Employment Prospects and Opportunities

Studying social policy is stimulating and brings many life-long benefits including the employment opportunities it generates. New graduates are facing fast-changing, highly competitive and often volatile labour markets but providing they can capitalise on their studies, they should be well placed to meet these economic challenges. Whether working in organisations in the commercial, voluntary or public sectors, effective policy evaluation is central to decision-making and there is a high demand for graduates who:

- are aware of resource and implementation issues and the complexities of meeting stakeholder requirements;
- are skilled in quantitative and qualitative policy analysis and appraisal;
- possess a strong knowledge-base grounded in the subject’s interdisciplinary and international nature.

This section of the website provides an indication of the range of employment opportunities open to social policy graduates and those who study the discipline as part of other academic programmes. It will help you identify the attributes you will need to bring to the graduate marketplace, how they might be best utilised both in employers’ recruitment and selection processes, and the possibilities presented by postgraduate study. Our focus is primarily on the UK, although there is relevance in the material for those interested in working or furthering their studies in other countries. You do need to note, however, if you are considering overseas study: the potential differences in the length and start dates of courses; the significance that can be attached to the training element; their often more vocational nature and, in terms of employment, the operation of their graduate labour markets.

The suggestions made here should be used in conjunction with the more tailored advice available from your tutors and careers service to help you make the most of the knowledge and skills you’ve acquired.

Successful Career Planning

In the current environment, competition for posts with the highest returns and development opportunities is often intense. This makes forward planning from the early stages of your academic programme essential. There are indications that almost half of undergraduates now start researching their post-degree options before the end of their first year, and a similar proportion start applying for graduate vacancies at the beginning of their final year. As careers advisors will tell you this entails researching the opportunities available, building a profile of your strengths and seeking to enhance them. The ability to market yourself and draw on any paid or voluntary work undertaken alongside or prior to your studies is also important.

The starting point, however, involves building on the insights gained through your studies to ensure that you are aware of:

- the employment areas typically entered by social policy graduates;
- what employers in these areas are seeking and how the study of social policy can meet their requirements;
Some cognisance of all three elements can be drawn from studying the graduate destination research and data provided by degree providers. The most frequently cited UK-wide surveys are those from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (www.hesa.ac.uk), the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey and the DLHE Longitudinal Survey. The first is an annual census of all those qualifying from publicly funded UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This provides information on the work and/or further study and salaries of UK-domiciled first-degree graduates within six months of graduating (summarised in the publication *What Do Graduates Do*, available at www.hecsu.ac.uk). The second, a sample survey, provides a follow-up that details qualifiers’ destinations 3.5 years after graduation.

An array of other official and non-governmental organisations which we will refer to later also produce regular general studies of the patterning of the graduate labour markets in the UK. These should be looked at together with the discipline and course-specific career data provided in the Key Information Sets (KIS) for undergraduate courses, which you may have already used. Collected since 2012/13 and published on the Unistats website (www.unistats.direct.gov.uk) these are intended to aid prospective HE students in deciding their programme of study, but are also a useful source of information on graduates’ initial employment patterns. Further information can also be gleaned from social policy degree providers’ websites, recruitment agency analyses of labour markets, employers’ recruitment and selection literature (much of which is now available online), and by talking with careers advisors.

Collectively, these sources indicate that employment prospects for social policy graduates and those who studied it as part of their degree are in line with those of graduates overall and that the discipline is the conduit to an increasingly wide range of careers. In job search terms, these fall into two main employment pathways:

- those where an understanding of social policy per se is of direct relevance and highly regarded by employers (described below as the ‘Social Policy Career Pathway’);
- those where a greater emphasis is placed on the analytical skills gained through studying the discipline (described below as ‘The Generalist Pathway’).

This distinction is, of course, flexible and in practice there is a degree of overlap between the two; the available data, however, suggest that increasing numbers of social policy graduates are recruited to positions where a premium is placed on their skills set.

### The Social Policy Career Pathway

Traditionally, many Social Policy graduates sought careers in public services and a grounding in the subject remains a first step to a career in social work and other caring professions. It has also become the gateway to a range of management, advisory, research, commissioning, procurement and administrative positions in UK Government Departments, linked agencies, the devolved Government administrations and local authorities. Salaries may not always match those in commercial organisations, but public-sector employment can bring considerable opportunities for training, fast career progression, good benefits and working conditions, and the satisfaction of working in socially worthwhile fields.

Until recently, this had been an expanding area of employment but, as should be clear from reading the *Companion*, the last ten years have seen cuts in many services and extensive restructuring, particularly in England. These have brought in their wake smaller, tougher and fast-
changing public sector labour markets for new graduates. The available indicators, however, suggest graduates with a social policy base still have a clear head start in gaining work in both government and public agency service provision. Moreover, through the outsourcing of work taking place through public sector restructuring, new openings have occurred in other sectors, for which studying social policy has also become a gateway.

An important case in point are the jobs offered by a multiplicity of voluntary and community organisations, many of which have become significant players by taking on the delivery of public services and also developing their other activities. Pay rates are highly variable, but graduates in these settings report their work is rewarding, and it is clear that employers in this sector place a particular premium on recruiting those with a working knowledge of social policy. The many possibilities here range from research, policy development, advocacy, campaigning, lobbying, marketing, fundraising, resource and project management to volunteer coordination, community support, training, advisory roles and service delivery. Such opportunities are not confined to the larger voluntary and charitable organisations, housing associations, campaigning bodies or thinktanks, but can also be found in the many smaller entities and, increasingly, in social enterprises. Developments in these areas and in service provision are also creating space for micro-ventures and, though risky, employment in these is another option you may wish to consider or see as a longer-term goal.

The reconfiguring of public services has also led to a growth in commercial sector opportunities. These include both direct provision and partnership or supply-chain arrangements with voluntary agencies. In both instances they extend from front-line to an array of project and general management, research and advisory roles. Beyond this grouping are other openings where a background in social policy is also advantageous, for instance, in firms supplying occupational or other benefits to companies engaged in policy-related auditing, consultancy, research, advice and service development.

Opportunities also exist in the increasing number of cross-sector partnerships and projects devoted to initiatives ranging from health promotion and well-being to community safety and local planning. More generally the increased emphasis on user involvement and consumer-oriented services has created further options in all three sectors, in policy research and development, consumer information and advice, financial advice, user-support services, quality assurance and general management, as well as corporate social responsibility.

To take stock of the many UK options, you will need to consider a variety of aspects of each sphere, organisation and possible positions (including the description of job tasks, the person specification, required competencies and attributes, reward packages and career trajectories). Across the sectors, however, the main fields of employment you might find worth considering are summarised in the following alphabetical listing:

- adult care services;
- auditing;
- Childcare, early years and family services;
- community development;
- consultancy;
- corporate social responsibility;
- criminal justice services;
- debt management;
- diversity and human rights;
- drug and alcohol recovery support services;
economic development;
education and training/lifelong learning;
employment services;
health services;
housing;
immigration services;
income maintenance services;
information and advice services;
international aid and development;
legal services;
leisure and sports services;
planning and redevelopment;
protective services;
policy information and advice;
procurement and commissioning;
quality assurance;
research and policy development;
trading standards;
well-being services;
youth justice services;
youth services.

At an international level, employment can be found in a variety of agencies. While it may require a proficiency in another language, there is a demand for policy-informed graduates to work in both inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations in Europe as well as global organisations (check, for instance, those cited in Chapter 46 and Part X of the Companion and the Key Sources on EU and International Welfare Systems on this website). The work ranges from field services involving aid, development, employment, health, housing and poverty reduction schemes to research, procurement, commissioning, administrative support, fundraising and project management.

The Generalist Pathway

The wider recognition of the skills sets provided by social policy degrees has led to an expanding range of work opportunities in linked fields such as human resource management (HRM), counselling, and public and customer relations, as well as others where the substance of the degree has a less direct bearing. The various destination surveys suggest the discipline’s graduates have taken up posts (some following postgraduate qualifications) in:

- advertising;
- business services;
- customer relations;
- digital, communication and media services;
- environmental services;
- events management;
- financial and professional services;
- hospitality, leisure and tourism services;
- HRM;
- legal services and the law;
- marketing/market research;
- policy analysis and development;
In these instances, in particular, demonstrating the skills you have acquired is of crucial importance. In turn this means both having a very clear conception of what employers are seeking from applicants and knowing how to communicate that you have the requisite skills mix and attributes throughout the various stages in selection processes.

What are Employers Seeking?

Studying the headline requirements in adverts, the types of questions asked on application forms, in interviews and what is assessed in other selection procedures (e.g. psychometric testing and assessment centres), it is clear that employers are concerned with applicants’ capabilities and disposition. This relates to those posts where the subject base has a bearing but even more so to the ‘generalist’ career pathway where the possession and class of a degree can be taken as an indicator of attainment, and the prime emphasis is on the skills base and ‘work readiness’.

It’s a picture borne out by the extensive research on graduate market entry in the UK. What emerges is that UK employers are increasingly placing attributes other than degree subject-matter at the heart of their recruitment, and more so than other EU states. Successive membership surveys by the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGRS), for instance, suggest 70% of organisations recruit from any discipline. Studies by the Confederation of British Industry similarly show that work attitudes and aptitudes are more important for the majority of businesses than the degree studied, as do a welter of others covering the public and voluntary as well as commercial sector employers.

In this context it is clearly crucial to be aware of and understand the data available and the abilities and skills most emphasised in graduate recruitment. The diverse and changing needs of employers means that constructing a common overall classification of graduate skills is problematic. The term ‘employability’ has been used in careers advisory literature to cover the spectrum of capabilities, attributes and attitudes, but there is a more important supplementary differentiation between ‘hard’ skills (specialist and technical), ‘soft’ skills (Box 1) and attributes (Box 2) that graduate employers are more likely to utilise in person–job matches and assessing potential workplace performance.

Soft skills typically comprise a cluster of what are variously termed ‘generic’, ‘transferable’, ‘portable’ or, in EU terms, ‘transversal’ capabilities developed in one context or setting that can be deployed in a wide range of others. The skill combinations and required attributes will clearly vary with the organisation and posts within it, as will the priority that employers place on each type. But what concerns governments across the UK, as well as employers and student representative bodies is graduate awareness of these requirements and how students can map what they acquire through their studies against these employer expectations.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Box 1: Skills Commonly Specified by Graduate Recruiters</th>
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<tr>
<td>• analytical/synthesising skills;</td>
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<td>• commercial, policy, organisational and customer/user awareness;</td>
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communication, presentation and multi-media skills (e.g., face-to-face, telephone and written fluency, and the ability to deal with varied audiences);

digital skills and ICT skills;

entrepreneurial skills;

evaluative skills;

inter-personal/people management skills (e.g., team working, listening, facilitation, negotiation, management of others, networking, leadership);

numeracy/data interpretation and management skills;

problem-solving skills;

project management skills;

research skills;

self-management/resilience (e.g., time management, the ability to prioritise, to work to deadlines, to work independently and under pressure);

task management, prioritisation and organisational skills;

teamworking skills.

Box 2: Personal Qualities Commonly Specified by Graduate Recruiters

- capacity to learn/self-reflector;
- critical стратегичный thinker;
- culturally sensitive;
- flexible/adaptable;
- focused;
- highly motivated;
- proactive;
- resilient;
- self-aware;
- self-starter;
- results-oriented.

Along with wider concerns over the UK’s competitiveness and productivity levels, this has been reflected in the growing significance of the so-called ‘employability agenda’ in government policy that has led to a series of measures ranging from the introduction of KIS to the outcomes of the 2015 Higher Education Green Paper (BIS, 2015). Employability is also now core to HEI strategies and means you can take advantage of general skills-related courses offered within or alongside your degree programmes, often with accreditation. More broadly, the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) have also invested in initiatives to raise awareness of what employers are seeking (see, e.g., NUS, 2015).

From studying social policy you should be able to map a broad range of ‘in demand’ proficiencies including: analytical, evaluative and problem-solving skills; the ability to undertake independent research; an aptitude for numerical and qualitative data analyses (and the use of the information management tools this involves); the expertise to assess the effectiveness of policy interventions and their implications for organisations, suppliers and service users, as well as self and task management competences and capabilities. Honing the personal qualities listed in Box 2 is in part a product of confidence about possession of these skills but also a matter of self-development through your studies.
In mapping and keeping a progress chart on these you may find it useful to refer to templates such as the Prospects Career Planner (www.prospects.ac.uk/planner). In doing so you will also find it worthwhile researching and reflecting on the type of questions you are likely to encounter in graduate selection processes, the thinking behind them and how your study of social policy might help you address them.

Here it is important to note that graduate labour market analyses suggest that, in the face of rapid technological and economic change, employers are increasingly prioritising certain skills and attributes. These centre on what are sometimes called ‘intrapreneurial skills’ (problem-solving skills and the ability to take the initiative/lead), resilience and flexibility in the face of change, people and project management skills, organisational and global awareness and the ability to learn. The emphasis now placed on these is reflected in graduate recruiters’ use of situational and strength-based assessments as well as competency-based selection methods. The last focuses on appraising ‘what you can do’ and asking you to provide examples of the ways you have used particular skills. Many of the illustrative questions in Box 3 fall into this category and considering them should assist you in thinking about how you might draw on your social policy studies to present your skills and personal qualities at various stages in the selection process.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Box 3: Sample Selection-Procedure Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>❖ What led you to apply for this post/organisation?</td>
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<tr>
<td>❖ What have you gained from your degree studies that has equipped you for this post?</td>
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<tr>
<td>❖ What skills and attributes make you a suitable candidate for this post?</td>
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<tr>
<td>❖ Describe three factors which you consider to be instrumental in shaping your choice of employment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>❖ What do you consider to be the main challenges faced by this organisation/business/service?</td>
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<td>❖ Describe how you plan your work to meet targets and objectives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>❖ Describe a situation in which you worked as part of a group. What was your contribution?</td>
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<tr>
<td>❖ Think of a situation where you were part of a successful team. Describe your role in achieving the team’s goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ Give an example of a situation in which you developed effective working relationships with people of different backgrounds or views to accomplish an important task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ Describe a situation where you met resistance to your opinion. What course of action did you take and what was the outcome?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ What positions of responsibility/leadership have you held? Describe your involvement and what you achieved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ Describe a situation that you consider to be a good example of using your initiative. What did you do? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ Describe a situation in which you successfully influenced others to complete a task the way you thought best. What was your role? How did you achieve the result you felt best?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ Give an example of when, as leader of a group, you set directions for them, gained their commitment, and led them to achieve the set target.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ Describe a challenging project that you had to undertake, how you dealt with it and to what effect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ Describe a situation where you generated a new idea or process that led to improved results.</td>
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The other modes of assessment (Box 4) give you a different scope for using your subject knowledge and the insights you have gained from studying by asking you in various ways to consider ‘what you
would do’ or ‘what you enjoy doing’. Grounded in positive psychology, strength-based assessments, especially interviews, are being increasingly used as it is thought they provide a robust gauge not only of an applicant’s ‘match’ with a particular role but their performance levels and potential, since if they can work to their strengths they are more likely to be both effective and innovative. Thinking about this selection tool does give you the opportunity to draw directly on your social policy studies. It can also be a way of recognising the areas of motivation and work satisfaction that matter to you in considering possible employment fields, settings and positions. The wide span of questions you might be asked could, for instance, include:

- What areas of study do you enjoy most?
- Why did you choose to study social policy?
- What do you value most about your studies/yourself?
- Do you see yourself as wanting to contribute to society/make a difference?
- Which aspects of studying absorb most of your time?
- What are you good at?
- What is your main weakness?
- What do you enjoy doing the least?
- What aspects of your course did you find most difficult?
- What was the most difficult academic decision you had to make during your time as a student?
- How did you organise work for your assignments?
- What aspect of studying did you find most stimulating?
- What qualities would you bring to this position?

**Box 4: Situational and Strength-based Selection**

**Situational Judgement Tests (SJTs)**
While these necessarily take many forms in essence they present you with a variety of hypothetical problems or decision-making situations or problems that you might encounter in the post/workplace applied for. In each instance you will be presented with several possible ways forward and asked which you consider to be the most effective, your response being gauged against the employer’s ideal one and hence providing an indication of your suitability and organisational ‘fit’.

**Strength-based Assessments**
These are geared to ascertaining your innate abilities, personal qualities and interests and ask you to respond to a range of questions designed to identify your preferences and the issues and activities that enthuse you. Your responses are judged against the organisation’s measure of the range of strengths demanded by the post for which you have applied.

In addition to your studies, graduate employers frequently seek evidence that you have applied or enhanced your abilities through work-related experience. This is construed widely and includes not only unpaid or part-time employment, but participation in university activities and engagement in voluntary or community work. Engagement in relevant activities is especially important if you want to pursue a career in services such as health and social care, education or housing but can be critical more widely as a way of enhancing or extending your skills base, for instance, seeing if a particular field is the one for you and signalling your strengths to prospective employers. But whatever your chosen option, you will again find it helpful to regularly record examples against the profiles and
questions in the Boxes and then gear your portfolio to particular organisational settings and job specifications.

**Contexting Your Planning: The UK Graduate Labour Markets**

As you will be aware from the preceding sections, job searching and career planning need to be attentive to labour market trends and, as part of this, recognise that it is not a single graduate market but multiple markets, varying in terms of products, services and across localities, regions, the UK and internationally. Looked at in general, recessionary pressures and the reduction in size of the public sector over the past decade made for a particularly difficult environment for new graduates in the UK. A range of recent surveys, however, suggest that graduate recruitment did pick up in 2014 and, indeed, by 2016 had exceeded pre-recession levels. They also point to continuing strong demand across all four nations as the UK moves forward and the fact that positions requiring graduate-level qualifications will continue to carry attractive starting salaries and remuneration packages as well as opportunities for advancement.

Nonetheless you need to be mindful that the ongoing reshaping of the economy is likely to bring further challenges, not least the: changing skill requirements arising from the spread of digitalisation; the changing nature of working practices; the growth of small- and medium-sized enterprises and the more complex passage into graduate-level work. Taking the latter as an example, unlike many large organisations, which plan their recruitment drives around the academic year, smaller businesses and agencies can differ quite markedly as to when and where they advertise for new staff. You may therefore need to widen your job search in order to find these often less visible openings. Again, the initial posts on offer can vary. Apart from the standard ‘probationary period’ in permanent contracts, some employers offer ‘starter posts’ that amount to:

- entry-level positions in which graduates are assessed as to their suitability before progressing to ‘second step’ roles with greater responsibility;
- taster jobs, often on short-term contracts, enabling graduates and employers to assess the feasibility and appropriateness of one or more possible careers.

Some graduates also take up interim work of a temporary, casual or part-time nature, frequently in occupations from earlier part-time or vacation jobs. Such posts may involve an internship or non-graduate level employment, though recent surveys show that the proportion of graduate labour market entrants in such work six months after graduating had fallen substantially since the depths of the recession. What the presence of these transitional arrangements highlight, however, is the need to be both realistic and adaptable in your choice of options and, where necessary, make initial compromises in terms of what you are prepared to do. That flexibility should also include thinking through whether studying for an additional qualification prior to or alongside employment will open up further work possibilities.

**Postgraduate Study and Further Training Opportunities in the UK**

- **Employer-Supported Training**

  Though competition is fierce one option you may want to consider is applying for a management traineeship. Targeted at graduates deemed to have management potential, these are offered by large organisations across the three sectors. More generally, many employers offer graduate entrants work-related training and this is a valuable element of reward packages that is worth considering in your career planning and job-searching. Should you wish to pursue a postgraduate
qualification it is also worth checking whether your employer offers assistance with fees, books or other costs and/or paid study leave.

Postgraduate Study
This can produce good returns on the time and money invested, boosting your expertise, employment prospects and earnings; the available evidence suggests this is particularly so for those with a Master’s degree in social policy. But you need to be clear about why you are following this path and check the options available, their relevance to your anticipated field(s) of employment, the admission criteria and costs. In overall terms, you need to assess whether the extra skills and knowledge gained are likely to reap the sought rewards. Bearing this checklist in mind, the main postgraduate options are:

- vocational courses leading to professional qualifications;
- conversion courses;
- taught academic courses leading to a postgraduate certificate (PG Cert), a postgraduate diploma (PG Dip), or a Master’s degree (MSc, MA, MBA, MPA);
- Research courses leading to an MRes, MPhil or PhD.

Some of the careers pursued by social policy graduates, including social work and teaching, require a professional qualification, while conversion courses enable you to work in related areas such as law or psychology. Postgraduate study is also increasingly a requirement for moving from ‘starter’ to ‘second step’ posts in many other fields. Career progression in HRM and marketing, for instance, can hinge on gaining a professional qualification, and in other areas too, you may find it worthwhile extending your subject knowledge through a vocationally oriented programme. These range from courses geared to particular areas of employment such as housing or health and well-being or to specific organisational settings such as the voluntary sector, to more general programmes in management. Many institutions run courses that offer both professional accreditation and a Master’s degree, and, for those with management experience, an MBA or MPA (Master of Business/Public Administration).

You may, however, prefer the flexibility afforded by courses with less vocational immediacy. There are a host of options, enabling you to further your study of social policy or move into cognate areas. Taught courses are generally offered on a credit-accumulation basis and in a variety of modes, institutionally, work- and web-based. PG Certs and PG Dips typically take nine months (full time) to complete and Master’s a year (full-time) or two (part-time). Postgraduate study for a Master’s by research involves undertaking an individual piece of research under supervision and also normally takes the same time. A PhD usually requires three to four years of full-time study in the UK (six plus on a part-time basis). It involves the submission of a thesis based on substantial independent research advancing current knowledge. It is widely expected that you complete a Master’s before starting a doctoral programme, and many students register for an MRes or MPhil initially, transferring to a PhD after their first year if their progress is deemed satisfactory.

Where to Study and How to Apply
These differing options are widely advertised in careers units, providers’ websites, the press and other media. Weighing them up and determining what and where to study should be based on advice from the careers service and, more particularly, your tutors. Unlike undergraduate study, the only centrally organised application schemes in Great Britain for postgraduate study are for teaching and social work, and in the case of the former, you should ensure your studies meet the admissions
criteria. For other programmes, applications have to be made directly to providers according to their specific time frames (which again can usually be checked on the appropriate website).

Admissions tutors for vocational and taught Master’s courses will want to assure themselves (through the application form, personal statement and any subsequent interview) that you have the background, ability and commitment to successfully pursue advanced study. For a PhD programme selection depends on the quality of the research proposal and typically involves applying to undertake research either in a pre-designated area or on a freestanding project. In either instance, it is important to seek your tutors’ advice and ensure in advance that they are willing to provide references supporting your submission.

**Sources of Funding for Postgraduate Study in the UK**

Financial support for Master’s degrees in the UK has been subject to significant change in part reflecting variations in policy between the devolved governments (see Part IV of the *Companion*). Full details will be held by your careers unit, but at the time of writing (April 2016) the main provisions to be aware of were:

- **From the academic year 2016/17 a student loan scheme will be introduced for English students taking full-time taught and research Master’s at any degree-awarding university in the UK. To be eligible they have to have lived in England for at least three years, be under 60 when they start studying and to have not previously studied for a Master’s or PhD (the original proposals limiting support to under thirty was, along with others, adjusted after extensive criticism). Those from elsewhere in the UK are also eligible if they have been domiciled in England for at least three years for a reason other than study. Students on part-time and distance-learning courses can also apply provided they’re pursued at an intensity equivalent to at least 50% of their full-time counterparts. The loan (set at £10,000 in 2016/17) is intended to contribute to but not cover the costs of studying and to be repayable with interest concurrently with an undergraduate loan.**

- **In Northern Ireland, postgraduate tuition fee loans (of up to £5500) will be available from 2017/18 for Northern Irish students or UK and EU nationals resident for over three years. It can be used for studying all taught postgraduate courses on a full-time, part-time or distance learning basis. It includes PG Cert and PG Dip courses but if they cost less than Master’s programmes then the loan will be capped accordingly.**

- **The Scottish government has developed plans for Master’s loans for Scottish residents studying either in Scotland or elsewhere in the UK with the aim of introducing it from 2016/17. Set at £9000 this is intended to contribute to the overall costs of studying for a taught Master’s.**

- **The Welsh government is currently considering a postgraduate loan scheme.**

In addition, from 2018 doctoral research loans are to be made available in England and are also being contemplated elsewhere in the UK. The other main avenues for support for doctoral studies are:

- **public funding: through Research Council Awards primarily for MPhil and PhD studies (applications for which should be made through the department at which you intend to study);**

- **institutional funding: bursaries, scholarships, studentships, teaching and research assistantships (again bids should be sent directly to the institution concerned).**
Whatever postgraduate course you aim to pursue, you are still likely to need to supplement the loan system and, as well as the possibility of employer support noted above, you could also consider:

- grants and assistance from charities and trusts (these are of varying amounts and based on differing criteria; leads on this can found on the Alternative Guide to Postgraduate Funding, [www.postgraduate-funding.com](http://www.postgraduate-funding.com));
- Professional and Career Development Loans (PCDLs).

If you are considering teaching or social work you should check the different routes in and the support provided by the English, Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh governments.

### Studying, Working and Volunteering in Other Countries and Time Out

This guide has largely focused on UK graduate labour markets, but as he Companion makes clear they operate within a global marketplace, marked by the internationalisation of higher education, pan-national recruitment by multinationals, and short and longer-term cross-sectoral opportunities in many other countries. Research from graduate recruitment agencies and other bodies has highlighted the growing numbers gaining work-related experience or studying overseas, and there is some evidence that this and organised ‘time out’ or ‘gap’ periods can enhance graduate employability.

In the light of many employers high valuation of international knowledge and awareness, these are possibilities worth exploring, as is furthering your study of social policy overseas. Commonly taught within broad-based social or political science departments, courses beyond the UK offer numerous possibilities but are subject to varied application processes and stiff competition for funds. Linguistic skills permitting, the range of subject-related and general employment options is, if anything, even wider than in the UK although some occupational areas will also require additional professional qualifications.

### Capitalising on Studying Social Policy: Further Sources of Information

In considering your graduate options, your first port of call should be your institution’s careers service; it can provide information and guidance on employment, voluntary and further study possibilities available in the UK and elsewhere. It can also help you with skills and attributes analyses, job searching and selection procedures. You should also draw on your own social policy skills and make use of the data and advice available from national bodies. The key ones that you will find worth searching are listed below, along with some of the many commercial sites.

Further information on the initial career paths of social policy graduates can be found on the Social Policy Association’s website, [www.social-policy.org.uk](http://www.social-policy.org.uk), and in the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) guide, *What Can I Do with My Degree, Public Administration and Social Policy* (which details graduates’ destinations within six months of graduation) available on the Prospects website, [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk). More detailed insights into the many benefits of studying social policy and the types of posts as distinct from the areas of employment entered by those who have graduated in the discipline can be found on course providers’ websites. You might also find it helpful to look at the short summaries of *Careers in Social Policy and Applied Social Science*, produced by social policy staff at the University of York, [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8Mr-ztCMuFnILyNjrINOuEMFsCXDADUQ](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8Mr-ztCMuFnILyNjrINOuEMFsCXDADUQ).

There is an extensive literature on ‘employability’ and graduate employers’ recruitment and selection practices. For job-seekers, however, the most useful insights and advice can be found in the CBI’s many publications on the issue (www.cbi.org.uk), those of UUK (Universities UK, www.universitiesuk.ac.uk) and the NUS (www.nus.org.uk). You will also find it helpful to crosscheck your skills profile and development against the Social Policy Subject Benchmark Statement (QAA, 2016).

As indicated earlier UK-wide trends in the labour market for new graduates can be tracked through the surveys produced by HESA (www.hesa.ac.uk); HESCU (Higher Education Careers Service Unit, www.hescu.ac.uk, including its Graduate Market Trends); AGCAS (www.agr.org.uk); High Fliers Research (www.highfliers.co.uk); and Social Policy and business reporting in the media.

These and broader developments in graduate labour markets can also be followed through the various studies and surveys undertaken for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-business-energy-and-industrial-strategy) and its predecessor, the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-business-innovation-skills), by UKCESS (The UK Commission for Employment and Skills, www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-commission-for-employment-and-skills, especially the Employer Skills and Employer Perspectives Surveys); the ONS UK Labour Market Statistical Bulletin www.ons.gov.uk; by Universities UK (UUK, www.universitiesuk.ac.uk; the National Centre for Universities and Business, www.ncub.co.uk; and for remuneration trends, ASHE (the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, http://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/previousReleases).

It is also worth looking at the findings on graduates’ labour market entry processes and early career development from the longitudinal Futuretrack survey (available at www.hecsu.ac.uk/current_projects_futuretrack.htm), which charted the experience of 2005/06 UCAS applicants on three- or four-year degrees from application to the year after their graduation.

The most comprehensive starting point for information and advice on employment and postgraduate opportunities and funding in the UK and other countries is www.prospects.ac.uk. Other useful sources of information on postgraduate study are www.targetpostgrad.com and www.ucas.com/ucas/postgraduate. Both the Prospects and Targets websites also offer helpful advice on general career planning and skills analyses for graduates.

Recruitment methods tend to vary by and within sector and between organisations. Some rely on traditional methods such as press advertising or employment agencies, but many rely on various internet job sites and social media, which are increasingly widely used. Hence you will need to research where the positions you are interested in are most likely to be placed, but for social policy-related employment, www.guardian.co.uk/jobs provides a good starting point. You should bear in mind though that small- and medium-sized enterprises will take more searching.

Information on UK and overseas postgraduate study can be found on the Prospects website and at www.targetpostgrad.com, both also provide advice on funding. Courses and PhD research opportunities are widely advertised in newspapers such as The Guardian, specialist publications such as the Times Higher Education Supplement and, for the UK and beyond, websites such as https://www.findamasters.com and https://www.findaphd.com. These will also keep you informed of the postgraduate loan system in the UK. As its title indicates details of postgraduate funding globally can be found in The Grants Register, The Complete Guide to Postgraduate Funding.
If you are thinking of working abroad, the Prospects and Target websites again offer advice along with country profiles and you can also find useful information on others such as www.gapyear.com and www.yearoutgroup.org.

Looking both at your career planning and your study of social policy in the UK you could follow up the sources cited below (and their updates), particularly if you are interested in educational policy and/or the social policy implications of labour market changes for social security and other services, the debates over them and the methodological problems faced in researching – and forecasting – in this area.

References

