

From School to an Economist

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Here is a quick run down on how I got from where you students are today to where I am today, which is working in the Economic Policy Division of the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF).

I, like you, took economics in year 11 and 12 and it was probably one of my favourite subjects if not my favourite. However, despite enjoying economics that didn't mean that it was necessarily my best subject or that I found it easy.

At the end of year 12 I didn't have a clear idea on what I wanted to do career wise so, based on enjoying economics at school, I decided to pursue that interest and undertook a Commerce degree with a major in Economics at The University of Western Australia.

I didn't really know what economics would lead to but just as an indication of the depth and breadth of what is covered at university, much of what I covered at school in year 11 and 12 was covered in the first few lectures and, given that the degree is three years long, you can appreciate there are many more issues to cover than the secondary school system can offer.

During my degree I began developing an even stronger interest in economics and eventually chose an economics major. Towards the end of my degree I decided that I really enjoyed economics and would like an economics related career so applied for a graduate position at the DTF.

The reason that I chose to work at the DTF was because I saw them as an organisation that could really influence the State of Western Australia based on the work that they did. And because of this, I thought that it would be the best place to foster my interest and abilities in economics.

And since I've been working at Treasury, which is 3^{1/2} years now, I definitely feel that I've been involved in issues that have had an effect on the State.

My role consists of undertaking economic research and providing analysis on economic information. That analysis is used to form opinion on policy initiatives and is also used to inform the public about what is happening in Western Australia's economy.

One issue that I have done a lot of research into during my time is the labour market and in particular the shortage of skilled workers, particularly tradesmen. Some of you might be aware of this issue, particularly if you know anyone who has built a house recently and may have had trouble finding people to do the work. My research in the area of skilled labour shortages formed the basis for our division's understanding of what was happening and what was driving the shortages. It also meant when funding requests came to DTF our area could comment on the appropriateness of that funding.

Another piece of work I have been involved in is the minimum wage for workers in Western Australia. As part of this process I provided analysis on what had been

driving wages growth in Western Australia, which was the mining and construction industries, as well as the outlook for wages growth in the State. This work helped the State's industrial commission form an opinion on the appropriateness of the proposed wage increase.

I regularly write two page summaries on key data releases such as the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and wages growth and these are published online. I also provide briefing notes and speech points to the Treasurer's Office on economic conditions within Western Australia. In addition, twice yearly I am involved in making forecasts about what economic indicators like CPI will be doing over the short and medium term. These forecasts feed into the budget process and help justify Government's decisions on where to spend money etc.

One thing that I love about working in economics is that it is so topical. There are so many people I know that are having problems building a house or complaining that they can't afford to buy a house and the work that I do deals with issues like this everyday. Also, the issues that we are discussing every day are discussed in the media regularly so you are much more in touch and informed about what is going on in your own State.

So I guess I would encourage any of you that have enjoyed economics at high school to definitely consider undertaking it in your tertiary studies and consider making it your career since it is so relevant to what's going on around you everyday.