Report on University of Huddersfield’s HEA-funded project
‘Employability in the Humanities curriculum’
Jane Lugea
Pat Cullum
Emma Andrews
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In partnership with:
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Executive summary

The project evaluated two work placement modules in the School of Music, Humanities and Media at the University of Huddersfield. We surveyed current students on their views of the modules, as well as consulting recent graduates and placement providers. As a result we have rebalanced the modules with less time on placement, and more time spent on classroom activities to increase students’ knowledge of the 21st-century world of work, their ability to understand and articulate relevant graduate attributes, and to improve their knowledge of, and ability to seek, placement and career opportunities. By involving the Careers Service and Business and Enterprise staff we aim to improve students’ knowledge of and engagement with these services.

We discovered that students were struggling to articulate specific Humanities related skills. We worked with the Careers Service to explore the graduate attributes they were developing, and as a result of consultation with students and placement providers have agreed a set of five University of Huddersfield graduate attributes: agility, resilience, self-motivation, commercial awareness and influence. While commercial awareness was an attribute that not all Humanities students recognised in themselves, we found that similar characteristics such as ‘enterprise’ and ‘problem-solving’ were ones they both felt more comfortable with, and were attributed to them by placement providers. We also found that students were generally happy to claim attributes such as “emotional intelligence”, “cultural sensitivity” and the “ability to analyse large, disparate and complex sources of information.” This is one example of where we have moved from a generic ‘transferable skills’ agenda to a more focused discipline-specific one.

We developed a set of four case studies of recent Humanities graduates. The graduates were chosen to represent a range of Humanities disciplines, and diverse career choices. They reflected on the skills they had developed during their degree and how they apply them in their career. They also talked about the value of doing a work placement as part of a Humanities degree. We will use the case studies to help future students understand the value of a placement, to see how they will be able to use discipline-specific skills and attributes in their future career, and to see a range of careers open to Humanities graduates.

The project culminated in ‘A Celebration of Employability in the Humanities’, an event that brought University academic, careers staff, and placement providers together with current and future students on the placement modules. The networking event provided students the opportunity to find placements for next year and allowed placement providers to understand the contribution placements make to our degree programmes. By running focus groups, we gathered information from placement providers and students about what skills the placement experience required and developed. Placement providers were overwhelmingly positive about the contributions that Humanities students brought to their organisations, and we used the feedback as input to the Careers Service’s definition of graduate attributes. The ‘Celebration’ was so valuable in developing our relationships with placement providers that it is now to be an annual event on our academic calendar.

The opportunity to work with the Careers Service, the Teaching and Learning Institute and placement providers has significantly improved both the teaching on the modules and our ability to embed employability more widely in the Humanities curriculum across the School.
1. Introduction

This report summarises the aims, methods and results of a Higher Education Academy (HEA) funded project to evaluate our placement provision within the School of Music, Humanities and Media at the University of Huddersfield. Our interest in this research stemmed from our involvement in the HEA’s strategic enhancement programme (SEP), ‘Embedding Employability into the Curriculum’. With the guidance of a HEA consultant, the SEP project motivated us to form a cross-university working group, which informed Humanities staff about activities of the Careers Service and vice versa. Furthermore, initial in-roads to evaluating the efficacy of our placement modules were made by seeking feedback through student advisors, who also sat on our working group. The SEP project concentrated on the development of the relevant modules, while the subsequent funded project was about the evaluation of that, and wider, activity. In terms of the HEA’s employability framework (Cole and Tibby 2013), the SEP project covered the initial two stages:

1. Discussion and reflection
2. Review and mapping

The funded project, which is reported on here, focused on the later two stages:

3. Action
4. Evaluation

This project aimed to evaluate the outcomes and impact of embedding employability into the Humanities curriculum for students, staff and stakeholders in three main ways:

1. Building on current efforts to enhance two work placement modules provided in the School of Music, Humanities and Media, we employed an intern to assess the changes we hoped to implement to these two modules, which give History, English Literature and English Language and Linguistics undergraduates the experience of completing an 180-hour external placement.
2. Going beyond the two placement modules, the intern was also involved in gathering case studies from four of our School’s graduates, which serve to qualitatively demonstrate the employability skills earned by Humanities students.
3. In order to co-ordinate the needs of our stakeholders, a one-day event was hosted in our institution, with staff, students and employers in attendance. The day culminated in a focus group with employers. The aim was to evaluate the employability skills offered by our students, as well as identify those that need developing. Providing hospitality for the stakeholders, the day offered an opportunity for staff, employers and students to network. We invited students from junior cohorts to network with potential future placement providers, an idea stemming from feedback from our current cohort. The best student presentations from this year’s cohort were presented to demonstrate the module outcomes, to show employers what our students are capable of and to inspire next year’s cohort. This was also a key opportunity for staff to forge lasting links with employers.
2. Rationale

At the outset of this project, we offered a long-standing 180-hour work placement module to English Literature and History students, as well as a newly validated placement module to English Language and Linguistics students. Given the range of placement modules across the School, we aimed to evaluate and enhance the long-standing module and ensure that newly introduced modules could be as effective as possible from the outset. Employability was unevenly embedded in the Humanities curriculum. Although well-established in the History curriculum, it was tied to a more conventional transferable skills agenda which required updating, while Linguistics was in the process of embedding employability. Our previous model of minimal teaching time and maximum time on placement worked well before the recession, when students were finding it much easier to secure graduate level jobs and simply needed time in placement to demonstrate appropriate levels of experience for a range of graduate jobs. However, increasing competition for fewer graduate jobs and changes in the nature of the job market mean students need more information and practice to make the best of their opportunities. With the introduction of the new Linguistics placement module, it was an opportune time to take stock of good practice and to learn where and how to improve placement provision to the range of Humanities students. Of course, across the School’s placement modules the students have different needs, but there are also common considerations in embedding employability in the Humanities curriculum in general.

What Knight and Yorke (2003) and Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) both stress is the incorporation of degree subject knowledge with career development tools. We recognised that this – the ‘embedded’ approach - was lacking in our practice and we needed to work harder to integrate subject area content and work experience.

We believe that work on embedding employability in the Arts and Humanities curriculum is necessary, given the pressure on students and their families to receive a return on their increased economic investment in higher education in England. Humanities students have had a high reputation for the employability of graduates (Nicholls 2005, 2011), and employment continues to be excellent (DLHE 2015) but recent comments by the UK Government’s Education Secretary (Nicky Morgan, quoted in Garner 2014) suggest that the recent emphasis on vocational degrees has caused a decline in understanding of the skills offered by Humanities courses. A new discourse on the employability of our graduates is needed to inspire our staff and students and restore faith in the value of a Humanities degree.

We realised that Humanities students were struggling to identify or articulate the specific skills that they have, and as a result lacked confidence in their ability to apply for high quality graduate placements or careers. While they could report that they had ‘research skills’, ‘critical reasoning’ or ‘communication skills’, they had little faith that these were distinctive Humanities skills. As programme specification documents across a wide variety of subjects have often embedded these as programme outcomes at level seven, it is indeed increasingly common to find students from a wide range of disciplines claiming these skills. It was therefore important to help students to understand and accurately value the specific skills that they have. As a recent graduate said during the project “We don’t expect to get good jobs anymore.”

This is particularly problematic in the wake of the recession where confidence in and ability to articulate high-level skills is essential to accessing placements and the careers that follow from them. This problem is exacerbated by a political culture that downplays the value of the Humanities compared to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects,
(despite many of those articulating these values themselves having Humanities degrees). Nor is it helped by the enormous variety of careers that Humanities students go into. We cannot simply invite half a dozen employers into the University and expect a large proportion of our students to find employment with them. We therefore need to be able to give students good models of our own alumni and the careers that they have gone into, as well as confidence that they themselves have the skills and ability to apply for and get high quality jobs. Following Dacre Pool and Sewell’s (2007) model of employability, the reflection and evaluation this project allows for can lead to the students’ self-confidence in expressing their employability skills.

The most recent HEA report on the issue (Allan 2006) dates from pre-recession times and focuses on key skills that are still necessary (e.g. communication skills) but are not up to date with the changing demands of the labour market and perceptions of competencies necessary for employability. Thus, we proposed to investigate new ways in which the employability of Humanities graduates can be defined and evaluated. Our initial discussions with the careers staff who sat on our working group revealed that the University Careers Service had recently devised seven graduate attributes that they believed contemporary graduates from the University of Huddersfield possessed:

1. Agility
2. Tenacity
3. Resilience
4. Adaptability
5. Self-motivation
6. Commercial awareness
7. Influencing

The HEA employability SEP was the ideal opportunity to test the applicability of these attributes to our students and graduates and their relevance for their placement providers and employers. As such, the project would be able to feed back into University wide definitions of and approaches to our students’ employability, as well as evaluate our School’s current practice by means of the placement modules.

With regard to the School’s placement modules, we hoped to learn:

- the ideal format the placement should take and how to best integrate the placement and pedagogy. This would ensure that the placement was a learning experience and not an addendum to their studies;
- specifically, we were interested in exploring the best balance of time spent in class and on placement and how this should be spread across the year, as well as learning technologies that could use our virtual learning environment (VLE) to bridge the gap between the workplace and learning;
- through use of online communication, such as blogs and wikis, as well as other professional modes of communication such as oral presentations, we sought to develop the students’ capacity to articulate their strengths and skills;
- furthermore, we sought to ensure that our provision of careers advice was as up to date and as tailored to the students’ needs as possible.

To achieve these goals, the project brought teaching staff together with careers staff across the University. In this way, lecturers’ subject-specific knowledge could be combined with
careers’ employability knowledge to produce tailored resources for the students (e.g. ideas for placement environments, CV templates). In summary, we began our project with the following mission statement:

*Staff will educate students about the real world applications of their subject and provide space for embedding employability in the curriculum. All students will complete their MHM degree with increased self-awareness and confidence, as well as the ability to articulate and apply their skills (transferable and subject specific) in a professional environment.*
3. Methodology

The project involved reaching out to a variety of different individuals involved in various aspects of employability including, but not limited to, current students involved in the workplace module, members of the University of Huddersfield’s Careers Service, work placement providers and Humanities alumni. In order to get the broadest overview of the work placement modules, it was necessary to gather data from as many different sources as possible including alumni case studies, student surveys, employer evaluations and student/employer focus groups. As a result, this methodology section will deal with each project method separately.

3.1 Student/employer focus groups

The employability event, although also an opportunity to thank placement providers, allowed for the hosting of two focus groups – one to gain the responses of students, and one to gain the responses of placement providers. Although we used a number of surveying techniques, the focus groups allowed for more organic, conversational discussion of the work placement modules. Both students and employers were invited to the employability event, and were asked to participate, discussing their experiences of the module and evaluating the seven graduate attributes presented in Section 2. Both discussions were filmed with the permission of the participants, and their responses recorded – a set of ten questions were discussed with each group, the questions differing slightly based on whether they were targeted at students or placement providers (see Appendix 1).

3.2 Student surveys

To complement the qualitative results gained from the focus group discussions, the use of surveys resulted in more quantitative data, the results of which are described in Section 4 of this report. Separate surveys were created, one for History students and one for English Language students; the reason for this separation stems from two primary elements: firstly, the module requirements were slightly different for the two subjects, English Language students were required to undertake linguistic research while on placement, while History students were not. Secondly, the differences between the modules meant that students completed their work placement module at different times.

The largest issue encountered with surveys was that, particularly with students, it was difficult to get a response if contact was done through mass emails – most of the time, these emails were ignored or unseen, making it far more difficult to engage the students and collect data.

As a result, various different methods to engage the students were trialed – for the Linguistics and Modern Languages department, this was done through the help of a student advisor, a current English Language student involved in the work placement module, who acted as a liaison and, in consultation with the module leader, designed her own questionnaire to send out to students (See Appendix 2). The student advisor believed that students seemed to feel more personally invested in assisting a peer from their cohort and responded much faster to her survey requests. The student advisor assisted with the design and distribution of a survey hosted online, which allowed students to assess the work placement module and give a general overview of their experiences.

History students were given similar online surveys to answer. However, these surveys were not emailed, but instead, completed during class time, ensuring that most students filled them out. Students anecdotaly appeared to prefer the in-class surveying technique when questioned as it
did not have to rely on participation outside of university hours – most were happy to fill in the surveys during timetabled hours, but were less likely to participate during their own time.

3.3 Alumni case studies

The alumni case studies served a number of specific purposes: firstly, the case studies were used to gauge previous students’ opinions about work placement opportunities and the significance of the seven graduate attributes in their post-university career; secondly, case studies allow current students to see the benefits of work placement, as well as providing real-world examples of the varied fields into which Humanities students may venture.

Attempting to locate alumni willing to participate in the project proved somewhat difficult – in order to combat this, various departments were contacted, asking staff members to suggest previous students eligible to partake in the case studies. These departments consisted not just of staff from the school of Music, Humanities and Media, but also the University of Huddersfield’s Careers Service, the Research and Enterprise department and staff in charge of alumni interaction.

As the case studies were partially designed to show less ‘obvious’ career routes for Humanities students, as well as a broad selection of alumni, those chosen for case studies were deliberately intended to be very different from one another. Individuals from each case study were interviewed face-to-face, if feasible, or by telephone or email; the same questions (see Appendix 3) were provided for each individual.

3.4 Employer evaluations

Employer evaluation forms are routinely provided to placement providers at the end of the work placement experience. Although not linked directly to this project, these evaluation forms provide a great deal of information which may be used to support more direct findings relating to the project itself. Employer evaluation forms typically ask employers to rate students on a scale of 1-5 in various categories (see Appendix 4).
4. Key findings

The key findings of this evaluation are overall, very positive – although some teething issues were encountered at the outset of the work placement modules, these were often recognised as such. The range of methods discussed in Section 3 used to gather data allowed for an overview of the module itself, but also allowed specific observations to be made. In this section, first, a general overview of the key findings will be outlined, then in Sections 4.1 and 4.2, the two work placement modules will be evaluated separately due to the reasons discussed in Section 3; finally, in Section 4.3 placement provider feedback from both the focus groups and the employer evaluation forms are grouped together.

The alumni case studies, although not directly related to the work placement module, were useful for reinforcing employability – all of those interviewed believed that the University had increased their employability prospects, even prior to the availability of current work experience modules. A number of the alumni interviewed had undertaken work placement despite there being no specific module encouraging it at the time. Those that did take part in work placement opportunities often ended up working for much longer in the organisations or jobs in which their work experience took place. A number of the alumni stated that they believed work experience was very valuable, with one post-recession graduate stating that he believed his work experience was actually more important than his degree in gaining employment after graduation.

The case studies also helped to highlight and reinforce certain issues with the module regarding mature students. For these students, issues arose if they had previously already participated in a workplace environment, as the students often felt that they already knew much of what was being taught in the workplace module. This is, however, not to say that mature students have nothing to gain from participating in work experience – one of the alumni case studies, a mature student, stated that doing work experience helped her decide on a career in archiving when prior to her placement, she had intended on training to be a teacher. Although some mature students were frustrated, a number recognised that the workplace module was still important; one stated that despite the module not being especially relevant to herself, “for students who have not worked before, it is useful.” Mature students who are not retired may benefit from undertaking work experience in a post-recession environment – some students may be less prepared than they originally feel, particularly if they have not had to apply for work for several years. To combat this, a proposed emphasis on the “changing world of work” was suggested for future implementation in the module; this would allow pre-retirement students to potentially explore the world of post-recession work and would give these students a chance to sample working environments outside of their previous work experiences as was discussed in the case studies.

4.1 English language placement students’ feedback

For English Language students, an anonymous survey was created using Bristol Online Surveys with 18 questions relating to student experiences of the work placement module. The survey received 18 responses, most of which could be combined into quantitative data. With 45 students on the ‘Language in the Workplace’ module, this meant a response rate of 40%, which is positive.

For the most part, students enjoyed being on placement, with just over 60% of students either ‘agreeing’ or ‘strongly agreeing’ with the statement. We see, however, more disparity among
the respondents when asked whether or not they viewed the placement experience as useful. Although for the most part, students did find their placements useful, we found a higher level of negative responses than the previous question. A number of students stated that they found acquiring 180 hours to be difficult, and frequently students did not start looking for placements until it was too late; this, in turn, may have led many students to simply take any placement they could, without necessarily thinking about the way in which the placement position might be useful to them; these issues were addressed and discussed, with the changes that came as a result being discussed in Section 5. As this was the first year in which the Language in the Workplace module was introduced, a number of teething issues may have also contributed to the negative experience of certain students.

Finding a placement and completing the 180 hours was one of the most common responses from those students who stated that they encountered setbacks during the placement module. Many recognised that these issues were often due to late placement findings and the difficulty of balancing university and work-life. When asked whether or not they displayed the graduate attribute ‘tenacity’ in these situations despite feeling discouraged, 85% of the students surveyed stated that they had, and that they had continued with and completed their placement regardless, already demonstrating the module’s capacity to develop one of the graduate attributes. Some students still found that despite setbacks, they ultimately became more self-confident – many found that work experience helped them decide on their future plans. One student stated that “securing a placement alone [had] improved [their] confidence in applying for future work”, and another believed that the placement had “motivated [them] to work towards [their] future job goals.”

The use of blogs created an unexpectedly polarised view: students were split 50/50 as to whether they enjoyed the format and found it useful. Regardless of this, many preferred the idea of their first summative assignment being several blog entries, but overwhelmingly, students stated that they would prefer that these blogs remain private. Most of the issues regarding blogs seemed to come from a lack of consistent use – often students’ entries were sporadic, with some writing up to three blog posts in one sitting in order to fulfil their module requirements. More assistance on how to write blogs and making sure to emphasise the progressive nature of consistent blog entries could improve the way in which students utilise the blogs.

Although students mentioned that there should be more help available with finding placements, many did not make use of the services offered by the careers department. This is in contrast to the large amount of students that stated that they would find timetabled sessions with the careers service and/or personal tutors useful as part of the module. This discrepancy may highlight issues with self-motivation, in that students would rather be ‘forced’ into using the service (as it would be timetabled, and presumably therefore mandatory to attend), rather than using it independently. A common improvement that students wanted to see implemented was a greater need for assistance in finding a placement and more emphasis on making students find their placements earlier on. Of those questioned, 38% had not utilised the drop-in sessions organised by the careers service at all. Those students that did make use of these sessions had mixed experiences, with 21% stating that the drop-ins were useful or very useful, and 21% stating that they were not useful.

Of the students surveyed, 28% stated that they had gained a “job, contract or opportunity” within their work placement organisation. These opportunities crossed a wide range of different
workplaces including teaching roles, editorial roles, and permanent volunteer positions working on a variety of different projects. One student stated that she was “put forward for a part-time Teaching Assistant job role as the school [felt that she] performed outstandingly whilst on placement.”

English Language students appeared to find the workload harder than History students, possibly due to the nature of their ‘Language in the Workplace’ module, which requires them to undertake a research project while still completing any tasks or requirements set by their placement provider. It is important, however, to also take into account the timing of the placements: ‘Language in the Workplace’ takes place during term time, whereas other work placement modules generally take place after teaching has finished, meaning that English Language students must also complete their regular studies alongside work placement.

4.2 History placement students’ feedback

The survey provided to History students was hosted on Socrative, and made use of smartphone technology, allowing students to fill in their answers in class with little effort. These survey responses were then automatically compiled into a spreadsheet for ease of access. Students who did not have access to mobile phones were provided with printed versions, the responses to which were added manually to the spreadsheet. The survey received 43 responses out of 85 students registered on the module, giving a 51% response rate.

Overall, History students seemed to find the distribution of classroom and placement hours to be about right, with more than 60% of the students surveyed agreeing that the time dedicated was appropriate. Similarly, student opinion of the amount of time spent on placement was, for the most part, considered about right.

Most students found the History work placement module useful, with many commenting that the experience helped them to gain a better idea of the specific skills and experiences required of them in a career related to their discipline. One student stated that the experience was useful, as it “gave [them] contacts with local historians/museum associations”, indicating that some students recognise the importance of networking on their career goals, particularly within a Humanities environment. Another student also indicated that the work experience module would look good on a CV, similarly demonstrating that students can understand the importance of the module outside of an academic setting, and can view it as a beneficial experience from an employability perspective.

Although students were questioned on the seven graduate attributes, a number did not believe certain skills were relevant to their chosen areas of employment. This is in sharp contrast to the statements made by the employer focus group and the alumni questioned for the project; employers stated unanimously that, with provisos over the wording of ‘agility’, all of the seven graduate attributes were relevant in their workplace environments. Although the questioned alumni stated that some attributes were more or less relevant to specific areas of their employment than others, all of them were important. ‘Commercial awareness’ was cited by some students as unimportant to employment in a History related area of employment, and others simply stated that it was not a skill that they possessed. The work placement module may benefit these students, creating links between students and industry, particularly if they opt for a subject-specific placement.

Most of the questioned History students had some idea of what they wanted to do after their degree. However, many of these were particularly vague plans, such as “apply for jobs” and
“figure out future plans” – some chose to apply for a MA, but most students seemed to be waiting until their course was over to begin looking for work.

4.3 Employer feedback forms and employer focus group

Once students had completed their placement, placement providers were required to fill in a general evaluation form (see Appendix 4) in which they were asked to rate their placement students on a variety of different aspects relating to their experiences. These ratings were done on a scale of one to five, with five being the highest in terms of satisfaction; there was also a rating of N/A if a particular category did not apply to the placement in question. These feedback forms relate to both History and English Language students, and were rated on the same scales.

The categories for these ratings are summarised as: timekeeping, appearance, communication skills, organisational skills, use of initiative, response to criticism, response to pressure, adaptability, motivation, willingness to learn, comprehension of work, standard of work produced, and overall performance. The responses to the survey, overall, were very positive, with no students receiving less than a three on any of the listed categories.

Timekeeping was consistently rated at four and five by placement providers for over 95% of the students, and was flagged in the focus groups as one of the skills that employers value – one provider stated that timekeeping “is such an important skill in the workplace”, and praised his placement students for their punctuality, particularly when dealing with inflexible times for visiting places with very strict rules regarding punctuality such as secure archives.

Although appearance, where applicable, was rated highly, it was also discussed at the focus group, with one employer stating that although it was only a minor point, students often found it hard to distinguish between “professional attire” and the clothes that they would typically wear to university. Overall, however, placement providers seemed very satisfied – one commented that the students’ “appearance was professional, as was [their] conduct.”, and another described their placement student’s appearance as “Neat and professional.”

Humanities students were frequently regarded as having ‘very good’ communication skills, however, few students listed it as a specific skill when asked – this may imply that students are not always aware of the skills that they possess. Students were instead, more likely to focus on more ‘tangible’ qualities, particularly ‘research skills’. One student stated that communication skills were important, but focused on simply having a “good grasp of English”, rather than considering communication on an inter-personal level.

In the focus group, placement providers stated that they believed communication to be an important skill that was missing from the list of graduate attributes. One provider even stated that they felt that students who did not develop communication skills were “dead in the water”, and that communication was an important skill in all areas of employability from as early as the interview process. The confusion surrounding the exclusion of communication skills could be addressed by reinforcing that the graduate attributes are generally examples of extraneous skills desired by employers, and that although their importance should not be downplayed, they exist alongside more ‘conventional’ skills such as communication.

4.4 Student focus group

The student focus group consisted of eight students, all of whom had recently completed the work placement module. Students agreed that they had all managed to show initiative in the
workplace – one even stating that doing so had led the organization in which they undertook their placement to offer them work after they had finished the initial placement.

Although students discussed communication skills, they did not seem as sure of their place within the graduate attributes – one student stated that communication skills allowed her to adapt to the workplace and job role much more easily, as she interacted with various members of the public while on her placement, but could not link this skill to the topics discussed in the focus group. In this case, the student related her communication skills to the graduate attribute of ‘adaptability’, without necessarily realising the link between the two. This seemed to be a recurring theme, as students in the focus group often did not automatically recognise the graduate attributes as skills that they possessed; when prompted, however, students were often very easily able to give examples in which they utilised them. This shows that although students are in possession of these graduate attributes, they may not necessarily recognise them immediately.

The English Language students, however, generally showed a much broader understanding of ‘communication skills’ than was mentioned by the History students surveyed in Section 4.2, and mentioned various methods of communication in the workplace, particularly interacting with others appropriately in a work environment, something which was emphasised as being important in the employer focus group.

A few students, felt underappreciated by their employers, and mentioned that although employers had seemed excited when they had taken initiative, their suggestions were not always followed up on. When prompted, however, students admitted that they themselves did not always make an effort to remind employers of these plans beyond their first mention – this prompting caused students to consider ‘tenacity’ as an attribute to be developed.
5. Impact

5.1 Module enhancement
Our main aim was the improvement and updating of our two placement modules. As a result of that project we have significantly redesigned both modules, increasing the engagement with the Careers Service, somewhat reducing the amount of time on placement (from 180 to 150 hours) and increasing the amount of contact time in class. We have used the extra teaching time to increase students’ engagement with both an academic approach to understanding the range of careers open to them and likely changes in the world of work in the next few decades, and practical skills in identifying and successfully sourcing work placements and subsequent jobs and careers, as well as reflecting more on their own skills and attributes. From Autumn 2015 both modules will be taught over a full term, with greater involvement of both the Careers Service and the Business Enterprise team to increase understanding of the changing nature of the world of work. This will include self-employment and social enterprise; identification and ownership of specific Humanities qualities and skills as well as more generic graduate attributes; greater exploration of career opportunities, and more help with sourcing placements.

5.2 Impact on graduate attributes
The Careers Service was about to trial the seven graduate attributes when our project started, so we specifically offered to test these with both the History and the English Language students. Students could generally identify at least five of the graduate attributes as ones that were applicable to themselves: agility; tenacity; resilience; adaptability; self-motivation with particularly strong emphases on tenacity, adaptability and self-motivation as qualities that they wanted to claim. Influencing was a quality that some students were less convinced about but most were happy to claim. As one History student wrote: “the ability to persuade others of your argument without forcing your opinion on them, and factoring in their opinions is a good skill that historians need.”

Commercial awareness was perhaps unsurprisingly, the quality that they were least likely to find applicable to themselves. One student responded to graduate attributes as follows:

*I believe most of these attributes apply to History/Humanities students. However, I believe commercial awareness is something that Historians may struggle to have, as I believe many of these students may not be looking at commercially based jobs.*

However, evidence we gathered from the placement providers and from our alumni will allow us to present ‘enterprising’, ‘independent’ and ‘problem-solving’ skills as ones that are the Humanities equivalents of ‘commercial awareness’. One placement provider, a Librarian working in a community with significant levels of social deprivation, when asked about this characteristic, praised the English and Creative Writing student who had volunteered to set up a creative writing workshop for school children which was extremely popular and brought more children into the library. This should have knock-on effects on their knowledge about and ability to access resources to help them with schoolwork. Another placement provider, the Huddersfield Mission, which works with homeless people, had previously worked with Social Work students from the University, who focused on issues like housing and mental health but when an English Language student did a placement he offered to do literacy work with clients,
which they were now considered adding to the service they offered. One of our case studies, a History with Sociology graduate now working for a housing association said of commercial awareness:

*As my job is about finding solutions to create new/change services or products, of course paying attention to what is happening in my sector is important. Creating networks and sharing ideas may sound a bit 70’s hippie but collaboration not just within my sector but across sectors is the best thing we can do.*

'Finding solutions' or problem solving is a characteristic that Humanities students easily recognise as derived from essay writing, and is a common desideratum for employers.

Students sometimes found it difficult to distinguish between agility and adaptability, and between tenacity and resilience. We fed this evidence back to the Careers Service and as a result they have reduced the number of graduate attributes in their final list from seven to five:

1. Agility – synonymous with entrepreneurship and creativity, agility is about being able to approach problems from different angles to find solutions and being able and willing to change in order to suit different conditions.
2. Resilience – to flourish in the work place there are times when you need to stick to your guns and be determined to achieve your end goal, you will need to be driven and resolute, letting nothing get in your way. Any job can be full of challenges, setbacks and even failures, those who are going to succeed must have the ability to spring back and be upbeat in the face of obstacles.
3. Self-motivation – having the ability to do what needs to be done without being prompted by others and having a willingness to take a fresh approach rather than sticking with the way things have always been done.
4. Commercial awareness – having an understanding of the wider environment in which an organisation operates and a commercial perspective from both the organisational and customer viewpoint. Also an understanding of how your own role contributes to the overall aims and strategies of the business you work for.
5. Influence – the ability to convince others to take appropriate action via a logical and well thought through approach. Also having the ability to discuss and reach a mutually satisfactory agreement with others having differing viewpoints.

### 5.3 Specific Humanities skills

In addition to the graduate attributes we asked students on the History placement about other skills which we thought might be particularly appropriate to Humanities students: emotional intelligence; cultural sensitivity; and the ability to synthesise large amounts of information. Although some students were unfamiliar with the term ‘emotional intelligence’ and one student felt that they developed this skill through volunteering with a youth group but not on their degree, the majority felt that this was an attribute that they had: “we are able to understand why people behave in the way that they do and what reasons they have.” Humanities students are exposed to a wide geographical and chronological range of cultures, and as a result can be
expected to develop sensitivity to cultural difference. One student said that because of the course “sensitivity to different race, class and gender is engrained” and another “History graduates study many areas of History and through this we become culturally sensitive. We understand different cultures have different customs.” We were also interested in whether Humanities students felt that they had more developed research skills than other students, and they were very positive about their ability to handle large bodies of information and disparate material. They said “historiography has taught us how to filter and manage a great deal of opinions in a successful manner” and “it is impossible to write a quality essay without these attributes.” In addition one of our placement providers felt that imagination should not just be a subset of agility, but was something they particularly valued in our students.

The project has therefore had an impact at the university level, through changes to the graduate attributes, as well as at the school level. We believe this set of graduate attributes, somewhat interpreted in the case of commercial awareness, together with specific Humanities competencies in imagination, emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to analyse large, disparate and complex sets of information effectively represents the skills of our students. We will be sharing the outcomes of this aspect of the project through our School Teaching and Learning Committee, and through the University’s Teaching and Learning Institute, to help other disciplines update their work placement provision. However, we want to further explore the idea of specific Humanities attributes in the future.

5.4 A celebration of employability in the Humanities

We billed our stakeholder event as ‘A Celebration of Employability in the Humanities’ to thank placement providers for the opportunities they offer, and to give current year one students a chance to meet placement providers and get advance information about placement possibilities. Over 40 people attended the event which included a lunch, networking, student presentations on the placements they have done, and focus groups. We asked providers what advice they would like us to pass on to students and they said they had only a few things to suggest (and mostly added the caveat “this isn’t about your students but things I have heard from other providers”):

➢ dress professionally and be punctual;
➢ do not be surprised (or complain) if you get tired;
➢ be more adventurous. If you are offered a placement in another town take it, especially if the placement is offering to cover your travel expenses.

We also asked the providers to tell us what they valued in our students and which of the graduate attributes they recognised in placement students. The providers emphasised the enthusiasm and imagination of placement students, the skills and new perspectives that they brought, and their ability to manage themselves. In relation to the graduate attributes they emphasised self-reliance and self-motivation, and tenacity. One provider talked about taking a student to visit an archive to source documents for a project. They had not been able to locate the right items on the first visit, but the student had been back three times under his own steam until he found what they needed. The project leader said that he would simply not have had the time to do that, and it added significantly to the final outcome. Evidence from the placement providers will feed back into teaching on the module; by providing examples such as this to help students understand the applicability of this attributes to their work experience. We
will address issues such as these raised by placement providers in teaching and use their examples in addressing the graduate attributes.

The placement providers were very pleased to have their contribution to our students’ degrees recognised and we hope that this will help us to build long-term relationships for the benefit of future students. Year one students also attended the ‘Celebration’ to find out more about the placement module they will take in the following year. They were able to meet providers, ask questions, and arrange follow ups. As a result, nearly a dozen students will start their placement in the summer of year one. This means that they will have the opportunity to broaden or deepen their experience in year two, so that they will be even better prepared for job-seeking in year three. We also hope to use them as peer mentors when the module runs next year, sharing their experience with students yet to seek a placement.

As a result of the success of this event the School of Music, Humanities and Media has agreed to fund it as an annual event. Next year we will seek to make it bigger, and include courses from elsewhere in the School. We will use this to build stronger relations with the placement providers we already have and use it as a way to develop placement experience in parts of the School which currently do not have them. We also hope that it will help us to develop opportunities for students to do placement years, in a way that is common in many vocational courses, but is currently very rare in the Humanities.

5.5 Alumni case studies

The second output from the project was a set of case studies of recent Humanities alumni (Appendix 3). We contacted around a dozen recent Huddersfield alumni from English Literature, English Language, History and Journalism about doing an interview or responding to a questionnaire about how their degree had led to their current career, the skills they had developed as undergraduates, how far they recognised and used the graduate attributes, and how important work experience had been to them. Eight graduates responded and although not all had done a placement, they generally agreed that it either had been or would have been useful. We chose four of the interviews to form our case studies to represent the range of degrees in Humanities, and a variety of careers which our students have gone into: including archives, media marketing, teaching, and university administration. These will be available on the HEA website at the end of our project. We will use both these and the remaining interviews in teaching to illustrate the ways in which graduates have used skills developed on their course in their career, and on the university website to represent the range of occupations our students go into and their views on the value of work placements and work experience for Humanities students.
6. Lessons learnt

We gathered feedback from students and employers in many different forms (questionnaires, evaluation forms, focus groups) and in a variety of methods across the two placement modules. This made compiling the results and extracting data quite difficult. In the future, we would standardise the evaluation techniques; now that we have ready-made questionnaires, these can be employed in a more principled fashion in future years.

Our colleagues in the Careers Service have been extremely helpful in the course of this project and we will continue to work closely with them in the delivery and further development of the revised modules. We will also be developing our links with the University’s Business and Enterprise team. We have realised the contribution our colleagues can make to this aspect of our delivery. We have also realised the importance of linking employability to the specific skills of the students’ programme, and helping students to articulate and ‘own’ those skills, as particular to themselves, and not just generic transferable skills that any graduate might have.
7. Future programmes

While we have worked on embedding employability into the year two programme, our research also showed that year three students tended to put employability and the concerns of finding a job aside during their final year so that they could concentrate on getting good grades in their coursework. The diversity of careers that Humanities students go into means that they are not presented with specific recruitment opportunities by employers coming on to campus. One of our aims for next year will be to develop an ‘outduction’ programme for year three History students to match the induction programme we have in year one, to help them retain the lessons from the ‘Work Placement’ module at the forefront of their minds and encourage them to be applying for jobs and training programmes from an earlier stage in the year.

Evidence from the most recent Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) return (2013-14 graduates) shows that employment and further study rates after six months for the School as a whole (breakdown by specific subject area were not available at the time of writing) are excellent at 97.9% and ahead of national figures for History and Philosophy (93.7%) and Languages (93.6%). However, graduate-level employment is significantly lower at 68.2%. HESA figures (https://www.hesa.ac.uk/stats-dlhe) for all 2013-14 graduates indicates that 75.1% are in graduate occupations or training after six months, but we know that Humanities students typically take longer than six months to settle into a graduate career (Allan 2006). We aim to help students through the year two modules and year three programme to move into graduate careers more quickly than they may currently be doing.

One of the areas we want to continue to explore is the idea of specific Humanities graduate attributes. While most students were happy to recognise the general Huddersfield graduate attributes they had also indicated earlier in the project that they felt they wanted to be able to claim specific Humanities skills. While students responded positively to suggestions about emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity and the ability to analyse large bodies of information, we want to be able to produce a set of attributes which is more clearly self-generated by students. We will be working in the next year to refine a set of Humanities attributes to run alongside the generic ones, and to allow students to personalise a set of their own graduate attributes.

We also want to do further work on embedding employability in other disciplines within our School, such as Music and Drama. We will draw on the experience of the current project to provide a baseline and useful evidence, while also broadening our approach to consider the specific needs of Creative Arts graduates, including the development of appropriate graduate attributes.
8. Conclusions

In conclusion, this project has met the three aims set out in the introduction of this report (Section 1). We have successfully embedded employability in the two modules we worked on, which have now been re-validated following extensive evaluation. Going beyond the two placement modules, we have produced case studies to demonstrate and to help students value the skills they develop through a Humanities degree. Finally, we used the ‘Celebration of Employability in the Humanities’ event to improve understanding of the skills that employers value.

This project has had an impact on our institution’s definition of our graduate attributes and how we talk about employability. We have learned that cross-institutional collaboration on an issue as key as employability is vital for the success and sustainability of an evaluative and transformative project such as this. Furthermore, by involving all stakeholders and creating opportunities to share experiences, we have deepened staff/student, cross-institutional and external relationships and created a shared understanding about what employability means in the Humanities. Although our mission statement (Section 2) still stands, we have made significant in-roads towards achieving our goal of embedding employability in the Humanities curriculum.
References


DLHE return. Available from: [https://unistats.direct.gov.uk/](https://unistats.direct.gov.uk/).


Appendices

Appendix 1: Focus group questions

Provider

We want to explore your experience of having students on placement, so that we can better help students prepare for placement and the world of work. We also want to find out whether you feel that Humanities students have specific skills and characteristics that you value.

When we prepare this material for teaching and research we will not use the names of students, but it would be helpful if you avoided identifying specific individuals.

What are the skills or characteristics that you most value in the students who come on placement?

What skills or characteristics (if any) do you find that students lack, or you would like them to have before they arrive rather than developing on placement? Have you got suggestions about how we should help students develop them?

We are going to share with you our Careers Service draft Huddersfield graduate attributes, which are intended to describe all Huddersfield students. Do you feel that these are the most important characteristics that you are looking for or do Humanities students have other characteristics or skills? If so, which ones do you value most? Can you tell us stories in which placement students have demonstrated them?

If you do not feel these are the most important characteristics, can you tell us why?

What would be your top seven characteristics?

Student

We want to explore your experience of placement, so that we can better help students prepare for placement and the world of work.

When we prepare this material for teaching and research we will not use names, but it would be helpful if you avoided identifying specific individuals.

What are the skills or characteristics you have used most on placement? Do you think they are specific to Humanities students?

What did you feel you learned from being on placement?

Can you map your experiences to the Huddersfield graduate attributes?

How would you improve your placement module for next year?

What advice would you give to next year’s placement students?

How are you going to use your experience to help you get a good job when you graduate?

Is there anything you feel you still need to develop before you start applying for jobs?
Appendix 2: Student survey questions

History students

1. **Thinking back to the Work Placement module. Do you think the amount of time spent on placement is:**
   a) too much
   b) too little
   c) about right

2. **Do you think the amount of teaching is:**
   a) too much
   b) too little
   c) about right

3. **How useful was the Work Placement module in preparing you for the world of work?**

4. **Name up to three things that would improve the Work Placement module**

5. **Thinking about this year. Do you think year three History students need more help with finding a job or course before they graduate?**

6. **If your answer was ‘yes’, which of these would be most useful:**
   a) timetabled sessions with the careers service
   b) discussion with your dissertation supervisor
   c) timetabled session with your Personal Tutor and Personal Tutor group
   d) other

7. **What do you think employers are looking for in Humanities graduates?**

8. **What specific skills do you think History graduates have?**

9. **Do you consider 'emotional intelligence' to be a skill which History develops? Please explain your answer.**

10. **Which of the graduate attributes do you see as being applicable to you? Are there any that you think are not relevant to you?**

11. **Do you consider 'cultural sensitivity' to be a skill or attribute which History develops? Please explain your answer.**

12. **Do you consider 'the ability to synthesise large amounts of information/different opinions/disparate kinds of sources' to be a skill or attribute which History develops? Please explain your answer.**

13. **Do you have a job, course or other opportunity organised for when you graduate? Please say what this is (e.g.) management trainee at Tesco, Schools Direct Kirklees, MA in History Huddersfield, VSO in Nepal.**
14. If you do not have anything organised yet, what are your plans?

**English language students**

1. Please tick the one that applies to you in response to the following statement: I really enjoyed being on a placement.
   a) strongly agree
   b) agree
   c) neither agree nor disagree
   d) disagree
   e) strongly disagree

2. I found the placement experience useful.
   a) strongly agree
   b) agree
   c) neither agree nor disagree
   d) disagree
   e) strongly disagree

3. I found the use of blogs and tutor comments for this module useful.
   a) strongly agree
   b) agree
   c) neither agree nor disagree
   d) disagree
   e) strongly disagree

4. Did you enjoy trying out a new style of writing in your blog entries?
   a) yes
   b) no

5. Would you have liked the blogs to be visible in Unilearn so that fellow students could also read and comment?
   a) yes
   b) no

6. Would you have preferred the first summative assignment to be several blog entries rather than a reflective essay?
   a) yes
   b) no

7. Would you have liked more teaching time in semester 1? (Weekly lectures and bi-weekly seminars)
   a) yes
   b) no
8. I found this module to be very useful in helping me develop my employability skills.
   a) strongly agree
   b) agree
   c) neither agree nor disagree
   d) disagree
   e) strongly disagree

9. I found the career drop-ins to be very useful.
   a) strongly agree
   b) agree
   c) neither agree nor disagree
   d) disagree
   e) strongly disagree

10. Do you feel more self-motivated as a result of being on placement? If so, give an example.
    a) yes
    b) no

11. Do you feel that you are now more determined to do well in your degree? (if so, how has being on placement made you more determined? Are you working harder in University? Are you working to achieve a place on a PGCE course? Give example(s))
    a) yes
    b) no

12. From being on placement, do you feel that you have developed skills such as the ability to think and draw conclusions quickly? If so, give an example.
    a) yes
    b) no

13. Did you encounter any setbacks during the placement module? If yes, what were they, and how did you deal with this?
    a) yes
    b) no

14. If you answered yes to question 13, did you carry on, ensuring you completed your 180 hours and performed your analysis, despite the problems encountered?
    a) yes
    b) no

15. Are you more aware of the way your placement organisation operates?
    a) yes
    b) no
16. **Do you understand how your role played a part in the smooth running of the organisation and helped to achieve the aims and strategies of the organisation? If so, please give an example.**
   a) yes
   b) no

17. **Did you find yourself having to adapt to suit different roles within the organisation?**
   a) yes
   b) no

18. **From being on placement, have you gained a job, contract or opportunity? If so, please give details.**
   a) yes
   b) no
Appendix 3: Case studies

CASE STUDIES
The University of Huddersfield

This document contains several case studies which form part of the University of Huddersfield’s larger HEA funded project concerning the embedding of employability into the humanities curriculum. In these case studies, graduates of the University of Huddersfield were asked to comment on their experiences both during and after their degree.

These experiences were framed through the university’s seven graduate competencies:

- **Agility** – approaching problems from different angles to find solutions, incorporating the ability to think laterally
- **Tenacity** – being determined to achieve your end goal, being driven and resolute, letting nothing get in your way
- **Adaptability** – demonstration of the capacity to change in order to suit different conditions
- **Resilience** – responding positively to challenges, setbacks and failure
- **Self-motivation** – demonstrating the ability to do what is necessary without being prompted by others and a willingness to take a fresh approach
- **Commercial awareness** – understanding of the wider environment in which an organisation operates and of someone’s contribution to organisational aims and strategies
- **Influence** – convincing others to take appropriate action via a logical and well thought through approach; reaching mutually satisfactory agreements from differing viewpoints

These competencies were developed by the careers service of the University of Huddersfield, and are designed to highlight important, potentially non-academic skills desired by employers when hiring graduates. As well as this, more general questions were asked of the interviewees concerning their views on work experience and placement opportunities, particularly their relevance in developing employability.

CASE STUDIES
Megan Beazley ...............2
Anthony Bourger ............8
Chloe Banks .................7
Andrea Waterhouse ..........9
Megan Beech

Studied: English Literature and Creative Writing BA Hons and Librarian Studies MA (Undergraduate: 2005 – 2006; Postgraduate: 2006 – 2010)

Current Job Title: Marketing Officer - Research and Enterprise at University of Huddersfield

Megan is currently employed by the university, but has also worked in several other organisations, including work with the academic publishing company, Emerald Group Publishing. She has acted as the Chairperson for the Northern and Midlands branch of the Society of Young Publishers, and has held various editing and proof reading positions since graduating from the University of Huddersfield.

“The competencies are the kind of areas that employers are looking for, and having gone through quite a lot of job interviews in the years since I left university, you do see a pattern of a lot of these words coming up in interviews.”

TITLE

1. What career path did you see yourself taking after university and how does that relate to what you do now?

When I was actually at university, I had a very different idea of what I wanted to do to what I’ve ended up doing, which I think is probably quite common. When I started, I thought that I might be interested in being a teacher, and that changed quite quickly. I quite quickly realised that that wasn’t where my interests lay, and it was during the second and third year of my undergraduates degree that I became interested in how research is created and the research process and in publishing. So my real interests developed into the publishing industry, academic research publishing, which is where I started my career. I worked in publishing for about five years after my degree and that led to the position that I’m in now as a marketing officer for research and enterprise. I don’t think I ever would have guessed that I would be in something that’s called a marketing role, but because of its basis on research, it fits really well. My interest in research, and the process of carrying out research and disseminating and sharing research definitely grew out of my time at university and the experiences that I had as a student.

2. Did your degree help you to decide your current career path? If so, why?

My degree definitely helped me focus on my career path. I think like most people, I never really had a clear path - it wasn't as structured. I think I was always a little bit vagrant; I had things that I knew I enjoyed and was interested in, but I wasn’t really sure what kind of role or career that would then translate to.

3. How important is it for humanities students to undergo work experience?

I think it’s really important. When I was at university, we didn’t have those kind of systems in place, so I wasn’t able to do work experience or placements and I think I would have taken a really good opportunity, so I think the fact that they’ve got these opportunities now is really, really important, especially for humanities students. The kind of areas and careers that a lot of students want to go into are often very competitive, so experience is really valuable from a very early stage. I had to go out and get that experience myself, and that took a lot of work and a lot of time and effort to do that, so the fact that current students have got some support and some help with that is great. Obviously you learn a huge amount through your degree and your lectures and the research that you carry out and those kind of experiences of university, but I think you need to balance that or complement it with practical experience as well because that’s what employers are looking for.

4. Do you feel that you were sufficiently prepared for employment by your course? If not, how do you feel that couldn’t have been improved?

I think because when I was at the university, we didn’t have work placements or work experience for my course. I think that potentially I wasn’t prepared for it as I could’ve been. Obviously since a lot of these initiatives have been put in place, which is great, and they would’ve been really useful at the time. That being said, I did get really good advice from my lecturers, which was really helpful. I was always able to talk to them about what I wanted to do. My dissertation tutor was especially good at helping me think about which areas of my work I really enjoyed, and what might translate into an industry. Obviously the work experience is really good for the students, but I would also always encourage them to talk to their lecturers or their future employers and get some advice on things as well because there might be roles that they’ve not thought of or they might not be aware of that other people could point them to.

5. If you could give one tip to current undergraduates to prepare them for employment, what would it be?

Firstly, be really flexible. Although the aspects of work that I enjoy, and the aspects I’m really passionate about, have remained the same over the years, my actual role and my actual career have changed a lot. Don’t get tied down and don’t just have one idea of what you think you want to do. It’s open to the idea that there are other passions about and enjoy doing are represented in a lot of different industries and there might be really good opportunities in an area that you wouldn’t have initially considered.

Secondly, experience. Get as much practical experience as you can, really. Obviously taking advantage of work placement schemes or work experience, as well as volunteering, I got involved with the Society of Young Publishers and set up a northern branch because when I got involved with them they asked if I’d a job offer, an Oxford branch and a Scotland branch, there was nothing in between, I got some that I knew were interested in. And I was set up a northern branch for the SYP, and that was really valuable, it was kind of interesting and people who put me in touch with good contacts in the publishing industry.

As well as that, if you feel like what you need doesn’t exist - in terms of support that you kind of know, as a kind of network that you need, don’t be afraid to try and create it yourself and get involved. I think I found that the most useful skills and advice that I received was developing my career from taking really active steps myself and really getting involved with things, not just using what was already available.
Megan Beech (Cont.)

6. Which of the graduate competencies do you believe to be relevant to your current career?
I think most of them are, but particularly agility and adaptability. I’ve kind of lamped those two together because I think they’re really about responding to change and looking at different ways of working at leisure and approaching them, and just approaching them by being adaptable to that change. I think that most roles that graduates go into will expect them to be able to do that because industries are constantly changing and will expect employees to adapt to those changes. Resilience is really important too, because whatever role you go into, you’ll encounter challenges - what you might initially see as problems, which might be difficult, and you can’t just give up at the first go; you need to be persistent and find a way to work with things, so I think that’s quite an important thing to learn. Self-motivation has been very important for me - the role I work in is very self-motivated, very independent. I very much set my own goals and aims, and decide my areas of work for myself, which is very rewarding and allows me to work on areas that I’m really interested in. It does take a lot of discipline as well, and I think that translates to my PhD as well, because if you go into a role in practice, or you go into a role in academia - that role of being a researcher is very self-motivated, it’s about setting your own targets and that kind of thing, so I think that’s probably been one of the most useful things for me to learn. My university course definitely did help me develop because of that level of commitment and motivation that they expect, particularly in the third year where you’re working on your dissertation.

7. Did you learn / work on any of these competencies whilst you were and undergraduate?
The self-motivation - that was definitely encouraged. I guess being resilient as well, that was something that tutors focused on - when you’re struggling with a piece of work, look at it from a different angle or try and approach it in a different way, and not be put off when you don’t do something perfect the first time - that was really helpful.
Areas we didn’t cover were: I think, influence. Influencing others is something that I’ve very much learnt as part of my practical experience through my career. It’s not something that I really focused on at university. I guess that’s a hard thing to tie into a degree, but I know that new students have more access to careers and things like that, which I didn’t have as much support through. I think that’s something that the careers service would be really good with. Possibly commercial awareness, as well - that’s something I’ve very much developed as part of my practical experience, not something I really considered much at university.

8. How important do you think these competencies are for students attempting to find work after graduation?
Definitely. They are the kind of areas that employers are looking for and, having gone through quite a lot of job interviews in the years since I left university, you do see a pattern of a lot of these words coming up in interviews. A lot of interviewers use what I think is called a competency based framework for interviewing, and I think they use a lot of ‘If you were in this situation and this happened, how would you address the challenge, and how would you respond to this?’ and the areas that they assess you on in interviews are very closely linked to these areas so I think that having an understanding of them right from the outset, as a student, would be really helpful and can only be a bonus really.

9. How do you think your degree equipped you for the world of work?
I think it did, but possibly in a more roundabout way than students might find now, as there have much more structured support. A good example is that as part of my degree, my dissertation tutor in my third year encouraged me to develop my dissertation into an article to be published in an academic journal - I think that experience really opened my eyes to the process of doing that, but also to the fact that there’s a whole industry built up out there around academic research and publishing, which is something I wouldn’t have been necessarily exposed to as an undergraduate. That definitely had an influence on me in terms of thinking about possible careers in publishing, so that was really important to me. I think as well, just the areas we talked about in terms of self-motivation and adapting to change, and that kind of thing. I don’t think I would’ve felt as prepared for dealing with those kinds of situations in a work environment if I hadn’t already experienced them through my degree as well.

“I think [work experience] is really important. When I was at university, we didn’t have those kind of systems in place, so I wasn’t able to do work experience or placements and I think it would’ve been a really good opportunity”

Anthony Bowyer

Studies: Journalism BA Hons (2010–2013)

Current Job Title: Marketing Executive at Northern Media

1. What career path did you see yourself taking after university and how does that relate to what you do now?
When I attained my degree I wanted to work for the BBC as a journalist in the sports department. However after getting a placement during my second and third year to work for them on a paid basis, during the London Olympics and the 2013 football season, I had achieved that and I wanted a new challenge. Thus marketing, which I also loved became my new career plan. This has also given me much more stability in my life in terms of job security and has allowed me to buy my first home.

2. Did your degree help you to decide your current career path? If so, why?
Certainly! Without doing my degree, especially at Huddersfield I would never have had the opportunity to work for the BBC. This would have meant that for the rest of my life I would have been chasing the dream. My degree however allowed me to achieve that early and chase new dreams in my life.
3. How important do you think it is for Humanities students to undertake work experience and why?

Without work experience I would not have achieved what I did and not have the career I have now. It was one of the main reasons I got accepted into university and having been in my job for two years now, have seen how work experience is important to our company when it comes to recruiting.

4. Do you feel you are sufficiently prepared for employment by your course? If not, how could this be improved?

Yes, but I also think I was prepared because of the volume of work experience I achieved whilst at university, having worked for the BBC, Huddersfield Giants, Vinapetcom, The Student Sports Magazine and running my own blog. More than anything else, I had the skills to be in any industry.

5. If you could give current undergraduates one tip to prepare them for employment, what would it be?

Have an attitude of making it. All my success at the BBC came from essentially looking after kids for two weeks. You never know who is watching you.

6. Which of the seven graduate competencies do you believe to be relevant to your current employment and how did they come into play?

What they are all important, for my company sustainability, and the ability to change due to certain scenarios is essential. At Northern Media we use the wording in and we adapt and able to change is vital. That is not to say however the other six are not equally as important and you must possess these skills as well.

7. Did you learn / work on any of these competencies whilst you were an undergraduate?

I tried to work on everything whilst I was at university and feel I developed massively in my time at Huddersfield. What I believe however is that it is often in real world situations where you learn the most, in terms of hard work in the media industry, such as deadlines or issues going wrong.

8. How important do you think these 3 competencies are for students attempting to find work after graduation?

Very important but it is not the only thing. It is important to offer a wide range of different skills to the employer. If you can bring something, a lot different, work outside skills then you will have major value to any company.

9. How do you think your degree equipped you for the world of work?

The degree gave me the core essentials to make a name for myself in any industry and for that I am extremely grateful.

10. Has your degree helped you get where you are today?

In one word, yes. Not only my degree, but also by doing my degree at Huddersfield University.

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Chloe Banks

Studied: English Literature and Creative Writing BA Hons (2010-2013)

Current Job Title: Tutor at Bolton College / Full time office work

1. What career path did you see yourself taking after university and how does that relate to what you do now?

I had no idea what I wanted to do after university. I thought I might want to pursue writing, but I didn't really know where to start. I'm currently working in an office during the day and completing a qualification to teach at college level part-time. I teach English GCSE to adult learners at night, and I did a degree in English Literature with Creative Writing, so they're definitely linked.

2. Did your degree help you to decide your current career path? If so, why?

It didn't necessarily help me to decide, but it definitely led me into my current career path - obviously, if I didn't have my degree I wouldn't be able to teach.

"Remember that, eventually, university will end – and that ending will be a lot easier to handle if you have a plan."

I was also lucky enough to experience some very good teaching when I was at university, and so this probably influenced my desire to be a teacher. I suppose my current career path wasn't necessarily influenced by my degree, but it was influenced by the experiences I had at university.

3. How important do you think it is for Humanities students to undertake work experience and why?

I think it's incredibly important. My BA didn't offer a sandwich year option, so when I graduated and came away from university, I was competing with thousands of people my own age who actually had practical experience. You live in quite an intense, unrealistic bubble for three years and then, once you're done, you sort of have to find your own feet without any experience under your belt.

4. Do you feel you were sufficiently prepared for employment by your course? If not, how could this be improved?

I don't think so, probably because I am one of those people who needs to be set down and told what my options are. The English Literature degree was fairly dissimilar to degree offered at the rest of the university, so although I did experience some excellent teaching, I also often felt like I was drifting through the course aimlessly. This could probably be improved by introducing points of contact for students; these could be tutors on the course, or a sort of personal tutor system. I often felt isolated and like nobody had led me in any direction for the end of my degree.

5. If you could give current undergraduates one tip to prepare them for employment, what would it be?

Remember that, eventually, university will end – and that ending will be a lot easier to handle if you have a plan.
Chloe Banks (Cont.)

6. Which of the seven graduate competencies do you believe to be relevant to your current employment and how did they come into play?

For me it would have to be networking. My current full-time job is B2B, and I expect to have lost that role by June 2024. My network, which I have had since I was 15, was invaluable when I was looking for work after graduation. Our ability to communicate effectively and to make successful connections is a key part of my job. I have had quite a few years where I’ve worked in the tourism industry, and this has been compounded by a lack of support from management within the industry. Ultimately, though, I think I’ve found my niche in this field and although finding the balance between work and study has been incredibly difficult, I am determined to make it work.

7. Did you learn/work on any of these competencies whilst you were an undergraduate?

I definitely learnt to self-activate during my final year of study, while I was working on my dissertation. As similar situations in the past, I have experienced a structure in terms of researching, drafting and editing the thesis in a way that was not the case when writing my thesis, as it was down to me to submit it on time, with little outside help.

8. How important do you think these competencies are for students attempting to find work after graduation?

They’re very important. Because they’re not always skills that people form organically. In my experience, many people who graduated around the same time as me remain frustrated by long periods after graduating because they did not have the necessary skills to find work, or they did not feel the work was right for them.

9. How do you think your degree equipped you for the world of work?

Because it was down to me alone to manage my finances, research appropriate material and meet deadlines, I managed to develop my independence, which has been invaluable in my working life.

10. How has your degree helped you get where you are today?

Primarily, I gained a qualification that I needed in order to teach. In addition to this, I gained confidence through social interaction before university, which was quite stressful, but the academic and peer support I received encouraged me to come out of my shell and have confidence in my academic abilities.

Andrea Waterhouse

Current Job Title: Archivist at Barclays

1. What career path did you choose after university and how does that relate to what you do now?

Because I was a mature student, I was already teaching IT at what would become a school. I kind of fell into it - my original intention was to teach history, but I needed to get a higher qualification. My parent had always been a history and at the time I was just teaching things like Microsoft Office, so I thought that I’d do a history degree and maybe get a job teaching history at a sixth form college.

2. Did your degree help you to decide your current career path? If so, why?

It was the second year of my degree, we were asked to do a work placement, I was up in arms about it because I had loads of experience but we had to do it to pass.

“I think the course would be much poorer without [work experience]”.

Originally I was going to do [work experience] in a school or a college, but I live rdens and when I was a teacher I’d written some courses about family history, so I knew about the archives and knew some of the staff. After a while the manager sat me down and asked if I’d considered a career in archives.

3. How important is it for humanities students to undergo work experience?

I think it’s very important. It’s amazing. I was quite nervous when I actually went into my work experience, but I think there’s always an element of uncertainty when you go into a new area or work environment. Doing work experience really boosted my confidence, and helped me understand working in a specific field. Work experience helps students understand the differences between a job and a career, and gives them an insight into the working environment. I think this course would be much poorer without it.

4. Do you feel that you were sufficiently prepared for employment by your course? If not, how do you feel that could’ve been improved?

I do feel that I was sufficiently prepared. It was all very organized, very efficient - they think of everything and provide information that is accessible and easy to understand. You can just flip through and find what’s appropriate for you and your needs.

5. If you could give one tip to current undergraduates to prepare them for employment, what would it be?

This one I found hard: be yourself, not what you think you should be. I think
5. If you could give one tip to current undergraduates to prepare them for employment, what would it be? (Cont.)

That’s really important, because I do interviews for work and you can see that some people’s interviews are very scripted—they go in thinking ‘this is what they want, this is what I have to say’. People might not get the job because they’re not suitable for that position, or it’s not what they’re looking for, but if people fake it and then get the job and they’re not really like them, it’s going to be hard for them and they’re not going to be happy. So I think it’s really important that people be themselves. The other thing I thought was try different things – especially with students of a typical age, now is the time to start investigating – if you’re going to get things wrong, it’s much easier to get them wrong early on in your career. The more things you try, the more successful you’re going to be, and the more informed your decisions about your prospective career are going to be.

6. Which of the seven graduate competencies do you believe to be relevant to your current employment and how did they come into play?

I put all seven competencies! In the current role I have, I use all of them. I work in the financial industry, and I suppose the customer-facing industry—you’ve got people who work in the financial side of things, but you’ve also got a lot of support staff. I’m an archivist and I don’t have any experience of banking or finance, so agility is particularly important—you have to learn to approach things from different angles.

7. Did you learn / work on any of these competencies whilst you were an undergraduate?

I can see all these—as I’m talking, I’m thinking about all the modules I did at university, all the lecturers I had, and how that all helped. Even though these competencies weren’t codified at that point, I feel that they were still developed even if it was indirectly.

8. How important do you think these competencies are for students attempting to find work after graduation?

Very important—as I said, in my job, I use all of the competencies, and I think that’s very common in industry. The qualities are definitely things that I would look for whilst interviewing for a position.
Appendix 4: Employer feedback form

Please complete AND RETURN TO THE ADDRESS BELOW
EMPLOYER FEEDBACK OF WORK EXPERIENCE PLACEMENT 2015

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<th>Student Name:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Company Name and Address:</td>
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<td>Supervisor Name:</td>
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<td>Start Date and Duration of Placement:</td>
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<td>Number of Days Absence:</td>
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### SUMMARY OF EVALUATION

1 = Very Poor; 2 = Poor; 3 = Reasonable; 4 = Good; 5 = Very Good; N/A = Not Applicable

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<th>Timekeeping</th>
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Any Further Comments/General Feedback:

Would you consider employing another student for 15/16?  (If no, please give reasons)

Has the Work Experience Programme been beneficial to your Organisation? Please comment.

Would you agree to this statement being included in course Publicity material?  □ Yes □ No
Would you be interested in recruiting a student on a One Year Placement?  □ Yes □ No

Signed (Supervisor):  
Signed (Student):

Date:  
Date:

Please return to: Stephanie Bower, Employer Engagement Administrator, School of Music, Humanities and Media, University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH  Tel: 01484 471572 Email: mhm-placements@hud.ac.uk

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