

Career Profile: Foreign Service Officer

Foreign Service officers are diplomats who serve their country. Their overall aim is to improve relations between their own and other countries and keep the home country informed on conditions in the country where they are working.

To be effective foreign offers are expected to have knowledge of history, government, political systems, cultures, world geography, international affairs, and political and social issues across the world. Important skills include basic accounting, interpreting and compiling statistics, interpersonal communication, and knowledge of basic economic principles and trends.

This is an exciting area in which to work as it offers opportunities for people to serve their country, to travel to interesting destinations, and to experience different cultures and realities. It requires personal dedication, flexibility, openness to other perspectives, ability to work under pressure, hard work and discipline.

Education Requirements

National Senior Certificate (NSC)

For a career in foreign affairs students are advised to select appropriate subjects suitable for tertiary study from the designated list.

Bachelor Degree

Bachelor of Arts (BA) - 3 years

An appropriate BA degree or equivalent qualification, preferably in ethnology, economics, political science/international politics, communication and Africa studies.

Offered at:

- [North-West University](http://www.puk.ac.za/fakulteite/lettere/sos/index_e.html)¹ (School of Social and Government Studies)
- [University of Johannesburg](http://www.uj.ac.za/Default.aspx?alias=www.uj.ac.za/humanities)² (Faculty of Humanities)
- [University of Limpopo](http://www.ul.ac.za/index.php?Entity=School%20Main%20Menu&school_id=4)³ (School of Social Sciences)
- [University of Pretoria](http://web.up.ac.za/default.asp?ipkCategoryID=1322)⁴ (Department of Political Sciences)
- [University of the Witwatersrand](http://web.wits.ac.za/Prospective/Undergraduate/what-can-i-study-at-wits/AcademicProgrammes/Humanities/GeneralBA.htm)⁵ (General BA)

¹ http://www.puk.ac.za/fakulteite/lettere/sos/index_e.html

² <http://www.uj.ac.za/Default.aspx?alias=www.uj.ac.za/humanities>

³ http://www.ul.ac.za/index.php?Entity=School%20Main%20Menu&school_id=4

⁴ <http://web.up.ac.za/default.asp?ipkCategoryID=1322>

⁵ <http://web.wits.ac.za/Prospective/Undergraduate/what-can-i-study-at-wits/AcademicProgrammes/Humanities/GeneralBA.htm>

- [University of Venda](#)⁶ (School of Human and Social Sciences)
- [UNISA](#)⁷ (School of Human Sciences)

Specializations offered:

Some specializations are listed but advice from the faculties is advisable.

North-West University

BCom (Economics) (3 years)

University of Johannesburg

BA International studies (3 years), BA Politics, Philosophy and Economics

University of Limpopo

Bachelor of Social Work

University of Pretoria

Political Sciences (International Studies - 3 years)

University of the Witwatersrand

BA (focus on global politics and diplomacy) BA (focus on heritage and historical studies) (3 years)

UNISA

BCom (with specialization in economics) (3 years)

Admission requirements

As admission requirements vary from one institution to another, find out what the specific requirements are by checking on the website and contacting the university if you have any queries.

Possible Employers

[Department of Foreign Affairs.](#)

Find out more

Find out more about working in foreign affairs:

- [Article](#)⁸ about people returning to the country.
- [Example](#)⁹ of the type of briefing given to officers.

⁶ http://www.univen.ac.za/human_social_sciences/index.html

⁷ <http://www.unisa.ac.za/Default.asp?Cmd=ViewContent&ContentID=15671>

⁸ <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-07-27-more-people-returning-to-sa-than-leaving>

⁹ <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/2006/merw0918.htm>

- A [Diplomat's Story](#)¹⁰, Apartheid and Beyond, by Pieter Wolfaardt, which may give you an idea of the role of foreign affairs.
- [Brief reports](#)¹¹ on current happenings.
- [The Mail and Guardian online](#)¹² helps you keep up to date with what's happening in foreign affairs.

¹⁰ http://www.galago.co.za/CAT1_018_b.htm

¹¹ http://www.southernafricatrust.org/whats_happening.html

¹² <http://www.mg.co.za/section/foreign-affairs>

Are you suited to this career?

This quick quiz can help you to identify whether you are suited for this occupation.

Quiz	Yes	No
Do people acknowledge you as a person of integrity?		
Are you discreet?		
Are you self disciplined and dedicated?		
Do you have above average intelligence?		
Are you flexible and adaptable?		
Are you interested to meet people of other cultures?		
Do you have a pleasant, social personality?		
Do you have a flair for languages?		
Are you able to speak fluently and make presentations?		
Do you have good general knowledge about the country and globally?		

If you have mainly yes answers it may be an indication that this is an occupation to consider.