CAREER EDUCATION – WRITTEN Q&A: Andreas Culora

1. **What is your job role and organisation?**

I work as an Analyst at RAND Europe, which is a not-for-profit research organisation that aims to improve policy and decision making through research and analysis. We are based in Cambridge in the UK and also Brussels in Belgium.

2. **What do you do in this job?**

Working as an Analyst at RAND Europe involves a number of tasks and responsibilities, but primarily my job is to collect, analyse and interpret data and information to answer important questions for policy and decision makers. These questions are wide ranging, including: how can we provide timely and accurate information on international migration around the world? How can we most effectively improve the educational outcomes of pupils in schools across England? How can we make housing more affordable in Cambridge? How can we improve the quality of life of people living in Greater Cambridge? How can we best facilitate children's participation in political and democratic life across Europe?

3. **Why did you choose this career?**

At school I always had a keen interest in maths and statistics. As I went through my studies and into my PhD, this translated into a passion for data and the role that this can play in improving societies and boosting the well-being of people and communities. Alongside this, from a young age I aspired to work in a role that allows me to have a positive effect on people's lives. Working as a policy researcher is a natural choice for me, as it is really where these two passions meet.

4. **What background education or training do you have?**

At A Level, I studied Biology, Geography and Law. I then studied Geography at Loughborough University.

At the end of my undergraduate degree, I then started a PhD in Human Geography also at Loughborough University, where I undertook research on the geographical trends and patterns on shared housing (Housing in Multiple Occupation – HMO).

5. **What has your career path been?**

Once I finished my undergraduate degree at Loughborough University in the summer of 2015, my plan was originally to move back to London for work. I was then offered the opportunity to study for a PhD by the Geography department at Loughborough University, so I remained in Loughborough.

Once I'd finished my PhD in the summer of 2018, I took on various short-term roles at Loughborough University, including University Teacher and Research Assistant. I spent around a year filling various roles on a short-term basis.

Following this period working on short-term projects, I was looking for a research role on a more long-term basis, to provide exciting opportunities to use research and analysis to have a positive influence on people, communities and societies. In August 2019, I accepted an offer to become an

Analyst at RAND Europe, my current role. I wanted to work at RAND Europe because I saw that the organisation could provide those exciting opportunities to contribute to positive social and policy change through objective research and analysis.

6. **What does a typical day involve?**

A typical day will likely involve the following:

- Learn new things from carrying out research and analysis tasks, which may include working with and analysing large datasets to gather useful insights and information to answer important social policy questions, or carrying out interviews with key personnel with relevant knowledge and insights on a particular research topic among other activities.

- Hone my writing skills by drafting research reports, summaries, briefs, blogs, slide decks or some other format to present the findings of our research activities to a range of audiences, including policy and decision makers, other researchers, other organisations with an interest in the research topic and lay audiences with an interest in the research topic.

- Work with my colleagues to manage projects, including providing guidance to project team members on tasks, monitoring budgets and timelines to ensure that a project is progressing smoothly and to schedule, and meeting with our funders to discuss progress on projects and the next steps to answer the questions that the study has set out to answer.

- Think creatively to write proposals to undertake new and exciting studies and answer some of societies most important and pressing questions. For example, recently I have been involved in writing proposals on how to more effectively identify and tackle online hate speech, and to analyse how small businesses across Europe have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

7. **What is your work environment like?**

RAND Europe's Cambridge office is based just north of the city centre. My normal working hours are between 9am and 6pm, but there is flexibility with this. During the lockdowns due to COVID-19, I began to work remotely. Now, I tend to come into the office 2-3 times a week, and work from home for the rest of the time. This flexibility has been really useful during the difficult periods that have resulted from the pandemic.

I work with very talented and kind individuals at RAND Europe, including researchers and others working in very important roles, such as providing support with managing and overseeing projects and proposals, advising on matters related to data protection and other legal issues, offering guidance on how to most effectively communicate our research to a wide range of audiences, and providing support with our day-to-day activities.

I also work with interesting and skilled people from other organisations– usually the funders of our research, as well as collaborators with whom we undertake the research.

8. What aspects of your job are most challenging?

While social policy research can be incredibly rewarding, there is no guarantee that our work will influence policy. I have learned that to maximise the possibility for the work to have a positive impact, the research must address important societal and/or policy questions, the research itself must be robust, and the findings should be written clearly and for the right audience. After that, a little patience is also required.

9. Can you give an example of a project or piece of work that you have been most proud of?

A big part of my role is to analyse what works in improving educational outcomes for pupils in English schools. To do this, we frequently use randomised controlled trials or similar approaches to evaluate the impact of novel educational programmes that, for example, look to improve the maths or reading outcomes of pupils.

In my time at RAND Europe, we have evaluated several educational programmes in this way. I am particularly proud of this type of research as it is intellectually stimulating and has the power to positively impact the lives of many pupils across the country. For example, we found that an early years reading programme had a positive impact on children's language skills, and it has since been rolled out to over 6,000 schools across the country by the Department for Education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

10. How do you hope your career will progress?

As a passionate policy researcher, I hope to continue to develop my research and analysis skills further and utilise these skills to answer important social policy questions and, in doing so, improve the lives of people and communities. I also hope to take on more leadership responsibilities as my career progresses, mentoring colleagues and supporting them in their development.

There are a range of different organisational sectors that researchers and analysts operate in, including central government, not-for-profit research organisations, charities and think tanks, and universities.