

PubAffairs Profile

Name	Kerry Neilson
Job Title	Head of Office @ Europe Analytica
What academic /professional qualifications do you have?	B.Ed PG Dip European Policy Law and Management
How did you get into Public Affairs?	<p>I came into public affairs by a rather circuitous route. This is my second career. I taught primary age children for ten years, a fair bit of that time outside the UK. I was always interested in politics, particularly what goes on in Europe so when I had to make the decision to either start looking for senior management posts in teaching or move on, I chose the latter.</p> <p>I had done an OU business course whilst working in Madrid and from that knew I wanted an additional dimension to any new career than simply pure business management. So I decided to combine the business with European politics and did a post-graduate course, which gave me a bit of both.</p> <p>Over the course of the year I was studying, I discovered exactly what routes were available to me. It became apparent that I would need to be in Brussels to find work here.</p> <p>I actually went back to teaching for a little while to earn enough money to base myself out here to look for work. That way I was able to go to companies and offer to work for free for a couple of months just to get my foot in the door. The other route open to new graduates is the internship programme offered by the Commission — unfortunately I was too old as you have to be under thirty .</p>
What others careers did you consider?	I considered corporate training as another option. I had done a fair amount of staff development work when I was teaching. But in the end public affairs work was the better option and I still get to do some client training in the job I do now.
How did you get your current job?	Just prior to coming out to Brussels to look for work, a friend who knew I was looking for something out here, introduced me to the Lib Dem candidate for my constituency who happened to own a small public affairs practice in Brussels. The three of us met for dinner. I brought my CV along and offered to work for free. A couple of weeks later I was offered an internship for three months with the additional bonus of an allowance to help cover my costs. After the three-month stage they offered me a permanent post. I gradually built up my experience until the point where I was ready to run the office. I think probably being a bit older when I started in the industry helped me to move up the ladder faster than is usual. So it was very much a case of being in the right place at the right time
What characteristics do you need to work in Public Affairs?	Resilience when you re starting out. I m not sure what the UK situation is but the Brussels public affairs scene is competitive and there are lots of people all chasing the same few jobs so you get a fair few knock backs in the beginning. Shyness would be something of a handicap. Well-developed social skills that help you make connections and form groups and alliances are vital, as is the ability to assimilate and communicate information in as concise a manner as possible. You

	<p>should always have at the front of your mind that your clients are generally not politics experts. They are experts in their particular field so have a high level of technical knowledge. This means you have to keep explanations simple without being simplistic.</p>
<p>What skills are most important in your job?</p>	<p>Multi-tasking is an important skill. I have clients to deal with, I need to liaise with my Directors so we can keep new business coming in and manage the existing clients efficiently. On top of that I supervise the day-to-day running of the office which can be anything from making sure we re working effectively as a team to making sure someone calls the plumber if the tap is leaking!</p> <p>A thorough knowledge of the subject is vital as well as the ability to communicate that knowledge appropriately and the capacity to target the information according to the audience (client, Member of Parliament, Minister, Commission official, the press and the public). My written communication skills are put into use regularly as a lot of our work involves helping clients to produce position papers to inform key stakeholders of their opinions. It s also important to listen carefully to what others involved in the debate are saying, even if their position is different to our own.</p> <p>Finally, as I mentioned earlier, well-developed social skills are vital in this particular industry. Lots of stakeholders are clamouring for a limited amount of attention from decision-makers. In order to make sure your organisation s voice is heard you need to build alliances and make good contacts. This helps to build the company s reputation too and can lead to good business opportunities.</p>
<p>What does your current role entail on a day to day basis?</p>	<p>My day-to-day work is varied. There are some weeks when I m travelling a lot or spending a lot of time in meetings and other weeks when I can spend more time on research and ensuring client knowledge of their issues is up to date. The weeks when the Parliament has committee meetings in Brussels can be hectic as there are lots of different debates to cover and report back on. This is not a nine to five post. Receptions and dinners can stretch out the working day but are an important part of the job.</p>
<p>Which campaign that you have worked on are you most proud of?</p>	<p>There is no specific campaign I would single out but periodically you get to see the results of your work really quickly. On the other hand it can take years to get to a piece of legislation through in the form that you want it to be and then the Council can change it at the last minute with no further debate, which can be disheartening. I think probably what is the most impressive thing about Public Affairs work in Brussels is the way groups work together to influence decision-makers. Of course it may not be the same in all industry areas but my experiences have been very positive.</p>
<p>How do you go about making contacts?</p>	<p>Always have a good supply of cards to exchange so that you can remember who you ve been talking to after the event. Keep the conversation light for an initial contact and follow it up via email or phone as soon as possible after the meeting if you feel there are issues you could support each other on. View everyone you meet as a good contact but be careful not to give the impression that you are working the room (even if you are) as this is really off-putting.</p>
<p>How has networking at PubAffairs helped you?</p>	<p>It has helped me to meet lots of people I didn t know before and it also helps me keep in touch with contacts I have already made but who I don t necessarily see in the course of my working week.</p>
<p>What advice would you give to anyone looking to break into Public Affairs?</p>	<p>Be where the action is! If you want to work in Brussels, find a way of getting yourself out here so you are in a position to hear about jobs. Join as many networking groups as you can, as well as attending conferences and courses, which is another good way of meeting useful contacts. Be prepared to do lots of pro bono work just to get experience and meet potential employers.</p>