

Eight pieces of advice for early-career professionals looking to enter the nuclear policy field

Sebastian Brixey-Williams, Executive Director, BASIC (British American Security Information Council)

The following is primarily directed at those thinking about entering the NGO / think tank sector, although I'm sure that much of this advice is transferable.

1. Build your profile around a specialism early on. As a hirer, I'm much more interested in candidates with a 'thing' that they have done in depth, rather than in someone who has dipped in and out of lots of things without committing fully to any of them. This is both because it shows me about your passion for certain subjects, and because it demonstrates your ability to do research – and my assumption is that if you can do it with one thing, you could always turn your hand to another.

2. Apply for fellowships. There are lots of fellowships in the field, many of which will cover your costs. I have copied a list of fellowships for everyone's benefit below this email.

3. Develop your wider non-research skills. NGOs, especially smaller ones, are frequently desperate for professional skills around communications, events management, fundraising, and project management. Aside from fundraising, all of these skills can be learnt outside the field and brought in, and actually can often be learned in a more thorough way outside the NGO sector. You can also do cheap or free Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), [Open University](#) courses, or even just use YouTube videos to learn a huge amount for free. People in full research positions, for the most part, know how to do all of these skills because they will inevitably need to line manage people to do these tasks for them. Given how few pure research positions there are in the field at the early-career level, learn them early and well.

4. Have a single set of notes. We've all been there – going to a conference, taking a jumble of notes on paper or a Word document, and then never looking at them again or being unable to make head or tail of them. Instead, set up a scalable note-taking system as early as you can. There are many ways to 'cut the cake' but the idea here is to have one note for one subject, and to add to it every time you go to conferences and talks. Accordingly, you'll develop a rich, layered understanding of any given issue, rather than a scattering of jottings. So for instance, have one note for 'Nuclear Safety' or 'Yemen' or 'Nuclear Deterrence' that you continue to add to, remembering to add references to where certain pieces of information came from, especially if there are opinions mixed into facts. I keep mine in Apple Notes which has the benefit of keeping all my notes in one 'notebook' (I've found this has its pros and cons, as notes are not easy to alphabetise); another popular option is Evernote.

5. Gain mastery of your to-do list. It's tempting to write your to-do list by hand, and if you're in a meeting it's find to jot down some actions in your notebook. But what's important is that that handwritten list ultimately joins into a single, master to-do list, which I would advise you keep digitally, because it means you can update it easily and reprioritise things as you go. I keep a living Word document with bullet points and sub-bullets, organised by themes (e.g. Communications, Fundraising, Emerging Voices Network). There are also softwares which are particularly useful if you're working as a team, such as Asana, Monday,

and Trello. Whichever system you choose, find a system that works and hone it to work for you.

6. See what is unique about you as a strength, not a weakness. It's often tempting to hide those parts of yourself that don't fit the 'International Relations Graduate' mould. Maybe you're a fiction writer in your spare time, or you have graphic design skills, or you used to work in sales, or you're just as interested in nuclear weapons as you are in human rights or overfishing. Rather than sideline parts of yourself because you think that that is what employers are looking for, see if you can find ways to bring all of these parts of yourself together into a more coherent whole. See those unique interests and abilities as strengths to your profile, and champion them. Speaking for myself, I went to art school and studied English and French literature at university – and it gave me an angle on these issues that most people don't have and which I'm sure served me well.

7. Be social, but identify and enforce your boundaries. As you know, a lot of the best work in diplomacy and policy happens during the social hours, around the edges of the formal meetings. Building trust and exchanging ideas with people through coffees, meals, and drinks is a very important aspect of the job. What's important, however, is to always keep in mind that you are still at work, even when you're out socialising; this is especially true if alcohol is involved.

So, have a think about what kinds of professional standards you intend to uphold at all times, and think also about what your boundaries are. Maybe there are certain topics, such as your family, relationship status, or where you grew up, that you decide that you don't want to share with people in a work context, no matter how professionally friendly you become. You can do this with a simple exercise: draw a circle on a piece of paper, and write down on the outside the things you're willing to talk about, and on the inside the things you keep to yourself. It's a personal choice, but it's better to do this consciously than share something that you later regret.

Further, you don't need to drink, and it is important as a field that we normalise and welcome the choice not to drink. There are various reasons that people don't drink or to go to bars and other noisy environments, and as a field we must be accommodating and open to the idea that diplomacy can happen in lots of venues, not just bars.

Finally, if you felt uncomfortable in a situation at work because of the way that someone behaved, I encourage you to raise it with a trusted mentor or friend. Unfortunately, there are people who don't behave appropriately in our field, and if you feel comfortable doing so, raising it is an important way to help forestall this. If you're not sure where to turn and you ever want to raise anything with me, please feel free.

Behaviour-based Approaches to Nuclear Arms Control

Thanks to those who came to Chiara and my talk on Friday night about Behaviour-based Approaches to Nuclear Arms Control, which we promised to circulate some resources from.

- Here is the webpage of the BASIC-ICCS [Programme on Nuclear Responsibilities](#).
- The main report (2020) that outlines the Nuclear Responsibilities Approach is [here](#), which gives a short history of how the language of responsibility has been used in the Nuclear Age, with a particular focus on the United Kingdom, as well as giving an

account of the outcomes of our early frame-testing dialogues with the UK, Japan, Malaysia, the Netherlands and Brazil.

- The Nuclear Responsibilities Toolkit [here](#) (2021) is where we outline our framework that officials can use to think through and articulate their nuclear responsibilities, and our original dialogue process.
- Here is the [compendium](#) (2022) that the team put together on Indian and Pakistani perspectives on crisis communications and nuclear responsibilities.

Career Stage	Opportunity
Early Career	Carnegie Nuclear Policy Conference Next Generation Track
Early Career	Cold War Archives: Research Institute Fellowships
Mid-Career	CSaP: Junior Policy Fellows, University of Cambridge
Early Career	CSIS PONI (US) Conference
Early Career	CSIS PONI Nuclear Scholars Initiative
Early Career	CSR Nuclear Risk Reduction Fellowship
Early Career	Dartmouth College and Sandia National Laboratories: Strategic Force Analysis Boot Camp
Early Career	EUNPDC Next Generation Track
Early Career	FAS New Voices on Nuclear Weapons Fellowship
Early Career	ISODARCO
Mid-Career	Manfred Wörner Seminar
Early Career	NATO Defence College, Rome: Early Career Nuclear Strategists Workshop
Early Career	Réseau Nucléaire et Stratégie – Nouvelle Génération
Early Career	RUSI PONI (UK) Conference
Early Career	Stanley Center Accelerator Initiative
Early Career	SIPRI / the Alva Myrdal Centre for Nuclear Disarmament Armament and Disarmament: Summer School
Early Career	SOIF and N Square: Peace and Security Community of Practice for Changemakers
Early Career	Univeristy of San Diego: Public Policy and Nuclear Threat Boot Camp

Early Career	University of Cambridge: The International Security and Intelligence Programme
Early Career	UNODA: Youth Leader Fund for a World without Nuclear Weapons Learning Programme
Early Career	Wilson Center: Nuclear History Boot Camp
Early Career	VCDNP: Young Women and Next Generation Initiative
Mid-Career	CSIS: Mid-Career Cadre
Mid-Career	Harvard: ACONA Fellowship
Mid-Career	Harvard: Managing the Atom Fellowship, Harvard
Mid-Career	N Square: Fellowship (Closed)
Mid-Career	UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship
All levels	EUNPDC Conference (Brussels)
All levels	Wilton Park (invitation only)