

SOAS Careers Service

Graduate Careers Case Studies



Languages & Cultures

Graduate Careers Case Study
SOAS Careers Service

Name: Chris Bowden
Year graduated: 2008
Course title: BA Swahili and Development Studies
Department: Languages and Cultures of Africa/Development Studies
Nationality: British

Job title: Executive Assistant to the Managing Director, S.P.O.
Organisation name: John Swire and Sons; Swire Pacific Offshore
Country of work: Hong Kong and Qatar

My job role in the first year entails assisting the Manager of the Qatar office whilst gaining a strong knowledge of the company. I also get to travel to Hong Kong, Singapore, Xiamen, Dubai and Qatar.

On a recommendation from a SOAS alumnus working in Xiamen, China, I applied to the graduate scheme of John Swire and Sons. The application and interview processes were very straightforward and friendly – a surprise considering one of the panel members was the former MD of Cathay Pacific. The interview focused on my line of study at SOAS, my ability to pick up languages and my former travels. There were three key factors that helped me to get the job: my ability to speak a foreign language (Swahili and some Chinese); experience of living abroad (I spent a year in Lamu, Kenya and Zanzibar); and knowledge of other cultures which had been honed while studying at SOAS.

SOAS provided me with a first-class life experience and education, and most importantly, made me want to travel and experience more of the world.

Job seeking tips

- Diversify. SOAS is such a good place to make the most of. I opted to do Chinese as a floater in my 4th year which opened up a whole new avenue in terms of employment.
- Be on the ball.
- Apply early.
- Make as many contacts on your travels as your can – they ALWAYS come in handy!

Would you like to find out more about this career path? If so, the Careers Service can put you in touch with Chris.

Graduate Careers Case Study
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Name: Adam Macklin
Year graduated: 2006
Course title: Chinese Studies
Department: China and Inner Asia
Nationality: British

Job title: Business Account Manager
Organisation name: Hutong School
Country of work: China

I am currently the Sales/Business Account Manager at Hutong School. This involves basic duties of running a small company – marketing and sales decisions, constructing future organisational plans, dealing and looking after students and interns. We organise and teach people Chinese and place them in Beijing internships. This requires that we talk to applicants and client companies alike. Arranging classes and accommodation for students also requires a great deal of organising.

I was offered this job after a 6 month internship which I found on the SOAS careers website.

I was interviewed by telephone after completing an application form. The interview included a test in Chinese language. After the interview I was offered an internship placement for 6 months where I learnt the duties of the job. On completion of the internship I was offered a full time paid contract.

Having studied Chinese and Chinese history at SOAS I believe I was prepared for the linguistic and cultural differences in Beijing.

The only real advice I would give a leaving student is get as much information and choices and think about what you really want to be doing in 5 years, 10 years and 20 years time. Then go about looking into how you have to get there!

Would you like to find out more about this career path? If so, the Careers Service can put you in touch with Adam.

Graduate Careers Case Study
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Name: Valerie Lynn
Year graduated: 2000
Course title: South East Asia Studies
Department: Languages & Cultures of Southeast Asia
Nationality: American

Job title: Executive Director
Organisation name: American Malaysian Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM)
Country of work: Malaysia

This position is a key private sector contact for American firms considering investing in Malaysia. My responsibilities include the overall operations of the Chamber, e.g. managing 10 staff members, budgeting, events, publications as well as Malaysian and US government lobbying efforts.

I was contacted about this position when I was residing in the US. I first had a telephone interview, then a face-to-face interview in Malaysia. My in-depth knowledge of Malaysia, which includes both business (by previously living and working in Malaysia for 6 years) and historical development (learnt at SOAS) attributed to me becoming the leading candidate for this position.

My studies at SOAS, which is a well-known and recognised educational institution, in conjunction with my study concentration on the Economic Development of Southeast Asia, have always given me an “edge” over other expatriates in Southeast Asia.

Job seeking tips

- Landing a job in Asia while physically in the UK may not be easy. Therefore, you must be flexible and may initially have to take a job that is not exactly what you wanted. Once you are physically in SEA, other opportunities will open up. A good country to start from is Singapore where there are currently (2008) many jobs for expatriates.
- Search websites, international and national newspapers and magazines for job adverts as well as for information on companies.
- Be ambitious, aim high, don't give up and you will achieve your goals!

You can read a more detailed version of this case study at the Careers Service.

Would you like to find out more about this career path? If so, the Careers Service can put you in touch with Valerie.

**Graduate Careers Case Study
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Name: Matt Bowden
Year graduated: 2006
Course title: BA (Hons) Chinese and Politics
Department: East Asia
Nationality: British

Job title: Manager, BMW Lifestyle Division & Manager, Investor Relations
Organisation name: Ports Design Limited
Country of work: P. R. China

My investor relations job involves a lot of varied duties and responsibilities. In the morning I might be taking part in a conference call with a group of investment analysts who want an update on the company's latest performance and near-term strategy, while in the afternoon I could be showing a shareholder around our manufacturing facility. As Manager of the BMW Lifestyle Division, I am responsible for liaising with BMW's head office in Munich and coordinating the operation of 35 BMW Lifestyle stores around China.

The Chinese which I learnt during my time at SOAS was the primary reason behind my being hired for the roles I am now doing. I use my Chinese on a daily basis to communicate with my team, read contracts and analyse reports. Being able to deal with the challenges of an international work environment and a very different culture is something which goes hand in hand with a SOAS education.

Job seeking tips

- Keep an open mind.
- Take a serious look at the career opportunities in Brazil, Russia, India and China – those are the new lands of opportunity.
- Who you know is very important, so don't underestimate the power of a good contact – the SOAS alumni network can be pretty useful.

Would you like to find out more about this career path? If so, the Careers Service can put you in touch with Matt.

Graduate Careers Case Study
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Name: Sarah Edmonds
Year graduated: 2009
Course title: BA Chinese (Modern & Classical)
Department: China and Inner Asia
Nationality: Swiss

Job title: Special Assistant, World Expo 2010 Affairs
Organisation name: Consulate General of Switzerland, Shanghai
Country of work: China

My main duty is to take care of all World Expo related Affairs, including organising programs for official delegations, writing up reports and newsletters, planning events, answering correspondence, etc.

In the summer before my final year, I sent out numerous emails to organisations I was interested in, asking if there was any internships available. Through that I got one at the Consulate General of Switzerland in Shanghai, and made sure to impress my employer. I knew that the World Expo was to be held in Shanghai the year after I graduated and that there would surely be job opportunities.

During my final year, I made sure to stay in contact with them and reiterate my interest for a job. One day I got a phone call – it was a job offer. As such I believe internships during university are key.

My deep knowledge of China and Chinese gained through studying at SOAS most certainly helped me get both the internship and the job. I think the most important thing when looking for internships/jobs is just to knock at every possible door. The worst thing that can happen is a “no.” You then just have to move on and keep trying.

Would you like to find out more about this career path? If so, the Careers Service can put you in touch with Sarah.

Graduate Careers Case Study
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Name: Sophia Pickles
Year graduated: 2006
Course title: MA African Studies
Department: Africa and the Middle East
Nationality: British

Job title: Field Logistician
Organisation name: GOAL
Country of work: Democratic Republic of Congo

My main role is to provide logistical support for five development programmes in a pressurised environment. This includes managing a team of 60 logistics staff; implementing GOAL systems to improve and maintain logistic functions; capacity-building local staff; overseeing on-site and off-site depots; writing reports and presenting information to in-country management.

I first found out about the job vacancy at GOAL's open evening at SOAS. This led me to the GOAL website, where I located the post. After the initial personal interview I was pooled, then my application underwent technical review, and I was subsequently offered the job.

As higher study was one of the requirements, my completed MA African Studies degree was important in getting the job. I had previously volunteered as an intern for 7 months in Rwanda and 3 months in India with UNICEF which I secured after I saw their advert in SOAS Careers Service. I am fluent in French and knew a little Swahili as I had started learning it at SOAS. Understanding the politics of the region was essential in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I also had two practise interviews with SOAS Careers Service and an advice session on my CV.

Studying at SOAS has offered me unique career opportunities as both GOAL and UNICEF told me after application that they like to employ SOAS graduates.

Job seeking tip

- Do as much related volunteering and as many internships as possible!

Would you like to find out more about this career path? If so, the Careers Service can put you in touch with Sophia.

Graduate Careers Case Study
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Name: Irene Capriz
Year graduated: 2004
Course title: Chinese and Economics
Department: Economics
Nationality: Italian

Job title: Managing Director
Organisation name: 88-Decibel
Country of work: Hong Kong, Indonesia and Italy

I decided to set up my own company in order to be more flexible with my timetable. It really started as a small project that just boomed much faster than was expected.

Without any background in fashion it has been a major learning process. Almost all responsibilities are carried out by me and my business partner. That means that my initial personal goal of having more time for myself and being more flexible hasn't been reached at all! At least all business goals have been successfully achieved. Of course SOAS hasn't given me a background in fashion or accounting but it has helped me develop a new way of viewing things and a new way of interacting with different cultures.

My job can take me to Hong Kong, Bali and Europe, all within a matter of days. I work with rural communities in SEA and also with luxury shops in the Western world so it is interesting to see how these two worlds interact with one another.

Job seeking tips

As someone once said, it's not how good you are but how good you want to be. Working smart and hard always pays back in whatever you want to do!

Would you like to find out more about this career path? If so, the Careers Service can put you in touch with Irene.