

Visit to Chatham House

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Who are Chatham House?

Chatham House, also known as the Royal Institute of International Affairs, is an **independent not-for-profit research institution and think tank**. It exists to provide analysis of international affairs, providing expertise on regions and countries across the world, as well as on cross-cutting issues, such as security, energy and law, through its 10 research programmes. It has no political bias or affiliation and draws funding from individual and corporate membership. Members gain access to Chatham House events, receive regular policy briefings and their journal *International Affairs*, and gain use of an extensive library for research.

The level of research

It can be difficult to understand what level of research an organisation is engaged in. Chatham House is broadly speaking a **think tank**, with research programmes generally designed to influence policy debates. The nature of research and its output does depend on the specific research programme. Some areas, for example the Russia and Eurasia programme, may be more academic and scholarly, while others, such as the Energy, Environment and Development programme, would be more typical of think tank research.

Research Programmes

Chatham House has 10 research programmes, based on regional or country-focused specialisms and broader cross-cutting themes or issues. The number of research programmes has expanded significantly in recent years, with new programmes established according to need, and where the necessary funding can be secured.

Internship Programme

Internships are offered for a period of 3 months on a flexible basis, which means students can fit them around their studies where possible. Both full and part-time applications are considered, and there are around 65-80 interns at Chatham House each year. An Internship at Chatham House, a think tank with a global reputation, will look great on your CV not just for policy research jobs but for other career areas as well. Interns in the past have been able to ramp up their skill set, attend international conferences and even had opportunities to appear in media such as CNN and Sky News.

Interns are accepted onto all research programmes according to the needs of the respective research staff. There are also occasional opportunities in their events, conferences or library departments. Vacant positions are usually advertised on the Chatham House website, or if there is a need to recruit students with particular knowledge or languages then adverts may be sent to the relevant university departments.

Applying for an internship

The web site requests that applications are only submitted in connection to specific, advertised vacancies. However, in reality, individual programmes do consider well-targeted speculative applications and many internships are filled by research staff going through CVs they already have on file. CVs sent in on this basis must be directed to a particular research programme, ideally to a specific member of staff and convey a real interest in the work. See the internship details on their website for details of what you should cover. Suitable applicants will be interviewed, and it is likely that around 4 people will be interviewed for each post. Prepare for these interviews with the same seriousness that you would for a paid job.

What to expect

The nature of an internship will depend on the research programme and the projects they are currently working on. A lot of the work will be basic admin, and so a good knowledge of computer packages such as PowerPoint and Excel are as important as research skills. Interns will be involved in the organisation of events and workshops related to their programme area, and will get the opportunity for research – previous interns have contributed to briefing papers and been closely involved in major events or projects. **The balance between admin and research work undertaken will depend on the programme.** There will be plenty of opportunity to attend meetings and conferences and to meet leading people in the field – interns are encouraged to get involved in these events. It is worth noting that **the summer is a quiet time at Chatham House with few events taking place.** You can maximise your chances of an internship by making yourself available outside of this time.

Application tips

- Make sure your application reflects your abilities in the core skills the internship requires. Much of this will be centred on administration tasks and the content of your academic work will be less important. Resist the temptation to show off how much you know
- If you have any specific skills that are relevant – eg language skills, research software make sure you highlight them.
- Make sure you have a good understanding of how Chatham House operates. For example that it is a membership driven organisation. You might even consider joining (under 30s can do so for £90). Attending events there would be a great networking opportunity as well as a chance to take advantage of the facilities and information membership makes available.

Maximising the internship

- Take advantage of the facilities. Chatham House consider that being able to attend events and conferences is part of the pay off for your contribution. Yet not every intern makes the most of these opportunities.
- Keep your colleagues informed. Don't feel you have to struggle with a piece of work or research on your own. Having the maturity to ask for help at the right time demonstrates good team working skills and can help you to get to know colleagues.
- Demonstrate initiative. You will need to clearly master the core tasks but there may be opportunities to get involved in other areas of work. Ask around to see who could do with some help.

Post-internship

A handful of previous interns have been lucky enough to get a job with Chatham House – although this depends on needs of programmes and when vacancies arise so is not to be counted on. To illustrate this, of the 65-80 interns at Chatham House last year only 3 were able to move into permanent positions. Other interns have gone onto to be successful in their future careers however, working in multilateral organisations, international firms, consultancies and commerce.

Chatham House staff – how they got there

Those working on regional programmes generally had an academic background in that area – a masters in Russian studies or Arabic for example. They generally had further experience of either living in the region they now worked on, or working for other think tanks or research centres. In one case the opportunity to work for Chatham House had come through a contact met at one of their events, leading to a temporary part-time research position.