

# Considering...Social Research

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## Introduction

Social researchers plan, design and manage social research projects. They collect and analyse information, using a variety of computer software packages to organise the data, which they present in writing or orally. A variety of methods, such as interviews, questionnaires and focus groups, are used to investigate the views of population samples on specific issues such as crime, unemployment, health, education, etc.

## Is this the right sector for me?

- Think about your motivation – is it purely academic interest? Or do you want to influence policy or improve service delivery?
- Consider what practical skills are important. For entry, some knowledge of both qualitative and quantitative research methods is essential, and postgraduate study is often desirable
- Think about other skills which might be important for you to thrive, such as interpersonal skills, organisational ability and time-management, confidence using statistical techniques, communication skills and analytical skills.
- Use some of the exercises in the [careers ideas](#) pages to help you identify what you want from your future career. The next step will then be to get some work experience to test out how you feel in different environments and roles.

## Researching the sector

- Understand what social researchers do. Read about the variety of sectors and organisations which employ social researchers and think about where your interests lie. The [Social Research Association](#) is a good starting point.
- Investigate the main employers:
  - [Government Social Research](#) (central government)
  - Local Government departments such as Social Service, Housing, Education and Chief Executive Departments.
  - [Local Area Research and Intelligence Association](#)
  - [Local government think tank](#)
  - [National Institute for Health Research](#)
  - Academia, in specialist departments such as the [Social Policy Research Unit](#) at the University of York, and in teaching departments
  - Independent research organisations, eg [National Centre for Social Research](#) or [Economic and Social Research Council](#), [Institute for Public Policy Research](#), including think tanks
  - Market Research organisations. Some larger research organisations offer graduate traineeships
  - Trades Unions
  - Political parties

- Charities and voluntary organisations such as the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) may advertise internships
- Clarify what you know about the job role. As a social researcher you would be involved in:
  - developing and testing theories
  - understanding and designing research, including deciding on methodology and management
  - carrying out the research – quantitative and qualitative methods
  - interpreting, evaluating and disseminating the results
  - report writing and giving briefings/advice
  - managing research subcontracted to other organisations

Use Prospects' [social researcher profile](#) to find further information.

## Work experience and developing skills

- Get involved in research projects in your department at university.
- Our Student Internship Bureau often has relevant, local internship projects advertised via [Handshake](#). Most are advertised over summer term for a summer vacation start.
- The [Market Research Society](#) has details of companies that welcome approaches from students and graduates looking for a work placement in social or market research. It also has a guide to [careers in research](#).
- Work experience or internships can be valuable, with organisations like the [Institute for Public Policy Research](#) or [Demos](#). See the [Politics and Public Affairs](#) job sector page for more organisations and try speculative applications
- [Citizens Advice](#) may have voluntary opportunities for social policy research. Also, look at the information on the [volunteering](#) pages of our website.
- Working in a managerial or administrative role in which research is used in evaluating service delivery also provides useful experience.
- Any experience in market research interviewing is useful.

While there are full time positions in social research, there are also project based jobs or short-term contract positions.

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

- It is possible to enter the profession of social researcher straight after completing your degree in a relevant discipline, especially if your course includes social research methods and statistics
- However, many employers now expect entrants to have a more detailed knowledge of research techniques, which may be acquired by taking a taught Masters course in social research methods or by doing a research degree (MPhil, PhD).

Short courses for developing skills in, eg report writing, statistical methods or relevant software packages, may also be valuable. Check out thousands of free online courses ([MOOCs](#))

# Useful resources

## Job sectors web pages

([york.ac.uk/careers/sectors](http://york.ac.uk/careers/sectors))

- Politics and public affairs
- Civil Service, central and local government

## Additional websites

- [York Profiles and Mentors](#) – make contact with York graduates working in this sector
- [Association for Qualitative Research](#)
- [w4mp.org](http://w4mp.org) - includes information on research within politics
- [jobs.ac.uk](http://jobs.ac.uk) - job opportunities in the academic sector
- [thejobcrowd.com](http://thejobcrowd.com) - job reviews from a range of sectors.

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