

Starting Point: Working in charities and the third sector

What is the “third sector”?

The third sector is made up of different types of organisations that are i) independent of government; ii) value-driven to achieve positive social and/or environmental goals; and iii) reinvest any surplus/profit in the pursuit of their goals. Charities make up the largest part of this sector, but it also includes other organisations such as associations, self-help groups, community groups, and social enterprises.

The third sector is sometimes also called the **voluntary sector**, **community sector**, or **not-for-profit sector**. However, a better term would be ‘not-for-personal-profit’, as most organisations need to make a profit in order to be financially sustainable. For example, social enterprises are businesses that have a social and/or environmental mission and reinvest or donate profits to create positive change.

What are the other two sectors?

The **private sector** is the part of the economy, which is run and controlled by private individuals or groups for profit. The **public sector** is the part of the economy controlled by the State and provides governmental/public services.

Key points

- There are over 850,000 paid employees working in the third sector in the UK.
- It contributes approximately £12 million to the UK economy.
- There are 167,000 charities alone in England and Wales. They can vary enormously in size, and must provide public benefit. It may surprise you which organisations have charity status. For example, Sheffield Hallam University is a charity!
- Although there are a range of opportunities, you may find lower salaries and more temporary contracts compared to other sectors.

What paid opportunities are there?

A wide range! This sector needs a range of core functions, most of which exist in other sectors.

Core functions can include:

- accountancy, finance and administration
- business development and project management
- campaigning, lobbying and fundraising
- human resources (HR)
- information technology (IT)
- marketing and public relations (PR)
- research and policy
- volunteer management and co-ordination

Depending on the cause of the charity, roles can be specialist, although in smaller organisations, you could be required to wear many hats. Specialist roles can include:

- advice and counselling
- social career and support services
- teaching, education and training

Some larger organisations offer graduate training schemes and/or student internships. Examples include [Charityworks](#); [Worthwhile](#); [Gradunique](#); [Sanctuary Group](#) and [Cancer Research](#). Opportunities abroad exist in International Development. For a fuller list of opportunities, see our information about Charity and Third Sector opportunities.

How can I break into the third sector?

- Volunteer! There are a LOTs of student-friendly opportunities to do this. To find out more, see our [volunteering information](#) on Careers Central.
- Show a passion for and commitment to the cause of the organisation.
- Build a relevant skillset. The good news is, a range of soft skills are in demand across the sector. These include communication (including negotiation); adaptability; creativity/innovation; organisation. [Recent research](#) shows that the greatest specific skills needs in charities are Fundraising and Impact measuring/reporting. Smaller charities have a particular need for marketing skills and larger charities for leadership and management.
- Make the most of your experiences. Reflect, be inquisitive and network.
- Show some understanding of the issues faced by the sector, and how you could help. Examples include funding shortages; abiding by legislation and showing ethical accountability. Find out more on [Prospects](#).

More information

- A thorough overview of the third sector is available on the [Prospects](#) website.
- Industry insider tips and videos on [Careerplayer](#) and [icould](#).
- To keep to date with the sector read the [Guardian Voluntary Sector Network](#) and [Third Sector](#).
- [Social Enterprise UK](#) is a leading global authority on social enterprise.

The information in this leaflet has been compiled by Careers and Employability Advisers who attend training and conduct research in order to keep you up to date with the realities of the current labour market.