

Audio Transcript

Pete Alcock - students and Social Policy studies

Julia Waldman: What do you see students doing with their social policy studies?

Professor Pete Alcock: Interestingly, let's take the empirical approach to that first of all, if you look at what happens to social policy graduates when they leave, they enter quite a wide range of different professions and activities, and in part of course because social policy embraces as I mentioned before a number of different institutional dimensions, central government, local government, public sector, private sector, and it also embraces a number of different areas, health, education, and so on. So there's quite a range, you know, you can do social policy in a number of different forums, and you can take it forward in a number of different career paths. Having said that, what quite a number of students do is they do elect to do more of it, in other words a three year degree in social policy isn't necessarily the end of higher education and the study of social policy it's possible to do post graduate degrees including post graduate research. And of course the routine to academic social policy becoming an academic in social policy is often through doing further study. In particular these days in doing a PHD. And of course what that links into is research, and as I mentioned the empirical dimension of social policy involves doing research on how policy is implemented and whether it works or not and quite a lot of work therefore and quite a lot of social policy graduates go into that kind of empirical research field, they become researchers working in universities, but actually the majority of them not working in universities but working in local government, or in the central government or in the health service or in other agencies, in other words the agencies that are delivering social policy want the empirical research which helps them decide what policies are working and what policies are not and then social policy students can then get jobs doing that. They can get jobs doing the research but also of course quite a number of them get jobs as it were, doing the business. They become health administrators; they become administrators within local government, housing officers and so on, so they can go into the delivery of social policy as well. Operating sometimes alongside as it what you might think kind of the professionals in those areas in other words the teachers and the doctors and the nurses alongside are the organizers, the administrators, the researchers, the managers working alongside them. So quite a number of people go into those kind of managerial, administrative, organizational aspects of social policy development and of course not only in the public sector but also in the private

sector and the community sector. Quite a lot of our students here in Birmingham end up working for big voluntary organizations in Birmingham both on a paid basis and of course to some extent on a voluntary basis. What many students both start out studying social policy and I think finish up studying social policy because they want to make the world a better place. That commitment to welfare is a moral and an normative commitment for these students and therefore once they've finished studying social policy they want to use the knowledge that they've got to make the world a better place. You can do that through research, you can do that through administration but you can actually also do that through vulgarly commitment and quite a lot of our social policy students continue to make a vulgarly commitment through a vulgarly organization, through working in the local community, through various kind of informal activities and in some ways I think that's one of the great attractions of social policy. It gives you both some of the intellectual tools and skills to make the world a better place, it also gives you the moral value base to want to do that. Which is why I came into social policy, because I thought that I could make the world a better place. It's what all of us I think tell our students that they should carry with them for the most part I think, it works. Social policy students do leave with both the skills and commitment to carry on promoting welfare.