

Employer Visit

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Contact: Organised by SPW
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Organisations Participating:

Asian Foundation for Philanthropy (www.affp.org.uk)
Development in Action (www.developmentinaction.org)
Voluntary Service Overseas (www.vso.org.uk)
Students Partnership Worldwide (www.spw.org)

Venue of workshop:

Abbey Community Centre, Westminster

Overview

This workshop was organised to give Careers Advisers and Information Staff an idea of the issues surrounding the International Development sector. It featured presentations on some of the salient issues and on the activities of the organisations involved, and concluded with a panel of students presenting us with their experience of trying to find employment in the sector.

Introduction by Eric Levine – SPW Chief Executive, Eric Levine

Eric spoke about the rise of the International Development sector in recent years, both in terms of the organisations and the opportunities available. It is very high profile, largely due to campaigns such as 'Make Poverty History'.

The general aim of the sector is to channel the energy and flexibility of young people into int. dev – aimed generally at 18 to 28 year olds, as most able to move around.

Urgency to engage young people to help tackle rise of HIV – but also a need to take care as market has become saturated. Applicants must think – what will we get out of it, and what will be the impact of the work they will be doing?

Presentation on International Development as a sector, by Frank Harle (SPW)

What is meant by international development?

Sustainable development – looking at needs of people and communities to make long term difference.

How has sector changed?

20 years ago – few key players – Oxfam etc. Opportunities largely limited to teaching. Ethiopian famine, live aid etc raised profile of sector and created desire to help, but few opportunities. Int. dev at that time known as the 'third sector' – i.e. anything not commercial or public sector.

Today – many people want to work in int. dev – why? Has become ‘fashionable’? Buzzwords – ‘participation’ and ‘empowerment’.

What should graduates looking to enter the sector think about?

What can they offer – skills? Some opportunities need specific skills.
What do they want to do? Sector vast – huge number of opportunities.

Why do they want to do it? This is likely to be first question they get asked in interview – but students often have vague ideas why.

Home or overseas? Don't have to go abroad – many orgs have offices in London.

Religious or non-religious – some for people with Christian ethos - e.g. worldvision.

Not all London based – Oxfam in Oxford.

Students should be realistic – expect to spend years at lower level – no ‘fast track’ to higher level. Low pay to start off with – MA not necessarily any help unless it has practical elements.

What sort of jobs can graduates do?

Few jobs in policy – need lot of experience.

Most in fundraising/marketing etc – 45% of all jobs funding related – crucial to sector – but not just ‘chugging’ – jobs based in HQ.

How to get into sector?

Postgrad qualification? Think carefully – some more practical than others.

Acquire skills – can get a job in commercial sector where you will be trained – then move into int. dev later on – transferrable skills.

Volunteering & internships

Grads need experience – can help them decide wherever they really want to work in sector, and also to help them identify which area best suits. Also to create contacts – demonstrate commitment and motivation.

Students should research sector – requires considerable time commitment to get into.

Conclusion

Think about your motivation – will need it!

Be realistic.

Act now – internships/volunteering.

Be positive and confident!

Ethical volunteering & int. dev

SPW + DiA

Over 800 organisations – sector has exploded.

In media – lately have highlighted dangers of sector – sending people overseas without any training or CRB checks to work with children – sometimes more volunteers than locals! Concern about damage they are causing.

Questionable aims of organisations – profit?

Some participants feel it is more like an expensive, extended holiday – ‘voluntourism’.

How to get right placement

New research underway – hoping to establish code of practice for organisations.

Both charities & commercial organisations in sector now. Comm orgs not all bad – but questions need to be asked – where is money going? What is ethos of org?

One org has been bought by First Choice – potential to make profit and cash in on market – aggressive marketing.

Length of placements – how much difference can someone make in a two week placement? 57% of placements under 1 month. What is benefit to community?

Org should have links with local community – programme not imposed, but responding to needs. Should be feedback, from volunteer and community – whether work is relevant and appropriate.

Is the org committed to development – what is their long term strategy?

Some use word ‘development’ in marketing – dev for volunteer, but not for community!

Orgs should monitor effectiveness of programme.

Dev + learning opps – in survey, 14 out of 54 orgs didn’t offer any training before departure. What does training include? Logistics – vaccinations – dev issues – culture – lang? Students should ask.

Volunteers should critically engage with organisation – ask questions.

Some orgs offer accreditation.

Support whilst overseas – some orgs give no support – health and safety risk, but also need it so volunteers can get most out of experience.

Orgs should offer debrief too after trip – feedback.

In conclusion – huge variety of experiences – v. important for students to ask questions.

Questions – students should try and speak to someone who has volunteered with org. If org doesn’t want to put you in touch, may not be reputable. Orgs should be transparent and willing to help – esp with money issues – otherwise alarm bells.

Case studies by students

Impressions – sector v. hard to get into – requires great deal of foresight, tenacity, planning, contacts and luck.

Some students had been volunteering for years and had always known they wanted to do int. dev from 16 – but still unable to find jobs, or just part-time.

Clear that experience and contacts v. important – also important for students to be realistic about their chances of getting into sector – not something you ‘drift’ into.

Speculative CV’s can help – target organisations – get name remembered.

Students should try to focus their efforts and volunteering on one particular skill or area of sector – e.g. fundraising, HIV.

For students unable to give time up for volunteering – can use jobseekers allowance – certain number of hours – also ‘virtual volunteering – work from home.

Forum 3 – recruitment fair for NGO/Charities – in October.