



Wider
fields

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A view from a member: **Nick Silver**



Nick Silver began his actuarial career as a pensions actuary. He now works at Callund Consulting and his expertise includes pensions policy and reform; the interaction of countries’ demography, social security system and economy; the application of social insurance to manage climate risks; design and application of actuarial computer simulation models for the analysis of pension and other social security systems and training in these areas.

Getting into Wider Fields

“My wider fields journey really started when I qualified. Chris Daykin was President and he gave a very inspirational speech. His message was this: being an actuary is a great qualification, you have a great set of skills, and you can use those skills for almost anything you want and in any geographic location. I didn’t realise it at the time but I have tried to take that to heart in my career.”

What are the Wider Fields:

Anything outside the traditional fields and I feel that you are only limited by your imagination. Some examples of areas where actuaries are working include:

- Nuclear decommissioning.
- Strategic advice to the Oil and Gas industry.
- Modelling energy supply and demand for the department of energy and climate change
- Microinsurance.
- Quite a lot of actuaries are working in the wider field of finance and investment and the banking sector. A friend of mine works in the World Bank in disaster risk finance and he has a whole team of actuaries (for example if a Caribbean country is hit by a hurricane the World Bank has put together a mutual insurance company to react to this eventuality).
- An actuary is the programme director of the think tank Institute of Economic Affairs.
- A former member of the Resource and Environment group developed sustainability indices for FTSE.
- There are people who have been quite inventive about using actuarial techniques for example advising Government on how much they should spend on hospitals.
- There are actuaries who use rating techniques to advise supermarkets on which goods to stock.



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In my company, Callund Consulting, we advise governments and the public sector on their Social Security systems. Two recent examples have seen us work with the governments of Ecuador and Rwanda.

How do you get into the wider fields?

Identify your core skills. The core skills of actuaries are very impressive. The one I like to highlight is the one we sometimes think we are bad at, communication. Actuaries are not bad at communication but we have to communicate very intrinsically difficult concepts therefore we have developed tools and techniques to communicate these concepts. This skill is a strength.

Another core skill which we have is our Risk Management expertise. Obviously taking a long term perspective we know about a lot of stuff other people are very interested in and don't necessarily understand: things like how capital markets work, investments, how institutions invest. We have a unique way of framing a problem in terms of risk and people trust actuaries as we bring a professional assurance, and in a world where trust is at a premium, you can't underrate that.

We work in a kind of nexus of statistics, economics, regulation, finance and also a bit of academia and again that's kind of a unique combination of fields particularly as we bring to it a commercial angle. This makes our core skills very sellable.

Actuarial Application:

Let me give you an example, when I moved into the wider fields I was asked if I would help think about the risk to the global food system. I went along to a conference thinking I didn't know anything about food, (apart from eating it!) and wondering what expertise I could offer. I soon realised they didn't want me to talk about the food system, they were the experts on that, they wanted me to talk about risk, and sure enough afterwards they said, well Nick we have never heard that perspective before, you have opened our eyes. That made me feel that as an actuary my skills are transferrable between sectors and I do have a lot to bring. People want you for your risk management long term perspective financial insight not your knowledge about their particular industry.

It is a footballing cliché that the strikers who score the most goals are the ones that are in the right place at the right time. Getting into wider fields is similar, you need to make sure you put yourself in the right place at the right time. The best way to do this is “networking”. I would start with your existing client base and your existing tools and think how you could develop. The consultancy advising supermarkets, they built that tool for advising insurance companies on their rating and then developed it out to supermarkets.

How the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries (IFoA) can help you:

The biggest single thing we have going for us is our membership body, the IFoA. The IFoA is an incredible forum to discuss and develop ideas and expertise and to network. Remember that CPD is member generated and the profession is incredibly supportive about whatever you want to talk about, within reason, so if you are interested in something, whether as an individual or as an employer, there is no better way to develop expertise and contacts than generating material whether it is for research events, through suggesting or joining a working party, or delivering a talk.

Summary:

It is perfectly fine and great to stay within the standard practice areas and traditional fields. For the profession to thrive and for individual members to grow we need to get into many other fields. There is a huge need for actuaries to advise people in many different areas.