

Careers involving History



History is the study of the sum of human experience. It is concerned with the past and its present legacy.

The study of history develops an array of skills including independent critical thinking, analytical skills, the ability to process and synthesise vast amounts of information - which is crucial in our world overflowed with information - and to engage in a historiographical debate.

This means that history is among the university subjects where you have to read the most material.

Engaging with the historiographical debate is central to a university essay as opposed to a school essay; this also means that the number of secondary and primary sources you will have to read increases dramatically.

Like all humanities, history also teaches verbal and written communication skills, as most evaluation is based on written essays and oral presentations.

History is one of the broadest subjects you can study and it gets taught in very different ways on different degrees. The various strands of the subject include economic, cultural, social and political history as well as the history of ideas. All of these topics can be studied at local, national or international levels.

Usually undergraduate degrees in history are varied so that you can cover a range of eras and types of history but degrees may focus on faculty members' interests.

Alongside learning about the historical method, typical modules you may find are medieval Europe, politics and society in the 18th and 19th centuries of the country in which you are studying and world history of the 20th century.

Other modules you may find on a history degree are history of political ideas from Plato to Rousseau, civil rights in the US, economic history after the Second World War in the country in which you are studying, women in the 18th century in the country where you are studying, the study of the family in early modern Europe, etc.

Nowadays history is considered everything that happened until 20 years ago.

If you're not fully set on history, it's possible to study it alongside another subject in many universities around the world. After graduating, history students go on to anything and everything.

In the past, history graduates have forged careers in academia, research, civil service, politics, journalism, consultancy, banking, business, PR, marketing, retail, accountancy and more.

History trains transferable skills which can lead to the most varied career paths.

More than 40 per cent of graduates joined full-time work after their degree, 23.6 per cent did further study, 14 per cent did part-time work and 6.6 per cent did both further study and work.

In France, a history degree is seen as the best preparation for careers in journalism and politics.

If you want a career that relates to history, you'll usually need to undertake further study after you graduate. For some careers, several years of voluntary experience is often needed before you land a paid job.

Our list of careers in history to consider includes the following.

- Academic historian. Most academics work for universities, doing their own historical research and teaching students. You'll typically need a masters degree and a PhD.
- Museum curator. You'll need voluntary experience – often several years' worth – and sometimes a relevant masters degree, such as museum studies. If you want to climb the career ladder to a senior level, a PhD helps.
- Heritage manager. Help run historic buildings or monuments, for example for English Heritage or the National Trust. Again, you'll need substantial unpaid experience and possibly a masters degree, plus a PhD if you want significant career progression.

- Archivist. Archivists help preserve and organise documents, typically those of historical interest or that may become so in future, for record offices, libraries, universities, businesses and other organisations. Likewise, you'll need a lot of work experience and a masters degree; a PhD can help.
- Secondary school history teacher. The most typical route is to take a one-year postgraduate teaching qualification. You'll need work experience in a school before you apply – two weeks is a typical minimum requirement. Alternatively, the Teach First scheme allows successful applicants to start earning straight away and get qualified while working.

Other jobs with a history degree

Many careers are open to graduates with any degree subject. History degrees are well respected by employers as a challenging academic subject – though the grade you get and which university you attend will affect this.

History graduates are particularly well suited to careers in law. Lawyers often need to read through lots of documents, decide whether they can be trusted and put together careful arguments based upon them. To become a lawyer you'll need to take a one-year conversion course after your degree, followed by a second course to teach you the skills you need to be a solicitor or barrister (different types of lawyer). Find out more about careers in law.

Alternatively, you might go into a career such as business, finance, the media, retail or public sector and charity. In some cases, such as journalism, you may need to take a relevant postgraduate course after your degree. However, in many of these areas you can start work straight after university and get trained on the job.

For all these careers, you'll typically need some relevant experience to help you get your first job. However, in most cases a few weeks or months is enough.

History degree skills and how they'll help your career

On a history degree you will develop skills such as:

- Gathering and analysing information from different sources
- Looking at events from different perspectives
- Coming up with an informed view of a situation

- Writing
- Giving presentations
- Constructing arguments
- Working to deadlines.

These are all useful skills to have in the workplace. For example, they can be very helpful if your job involves investigating situations in which something has gone badly and trying to understand what happened. This could be the case if you're a manager or HR manager trying to get to the bottom of a conflict between colleagues, a journalist investigating possible corruption, or a police officer or lawyer investigating a crime.

More subject guides:

As a history graduate you will have gained skills highly valued by employers, such as analytical and critical reasoning, oral and written communication and research skills - a history degree is a good launch pad for a wide range of careers, including law, the public sector, business management and finance. However, if you are passionate about history you may wish to use your degree in an area more directly related to your studies. In most cases you will need further postgraduate qualifications, either a history specialism, research based study or a specific vocational course.

The following career areas may have opportunities for direct entry from a history degree. However bear in mind a history specialism at postgraduate level, either taught or research based, may create more openings.

Museum Researcher

Some of the larger museums, such as the British Museum and the Imperial War Museum employ history graduates with knowledge of specific periods of history as researchers. Working as a museum assistant or voluntary work in the museum or heritage industry may increase your chances of entry.

Media Researcher

For work as a programme researcher at organisations such as the BBC, a subject based degree, such as history, may be more useful than having studied media production skills. Producers often look for applicants with specific subject knowledge relating to programme content. See BBC Careers for details of the Production Talent Pool, the route on to the BBC Production Trainee Scheme. Entry is highly competitive and you will need experience of local or

student newspapers/radio/TV or have worked as a runner with TV production companies.

Genealogist

Currently there is a huge public interest in tracing ancestors and researching family histories presenting opportunities for self-employed genealogists to offer research services to private clients. See the Society of Genealogists for related courses.

For the following areas specific vocational postgraduate qualifications are usually required for entry.

Museum Curator

Curator is a very broad term; the job varies considerably with the size and type of museum. Working in a small local authority or university museum, you may need to be a jack of all trades; the role can combine collections management, staff management, exhibition management (including hands-on installation) and museum education and require business awareness. In a large museum you might focus on only one of these areas.

A degree appropriate to the subject of the museum collection and a Masters degree relating to museum studies will almost always be required. The best advice is to volunteer or work as an assistant in a range of museums to get a feel for the environment that would suit you best and to gain the work experience essential for entry to museum studies courses. The Museums Association is a useful resource.

Museum Education Officer

Entry is as for curator but classroom based experience or teaching qualifications, such as a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) are also useful. See the Group for Education in Museums for information.

Heritage Industry

Recently there has been a huge expansion in heritage and tourist attractions to reach out to wider audiences. Work is possible at heritage sites in a range of roles including steward, manager or in visitor services or heritage interpretation – in costume or demonstrating craft skills to school groups or the public. History or archaeology degrees can be useful and this can be a way to bring your love of history alive and share it with others. Voluntary work with the National Trust or English Heritage could be a good starting point. Masters degree courses are available in heritage studies/management.

Archaeologist

Conversion courses at postgraduate level are available for those without an archaeology degree. Opportunities exist in excavating or assessing sites prior to building work as part of the local authority planning process, as well as with university departments, museums and heritage agencies. A good starting point is the Council for British Archaeology at new.archaeologyyuk.org.

Archivist/Records Manager

If preservation of historical documents or helping members of the public with research appeal, you could consider archives work. In most cases a Masters degree in archive administration/record management will be required and this can include learning to digitise records for on-line preservation– a skill currently in demand. The Archives and Records Association is a good source of information on accredited courses and the work experience required for entry. Other options include working in publishing with history books, as a specialist librarian with early printed books, teaching history or working as a political researcher. All could involve using your history degree as a good starting point and pursuing a subject you have a passion for.

History graduates are employed by a wide range of organisations including heritage organisations, museums and libraries. Other typical employers include:

- accountancy firms
- archive and records offices
- banks
- charities
- higher education institutions (HEIs)
- international development organisations
- law firms
- management consultancies
- publishing companies
- retailers
- schools
- television and radio broadcasters.

National and local government and the public services also attract history graduates, particularly the civil service (with some graduates applying to the Civil Service Fast Stream), NHS management, the police and armed services.