

Job title: Health Economist (Civil Service grade 7)

Current employer: Public Health England (PHE)

Sector: Civil service / economics / public health

Tell us about your current role and organisation.

I work as a Health Economist at Public Health England, helping to make the economic case for prevention in health. Health Economics broadly deals with questions such as 'how much money should the government spend on health?' or 'How should the money spent on health be allocated to different areas, given trade-offs between the health, financial, and other impacts of policies/interventions?' I currently lead on about five different analytical projects and line manage one Assistant Economist. I work in the Health Economics and Modelling team, working alongside Economists, Mathematical Modellers, Statisticians, Data Scientists, and an Epidemiologist.

What sort of person would this role suit? (i.e. personal skills, qualities and values)

This role would suit an analytically minded, numerate individual with an interest in health policy. Also important are softer skills such as taking the lead on projects and being able to problem solve in an innovative way, working collaboratively across teams and organisations.

What does a normal working day look like for you?

I usually work from home in the mornings, as an adjustment for my disability. I use this time to catch up on emails, progress forward analysis, or do training (I recently went on a data science 'accelerator' programme and I'm trying to keep my coding skills up). I spent this morning extracting data on weight loss of various anti-obesity interventions from academic papers, into a spreadsheet where I can compare them and input them into a model that will calculate the long-term health impacts and NHS savings. At lunchtime I head into the office and usually have a few meetings, catching up with my team or discussing work requests with policy colleagues. I usually work 9:30 – 5:30.

How did you get to where you are now? (i.e. what are the entry-level roles graduates would apply for to get where you are?)

I was always interested in a career in health, and wanted to be a doctor when I was growing up. Quickly realising I had no talent for biology, my interest swerved towards economics and understanding how resources can best be allocated in society. I studied towards a BA in Economics and Management from the University of Oxford. I applied to the Department of Health through the Government Economic Service (GES) fast stream during my final year and didn't get in. While there are now non-fast stream routes into the GES, it wasn't the case a few years ago so I undertook an MSc in Economics at UCL and re-applied, and successfully gained a place at the Department of Health for my first Assistant Economist post. Two years in, I applied and got a promotion to my current role as a Health Economist at Public Health England.

During my time at university I did a few summer internships in an emerging markets investment firm, a HR department of a transport company, and a research internship at a Think Tank. While these weren't directly relevant to my first job, they definitely helped me work out what I didn't want to do, and gave me useful things to talk about in interviews.

How would you go about getting experience (*placements, work experience, internship*) in the industry you work in?

Entry-level opportunities offered by the GES tend to be formally advertised on civil service jobs or NHS jobs online. The fast stream is the government's formal graduate stream and exists for economists (GES), statisticians (GSS), and social researchers (GSR), taking students from a variety of analytical backgrounds, but there are sometimes non-fast stream entry level jobs advertised (usually at HEO level). The GES runs a summer placement scheme. You can also find analytical roles in non-profit health charities.

What are the biggest challenges you face in your work?

Probably saying no to people – there are so many things I could be doing but I only have a limited amount of time so I really have to understand what my team's aim is and prioritise requests! A more general challenge is in making the case that prevention is worthwhile even if it doesn't save money to the NHS, particularly in the context of recent cuts to local government funding.

What's the progression like/where do you see yourself going from here?

There is quite a flat hierarchy in my team. As an Economist, you progress from Assistant Economist (HEO) to Health Economist (Grade 7), Senior Health Economist (Grade 6), to Chief Economist (DD). As we are all civil servants, many people also move across the civil service within their grade before moving up. I am still being challenged and learning a lot in my job, so I haven't decided what my next move will be!

What top tips would you pass on to students interested in this type of work? (i.e. any particular skills, knowledge, experiences, volunteering, extracurricular activities)

Economic Impact Assessments published on gov.uk give you a good idea of the type of analysis that economists in government do. My team has also published several blogs about health economics in public health, which are a good read. Use the STAR method when answering questions on civil service applications and interviews, focusing on what **you** did and the impact it had. You can use examples from other jobs or from extracurricular activities.