

# News story: GES Career Stories

Danny Quinn – Economic Adviser at DFID

I joined DFID as a Fast Streamer in September 2011, having successfully navigated the awful horrors of first the FSAC and then the EAC (a joke! they aren't that bad – my tip, lots of caffeine and sugar, it's an endurance test as much as anything else). My first assistant economist post was in the Middle East and North Africa Department, which was rapidly expanding in the wake of the Arab Spring. This was very much a case of being in the right place at the right time, I had put DFID down as first choice but hadn't expected to get it as I knew it was very popular. Regardless, I took the opportunity and absolutely loved it. My work in MENAD was remarkably varied, from trips to the region, to cross-government meetings on sanctions to learning how to write a briefing like a good civil servant! Following a great year in MENAD, I held posts in the International Financial Institutions Department and DFID's Quality Assurance Unit. These posts gave me valuable insights into the international development system and the breadth of DFID's work. In 2014 however I finally got the opportunity I had been excited about since the day I joined DFID, the chance to go and work overseas!

I arrived in Sierra Leone in early 2014, nervous, bewildered and excited. Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries in the world and ranks near the bottom of almost every development index out there. Despite these hardships, Sierra Leoneans are some of the warmest, generous and most optimistic people I have ever met. In those first few months I began finding my feet, learning what is expected of an assistant economist in a country office. My main lesson was – there is no hiding! I may have been new blood but was expected to pull my weight, managing programmes, producing analysis on the Sierra Leonean economy and developing relationships with Sierra Leonean Government counterparts. In the summer, the situation changed fundamentally.

The Ebola virus, which had previously been confined to a small area of dense forest in neighbouring Guinea, entered Sierra Leone and began spreading rapidly. Ebola is terrifying, the mortality rate for those who caught it was well over 50% and the associated symptoms were catastrophic to the body. Those early days were full of fear; evacuations of staff and dependants, airlines closing flights, continual rumours of new cases popping up. However, despite this fog of desperation, the response in combatting this deadly virus was truly astonishing and a privilege to see first-hand. UK government departments mobilised and got people on the ground; Public Health England, the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and DFID. The remarkably brave nurses and doctors who volunteered to work in treatment centres were absolute modern day heroes. Finally, of course, the Sierra Leoneans who formed the bulk of the response, were resolute in the face of daily danger. My job changed almost overnight, as I began working on the systems for paying hazard pay to the Sierra Leoneans working in treatment centres or in burial teams, all of whom were assuming considerable risk.

Thankfully, the threat passed. Following Christmas, the number of new

infections began to wane. On November 7 2015, the World Health Organisation declared the end of the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone. We celebrated with gusto in Freetown but the rehabilitation process in Sierra Leone will continue for many years. I left Sierra Leone in the summer of 2016. There had of course been considerable lows, but I left with many great memories and a feeling of optimism for Sierra Leone. What the experience really demonstrated to me though is just how fragile everything is in the countries where DFID operates. While there may be an outward veneer of normalcy, these countries are remarkably vulnerable to crises, be they related to infectious diseases, climate change or the economy.

Working in DFID gives you the opportunity to address these vulnerabilities, mitigate them where possible and respond where necessary. I can't recommend it highly enough!

---

Malindi Myers – Economist at Office for National Statistics

When I graduated in economics, I had enjoyed my degree – I wanted to be an economist, and work in economics. In thinking about what I could do with my economics degree, I went to careers service who offered endless brochures and PR events for investment banks, accountancy firms, management consultancies, commercial banks with little information on how I could actually work as an economist!

Frustrated, I decided to do a Masters in Environmental and Natural Resource Economics. Fortunately a friend recommended a junior economist post at the Treasury, which I happily took and spent a couple of years finding my way as an up-start economist monitoring the UK's contributions to the EU Budget.

I was also making in-roads into the British rowing team, so after a year and a half as a junior economist, I took a few months away from work to concentrate on training and qualifying for the World Champs.

I returned to the civil service, to an economics role working on the UK's GDP data submission requirements for the EU (to Eurostat). I then went off to the European Commission on a secondment scheme that the European Commission run for young professionals, initially for six months but it turned into two and a half years! I worked on their global forecast model, coordinating input across country and regional desks. I really enjoyed the international environment, the bright and open minded people that work at the heart of Europe, living in a foreign city and getting myself set up as a 'proper' economist!

I then applied to the GES and passed and came back to a fantastic job at the Treasury, with a great manager who helped me integrate and find my feet. I covered India, Pakistan and other bits of emerging Asia, which was so interesting at a time when globalisation was becoming very much centre stage in economic and political debate. My boss covered China and I covered India in the Treasury global team, so between us we covered about a third of the world's consumers. Gordon Brown, the chancellor at the time, was all over

'globalisation' and we had to supply endless facts and explanations for speeches, notes, etc. for him. Our facts were in the Chancellor's parliamentary speeches, and I was just one year in to my GES career.

I then moved over to cover Japan, the US and Canada – forecasting growth, providing briefing to senior officials and ministers, and analysing economic developments. I was in (professional) heaven! I was discovering my interest and enjoyment of macroeconomics, in the most central economic policy-making department. My assessments, forecasts and country economic data were in the Budget reports, Chancellor's speeches, UK official statements and fed into the UK economic forecast – I felt that my work really counted and mattered, and made a difference.

I am now at the Office for National Statistics, which is a non-ministerial department, independent of political pressure by design. It's at the centre of so much economic policy making, economic assessment, and economic commentary. I've done five posts during nine years in ONS including delivering the ONS's flagship monthly economic analysis article, and now over-seeing the economics profession in the ONS.

I have been working as an economist for most of twenty years, and in the GES for thirteen years. I love it!