CAREERS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Key Facts

Many graduates work in local government, attracted by its focus on service rather than profit, and on developing policies and services for people and communities. Unlike central government, which operates at a national level, local government provides localised services through local authorities. There are a number of different types of local authority depending on where you live, and these include unitary authorities, county councils, and district councils.

Many local authorities continue to be amongst the largest employers in the country, despite recent significant cuts to their budgets, which have resulted in the loss of many jobs. They are also continuing to recruit new staff, although competition for jobs is increasingly fierce. The local authority landscape is changing in other ways too: many services traditionally provided by councils are now outsourced to external organisations, and it is increasingly common to find partnerships for service delivery between councils and both charities and private companies. Job opportunities are thus also available in organisations such as housing associations, social enterprises and non-governmental organisations.

There are a wide variety of roles for graduates in local government, covering the broad range of service areas provided by local authorities, including education, environmental services, housing, policy, and social care. You can find out information about many of these roles in other Careers Network resources.

Opportunities in Local Government

There are many different job roles that graduates can undertake within local government. These include:

- Developing and implementing policies
- Providing support services to vulnerable people
- Managing facilities
- Providing advice and information

Some staff are professionally qualified in their area of specialism (surveyors, social workers, engineers, accountants, lawyers etc.) but there are roles across all departments (often known as directorates, divisions or units) where local government officers assist in the development of council policies and procedures, and ensure that local services are delivered effectively.

Most graduates who work in local government either qualify in a specialist role, such as trainee accountants, or work in a non-graduate role before applying for promotion. These roles are often advertised throughout the year. A period of work experience or internship while you are still a student in a local government directorate is advantageous and some councils such as Birmingham City Council offer opportunities [https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20102/jobs/466/work_experience/2](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20102/jobs/466/work_experience/2). We are also seeing an increasing number of graduate internships being advertised.

Get more support from the College of Social Sciences careers team:

[www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/careers](http://www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/careers)

- Book appointments for 1:1 careers advice
- Book a CV check at the applications & recruitment clinic
- Attend careers events and workshops
- Get individual advice on internships / work experience

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The National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP) is a popular two year programme for graduates that combines placements, the chance to gain a management qualification via online learning and development and residential events. Fifty-six local councils are currently involved and applications to join the next cohort open in Autumn 2018. The application process includes: online tests, video interview, assessment centre and a final interview with a local authority.

A small number of councils run their own graduate programmes, including Kent County Council whose Kent Graduate Programme offers strands including Management and Operational Research. In 2018 Birmingham City Council’s Graduate Development Officer scheme offered opportunities across a number of departments.

‘Despite the perception that working in local government isn't as glamorous as working for a global accountancy firm or a huge retailer, working for a Council can present exciting challenges that truly impact on the lives of the community.” (Laura Herbert, Shropshire County Council)

Graduate profiles

Grace Towers, BA International Relations: Future Leaders Programme, Shropshire Council
Grace secured an internship with the Corporate Director of People, Shropshire Council after her finals and she subsequently gained a place on the council’s Future Leaders graduate programme. Her role has involved coordinating the authority’s Safeguarding Ofsted inspection, project managing the design of a Shropshire youth health website and creating a Shropshire Young Professionals Network. As an undergraduate Grace undertook a range of extra-curricular activities which she feels “were vital in securing both internship and graduate roles, demonstrating key employability skills including; flexibility, time management and team work”.

Unjum Hussain, BA Political Science & Sociology: Research & Liaison Manager, Birmingham City Council
After undertaking a Masters in Politics and Religion at Birmingham University and working on a number of research projects, Unjum joined Birmingham City Council’s Graduate Development Programme. Whilst on the programme he undertook a number of project placements across a range of departments including Corporate Policy and Performance, Legal and Democratic Service and Regulatory Services becoming a Research and Liaison Manager within the Council’s Regional, European and International Division, working on a European Funded project entitled Cities for Active Inclusion (CfAI).

Further resources

Gov.uk – provides information on how councils work
Local Government Association – information on local government
Prospects: Public Administration – provides a useful overview of public sector jobs
LGiobs – website advertising council vacancies
Jobs Go Public – website advertising council vacancies
wmjobs.co.uk – website advertising local authority vacancies in the West Midlands
UK county councils – a list of county councils in the UK
LGIU Local Government Information Unit – a think tank which focuses on local democracy
Institute of Local Government Studies – research centre on local governance at the University of Birmingham

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For quick links, access the electronic version of this handout on
www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/careers