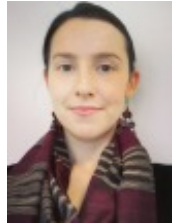


A greater proportion of social science graduates are employed shortly after leaving university than STEM or arts graduates.

LSE blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2013/11/07/what-do-social-science-graduates-do/

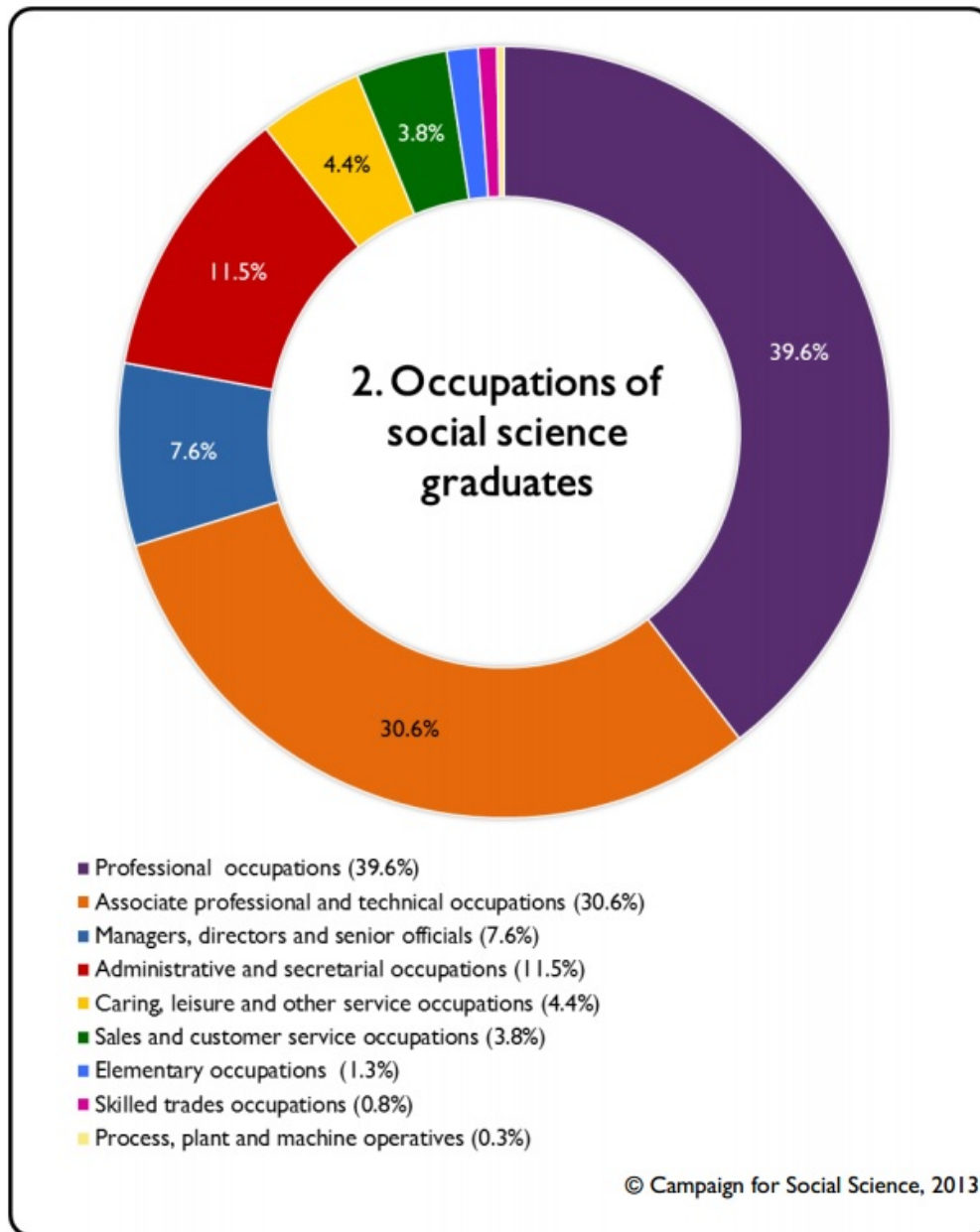
11/7/2013

Roses Leech-Wilkinson presents the findings from a recent report which underlines the strong career prospects of social science graduates. This data does well to challenge some negative stereotypes on the usefulness of social science disciplines, but falling student numbers could already be leading to staff reductions in social science departments. It is therefore a pressing concern to make visible the vital offerings of social science approaches for society and the economy.



A new report published by the [Campaign for Social Science](#) last week [made news for challenging some common myths](#) about the careers prospects of social science graduates. 'What Do Social Science Graduates Do?' analyses data from a recent [HESA survey](#) to reveal that a significantly greater proportion of social science graduates (84.2%) are employed, 3.5 years after graduating, than graduates in STEM (77.8%) or arts-humanities subjects (78.7%).

Among those employed moreover a higher proportion of social science graduates are in 'professional, scientific and technical activities' (19.8%) or are already 'managers, directors and senior officials' (7.6%) than their peers from STEM (10.9% and 3.6%, respectively) or arts-humanities (14.2% and 6.2%). More social science graduates too can also be found in 'financial and insurance activities': (7.1%, compared with 3.7% from STEM, and 3.9% from arts-humanities).



Source: *'What Do Social Science Graduates Do?' (2013)*

It is high time we laid to rest the popular myth that social science graduates are unemployable or work solely as teachers. Not including those with education degrees, the proportion of social scientists working in education (10.4%) is considerably smaller than the proportion of STEM (14.3%) or arts-humanities graduates (25.4%). Instead social science graduates are shown to work in a wide range of industries right across the public and private sectors. As the *'i'* reported it, "Social science graduates defying 'layabout' myth"; the BBC proclaimed more boldly that "Social science graduates 'have best job prospects'".

Whose myths are these anyway? Clearly, given the research findings, savvy employers have left them behind. But as increased tuition fees and general austerity have led to an [increased demand for directly vocational degree courses](#), there is a danger that prospective students and their parents continue to believe that degrees in sociology, criminology, human geography and other non-vocational social science subjects will leave them less equipped to find high-level work. On the contrary, social scientists are trained to understand people, institutions and processes of change holistically, from behavioural, psychological and economic perspectives. Jobs in management, social research, finance, advertising, town planning and many others require employees who can analyse problems on individual, institutional and societal levels – skills social scientists offer in spades.

It is a strategic objective for the Campaign for Social Science to ensure a good supply of graduates to fill the many and varied jobs where a social science background is useful. This report comes as part of a series of Campaign investments to this end. We [present the benefits of a social science career](#) to schools and sixth form colleges and engage with big social science users such as government departments and management consultancies. We [comment in the media](#) when social sciences are unhelpfully or misleadingly portrayed, and we are about to embark on our third internal survey of social science departments in Higher Education Institutions across the UK, assessing their capacity and capability to meet demand for student places.

The first two such surveys, as yet unpublished, reveal reductions to staff numbers in 2011 and 2012, particularly in universities outside the Russell and 1994 groups. Respondents ascribed these to falling student numbers, reductions in government funding and high staff costs. The [£19.5 million Q-Step funding pledged by the Nuffield Foundation, ESRC and HEFCE](#) for quantitative skills training is timely but will benefit just fifteen universities across the UK. Since the introduction of £9,000 fees, full-time undergraduate income makes up the bulk of teaching funds (see the chart on slide 6 of [HEFCE's presentation at the recent HE Expo](#)), so it is imperative for universities too that student numbers are protected.

We all have a role to play in tackling prejudices about our disciplines that might otherwise discourage applicants. While we hope the report on graduate employment will be widely circulated among university admissions staff, A-level students and their parents, researchers and practitioners too must be more active in promoting their research findings to government and the media, making visible the vital offerings of social science to our society and economy. Signing up to the Campaign's [database of experts available for media comment](#) and responding to our calls for evidence for policy submissions are just two ways to go about this.

The point of breaking stereotypes about the employability of social science graduates is not to score points against other disciplines: as the Minister for Universities and Science, David Willetts MP, remarked on Monday 28 October at the [Campaign's inaugural Annual Lecture](#), "there are no significant problems in the world now that are going to be tackled by people working within one disciplinary framework ... be it climate change or demographic change or terrorism." Rather it is to help ensure that social science is taken seriously by policy-makers, employers and the wider public. It is in everybody's interests to do so.

So next time you hear the one about the scientist who tipped the social scientist for the pizza, encourage others not to swallow it. It's a public health risk – long past its best.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Impact of Social Science blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

About the Author

Roses Leech-Wilkinson works for the Campaign for Social Science. She is the author of their new report, '[What Do Social Science Graduates Do?](#)'. Besides her work at the Campaign she is a visiting caseworker to migrant detainees in immigration removal centres.

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