

## **80,000 Hours Feedback for Richard Sleight**

November 10, 2013

### **I. Background**

Richard Sleight recently left a position at an international NGO to concentrate on completing his master's degree in communications by early 2014. His work experience includes training individuals and groups in IT and digital media, website management, community video facilitation, and project management. He holds a BSc in maths and philosophy and an MSc in development management. Richard is considering a career change and has already done significant research into different options. He is interested in learning more about the impact of different careers, and how those impacts might be quantified.

### **II. Causes**

High priority [causes](#) for Richard include human rights, international development, participation and voice, community development, animal welfare, and the environment (e.g., food waste). The information below on Richard's academic interests also sheds light on which causes interest him. He is considering continuing onto a PhD; [conducting socially valuable research](#) is itself a cause. Human rights and international development are such broad causes that they cover almost every cause Richard envisions working on in the future (i.e. he is unlikely to switch to a new cause).

### **III. Career and Volunteer Options**

Richard listed the following as career and volunteer options once he completes his master's degree in early 2014:

1. Traveling and volunteering/working for six months a year in exchange for expenses. He has been reaching out to organizations that interest him.
2. Entering a PhD program, or pursuing a research career without further study. He struggles to limit his academic interests, which are broad and include power relations, social change, (green) economics, action research, ethics, empathy, and other fields related to the causes outlined earlier.
3. Returning to a communications project manager or related ICT role (most likely, given his prior work experience and other practical reasons). Such a job would have to be with the right organization, allow him to develop his skills, and entail work beyond maintaining the organization's website. Overall, he is uncertain about continuing in this line of work.
4. Community video maker/facilitator (quite niche).
5. Freelance writer for magazines and newspapers, most likely as a side project.
6. Social enterprise given his experience in communications and website management. Could involve setting up his own organization.
7. Fairtrade projects, also likely as a side project.

### **IV. Feedback from 80,000 Hours**

Our best guess is that promoting international development (reducing global poverty) and animal welfare (ending factory farming) are the most effective causes among those listed. Nonetheless, much depends on the specific opportunities available within each cause, some of which (e.g., participation and voice, community development) we have not researched. Examples of other high priority causes 80,000 Hours has identified include cause prioritization research, building the effective altruist movement, improving decision making, targeted interventions to improve the far future, and meta-research. More information on each is available on our website.

Over the next couple of months, 80,000 Hours plans to publish multiple blog posts about why it is important to pick a cause, how to assess causes, and, later, our best guesses about which causes are most effective. Until those posts are available, we recommend these resources about causes:

- Given how broad international development and human rights are as causes, it may be helpful to narrow them down and then start to identify specific interventions. Our blog post “[How to assess career impact](#),” especially the subsection on cause effectiveness, and our [causes page](#) are useful starting points.
- Review GiveWell Labs’ information about causes. This [blog post](#) provides additional background information about causes, but, more importantly, links to their cause [investigations](#), which are concise overviews of potential causes.
- Consider whether targeted interventions to help [future generations](#)—a cause we consider particularly [high priority](#)—is a potential way of giving voice to the underrepresented future.

In terms of pursuing a PhD and other research opportunities:

- Several of our blog posts relate to careers in research and academia. In the the most recent, “[Why I’m doing a PhD](#),” one of our volunteers’ applies the 80,000 Hours framework to her decision to enter a PhD program. Here is a link to some unpublished and preliminary [internal notes](#) (please do not share with others) about the value of a PhD. Unfortunately, we are also uncertain about the availability of PhD funding.
- We have some reasons to believe an economics PhD is particularly valuable and will be posting more information on our blog over the coming weeks. We recently [interviewed economist Robin Hanson](#) about the value of such a degree. Given your undergraduate degree in maths, the possibility of an economics PhD is worth exploring. Here are two additional articles of potential interest by economist Noah Smith: [[link 1](#)] [[link 2](#)]
- We have also written about some of the common [pitfalls](#) in research and have explored how to get involved in [high impact research](#). Meta-research studies how to improve the impact of research. For more information about meta research, see GiveWell’s meta-research [page](#) and [update](#). GiveWell has also written about the movement towards open-source publishing of research (“[Our Landscape of the Open Science Community](#)”).
- Do not discount the potential impact you can have as a [research assistant or manager](#), especially given your [project management skills](#).

Finally, we have written little on social enterprise, but we have [an interview](#) with Tom Rippin, founder and CEO of [On Purpose](#).