

Pathways into the public & charitable sectors

Roughly one-fifth of postdocs who decide not to pursue an academic career go on to work in the public and charitable sectors: developing and implementing science policy, research and advocacy (e.g. for medical charities), grant administration and programme management, business development and fundraising, and so on.

This tip-sheet suggests five steps on the pathway to a job in the public and charitable sectors. The advice here is primarily intended for postdocs who are just beginning to explore their options.

1. Be prepared to shift identity

Many roles in these sectors allow postdocs to 'make sense' of their research experience, but it's important to recognise that **you are making a significant career change**.

This means making an identity shift: even though your scientific knowledge might be an asset, you will not be an academic scientist anymore, nor will you be recognised as one by those around you.

This kind of identity shift is not always straightforward, and it can't be accomplished in a single decision:

- You cannot find out what you need to know by self-reflection – instead, **start by looking outside yourself**. Investigate what is out there and see how you respond.
- **Allow yourself a period of indecision** – some days you'll want to stick with what you're currently doing, some days you'll want to change. That's OK. It can take a while to move from old to new.
- Identify **small actions that you can take now**, e.g. side projects, voluntary positions, new activities outside work related to your potential new area of work. Think of them as important experiments without binding commitment.

2. Scan the horizon

Do you know someone who has moved into the public or charitable sector? What's their advice? Ask around: who else could you speak to?

Read the national and scientific press, to keep abreast of major developments in science policy.

Start to learn the many acronyms in your area of interest. For example:

POST (Parliamentary Office for Science & Technology), NIHR (National Institute for Health Research), GO-Science (Government Office for Science), GCSA (Government Chief Scientific Advisor), STOA (Science & Technology Options Assessment), UNESCO, WHO, RCUK, UKRI...

Identify organisations in your area and check their websites. What are they posting on social media?

Update your LinkedIn profile and do a keyword search.

3. Search for vacancies

In addition to LinkedIn and specific organisations' own websites, vacancies are regularly advertised on the following jobs boards:

- [Guardian Jobs](#)
- www.charityjob.co.uk
- www.charitypeople.co.uk
- www.w4mpjobs.org
- [Civil Service Jobs](#)
- [Third Sector Jobs](#)

4. Translate your skills

General subject knowledge and scientific training can be assets, but your specific publications and funding track record are unlikely to be of interest to recruiters.

You may find that, particularly in public administration, there are many layers of management and oversight. Show where you have worked within regulations.

Commonly sought competencies include:

- analytical skills
- ability to work to tight deadlines
- adaptable writing skills – e.g. report writing, policy documents, minutes, articles for the public
- networking and building relationships.

5. Prepare your application

You will need a well-tailored two-page CV. Most recruitment in these sectors is structured around competencies, so refer to our tip-sheet on **skills-based CVs**.

If you are asked to write a **cover letter**, stick to one page and address the specified competencies carefully. Refer to our tip-sheet for advice on structure and tone.

Book a **one-to-one**: pfdc-support@imperial.ac.uk

