

A day in the life of a government research advisor



CLAIRE DUDDY

Research Advisor, HM Treasury, pictured in Westminster close to the hub of HM government

I begin my day the way I suspect every information professional should: checking on RSS feeds and Twitter over a bowl of Crunchy Nut Cornflakes. Following libraries, librarians and other information-related people and blogs helps keep me up to date with developments and also lets me keep an eye on other worlds, like the academic sector I worked in before I came to work in government. I mark anything potentially useful for work as a favourite and will try to catch up with the week's noted Tweets and posts at the weekend. At the same time – multi-tasking has become my forte in the last year and a half – I check news alerts and listen to the *Today* programme to keep up with any political developments or mentions of Ministers.

Before I head out the door, one last check on Twitter for hyperlocal warnings of tube delays, and I'm off to work. As hard as I try, it's difficult to predict how busy I will find myself on any given day so I try to spend my train journey switched off. It's too busy to read a book comfortably, so I just look around and wonder about the destinations of my fellow commuters.

I emerge from Westminster tube station at around half past eight, already having to make my way through some tourists and a crowd of Spanish schoolchildren simultaneously photographing Big Ben. Through security, and logged into my laptop, the first task of the day is, as ever, catching up with e-mails that have arrived overnight. I check both my personal and our team's central e-mail account, looking for anything urgent that may have popped up and will need to be dealt with quickly, but luckily this morning there is nothing too pressing.

I work my way through my e-mails with the help of an enormous latte, and deal with a couple of simple enquiries: passing on two requests for books that will need inter-library loans to a colleague and reminding an official just returned from holiday of his password for a database.

When everything is settled, I turn my attention to one of my longer-term projects. I am developing a new web-based 'research portal' for the department, to point officials in the direction of useful sources of information in their fields of interest. My main role is to support the creation of

evidence-based policy and the portal will also contain content designed to give advice on valuable researching skills, like searching and evaluating information. Last week I picked up on a Tweet letting the world know that an 'AROUND' operator is available in Google! I add this information to a Google 'cheat sheet' that I hope helps people to get a bit more out of the popular search engine than just the single box search. Document updated, I submit the changes I've made to the web page into the workflow for approval by another colleague – they should be live by this afternoon.

I have time to buy the second enormous latte of the morning before our weekly team meeting begins. We discuss the week's meatiest enquiries and anything outstanding, and update each other on the progress of ongoing projects and whether work is on schedule. Updates in hand, I just have time then to complete a monthly management report with some more detail and a bit of colour – it is already populated with detailed statistics breaking down customer enquiries and my budget position at the end of last month, but I can add some details of where we've really contributed to some new policy areas.

Once I have e-mailed the report off, I head to the restaurant to grab some lunch. Today I am very virtuous and opt for the roasted vegetable soup (excellent). I check the news again while I eat and also read through department notices and community updates before starting back in on work again.

I get my head down to concentrate for a couple of hours on two in-depth enquiries we received a couple of days ago. Both need to be completed by the end of the week and I suspect the sooner the better, so I am planning to have at least one signed off by the time I leave today. I scribble down a rough plan of action for each and opt to look into the more difficult searches first. Unfortunately, I can't divulge any juicy details of the actual content of these requests – confidentiality is a key part of the service we offer. Luckily, other colleagues are around in the office this afternoon so I won't have to field any interruptions or visitors myself.

A couple of hours later I look up from my screen again, having completely lost track of time. One enquiry is finished, and results e-mailed off to a grateful customer who will be able to use the

information to add to a briefing paper. I also have a plan of action for the second enquiry and I'm sure I'll be able to run through it quickly tomorrow morning. I add a note to my to-do list for the rest of the week.

To wind up the day, I run through slides for a presentation I'll be delivering tomorrow as part of an in-house Information Skills seminar programme we offer. I designed the presentation myself but it has been a few weeks since I last delivered this one so I think I need to refresh my memory and make sure I have the running order and timings correct. The session focuses on information evaluation, assessing information for reliability and accuracy and especially looking at web content. Everything is in order and all the links in the slides are still working as they should, so I can save this file ready to go tomorrow.

Before I head home, I try to put together an achievable to-do list for tomorrow, assuming no emergency research requests arrive in the meantime! Time then to get out my mobile to check Twitter again. Happily, there are no reports of tube delays, so I can say goodnight to the team and head back out, past Big Ben again and onto the train home for a rest before I find out what tomorrow will bring!

