

## HISTORY

History is as essential to human society as memory is to an individual. It provides a framework within which complex issues of identity, morality and reality can be argued out. It also offers reference points for speculation about what might be possible in the future. History is an intellectual discipline which requires the rigour of a scientist, the persistence of a detective and the imagination of a novelist. It is a subject which offers numerous areas of specialisation and one which generates enthusiasm and commitment. When surveyed, history graduates comment on their enjoyment of the subject and its lasting effects on their intellectual and professional confidence and abilities.

### WHAT SKILLS DOES THE STUDY OF HISTORY DEVELOP?

The study of history involves in-depth analysis of particular historical periods or sequences of events. This builds specific bodies of knowledge which may, in themselves, be necessary for a particular job, but studying history also develops more generic skills which are considered essential for maintaining employability in the job market both now and in the future. Employers often write these skills into job descriptions in terms of analytical ability, problem solving skills, decision-making ability, written and oral communication skills, reading comprehension, sound judgement, creativity, and so on. History graduates can claim the ability to:

- construct a logical argument based on fact
- systematically analyse a complex situation
- understand the dynamics of conflict
- make connections between apparently unrelated events
- make a decision in the context of ambiguous information
- interpret events from various points of view
- be aware of the long-term consequences of decisions
- concentrate and focus on a defined topic
- analyse past events for implications in the present
- discriminate between relevant and irrelevant information
- seek alternative explanations and maintain a questioning attitude

- appraise prevailing social, political and economic belief systems
- evaluate the quality of information provided for the public record

In addition, History graduates demonstrate:

- good written and oral communication skills
- skill in research methods
- attention to detail
- knowledge of referencing and information systems
- persistence and intellectual curiosity
- enthusiasm for their subject - employers tend to value applicants who are passionate and articulate about their interests.

### WHERE DO HISTORY GRADUATES WORK?

History graduates are 'intellectually trained' to work in almost any position which requires the sort of critical thinking skills described above. These can include **administrative** and **managerial** roles. For example, large, multinational companies, such as Unilever, recruit management trainees through university recruitment programmes. Management is all about strategic plans, pragmatic outcomes, the dilemma of the right decision, the enlightenment of past experience, human relationships, and the 'bottom line'. So is history.

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*Areas covered include how degrees and courses relate to employment opportunities, to life/work planning, graduate destination information and current issues or material relevant to the employment scene. Your comments and suggestions always welcomed.*

Positions which specifically require abstract reasoning skills and the ability to analyse large amounts of written information are also highly appropriate for history graduates. **Policy adviser** roles, in particular, demand these skills. Most government departments employ policy advisers, including; the Ministry of Social Development, the Education Review Office, NZ Immigration Service and the Ministry of Education.

Similarly, jobs involving research and report-writing draw on the skills that history graduates have developed - knowing where to look for information, how to access it, how to interpret it and how to present it. Job titles include; **research assistant**, **advisory officer** and **information officer**. Employers include; government departments, local authorities, banks, insurance companies, and educational institutions. History graduates typically have both research and writing skills which can be developed into **contract or freelance writing** projects, including proof-reading and indexing. The website <[www.writerfind.com](http://www.writerfind.com)> lists writers, markets and jobs and includes a NZ link.

Work that involves the communication of information is also suited to the skills of history graduates, particularly **journalism** or **public relations**, although an additional vocational training course is usually required for these jobs. Submitting freelance articles for publication or broadcast can help build up professional credibility.

History is hot, particularly New Zealand history. Partly because the Internet has made historical source material available to an increasingly sophisticated general public, the demand for historical accuracy extends to all forms of the media, including films and computer games. Heritage tourism is a developing niche market. Local historical societies are active and growing. For example the Karori Historical Society, has a website ([www.karorihistory.org.nz](http://www.karorihistory.org.nz)) which contains details of its collection of local historical documents, newsletters, the annual journal, photos, the origins of local street names and so on. Volunteering to help with such organisations can offer excellent opportunities for learning how history translates from an academic discipline to a community resource, and even a marketable product.

**Historical consultants** sell specialised historical knowledge and research skills, typically on a contract or

project basis. Historians can be contracted to research histories of towns, business enterprises, public institutions and even grave sites. Government departments concerned with historical matters have a regular, if intermittent, demand for **contract historians**. The work is competitive (opportunities are often word of mouth) and a Masters degree together with a record of publication are often selection criteria. As well as having high levels of curiosity, contractors need to have excellent written communication skills, good judgement when assessing the reliability of information, and be motivated to think beyond the obvious as historical information can be found in unlikely places. Taking an oral history course offered by the National Library can enhance contractors' skills.

Recent graduate employment surveys demonstrate the variety of jobs that history graduates take up. Across all degree levels, these include:

- a policy analyst
- a medals researcher
- an archives officer
- a university librarian
- a refugee status officer
- a research assistant
- a heritage researcher
- a customer services executive
- an international travel consultant
- an account executive
- a community support worker
- a newspaper journalist

The **Ministry for Culture and Heritage** provides advice to the Government on culture and heritage matters and undertakes activities that support and promote the history and heritage of New Zealand. Its *Reference Group* is responsible for producing *Te Ara: the Encyclopedia of New Zealand* and the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*. A research degree (Masters with a thesis or Honours with a dissertation) would be a requirement for any applicant, including those recruited from time to time to assist with writing. A record of publication is almost essential for all positions. *The History Group* specialises in histories

of state and government activity, war history and other histories of national significance. Permanent staff numbers are small, but, depending on the work flow, there are openings for contract historians, including editors and indexers. *The Heritage Operations Unit* protects and promotes New Zealand's heritage. Although a degree is not essential for junior level positions, a History degree is useful.

The **New Zealand Historic Places Trust Pouhere Taonga** is an agency funded by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage. It is concerned with the management and protection of New Zealand's heritage. The work of the Trust revolves around the Register of Historic Places. The regional offices are staffed by people with a range of technical skills; historians, architects, archaeologists, and Maori heritage advisers, who work closely with their local communities and local authorities. A Masters degree would be a minimum qualification for a historian.

The **Department of Conservation** is responsible for the conservation and maintenance of historic buildings and historic sites on public conservation land. Generally, there is one employee with an historical focus at each of the thirteen conservancies. The Heritage Appreciation Unit contains a team of three scientists, one historian and two archaeologists whose work involves research and planning how best to manage the conservation of the site. When recruiting, the Department looks for a strong interest and commitment to conservation. Some relevant experience as a volunteer with the Department may be helpful.

The **Waitangi Tribunal** is a permanent commission of inquiry whose role is to make recommendations on claims brought by Maori under the Treaty of Waitangi. Within the Waitangi Tribunal Business Unit, the *Research and Inquiry Facilitation*, and *Report Writing and Editorial Assistance* sections are involved with primary historical research. At least a Masters degree in History or Maori Studies is required for both sections. The role of the *Research* staff is complex and exacting. In broad terms, they conduct independent and commissioned research, and carry out thematic analyses of claim issues and collate them into a Statement of Issues. Their enquiry work is facilitative in nature and is aimed towards establishing an evidential base for the Tribunal hearing.

They work co-operatively with the panel members, the legal teams and the claimants. History post-graduates are valued because they already have experience researching, analysing and interpreting primary source material. There is comprehensive in-house training. *Report writers* help Tribunal panels to plan, prepare and finalise their reports. The report is a quasi-judicial piece of work and some knowledge of jurisprudence is helpful. Good analytical and writing skills are essential. Law is a useful complementary subject. Contract report writers are drawn from a pool of experienced people. The link "Working for the Tribunal" on the Tribunal's website is very detailed and informative.

The **Office of Treaty Settlements** is part of the Ministry of Justice and negotiates, on behalf of the Crown, settlement of historical Treaty of Waitangi claims with Maori claimant groups. In general, historian roles require a Masters degree with an emphasis on New Zealand history, but someone with an Honours degree and the right personal qualities could be considered. Writing and analytical ability are important, as is passion and a high level of commitment towards the resolution of historical issues. On the job training is substantive. Law is a useful complementary subject. A Law and History combination could also be appropriate for a policy analyst role.

The **Crown Forestry Rental Trust** is based in Wellington and assists Maori claimants to prepare, present and negotiate claims lodged under the Treaty of Waitangi that could involve Crown Forest Licensed Land. The Trust employs three research facilitators. It also draws on a pool of 20 -30 *contract historians*. The research facilitators work with claimant groups to design and implement research programmes. This includes identifying claim issues, commissioning researchers, liaising intensively with claimants, overseeing production of the reports, and providing quality assurance and support to the contract historians when they present evidence at the Waitangi Tribunal hearings. The Trust looks for History, Anthropology, and Maori Studies graduates, generally with post graduate qualifications; although a very good Bachelors degree would be considered. History graduates are valued for their ability to deconstruct historical documents. All applicants should have a very good work ethic and be passionately committed to assisting with the resolution of Treaty claims.

## MUSEUMS

Museums vary considerably in their size and methods of operating and many maintain a roster of volunteers. Enthusiasm and communication skills are very important as museums move away from the static display of labelled artefacts towards a 'story-telling' approach.

**Te Papa Tongarewa, Museum of New Zealand.** A History degree, ideally with some Anthropology, is relevant for both the Research and the Collections areas. In addition, Master of Museum and Heritage Studies, is almost essential. Opportunities for voluntary work are largely taken up by students from this course who do a practical placement at Te Papa. Previous experience working at a smaller museum is highly desirable, partly because it teaches people how to handle objects and prepare them for exhibition. The Research area includes curators, concept developers, and interpreters, all of whom contribute expertise to the final 'Te Papa experience'. Passion and commitment are valued qualities for applicants, as are clear conceptual thinking, the ability to multitask and cope with pressure, and an aptitude for rigorous scholarship.

**Auckland Museum** maintains ten major collections each of which is overseen by a curator. The History curator's role includes adding to the collections and enhancing the value of existing collections by, for example, researching the biographies of people associated with objects in the collections, as well as developing themes and narratives for exhibitions. Curators are assisted by technicians, whose duties include cataloguing collections and dealing with enquiries. A Bachelor's degree would be considered for a technician role. Working as a volunteer is one of the best ways to get a foot in the door. A background in History could be relevant for other areas of the museum including the Library.

**Regional museums** generally have a local focus and may employ only a single collections manager, if that. Both employees and volunteers need good public relations skills in addition to knowledge about the collections. For example, the Otago Museum is certainly interested in History graduates for its Collections and Research division, but the right attitude and a passion for museum work is the main requirement.

## ARCHIVES

Archives exist to preserve and manage records of permanent value. Many different organisations maintain archives, including libraries and local authorities. The **Wellington City Archives**, for example, is part of the Wellington City Council and employs history graduates as research assistants and archivists. An undergraduate degree is perfectly acceptable, but an additional archive qualification such as the Certificate/Diploma of Archives and Records would be very desirable. Specialised archives tend to require knowledge or experience which is relevant to the particular class of objects in the collection. For example, the **New Zealand Film Archive**, generally employs people with experience of the film industry but a History degree with an emphasis on Twentieth Century history and some library experience could be appropriate for roles involving research, cataloguing and client services.

**Archives New Zealand** is the official guardian of New Zealand's heritage documents and is responsible for both their preservation and their public accessibility. The minimum entry level qualification is a relevant undergraduate degree, with History being a desirable major subject. Personal skills also count, with analytical and abstract thinking being highly rated. A qualification such as the Diploma in Archives and Records would be desirable. There is considerable on-the-job professional development. All the core systems are computerised so archivists need to be comfortable working in an IT environment. Archivists interact extensively with the public and government officials.

## LIBRARIES

Libraries vary considerably in the amount of historical material they hold in their collections. Although some libraries, such as the **Wellington City Library**, have a position dedicated to New Zealand and/or local history, history graduates who are skilled in using information systems and reference resources typically function well in general library environments. Some libraries prefer their staff to have, or be studying towards, a professional qualification, such as the Master of Library and Information Studies.

The **Alexander Turnbull Library**. A Bachelors degree in History, particularly New Zealand history, is appro-

appropriate for a library assistant, but for librarian or curator roles, a post graduate qualification such as a Master of Library and Information Studies would be required. The Turnbull Library contains historical material in all formats, including music, books, newspapers, photographs, maps, paintings, and oral histories, with a specialist curator responsible for each area. Basic librarian tasks are common to all areas. The Oral History Centre offers training in oral history so its staff are trained in-house to facilitate this role.

The **Hocken Library** at the University of Otago, has a preference for history graduates, and competition tends to favour a Bachelors Honours degree with a research dissertation or Masters degree with a thesis, particularly with an emphasis on New Zealand or Pacific history. The entry-level position is library assistant. Further advancement would require a postgraduate library or archive qualification.

## TEACHING AND LECTURING

History teachers in **secondary schools** are required to have a Diploma in Teaching in addition to a relevant undergraduate degree and may also be required to teach subjects other than history. In **universities**, a PhD, together with a significant record of publication is a minimum requirement for a junior lecturer's position. Competition for academic positions is intense. Some postgraduate history students are employed as tutors which is valuable experience for an aspiring academic.

## GRADUATE PROFILES

### **Camille Fraser**

*Bulletins Editor  
LexisNexis NZ Ltd*



I decided to study History in conjunction with my law degree as I learnt from my history teacher at school that the skills learnt in History are invaluable when it comes to studying any subject that requires one to analyse details and draw a conclusion.

I enjoyed the wide range of subjects offered in History, and found the Historical Methods paper useful for both

my degrees. I found that doing both degrees in conjunction with each other helped form a solid foundation for my research and analytical skills. I also found that some of the subjects I was learning in both my degrees overlapped and enabled me to learn about a subject from a historical and a legal point of view.

History and Law require similar skills. History looks at the past and helps a society to learn the best course to take in the future to avoid making the mistakes of the past. Law looks at precedent cases and legislation and helps those involved to learn from decision makers of the past and to avoid “reinventing the wheel” when it comes to the best path to take in both litigation and for legislators.

I am now a legal editor at LexisNexis NZ Ltd, a legal publisher, and am using the research skills to research relevant subjects to be included in the legal Bulletins I edit such as the Immigration Practitioners Bulletin. I am using skills I have learnt to aid me in editing articles for legal Bulletins and for updating the titles in the New Zealand legal encyclopedia Laws NZ. I also work on legal textbooks ensuring that the material they contain is legally correct and that the references to cases, legislation, and articles or books are relevant and cited correctly.

I proofread material to ensure that it conforms to house style, something that is of great importance to ensure that our company retains a reputation for publishing excellence. I owe my strong proofreading ability to my history training which emphasized skills of accuracy.

Every day I use the skills learnt in History to assemble different research sources together and form a concise summary of legal material. I highly recommend that any one who is interested in a publishing career study History.

### **Fiona Keith**

*HR Coordinator, Human Resources  
Department of Labour*



As a recent graduate of Victoria, I found that having a BA in History helped greatly in widening my job prospects. I decided on a career in HR, as I wanted to build on my research, writing and problem solving skills

gained through my degrees. I found that my background in History made me an attractive candidate, as I was able to communicate complex information in a succinct and clear structure, something that is required daily in HR.

Human Resource practitioners are routinely asked for advice on a wide range of complex issues. History teaches you how to research, collate and synthesize information in order to write and form clear arguments. I use these skills every day when I provide advice to my clients. As an HR practitioner, I need to be aware of what is occurring within the organisation. History provided me with the skills to see the big picture and to make connections between apparently unrelated events, something I do daily in order to provide effective advice to my clients.

My advice for students thinking about studying History is to study topics that interest them. My interest lay in the 19th and 20th Centuries, as I enjoy learning the origins of conflicts and social movements and how they have affected society. I found that History provided me with the skills to identify trends within the organisation, so I could plan my work programme and advice constructively.

I would recommend the study of History at Victoria as it provides the skills all employers are looking for people who can write and communicate their ideas and thoughts, sound analytical and problem solving skills, judgment and attention to detail.

### **Jay Eden**

*Historian - Policy/Negotiations  
Office of Treaty Settlements  
Ministry of Justice*



Studying History at Victoria was an easy choice. From an early age, I was conscious that history was the art of telling great stories, and understanding their lessons for the present. I enrolled in a BA degree in 1998, majoring in History and Politics. Over the following three years, I decided to study a wide range of history papers, ranging from the French Revolution to Gandhi, to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Eager to continue, I completed my Honours degree in History in 2001. One of my Honours subjects was the Contexts of

the Treaty of Waitangi. This paper provoked intense discussions and stimulated a powerful interest in the Treaty and its application to New Zealand society. A short time later, I landed a position as an Historian at the Office of Treaty Settlements, where I have been working for over three years. My role involves drafting Crown apologies for historical Treaty settlements – explaining how Crown actions and omissions since 1840 have breached the Treaty – and negotiating them with claimant groups. The process of negotiating history is difficult and delicate, and can take months if not years to complete.

My studies in History taught me the skills to research and examine historical documents, and to critically assess various interpretations of complex events. It's always important to know who has written about a particular subject, and why they formed their conclusions, before you come to your own assessment of the situation. At a general level, History also instilled the importance of writing clearly and persuasively, which would be useful for any career.

For anyone thinking about studying History at Victoria, go for it because you'll be surprised at what stimulates your interest. My advice to anyone currently studying History is to read as widely as you can – there's always more than one version of a great story.

### **Tim Shoebridge**

*Research Officer  
Waitangi Tribunal  
Ministry of Justice*



I was always interested in history, and never really considered specialising in anything else when I started university. The decision to study at Victoria was easy, as many of the main sources for New Zealand historical research are based in Wellington. I've never regretted either decision, and have followed my interest in history through a BA, an Honours degree, and an MA, and now work in a history-oriented role at the Waitangi Tribunal.

My interest in studying history was fuelled by a fascination with seeing the shape of things emerge over time, but I quickly came to see there was much more

to studying history than this. To attempt to understand the complexities of the past, you need to keep an open mind and keep your analytical skills sharp. History really shows you the sheer variety of human thought, and the variety of approaches employed to try and understand the chaos. My one regret as a history student is that I didn't explore the full breadth of the courses that were offered by the history department at Victoria, and I would encourage anyone who studies history to try and sample as much as they can.

Historians sometimes say that history, unlike many other disciplines, includes 'all of life', and there is some truth - as well as some exaggeration and self-importance - to this saying. Studying history allows you to pursue your interests, especially at post-graduate level, and there is a lot of scope to follow your own passions. I focussed my post-graduate study on an 'intellectual history' of a short story writer, but a glance at the Victoria History prospectus will demonstrate the variety of different subjects that interest people. I thrived on writing my thesis; it was a richly rewarding and slightly hypnotic experience.

I was fortunate to get a job as a researcher at the Waitangi Tribunal shortly after the completion of my thesis. The research unit at the Tribunal is a prime example of where history graduates can wind up, and there's an informal 'Vic alumni' there. Positions are sought-after, and a Masters degree or higher is an advantage. While I have pursued history directly as a profession (for the time being), many history graduates pursue policy roles in government agencies. Many of the people I did post-graduate history with have found their way into such positions. For example my partner Nicky, who completed her history honours degree five years ago, is now a Senior Policy Analyst with the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

While an undergraduate I occasionally balked at the fussiness of the markers of history essays, I have always appreciated the attention to detail and the concentration on 'good writing' which history forces upon you. Everyone will tell you that history really develops your powers of analysis and strengthens your ability to interpret and argue, and this is a really valuable skill out here in 'the real world'. This to me is what being a history graduate is really about, as well as being able to make sage and pithy observations at dinner parties.

## **Zoë Wyatt**

*Policy Researcher/Analyst  
Economic and Trade Policy  
British High Commission*



I majored in History and Religious Studies for my BA and did my Honours year in History, graduating in 2004.

I have always liked writing and at school preferred History to English, which felt too prescribed. At Victoria I encountered Pacific History and quickly came to adore it. I found it fascinating to study a region that contemporary New Zealand is considered very much a part of and has a myriad of ties to, but which many New Zealanders know very little about. I focused on the history of conflict and conflict resolution in the region, its environmental history and the impact of globalisation. I soon abandoned my LLB; I decided to devote more of my time to History because it was my preferred subject. I knew it was likely to lead me to a fulfilling career – even if I wasn't sure of what that might be until I got there.

A bonus to studying History is its credibility with employers. I considered applying to do post-graduate journalism. On enquiring as to which courses would be most beneficial on my resume the answer again and again was a strong History degree, because it teaches you to research, to think and to write. Another attraction to History is the approachability of people in the field. Disciplines within higher education would all like to claim that their subject area benefits both individuals and society at large. I think this is certainly true for History, which makes for camaraderie among historians and a network which students of any level should not be afraid to tap into.

I recommend doing Honours. It is a challenging programme and different to undergraduate years because of the sense of community possible among a small group. It was an entertaining and supportive environment and my peers became firm friends. I found the paper on theory particularly valuable because it allowed me to approach historical questions in a methodologically sophisticated way.

There is plenty of work for historians if you recognise that the career path from History is nonlinear only because its skills are so transferable. Over the summer before I started full-time work I wrote an article for the New Zealand Historic Places Trust to mark their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and did some research work.

My position at the High Commission involves analysing social policies in New Zealand that are of relevance to policy makers in the UK, assisting with lobbying, supporting UK and EU climate change initiatives and organising UK officials' programmes in New Zealand.

Studying History has been a great advantage to me. I better understand contemporary events and issues and am able to work without too many parameters. Years of tutorials have trained me in the subtle art of getting my point across in meetings. And the history student's ability to think critically, and sift through vast amounts of information, and quickly, to create a full picture of any situation is such a vital part of my everyday life that I would be lost without it.

## HISTORY AT VICTORIA

History courses can be taken for a variety of degrees: as a major subject for the BA, as a joint/double major for the BA, as a non-majoring subject for the BA (at 100, 200 and even 300 level), as a BA major for the BA/LLB course of study, and as a Humanities and Social Sciences subject in BSc, BCA, Bachelor of Architectural Studies and a range of other degrees. History is a highly flexible, valuable and interesting subject.

History offers a range of courses at 100, 200, and 300 level as well as advanced study in postgraduate degrees. In any one year a selection of History papers are offered at each level. 100 level courses tend to be broader in scope offering a survey of a longer historical period and a strong grounding in historical analysis, information seeking and interpretation. Courses at 200 and 300 level tend to be more thematic, devoted to narrower time periods. Three broad streams exist within the History programme: a series of courses focusing on New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific history; European history – including 'the Atlantic World', and Asian History with a particular focus on the histories of China and modern India. American History is also represented at several levels. These streams allow students to follow the history of particular regions if they wish to do so. Courses currently offered include HIST 117: Europeans, Africans and Americans: Empires, Migrations and Encounters; HIST 232: The Worlds of Christopher Columbus; HIST 332: The Holocaust and Genocide.

The BA (Hons) degree is a one year full time postgraduate degree for students wanting to specialise in History. Four papers (one of which is recommended to be a research essay) are chosen from a choice of papers ranging in theme, area and time period. These currently include the cultural history of World War One, Studies in the history of Sport and Spectating, History and Theory, Science, Magic and Religion. The MA and PhD by thesis offer students opportunities to undertake a major piece of original research. VUW's History programme is particularly well suited to advanced study through its proximity to the major national collections: Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library, Archives New Zealand, the New Zealand Film Archive, Parliamentary Library.

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