Finding employers that value your political and ethical beliefs

Many companies in the private sector seek to recruit students who are concerned about their impact on the world. Similarly, voluntary organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are keen to employ students who are passionate about making a difference to people around the world and appeal to those with strong ethical or political beliefs.

Surveys of UK students have demonstrated that over 70% believe a company’s ethical approach to be a determining factor when they are assessing potential employers.

Before doing your research, think about how key your political or ethical views are in relation to the type of career you’re interested in. Use the TARGETjobs Careers Report to explore which of your values are most important to you. Also, think carefully about the degree of political or ethical activity, if any, you want from a career.

How to choose an ethical employer

Try to find organisations with equal opportunities policies and those which take active steps to promote equality in the workplace. Here are some signs that may indicate an employer is gender-positive:

- Research companies that interest you to find out whether their policies and ethics match your own political and ethical views, as well as your career aspirations.
- Look at the company’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy. What does it say about issues such as equal opportunities, the environment, community relations and trading relationships?
- Does the policy seem to be integrated into the day-to-day activities of the company or does it feel more like a wish list?
- Think about applying for a CSR-related role, particularly attractive to graduates wishing to contribute to society in a particular way.
- There are many external benchmarking schemes such as the Corporate Responsibility Index – is your chosen company on such a list?
- What type of news stories are on their website – are they active in their local communities?
- If you are interested in an ethical career, look for jobs in the public sector where you will find many community-based roles.
- Ethical jobs are often based with charities. Think about doing voluntary work first and then moving into a paid job as you gain experience and vacancies become available.
- Search the ethicalcareers.org and Green Guide websites for details of ethical careers and employers.
- Careers advice sites such as 80,000 hours offer advice on alternative approaches to ethical issues in careers.
Questions to ask yourself

- What does the company do or what does it produce? For example, would you work for them if they produce products that are unhealthy?
- What impact does the company have on the environment?
- Does the company support undemocratic regimes financially or otherwise?
- Does the company have an ethical policy for their supplier relationships?
- Is there any conflict of interest between your values and activities and those of the employer?
- Does your activity in any way affect your competence, capability and commitment to the job?
- Would you feel you were compromising your values by taking this role?
- Do you believe it would always be impossible to be honest with future colleagues about your activities?
- How much time do you want to allocate for your political/ethical activities? Is this compatible with the demands of the career you are seeking?

Finding employers that value your political and ethical beliefs

Deciding whether to mention any political or ethical activity to an employer is a matter of personal choice. However, if you decide to do so, think carefully about how and when to present it.

Your decision to discuss your political or ethical views may be affected by:

- How relevant they are to the employer.
- Whether there is any conflict of interest between your values and activities and those of the employer.
- Whether they may affect your ability to do the role.

Questions to ask yourself

Don't get into a discussion about your political beliefs or values unless it's clearly and directly relevant to the job you're applying for. If it is, take the same approach you would to answer any other interview question.

Make sure you discuss your political or ethical activities in terms of their relevance to the job. Concentrate on the skills and qualities you've gained from the experience which match those the employer is looking for. You may, for example, have gained skills in teamwork, problem solving, negotiation, organisation, time management, communication and marketing through your activities.

Give positive examples to the employer of how you have developed these skills:

'My role as organiser of ten coaches of students going to London for the Stop the War Coalition demonstration really honed my skills as a coordinator. This involved everything from recruiting students to liaising with coach companies, not to mention being responsible for everyone getting home safely.'

'My greatest extracurricular achievement was being elected as a Conservative student delegate to the NUS conference. This was the first time a Conservative student had been successful in these elections at my university for two years. I think this is a testament to my own personal conviction and energy, as well as
my ability to inspire a small team to support my campaign and also to debate effectively and persuasively.’

Avoid focusing the whole of your application or interview on the issue of your political or ethical convictions.

Sources of help
Speak to a careers adviser for more advice on if and how to broach the subject of your political and ethical views.

Your rights around political and ethical issues
Except for trade union membership, the law offers no clear protection against discrimination on the basis of political activity and there is no specific legislation aimed at preventing such discrimination.

The Equality Act 2010, which brought together all of the existing regulations that gave protection against any kind of discrimination, does not cover political belief. The Trade Union Reform and Employment Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 makes it illegal to discriminate within employment against individuals because of their trade union membership. For other political activities, The Human Rights Act 1998 may offer some redress.

Politically restricted jobs
Some employers can legitimately restrict political activity in certain roles, in particular the civil service and local government. Civil service posts are designated as either 'politically free' (i.e. no restrictions on political activities) or 'politically restricted'. However, it usually takes a new graduate some years to progress to these positions.

For local government, the following roles are 'restricted' to a greater or lesser extent:
- Those who give regular advice to committees or subcommittees.
- Those who regularly speak on behalf of the council to journalists or broadcasters, such as senior press officers.
- Chief officers, their deputies and others on very senior salary scales.
- Assistants to political groups on councils.

Further Information
Human Rights Act 1998

Political restrictions on local government employees
http://www.lge.gov.uk/lge/core/page.do?pageId=119739

The Trade Union Reform and Employment Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992

TARGETjobs Careers Report
http://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-report
Corporate Responsibility Index
http://www.bitc.org.uk/our-services/benchmarking/cr-index

ethicalcareers.org
http://www.ethicalcareers.org/

Green Guide
http://www.greenguide.co.uk/

80,000 hours
http://www.80000hours.org/