

Tania Plahay works in the Trade Policy Unit for DEFRA

What A Level combination did you do?
Geography, Music, Biology

Why did you choose Geography at University?
I loved the fact that Geography was the only subject which really studied the relationship between humans and the environment. I also found the broad range of subjects offered appealing.

At which University did you read Geography?
UCL

When?
1998 - 2001

Do you have any post-graduate qualifications? Please list:
No. However I am thinking of undertaking an MSc in Environmental Management.

Please give an outline of your employment history after graduating (most recent at the top):
DEFRA- Higher Executive Officer – Trade Policy Unit, EU and International Agriculture Division
DEFRA- Executive Office – Europe Environment Division
RGS-IBS- Personal Assistant to the Deputy Director

What skills do you think you have developed through studying Geography?
I have learned how to study the relationship between man and the environment by being able to analyse various forms of data i.e. both scientific and empirical forms of data. I have also learned to look at issues from different viewpoints and question perceived wisdom.

Do you think Geography has helped you with past/current jobs? How?
Geography is especially helpful in a policy environment where there may be a broad range of issues to deal with i.e. social, economic, environmental. Geography has helped me consider the varying interest groups and look at the reasons behind why they are lobbying for a particular proposal. Geography also helps by enabling me to explore issues from different view points and see if alternatives can be proposed.

At the moment I am working on a World Trade Organisation agreement, learning about different countries and globalisation has helped me to understand the different perspectives of those countries.

What advice would you give a 6th former who is good at Geography and considering studying it at degree level?
I would advice a 6th former to think about different careers and spend as much time as possible in the careers library and undertaking some work experience. If they are thinking of civil service career geography would defiantly stand them in good stead.

Are there any other ways you feel that geography and your career structure may be linked?
Many of the key objectives of the Department of Food, Environment and Rural Affairs are linked to the subjects that I studied during my geography degree i.e. The EU, Global Poverty etc. I therefore feel that the skill gained when studying geography have enabled me to move from an position in the environment section of Defra to one in the international and EU agriculture section without too much difficulty.

Do you feel that studying Geography has meant you could reach your career goals? Why/why not?
Yes in a limited way. I am still in an early stage of my career and I hope to commence a MSc in Environment Management this year. I feel that it would be good to specialise and gain another transferable skill. Ideally in

the long-term I would like to work as a consultant and this type of work usually requires a postgraduate qualification.

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