

Using your language skills

Language skills open up a whole world of opportunities. While careers in interpretation and translation might immediately spring to mind, you can apply language skills in an enormous range of careers because communication is an employer's number one requirement.

Translating and interpreting

Translating and interpreting are the art and science of converting one language to another, usually into the native language. Translators work with written materials and interpreters deal with the spoken word. These roles require a high level of fluency and varied vocabulary to convey meaning precisely and capture the original intention for any kind of topic, whether technical, commercial or literary.

Freelancing

The majority of translators and interpreters now work on a freelance basis, since contracting work out is common in commercial enterprises and even public service. Getting started will take persistence and you'll need to network and market yourself, perhaps gaining experience as a volunteer. Learning additional languages can boost your chances significantly, so research which are in demand for your chosen area of specialisation and ensure you're up to speed on current issues. Using professional bodies like the [Institute of Translation and Interpreting \(ITI\)](#), the [Chartered Institute of Linguists \(IoL\)](#) or the [Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence \(AIIC\)](#) and becoming registered helps raise your profile and may offer further training and qualifications. Advertise your services directly through sites like [Find-A-Linguist](#), or consider working for an agency such as the members of the [Association of Translation Companies \(ATC\)](#).

Interpreters also have opportunities in public service settings, such as health, law and local government, with appropriately qualified staff represented by the [National Register of Public Service Interpreters \(NRPSI\)](#) whose 2,350 interpreters cover 101 languages between them (NRPSI, January 2012). [Linguist Lounge](#) also hosts a register for freelance Ministry of Justice opportunities.

Advantages of freelancing include the freedom to choose when and how much to work. You'd effectively be running your own business so must take responsibility for managing your accounts and professional development, finding work and negotiating pay. Furthermore, you may frequently work alone or with unfamiliar colleagues, which requires motivation, discipline and confidence. You may wish to consider translating and interpreting as a combined career, and many freelancers do both. Bear in mind that they need different skill sets and while translation can be done from anywhere with internet connection, interpreters need to be on site so travel is often required.

Employers

Various departments of the UK Civil Service hire interpreters and translators, the majority in [Government Communications Headquarters \(GCHQ\)](#) which recruits directly. Occasional opportunities may be found on the [Civil Service Jobs Online](#) website. Arabic, Asian and African languages are in demand and knowledge of dialects can be useful. The [Security Service \(MI5\)](#) also has a language unit, with Russian, Mandarin, Somali and Pashto currently sought after, although needs change in line with the fluctuating political situation. Each of the [European Union \(EU\)](#) institutions also recruits its own interpreters and translators to cover all 27 of the official languages. Staff posts are highly competitive and among the best-paid for this type of work. Two foreign languages and postgraduate training may be required for entry and these employers often support staff to learn additional languages, especially under-represented languages. There may also occasionally be contractor (freelance) and trainee opportunities, though competition will be fierce. Some large companies employ in-house translators and there may also be jobs within translation agencies though much work will be contracted out to freelancers. Editing and management skills will enhance your prospects. Translation skills are also required to create bilingual dictionaries, though there are few permanent opportunities for lexicographers. The [UK Border Agency \(UKBA\)](#) also draws upon a pool of specially trained freelance interpreters. Languages spoken by minority and immigrant communities in the UK are more in demand especially African and Asian languages and, more recently, Romanian and Bulgarian.

Further study

Although knowledge and ability are the essential prerequisites, further study is often a real asset for interpreting and translating. Some employers may also prefer candidates with professionally accredited postgraduate qualifications. To gain entry to one of the many available postgraduate courses, you will need a sound knowledge of at least one other language. This does not necessarily mean you must have an undergraduate degree in languages, and indeed a background in an area such as law, engineering, medicine or science can improve your career prospects. Choose a course carefully, taking into account the content of the course and employer requirements.

For more information, see [translator](#) and [interpreter](#) and [about postgrad study](#).

Further information

[Directorate General for Translation \(DGT\)](#)

[Directorate General for Interpretation](#)

[Aquarius Directory of Translators and Interpreters](#)

[International Federation of Translators](#)

Teaching and education

A great way to share your love of languages with others and ensure you use your skills regularly is to teach. Depending on the setting you choose, you may work with children, adults or both, towards a variety of goals, from passing exams to getting ready for holidays abroad or conducting business negotiations.

Teaching in schools

Modern foreign languages teachers are currently in demand in secondary schools, with extra financial support on offer for training. The most common languages are French, German and Spanish and you would use your language skills to a great extent in most lessons as a [secondary school teacher](#). In Wales, Welsh is also widely taught as either a first or second language, plus Gaelic-medium and Irish-medium education is on the rise in Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively.

Currently, there is no shortage of [primary school teachers](#). However, since the majority of schools offer language tuition, with French the most popular, your skills could be attractive. Bear in mind that primary teachers must cover all subjects, so you may not spend much time speaking the language. For more information visit [Primary Languages](#). You'll need to gain qualified teacher status (QTS) to teach in any state school and details are available at [Training and Development Agency for Schools \(TDA\)](#).

Teaching English as a foreign language

Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) is a worldwide industry. Working as an [English as a foreign language teacher](#) can be a lifelong career, but is also a popular choice for gap years and vacation work. Language schools are found in all major cities and often in popular tourist destinations, especially those offering educational holidays for groups of young people. You don't necessarily need to speak your students' language, although it may be helpful, particularly for finding work overseas. Similarly, relevant qualifications are not always required, but do enhance your prospects. Internationally-recognised short courses such as the CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults) are offered by a range of providers. Pay and conditions vary, but you could supplement your income and build experience with one-to-one private tuition.

Further education lecturing

Further education (FE) colleges for students aged over 16 offer many language courses, including GCSE, AS and A-level. Many also run leisure courses for adults, from beginners to advanced level. Major European languages remain the most popular, but courses in Russian, Arabic, Chinese and Japanese are increasingly available. Some colleges offer full-time study, mainly for 16 to 18 year-olds, but the sector has many part-time courses which often leads to sessional teaching contracts. This gives the advantage of flexibility, but jobs may not be secure over the long-term. For qualifications required by FE lecturers and more information, see [further education lecturers](#).

Higher education lecturing

University degrees frequently offer languages in combination with other subjects such as law or business, as well as traditional language degrees with their in-depth study of foreign language and literature. Courses often cover social, historical and political aspects or linguistics. This can provide an opportunity to teach your language at an advanced level, though beginners' courses are widely available too. An enormous array of world languages, both ancient and modern, are studied at UK institutions, but the most numerous are, unsurprisingly, the major European languages. See [higher education lecturer](#).

Freelancing

There are many freelance opportunities to teach languages, from sessional work in FE colleges or adult education centres to being a private language tutor to individuals or commercial organisations. You may juggle a range of contracts and even combine this with some translating or interpreting. Flexibility, time management and organisation will be important to maximise opportunities and you may need to travel. Bear in mind that there is likely to be more work in term-time and this may affect your earning potential.

International officers

Universities and some colleges have a department dealing with international matters. Responsibilities might include recruiting overseas students which may involve travelling to education fairs, dealing with overseas agents, handling European funding and exchanges, and arranging partnerships. A further aspect involves supporting international students and assisting with paperwork for visas, which is sometimes integrated into wider Student Services teams or the Students' Union. There is no set route into this career - some are academics and others administrators, many of whom have lived and worked or studied abroad. An ability to speak languages could help make students feel comfortable. Chinese students form one of the biggest international groups in the UK, so knowledge of the language or culture would be an asset.

Further information

[Graduate Teacher Training Registry \(GTTR\)](#) - clearing house for applications to teacher training

[Teach in Scotland](#)

[UKCISA: UK Council for International Student Affairs](#) - supporting international students in the UK

[British Universities' International Liaison Association \(BUILA\)](#) - professional body for HE staff involved in international activities

[The British Council](#) - UK's international cultural relations body, supporting teaching of English

Government and public administration

Working for the government often appeals to graduates who want to make a contribution to society or the community. Although language skills may not be called for constantly, even teams that deal solely with domestic or local issues can benefit from knowledge of community languages. In departments with an international dimension, opportunities to exercise your language skills will still be variable but potentially more frequent.

Home Civil Service

There are currently almost half a million civil servants across the UK working in 254 departments, agencies and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), each responsible for its own recruitment ([Civil Service](#), January 2012). Graduate entry to most government departments is possible at two levels, the [Civil Service Fast Stream](#) and the operational grade. Entry to the Fast Stream is intensely competitive and the work is at a high level. Language skills are not required of applicants and won't be used at all in some departments. There are many more vacancies at the operational grade, advertised through the [Civil Service Jobs Online](#) website. A degree is not required, though the majority of entrants are graduates.

Various departments may be able to use your linguistic abilities, particularly if staff serve in embassies and UK delegations abroad, and intensive tuition is provided if required. For example, the [Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs \(DEFRA\)](#) has many staff working in Brussels where European languages are an asset.

Local government

According to [The National Centre for Languages \(CILT\)](#), although detailed official figures are not available, there are millions of people living in the UK who speak a first language other than English (CILT, January 2012). Some will not have learned English to a good standard and may need help. As providers of local services, councils need to communicate with all residents effectively, so knowledge of other languages will help to forge positive and trusting relationships. Staff whose roles involve direct information provision and customer service may be able to use their language skills, even if they are only at a basic level. Community languages are most likely to be needed in health promotion, welfare and support jobs, as well as community liaison and outreach. Languages in demand vary according to the location, size and background of immigrant communities. Commonly spoken languages include Chinese and South East Asian and Eastern European ones.

See [local government officer](#) for more information.

Diplomatic service

The [Foreign and Commonwealth Office \(FCO\)](#) recruits graduates every year to the Fast Stream for the Diplomatic Service. An aptitude for foreign languages is an

asset, but most recruits are not language graduates. You will be given intensive language training before any overseas posting, the first of which comes after two to three years in London. Most posts abroad involve dealing with representatives of overseas governments, explaining British foreign policy and negotiating particular issues, or promoting exports and assisting trade. The [Diplomatic Service Economist](#) scheme recruits several additional economics graduates annually.

Institutions of the European Union (EU)

All the [European Union \(EU\)](#) institutions recruit staff through the [European Personnel Selection Office \(EPSO\)](#) using open competitions. There are opportunities for graduates of any discipline to obtain a wide range of general administration posts. Details of competitions for traineeships are available from the [European Commission Traineeships Office \(Bureau de Stages\)](#). The UK government is keen for more UK nationals to apply for posts within the [European Commission Civil Service](#) and a good level in a second EU language is required.

There are numerous satellite employers surrounding the institutions of the EU. These include trade associations, pressure groups, political consultancies, law firms and media and PR agencies. Most vacancies are filled by networking or speculative applications, although some are advertised in the local press or specialist journals.

Other international organisations

English is one of the official working languages of the [United Nations \(UN\)](#), but vacancies for recently qualified graduates in the UN and its agencies, e.g. the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation \(UNESCO\)](#) or the World Health Organisation (WHO) are rare. Posts in administration demand considerable practical experience, as well as high academic achievement. Successful applicants often have postgraduate experience and/or relevant work experience. Other international organisations include the [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation \(NATO\)](#) and the [International Atomic Energy Agency \(IAEA\)](#).

See [working abroad](#) for further information.

Further information

[Court of Justice of the European Communities](#)

[European Parliament \(UK Office\)](#)

[Northern Ireland Civil Service \(Recruitment Service\)](#)

[Local Government Jobs](#)

Business services

Foreign language skills can be a significant asset in the commercial sector, even if they are rarely a requirement. In increasingly globalised businesses, speaking the buyer's language helps attract overseas clients. Naturally, you need to

demonstrate a range of skills to suit the role and industry you're aiming for but communication, along with commercial awareness and organisational skills, will be useful everywhere. Research companies and exploit any opportunity to use your language skills once you are employed to get noticed and progress in your career.

Marketing and selling

Look for job titles such as export sales assistant/manager, or for companies with overseas clients. You may be based in the UK, but you are likely to have regular contact with overseas clients and there may be opportunities to travel abroad. Also see [sales executive](#) and [marketing executive](#).

Purchasing and buying

Many companies source raw materials, components and equipment globally, contacting suppliers to obtain quotations, negotiate prices and draft contracts. See [industrial buyer](#) and [retail buyer](#).

Conference, exhibition, and event organising

International conferences are big business. Planning trade fairs and other promotional events is also a growth area. See [event organiser](#) and [conference centre manager](#) for further information.

Secretarial work

Bilingual administrators combine secretarial and language skills to interpret, translate or summarise information and make practical arrangements for meetings and travel. High-level secretarial skills are as important as your language ability. See [secretary/administrator](#) for more information.

Banking

Some major banking groups have a branch network overseas and assist trade across national boundaries. Investment banks with international interests are based mainly in Britain, Europe, the USA and Japan. Specialist departments work to invest the bank's funds in international ventures. See [banker](#) for more information.

Law

While law firms consider language skills an asset they will, of course, be looking for legal skills and qualifications. Larger law firms, particularly those in the City, are international and have offices throughout the world. They employ translators and interpreters as necessary, but staff with language skills may be in a better position to deal with international cases or to get overseas postings. For more information on working in the legal profession, see [law](#).

Patents and trademarks

Patent examiners need a scientific, technical or engineering background. It is sometimes useful to know European languages at a conversational level. The [European Patent Office \(EPO\)](#), requires a good knowledge of at least two of the official EU languages (English, French and German). Patent agents, who apply for the granting of patents, may find these useful too. Also see [patent examiner](#) and [patent agent](#).

Accountancy

Accountants working within international businesses are responsible for financial reporting, budgeting and planning. They also play a key role in operational decision-making. Multinational communications are facilitated significantly by language skills. Increasing centralisation of core functions such as finance means accountants are highly likely to deal with colleagues, customers and suppliers overseas.

Large accountancy firms audit and advise clients with international businesses, which may require them to audit the company's business and transactions in all its offices abroad. See [chartered accountant](#) and [chartered certified accountant](#), [chartered management accountant](#) and [chartered public finance accountant](#).

Insurance

Many larger insurance companies have overseas departments. Initially, graduates are likely to take professional exams and gain experience but, after this, overseas postings are a realistic option.

Much overseas business is reinsurance, which spreads the risk for major insured losses such as natural or shipping disasters between two or more companies. Larger or specialist firms of insurance brokers advise on and arrange insurance worldwide. See [banking and finance](#) for further details.

Further information

[Intellectual Property Office \(IPO\)](#)

[Association of International Accountants \(AIA\)](#)

[The National Audit Office \(NAO\)](#)

Museums and libraries

Knowledge of a language is vital in some specialist areas of the information, heritage and culture sector. For example, if you work as a subject specialist for modern languages in an academic library or in the regional department of a museum. Otherwise, opportunities to use your languages are limited. You therefore need to do careful research to discover roles which would use your language skills frequently.

Library and information management

If your first degree is not in the field of librarianship or information management, you will need a postgraduate diploma for entry into this profession. Librarians and information managers work in all sectors including public, academic, scientific, government departments, business, charity, law, schools and more. Throughout all these sectors language competence can be useful in cataloguing and assessing foreign language materials and in helping users who do not speak English or do not speak it well. It also increases opportunities to work abroad in all sectors and to volunteer for work in developing countries. Information scientists research and exploit information, so language skills enable them to uncover a greater wealth of resources. See [academic librarian](#), [public librarian](#) and [information officer](#) for more detailed information.

Museums

Major museums like [The British Museum](#) have regional departments including Oriental, Western European, and more, where appropriate languages can be important. The [Imperial War Museum](#) and other military museums like some recruits to speak German, French, Italian or Japanese. Provincial museums, however, seldom have language requirements.

Museums run all kinds of education programmes and languages can sometimes be useful here, or for arranging to take exhibitions abroad or bringing exhibits to the UK. Museum knowledge and skills would always be essential for the limited and competitive opportunities available and many recruits hold postgraduate qualifications. See [heritage manager](#) and [museum education officer](#).

Further information

[Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals \(CILIP\)](#)
[Museums Association \(MA\)](#)

Hospitality and tourism

Whether you prefer to work at home or abroad, hospitality and tourism offer a variety of opportunities to use and develop your language skills. A wide range of casual or seasonal work is also available, which can help you develop and build your language skills for other careers.

Travel and tourism

The travel and tourism industry includes businesses like tour operators, travel agencies, business travel specialists, villa rental companies, airports, airlines, ferry operators, tourist boards and local authority tourist departments. If you are competent in a foreign language, you may be at an advantage for many posts. Though a lot of visitors to the UK speak English, there is a growing awareness in

Britain that we could do more to welcome tourists if staff across the leisure and hospitality industry had better language skills. Entry-level positions may not always require a degree, but language skills can be an excellent way to get noticed and build a career.

Many companies use a [tour manager](#) to accompany groups and ensure all arrangements throughout the trip run smoothly. Language skills would be useful when liaising with accommodation, attractions and restaurants and knowledge of culture, history and the country would be essential when pointing out places of interest to the group.

Seasonal jobs are also available on cruise ships which often have all the facilities of a town, with employees in virtually every sector, from housekeeping to entertainment. Even some business functions such as human resources, finance and IT can provide shipboard assignments which increase your chances to travel and use your languages. Roles would rarely be graduate-specific and careers at sea tend to be relatively short-lived, but these skills can easily be transferred.

Some airlines and holiday companies recruit graduates of any discipline to graduate development programmes in departments such as marketing, finance and information management. Foreign languages will make you more effective, particularly in areas involving direct contact with customers or overseas companies. Outside the graduate programme, staff with languages might work in air terminals, or as a [holiday representative](#), and an additional modern language is sometimes needed for [air cabin crew](#).

[Tourism officers](#) develop plans to attract visitors to a specific site or region and language skills would be useful for such roles in overseas destinations or to promote the UK to foreign tourists. Marketing and sales skills are important in the work, but employers are increasingly concerned with the sustainability agenda. [VisitBritain](#) has an overseas network of outlets, from which it markets Britain as a holiday destination. Occasionally there are vacancies for graduates who are friendly, customer-focused and fluent in at least two languages.

Hotels and catering

Foreign language skills are not usually a requirement for work in British hotels, but having another language may be an asset in establishments and destinations with a high proportion of foreign guests. Applying to international groups with hotels in several countries will increase your chances of overseas postings and language skills would be a further advantage.

The roles most likely to use language skills are front of house, such as reception, where excellent communication and customer care skills are essential. It is common for hotels to hire staff from diverse backgrounds, which means language skills and cultural awareness may also help in supervisory roles.

Some major hotel groups and restaurant chains operate graduate training schemes, but it is common in this industry for graduates to begin their careers in operational roles. Direct experience, from casual jobs or university placements, is highly valued and sometimes a pre-requisite for management training. See [hotel manager](#) and [restaurant manager](#).

For more information on other roles, check out [hospitality](#).

Further information

[Association of British Travel Agents \(ABTA\)](#)

[The Tourism Society](#)

[Institute of Hospitality](#)

Media and publishing

Few people fulfil the journalist's dream of becoming a BBC foreign correspondent, but many other media organisations have offices around the world. Since communication is key to many media jobs, having foreign language skills can be a major advantage.

Advertising and market research

The largest London-based advertising agencies are becoming part of international groups. Advertising needs to be tailored to suit different cultural contexts, and sometimes there is a role for UK-based staff who can use other languages when ideas are being exchanged. Some overseas companies use UK advertising agencies to promote their products and services in the UK. Market research agencies may undertake work overseas for British clients or take commissions in the UK for foreign clients. See [marketing, advertising and PR](#) for more information.

Broadcasting

The [BBC World Service](#) is renowned for its unique programmes in a wide range of languages. Candidates for World Service traineeships should have detailed knowledge of the countries they aim to broadcast to, and have spent time living and working abroad. Your foreign languages would be regarded as a useful asset rather than an essential requirement. Programme assistants in a language service require knowledge of the relevant language.

[BBC Monitoring](#) is part of the World Service and listens to radio and television programmes from around the world. It recruits language monitors with a command of one or more foreign languages. The ability to translate into good English, familiarity with the relevant country and its culture, and a good understanding of world affairs are necessary. The BBC also employs linguists for international sales, marketing, programme research and website translations.

Journalism

A few British journalists work abroad either as foreign correspondents or with news agencies such as [Reuters](#) or [Bloomberg](#), where knowledge of both language and culture or business is required. Some graduates, especially those with unusual languages, can get jobs on academic and trade journals dealing with particular parts of the world.

See [newspaper journalist](#), [magazine journalist](#) and [broadcast journalist](#).

Publishing

A large proportion of books published in Britain are exported, especially educational books. Working in this international field is akin to export sales and marketing. As a result of modern technology, the printing industry is increasingly operating in an international market and graduates may be recruited in sales, marketing, production and finance. Speaking another language may benefit a [publishing rights manager](#) when negotiating overseas deals and following up throughout the production process, though not essential. See [publishing](#) for further information.

Further information

[Institute of Practitioners in Advertising \(IPA\)](#)

[Market Research Society \(MRS\)](#)

World Radio TV Handbook: The Directory of Global Broadcasting, Sara Gilbert, Bernd Trutenau, Professor John Nelson, WRTH Publications Ltd., 2012 (0955548144) (published annually)

[Publishers Association \(PA\)](#)

[National Council for the Training of Journalists \(NCTJ\)](#)

Science, engineering and technology

If you are studying science, engineering or technology you may also have the option to study a modern language, or perhaps you already speak other languages. You may wonder about opportunities for using both your technical or science degree and your languages in your career, and to give you an edge over rival candidates.

Companies in sectors such as biotechnology, manufacturing, IT or engineering are likely primarily to be interested in the technical content of your degree and your work experience. Language skills are a useful addition, with companies increasingly involved in joint ventures or setting up projects and winning contracts overseas. In larger organisations especially, you are likely to work in multicultural or multinational teams as employers seek to recruit talented staff from all over the world. Your language skills may also put you in the best position to get work abroad, if this appeals to you.

A good grasp of the language is important for technical discussions, where getting the fine detail of a design specification right, or understanding the contents of a scientific research paper accurately, is essential. Contact is always more immediate, and sometimes more accurate, if you don't have to work with a translator as an intermediary. If you are working in any project leadership or training function, being able to speak to your staff in their own language has clear benefits. At a more down-to-earth level, it is simply good to be able to socialise and communicate well with all your colleagues, and things usually run more smoothly that way.

If you have technological aptitude and are good at spotting opportunities, work as an [IT consultant](#) might appeal. Whether you're consulting with colleagues in your own organisation or working for external clients, multinational projects are likely and the ability to build relationships quickly is essential. This makes languages a real asset. Consultants are the interface between the business and contracted hardware providers or software specialists. Being able to find innovative solutions that improve efficiency is more important than having detailed technical knowledge, so applicants from all disciplines are welcome. Job titles vary, with terms like business technology specialist reflecting the balance of commercial nous and technical talent required for the work. Employers who aren't specialist consulting firms sometimes have difficulty attracting high calibre candidates, so it's worth looking for opportunities across a range of industry sectors to increase your chances of success.

Many roles in research and development can make good use of language skills and draw from a wide range of subjects, because teams tend to be multidisciplinary. Bringing together skilled and knowledgeable staff from varied backgrounds makes for a stimulating working environment. This field suits graduates who enjoy the challenge of involvement in cutting edge developments and like seeing results. Some projects may be completed quickly, but patience and the ability to maintain motivation are important as some endeavours may never come to fruition. [Product/process development scientists](#) work alongside other professionals, such as research scientists and [manufacturing engineers](#), to devise and implement innovations or improvements.

For more information about the wide range of technical jobs you could combine with language skills, take a look at various [industry insights](#), including:

- [construction](#);
- [environment and agriculture](#);
- [engineering](#);
- [energy and utilities](#);
- [information technology](#);
- [manufacturing](#);
- and [science](#).

Transport and logistics

Management jobs in transport and distribution companies are open to numerate graduates of any discipline, and an additional European language is valuable. Trainees may move to managing distribution centres in mainland Europe or marketing the company's services abroad. Further information can be found in [transport and logistics](#).

Logistics and distribution

Companies of all sizes nowadays make use of an increasingly globalised network to obtain supplies and distribute goods, with [logistics and distribution managers](#) taking the lead on ensuring efficiency. Large businesses with overseas manufacturing operations or multiple suppliers are keen to maintain standards and hiring staff with linguistic abilities and cultural awareness facilitates monitoring and negotiations. The remit is far broader than many people assume, so in this function you could take responsibility for planning, manufacturing, quality assurance, contracts, storage and transportation of goods, as well as systems management.

Shipping services

The [Baltic Exchange](#) in London is the world centre for matching cargoes with ships. You don't have to be a graduate to get into shipbroking, but firms increasingly prefer to take graduates. Some shipbroking firms also act as ships' agents through their representatives in foreign ports. They deal with local operational matters on behalf of a ship's owners. Knowledge of one or more foreign languages (particularly Greek, Norwegian and Japanese) is helpful, although English is the language of international shipping.

There are also opportunities in commercial shipping operations, collectively known as the Merchant Navy in the UK. Although officers may not require a degree, these professions can offer significant responsibility and extensive international travel through a life at sea as part of a truly international community. On shore roles include marine specialisations of surveying and law as well as administrative work in shipping companies. Languages can be put to good use in this sector both on land and at sea, see the [Merchant Navy Training Board \(MNTB\)](#).

Freight forwarding

Freight forwarders offer a specialist service to importers and exporters. They arrange documentation, customs clearance, packaging and insurance, understand international rates and routes, and may specialise in certain commodities or regions of the world. Most firms are small and have few vacancies. Language skills are a great asset when coupled with analytical, negotiation and problem-solving skills. For more information, see [freight forwarder](#).

Further information

[British International Freight Association \(BIFA\)](#)

[The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport \(CILT\) UK](#)

[International Chamber of Shipping and International Shipping Federation](#)

Charities and voluntary work

There are many voluntary organisations that provide overseas aid in the form of health, education, agriculture and construction projects. Although a major objective of these organisations is to devolve as much management and project development to local people as possible, there are still opportunities for volunteers and paid workers with relevant skills such as teaching, health care, or crafts and trades. Experienced people might become involved in setting up these projects and acting as links with the head offices of aid organisations.

Most permanent staff employed by voluntary organisations have administrative and overseas experience prior to recruitment. Those working as [international aid/development workers](#) may bring a range of skills to the role, as the remit varies hugely according to the charity, location and project aims. Staffing is often limited and you must be prepared to be flexible and take on diverse responsibilities. Even if you work as an engineering or health professional, for example, you may need to take on basic administrative tasks or pitch in with cleaning and maintenance.

Young people without significant experience are also welcomed onto volunteer programmes in many countries, with numerous opportunities in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Organisations such as [Voluntary Service Overseas \(VSO\)](#) have established projects where you would have local support from the outset. Short assignments of three to six months are often available, making volunteering a viable option for a gap year, although you may be expected to pay travel costs.

Overseas projects provide ample opportunity to apply your language skills and even if you don't speak the local indigenous languages, there are still many parts of the world where French and Spanish, as well as English, are widely spoken.

Within the UK, there is a range of charities and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) where the knowledge of other languages is helpful, especially those dealing with refugees and asylum seekers whose English language skills may not be strong. If you want a hands-on role which involves you in delivering a service to the target community, jobs such as [advice worker](#), [community development worker](#) and [youth worker](#) might appeal. Postgraduate or vocational qualifications may sometimes be required, but experience and commitment are also valued which makes volunteering a worthwhile step towards paid employment in the sector.

Office-based support roles would be less likely to utilise language skills, but this may be possible in some organisations or for particular projects. Working as a

[charity fundraiser](#) might involve contacting a wide range of potential donors or organising events in a variety of locations, though budget restrictions would keep travel to a minimum. The scope of responsibilities differs with the size of the charity. If you join a small organisation you may be involved in all aspects of the work whereas larger charities may have more specialised teams. As a [charity officer](#) you may be concerned with duties such as lobbying, recruiting volunteers or completing bids for grants and funding. See the [charities and voluntary work](#) sector for further information.

Further information

[Community Service Volunteers \(CSV\)](#)

[Do-it](#) – database of voluntary opportunities in the UK

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