

## Working in Risk Analysis

We recently spoke to a Masters student who has been working for a risk analysis company. For the sake of confidentiality both the company and the student are anonymous. Jeff Riley, the Careers Group, University of London August 2009

### How did you find out about the Company

They came along to careers event at college and I was able to talk to one of their senior people. On the basis of that meeting I was asked to do a written exercise and then I had an interview.

### Tell us about the written exercise and interview

It was a short report on a pig disease in China. It exploited my area of expertise – animal health and I think they used it to assess how quickly I could put together a report and get an idea of what my writing and research skills were like. The interview which took place a little later was on the one hand very informal – a chat in a local cafe over a coffee but, at the same time, very penetrating questions. Again focused on my area of expertise but really testing making sure I knew what I was on about or was able to think on my feet. In this case it was about a recent cholera epidemic in Zimbabwe.

### What did the work involve ?

Well the company has a range of clients – government departments, retail companies, insurers, NGOs. They want a risk assessment for a whole host of different reasons. What could interrupt a supply chain in a particular country or what do they need to consider before taking on a project in Laos, for example. My job would be to provide an authoritative report – ranging from 300 to 3000 words outlining the potential risks. The turn around for the short reports was as little as one day in one instance. Longer reports could take a couple of months.

### How did the writing compare to academic work ?

Well I think it required the best factual writing I've ever done and to a 100 per cent degree of accuracy. In that sense it was rigorous. At the same time it was different from academic work because you aren't providing historical context as much nor referring to other experts or academics – you are the expert ! So the depth of the work was limited but still challenging – and brilliant stuff to work on.

### What was the office like to work in ?

It was a young work force – mainly people in their 30s with a few older people. International and a good gender balance as well – about 50:50. It was a busy place with a work ethos. I officially started at 8.45 but often got in at 7.30 if I was starting a new project. Lunches were taken quickly and it would be unusual to disappear for lunch. This is because people were interested in what they were doing but also because they were busy and didn't have enough time to do stuff.

I was an intern and they did offer us support. Regular meetings and space to talk with heads of departments for example. There wasn't any of the photocopying work you sometimes worry you are going to get stuck with.

**What would your tips be?**

When applying make sure you emphasise an area of expertise. This could be regional or a discipline expertise – I was a qualified vet (and was the only scientist working there, so don't let that put you off). Probably you would need to combine this with language skills and having some contacts in your arena. Also a good academic track record.

When scanning your CV they will be looking for this expertise and noticing distinctive things you have to offer – I had worked as a vet in China, for example.

Though will get lots of work focused on your specialism there will be scope for growth. If I'd stayed there or if I went back there I would be looking to broaden my area of expertise. For example moving from health into bio-terrorism.

I enjoyed the work I did for them but in the longer term I think I would flourish more in an environment where I am meeting people who know more than me – in this field you really have to be the expert and at this stage of my career I'm not sure that's best for me.

Finally don't be surprised if companies are hard to get hold of. Its a small industry that took off after 9/11 and there isn't a professional body or central register. By definition its discreet and below the radar.