites may help: [Human Rights Watch](#), [Minority Rights](#).
- Use our [online profiles](#) of York alumni working in this sector – some of them will be happy for you to make contact with them to get advice, information and to find out more about their experiences (potentially several job sectors will be relevant in York Profiles and Mentors, including: Not for profits; Diplomatic & International Relations; Legal; Civil Service...)
- Attend relevant [careers events](#) as these can be great networking and information gathering opportunities – our sector events and the Global Opportunities fair give you the chance to hear from and meet professionals working in these sectors. In many departments we also run smaller alumni events, giving you another opportunity to meet graduates from a range of sectors including Foreign Office, journalists, researchers, lawyers, charity campaigners, PR professionals. There are more details on these and other events in [Handshake](#).

Work experience and developing skills

Develop skills through voluntary work, internships and work experience. If you are looking for international roles, take any opportunity to experience other cultures by working, studying in and visiting other countries. Some internships and work experience opportunities may be found on the following websites (although this is not an exhaustive list):

- [Human Rights Watch](#) internships and fellowships
- [Human Rights First](#)
- [Centre for Social Justice](#)
- Many of the large organisations in Human Rights work have volunteering opportunities, check their websites for details. Organisations include Amnesty International; Liberty; One World; Human Rights Watch; CAFOD; International Alert; International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; World Vision; Justice; Refugee Council; Reprieve; Human Rights Unit.
- The Human Rights Lawyers Association has a [bursary scheme](#) (available annually) to help individuals take up internships, work placements and other unpaid/poorly paid work.

Note: some internships offered in this sector may be unpaid. Before starting an internship you should be clear about the length of the internship, pay and conditions, what you will be expected to do, and what you will gain from the experience.

Routes into the sector

Relevant internships/work experience/volunteering are usually needed and sometimes postgraduate study too (depending on the role you want to do).

- Many recent graduates begin in administrative positions, so take opportunities to develop good [IT and administrative skills](#) whilst at university. If you're interested in working abroad or for an international organisation, learning additional language(s) may also benefit you (see the [Languages for All](#) courses).
- Some people move into human rights work later in their career, after some years of experience with a professional qualification, e.g. law.

Useful resources

[Job Sector](#) pages:

- Charity and Voluntary Sector
- Civil Service, Central and Local Government
- International Development
- Politics and Public Affairs
- Social Care and Social Work
- Criminal Justice

[Information sheets](#):

- Considering...Ethical Careers

Reference books and journals in Careers and Placements:

- Routledge Guide to working in criminal justice
- Working in international development and humanitarian assistance: a career guide
- Third Sector (Journal)

Please note: The websites listed here are not intended to represent a comprehensive list. Careers and Placements cannot be held responsible for the content of external websites.

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