Welcome to the sector guide for environment and conservation careers. Being interested in a career in this sector opens up many possibilities. You could work as a campaigner, a scientist, a consultant or a policy adviser… the list goes on. It is an incredibly diverse sector which makes it exciting but also a little daunting if you do not know quite what you would like to do. However, do not despair, there is a huge amount of information out there to help you find out about different roles within this sector, what you would be doing, what qualifications are needed and how to get that all important first job.

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Environmental areas of work

1. Climate Change

Working in this area you could specialise in looking at climate change, either in better characterising climate change to inform decisions, or in creating policies and strategies to reduce the risks of climate change. Your role could vary from working in research, science, policy, advocacy, education or leading institutions to action. You could be involved in remote sensing, looking at sea level change, designing low carbon buildings and infrastructure, working with businesses to reduce their vulnerability to climate change or wider issues linking climate change to sustainable development. You could be based within a university, government, the voluntary or private sector, or as a private consultant.

Getting on and in to this area of work

Since there are many different careers, career routes will possibly be quite diverse. Depending on your disciplinary background and interests, there are three broad categories of careers: a science career helping the world better understand the risks of climate change and reduce vulnerability to these risks; a policy career helping governments or businesses design and implement policies that reduce these risks; or a social career helping individuals and communities respond to climate change through personal and collective action. This work might be at the level of individual institutions (e.g. a business), communities (e.g. a local authority), nations (e.g. working for the UK Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy) or international (e.g. helping run a programme under the Clean Development Mechanism).

Resources

- The Guardian, Climate Change
  www.theguardian.com/environment/climate-change
- The New Scientist
  www.newscientist.com/topic/climate-change
2. Conservation

Working in this area can mean working in rural, urban or marine environments with flora and/or fauna. You could work for a charity, government body or consultancy. The range of jobs in this area is large and may include typical roles such as Ecologist, Conservation Officer, Ranger or Environmental Scientist or less science based roles such as Project Coordinator, Administrator, Media Officer, Campaigns Developer or Membership Development Officer. In a science-based role, you may be involved in research, data collection and analysis and making recommendations from findings. You could collect data from field species identification, distribution, monitoring, etc. For non-science related roles you could be involved in campaigning, fundraising, administration or media work.

Getting on and in to this area of work

There are few defined career paths in this area of work. This can mean taking on short-term contract work rather than permanent employment which in turn may mean you have to move employers and locations. For science-related roles, a degree in a related field such as marine science, biology, ecology or zoology is necessary. Getting some field experience is essential and experience of survey techniques and GIS can set you apart. A driving licence is often required for field based work. For science-related or non-science-related roles you are likely to find it helpful to have gained relevant experience whilst at University by volunteering for an organisation or through your degree work. Field experience is essential for science based roles. It can be useful for you to research how an organisation fills short-term, fixed-term and part-time positions. Some will advertise in the normal way, others will use recruitment agencies and others will use their database of speculative applications. Therefore, if you know what organisation you would like to work for or what type of work you want to get experience in then spend some time finding out what the recruitment process is and who would be doing the hiring. You can then target the right person in the right way.
Resources

• The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM):  www.cieem.net

• Prospects – Graduate Jobs in environment and agriculture
  www.prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/job-sectors/environment-and-agriculture/graduate-environmental-jobs

• National Careers Service Ecologist job profile:
  www.nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/job-profiles/ecologist

• Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) -  www.nerc.ukri.org

• The World Wildlife Fund - www.wwf.org.my

• Friends of the Earth - www.foe.co.uk

• The Cambridge Conservation Initiative - www.cambridgeconservation.org

• The European Environment Agency - www.eea.europa.eu

• The United Nations Environment Programme - www.unep.org

• The International Union for Conservation of Nature - www.iucn.org

• The Environment Agency -
  www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency

• The National Trust - www.nationaltrust.org.uk

• The Wildlife Trusts - www.wildlifetrusts.org

• The British Ecological Society -  www.britishecologicalsociety.org
3. Environmental Consultancy

Working in this area, you could work for local authorities, central government, non-governmental and wildlife organisations, specialist environmental consultancies or multi-disciplinary consultancies. Projects range from contaminated land, ecology, hydrology, environmental impact assessment or policy development and work can be both national and international depending on your employer. Working as a Consultant you could be involved with collecting and analysing data, making recommendations, report writing and working with clients. Consultants can be a bridge between developers, the government and public - enabling developments to take place whilst taking into account a range of ecological, environmental and socio-economic considerations.

Getting on and in to this area of work

A good undergraduate degree from a relevant subject is necessary. As this is a competitive field a Masters is often needed in addition but it is worth researching the organisation to check! If you can, try to get some work experience with a consultancy during your time at University. This shows commitment and will develop your professional skills. The scope of work consultancies deal with is broad and diverse. Therefore, if you know you want to work in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for example try to gain some relevant work experience and target relevant consultancies for opportunities.

Resources

• Careers Service Environmental Podcast
  www.careers.cam.ac.uk/podcasts/podcastsEnv.asp

• Prospects Environmental Consultant Job Profile
  www.prospects.ac.uk/environmental_consultant_job_description.htm

• ENDS Directory list of consultancies - www.tinyurl.com/ycfmfxgr
4. Recycling and waste

These roles deal with the management of waste. This could be the collection, disposal and recycling of waste to strict environmental guidelines or working to raise awareness or campaigning on these issues.

Getting on and in to this area of work

There is no set career entry point into this sector. An undergraduate degree is normally required and could be geography, geology, earth sciences, biology or engineering. It is worth researching whether or not a master’s degree is required depending on the organisation and role to which you are applying as this may vary. Some organisation may offer graduate development programmes.

Opportunities in this area include local authorities, private companies, the NHS, charities or consultancies.

Resources

• The Chartered Institution of Wastes Management - www.ciwm.co.uk
• Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee - www.larac.org.uk
• Materials Recycling World - www.mrw.co.uk
• National Careers Service Recycling Officer Job Profile -
  www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/advice/planning/jobprofiles/Pages/recyclingofficer.aspx
• Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) - www.wrap.org.uk
5. Sustainability

Sustainability is about how organisations can improve the social and environmental impact of their activities by making sure that their products, services and processes are developed and delivered in ways that consider people and planet alongside profit.

Getting on and in to this area of work

As a relatively new area of work, there are no defined career paths. Skills needed for the professions will also vary but could include leadership, business, communication, strategy development and technical (environmental) knowledge. Similarly, as a relatively new area of work, not all organisations will have specific departments or roles but larger companies are more likely to. In smaller companies these roles may fall under the remit of another department so you will need to research what companies incorporate sustainability in their organisation. Job titles may not always include the word sustainability - so when you are looking for vacancies you may have to think a little more broadly, search using terms such as sustainable, policy or environmental officer for example. You will then need to read the job description carefully to see what you would be doing. Another way to enter this sector is to work for a company and to then take on sustainability as an additional role once you are established. You could also work in the public and voluntary sectors.

Resources

• The Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership - www.cisl.cam.ac.uk

• Guardian online newspaper; Sustainability - www.theguardian.com/guardian-professional/sustainability

• The difference between sustainability and corporate social responsibility - www.huffingtonpost.ca/ivey-business-school/sustainable-business_b_5678831.html
6. Renewable energy

This sector includes roles connected with energy derived from sources which are naturally renewable, such as wind, tide, rain, solar, geothermal, plants or algae. Renewables are used for electricity generation, heating and to make fuel for vehicles. Renewable energy is important to the UK and the rest of the world.

Getting on and in to this area of work

Roles in this sector can include research and development into plant and equipment, research into sites, development of sites, project management, design and manufacture, policy making, campaigning, marketing and sales, together with various management, finance and IT roles.

Employers in this field include utility companies, civil, electrical and manufacturing engineering companies, wind farms, agricultural companies, environmental consultancies, government, local government and trade bodies. Engineering offers one obvious route into this sector. Some large utility companies offer broad management training schemes (any degree discipline) with possible placements within the renewable part of their business. You can also look out for administrative, sales, marketing, finance and IT roles with companies working in this sector. Sometimes mathematicians are sought for modelling roles.

Resources

• The Guardian - www.theguardian.com/environment/renewableenergy
• Renewable Energy Jobs - www.renewableenergyjobsuk.com
• Renewable UK - www.renewableuk.com
• Wind Europe (formerly the European Wind Energy Association - www.windeurope.org/about-us/new-identity
7. Water and wastewater

The water industry provides drinking water and wastewater services (including sewage treatment) to residential, commercial, and industrial sectors of the economy. The water industry includes manufacturers and suppliers of bottled water. The economic side of the industry is regulated by Ofwat, the Water Services Regulation Authority and an overview of the industry is provided by Ofwat: http://www.ofwat.gov.uk/The government department responsible for this area is DEFRA and the environmental regulation and sustainability of rivers and coastal defences is overseen by the Environment Agency.

Getting on and in to this area of work

Engineering, particularly civil engineering, is an obvious route into this field but utility companies offer general graduate management programmes, often open to graduates from any degree discipline.

Resources

- Standards for drinking water are set by the EU. There is a Drinking Water Inspectorate which oversees this in the UK -
  www.dwi.defra.gov.uk/index.htm
- Water.org.uk and Wikipedia give current listings of companies, their owners and their websites: www.water.org.uk
  www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_water_companies
- Review the Energy and Utilities sector overview from Prospects -
  www.prospects.ac.uk/energy_utilities_sector.htm
Do I need a postgraduate qualification?

It is possible to begin working in this sector without a postgraduate qualification, however you may find that you will need one at some point - so the main question you need to ask is do I need one, if I do, what do I want/need to study and when should I do it. Some students opt to do it immediately after their undergraduate degree, others choose to wait to gain some work experience first and some do not do one at all. There is no ‘best’ option - you must decide what suits you. To find out about postgraduate courses go to our Moving on to Postgraduate Study or Research web pages at:

www.careers.cam.ac.uk/sectors/postgrad/index.asp

If you are in the process of trying to decide if and when to do a postgraduate qualification, ask yourself the following:

“Do I really know what I want to do?

Have I looked at current job advertisements to see if this postgraduate qualification, or indeed if any a postgraduate qualification, is necessary?

If you are finding jobs that state a postgraduate qualification is necessary then you know that at some point you may have to do one. However, an employer may be looking for specific skills and/or experience – in which case it may be more important to get these

Have I spoken to people in my department or professionals in the sector about the type of work I want to do, as well as if a postgraduate qualification is needed or if the one I have selected is a suitable postgraduate course for me?

Have I considered the investment in funds and time that a postgraduate qualification will take?

Have I considered the advantages and disadvantages of getting work experience first?”
How do I get work experience?

Gaining practical ‘on the ground’ experience in this sector is really important. Environmental work varies widely - some is office based, some is field- or lab-based. Getting your first bits of experience is essential as it will give you more insight into a particular environmental area of work and it will enhance your own knowledge and skills.

The kind of experience needed depends on the type of job you want to do. If you are interested in research, field work or consultancy for example then hands-on practical environmental experience would be essential. However, if you want to fundraise or manage a project then linked experiences to these types of roles would be beneficial.

But how can you get work experience without a job? We tend to call this the ‘experience trap’. It is therefore really crucial that you try to gain as much work experience (practical and office based) as possible whilst at University - ensure you make the most of the opportunities you find. The more experience you get, the more employable you will become.

Look at the information below to start deciding how you will get this all important experience.

When can I get this experience?

Summer vacations are very long at Cambridge University - this means you are fortunate enough to be able to study, relax and to gain invaluable experience undertaking vacation work - allowing you to develop key skills for the future. Even volunteering/working for a few weeks or days here and there during your time at University will be invaluable when you come to developing skills and putting together your CV.

Steps you can take to find work experience

• Search the Careers Service Vacancies & Opportunities
• Look at job sites/sector organisations and professional body websites
• Send in speculative applications for work experience, work shadowing – use the CV & Cover Letter book to help you
• Use contacts (friends and family) to seek out opportunities - do they know of an opportunity? Are they in a relevant role you could shadow?
• Talk to people within your college or department - is there a project you
could work on during the summer?

• Attend Careers Events – refer to our online and printed diary for dates of events. Which employers have relevant opportunities available? Could you make speculative applications?

• Listen to our environment & conservation podcasts - www.careers.cam.ac.uk/podcasts/podcastsEnv.asp

• Read our web pages on Vacation Work to gain some more ideas

• Look at the Career Service’s Summer Bursary Reports. These bursaries help recipients access opportunities with organisations working in the not-for-profit sector: http://www.careers.cam.ac.uk/bursary/successfulreports.asp

• Volunteer for an environmental organisation during your vacation or even at weekends. Even one week here and there can really enhance your skills and CV. Some of these organisations, e.g. Wildlife Trusts and other membership organisations, run inexpensive highly-focussed short courses for members, which can help you develop skills and demonstrate motivation

• Join a related student club or society; take part in its activities and go on to take on a position of responsibility in that organisation. Can’t find a society you want - why not start one?

• Use our GradLink database - hundreds of alumni - some working in the environmental sector that are happy for you to contact them to ask about their careers

• Create your own opportunity to match your interests and develop your skills. Start an environmental blog or sell your idea for an environmental project to an existing society or communication channel like CU Radio, BlueSci or the Naked Scientist

• Read the environmental section in a newspaper to gain more insight into some of the environmental issues we face today - try the Guardian

• Think about the specific skills you could develop which might be essential for, or assist in your chosen route: for example species identification or use of appropriate databases. But many environmental jobs also require good communication, organising, project managing and team working skills. These can all be developed through extracurricular and workplace activities or from aspects of your studies
• Pick up your free copy of our CV and Cover Letters guideline at the Careers Service to get your CV up-to-date

• Do you have another field of endeavour in which you excel and perhaps help to train others? Explore obtaining an NVQ Assessor qualification. Your skills as an assessor could assist you in the environmental sector, for example in assessing evidence of organisational compliance with an environmental standard

• Come to the Work to Change the World careers event in February (keep up-to-date with our diary for more details on this)

• Check out other links on our Vacation Work web pages at www.careers.cam.ac.uk/sectors/vacwork/index.asp

• Research the sector or roles via LinkedIn or following current topics on Twitter.

• Detailed job descriptions can be found on the Prospects website at www.prospects.ac.uk
Want to work internationally?

Environmental issues and consequently work are global, but without work experience and the relevant qualifications it can be tricky to get paid work overseas. However, there are opportunities for you to gain experience overseas:

• Read our sector information on International Development and For More Than Profit

• Research our own Vacancies & Opportunities

• Check out the Green Volunteers Handbook. This can be found in our Careers Service library. It gives you information about organisations and details about what they do, where and how much they charge

• Find out if there are any opportunities to take part in research overseas within your own Department

• Look at ‘GoinGlobal’ and ‘Careers and Study Abroad’ on the careers service website - these give you access to a complete range of international resources.

• Think about gaining some international experience during your summer vacation - there are a number of organisations that you can volunteer or intern with. Also look at our vacation pages:
  www.careers.cam.ac.uk/sectors/vacwork/index.asp
Careers Service Resources

At the Careers Service
• Files and books on occupations
• Files and books on short-term work/work experience, gap year and working abroad
• Feedback Files for individual reviews of organisations

Online
• GoinGlobal - www.careers.cam.ac.uk/library/GoingGlobal.asp
GoinGlobal is a resource that contains information to help you plan your international career. It gives you access to the complete range of career and international career and employment resources.
• GradLink - www.careers.cam.ac.uk/Gradlink/
Hundreds of graduates, predominantly Cambridge alumni, have joined the GradLink database. You can ask them career-related enquiries via a web form. GradLinks have offered to tell students, informally and in confidence, how they got to where they are, and what it’s really like. They have sometimes been able to help students arrange work shadowing or find vac work, put them in touch with other contacts, or tell them about impending vacancies or selection processes.
• Podcasts - www.careers.cam.ac.uk/podcasts/podcastsEnv.asp
Listen to a number of experts working in the environmental field. Speakers discuss their own career paths, what it is like working in their sector and hints and tips for starting off your own career.
• Not-for-Profit Bursary - www.careers.cam.ac.uk/bursary/index.asp
• Moving on to Postgraduate Study or Research - www.careers.cam.ac.uk/sectors/postgrad/index.asp
• Vacancies & Opportunities - www.careers.cam.ac.uk/CamCareers/Vacancies.aspx
• Vacation Work - www.careers.cam.ac.uk/sectors/vacwork/index.asp
Online Resources

Career & Sector Information & Professional Bodies:

• The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) - www.tcv.org.uk

• BSI (Business Standards) -
  www.bsigroup.co.uk/en-GB/iso-14001-environmental-management

• Chartered Institute of Water and Environmental Management -
  www.ciwem.org/

• National Resources Wales (formerly Countryside Council For Wales) -
  www.naturalresources.wales/

• Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - DEFRA -
  www.defra.gov.uk

• Environmental Data Services (ENDS) - www.ends.co.uk

• Environment Agency - www.environment-agency.gov.uk

• Forum for the Future - www.forumforthefuture.org

• Groundwork Trust - www.groundwork.org.uk

• Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) - www.cieem.net

• National Careers Service -
  www.nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/job-categories/environment-and-land

• National Parks - www.nationalparks.gov.uk

• National Trust - www.nationaltrust.org.uk

• Natural England - www.naturalengland.org.uk

• Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) - www.nerc.ukri.org

• Prospects - www.prospects.ac.uk

• OFWAT - www.ofwat.gov.uk

• Renewable UK - www.renewableuk.com

• Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) - www.rspb.org.uk

• Scottish Natural Heritage - www.nature.scot

• Society of Environmental Engineers - www.environmental.org.uk
• Wind Europe (formally The European Wind Energy Association - www.windeurope.org/
• The Guardian - www.theguardian.com/uk/environment
• Water UK - www.water.org.uk
• Wildlife Trusts - www.wildlifetrusts.org
• World Wildlife Fund – WWF - www.wwf.org.uk
• The New Scientist - www.newscientist.com/topic/climate-change
• The Carbon Trust - www.carbontrust.com

Website useful for job searches
• ACRE- www.acre.com
• Charity Jobs- www.charityjob.co.uk
• Civil Service Jobs- www.civilservice.gov.uk/recruitment
• Conservation Careers- www.conservation-careers.com
• Countryside Jobs Service (CJS)- www.countryside-jobs.com
• Earthworks Jobs - www.earthworks-jobs.com
• Eldis- www.eldis.org
• Environmental Data Services - www.endsjobsearch.co.uk
• Environment Jobs- www.environmentjobs.com
• Green Jobs - www.greenjobs.co.uk
• Monster Jobs - www.monster.co.uk
• Nature Jobs- www.nature.com/naturejobs/science/welcome
• Renewable Energy Jobs- www.renewableenergyjobs.com
• The Environmentalist - www.theenvironmentalist.com/index.php
• The Guardian - www.jobs.theguardian.com/jobs/environment
• Third Sector Jobs – www.jobs.thirdsector.co.uk/
• Utility Jobs - www.utility-jobs.net