

# History Graduates with **Impact**

Edited by: Lisa Lavender



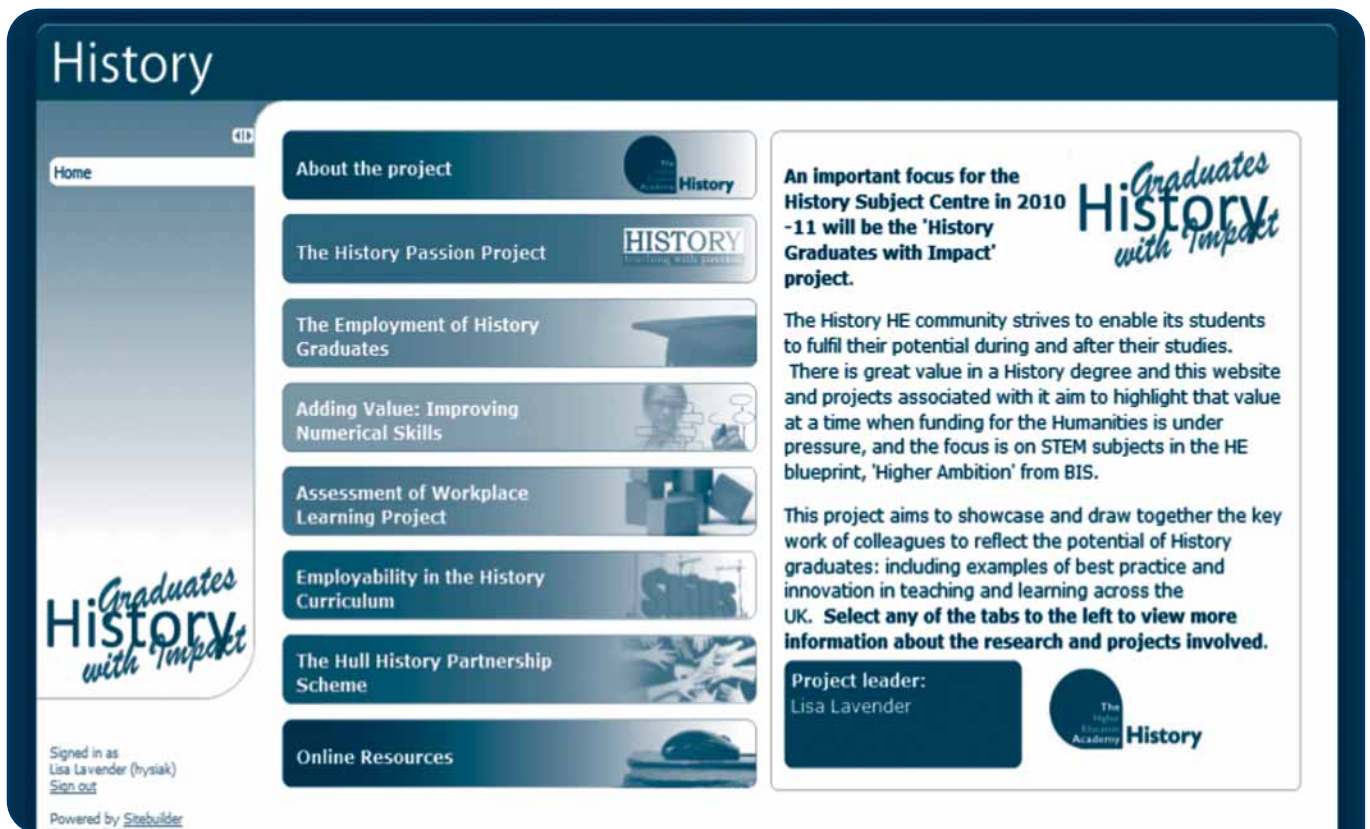


# History Graduates with Impact

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## Acknowledgements



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Most importantly, the History Subject Centre would like to thank all the project leaders who submitted reports and case studies for inclusion in this publication and the wider resources they have also produced as part of their projects, which can be found on the History Graduates with Impact website: <http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/research/gwil>. All project leaders have worked hard to a tight deadline to complete their projects, enabling us to share their work with the history community in time for what will be a challenging new academic year: we are extremely grateful.

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- Richard A. Hawkins (University of Wolverhampton) – The Assessment of Workplace Learning.
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- David Nicholls (Manchester Metropolitan University) - Adding Value: Improving Numerical Skills and *The Employment of History Graduates*.
- Geoff Timmins (University of Central Lancashire) - Adding Value: Improving Numerical Skills.
- Alison Twells (Sheffield Hallam University) – Employability in the History Curriculum.
- Harvey Woolf (Associate, Institute for Learning Enhancement, University of Wolverhampton) - The Assessment of Workplace Learning.

## Aims and Objectives

The over-arching project (of which this publication forms only part) was instigated in response to the challenges facing history in higher education.

The History Subject Centre has taken seriously its role to support innovation and highlight impact in the teaching of our discipline. As a result, a number of projects were funded in 2009-11 to advance the understanding of key aspects of impact, engagement and employability for those studying history in the UK. In addition, academics noted for their work in this field were approached to revisit their research in the changing landscape, enabling us to pool the expertise of a range of project leaders in a comprehensive exploration of increasingly important aspects of teaching and learning in the humanities.

Its primary aim was to combine case studies on teaching with in depth survey and research analysis on the impact that the study of history at HE level can provide for its graduates. The resulting collection reveals insights that will hopefully provide faculties, departments and individual academics at all levels with innovative approaches, examples of impact and evidence-based ideas for taking teaching in new directions.

It was always the intention to develop a complementary website to enhance the information in this publication where relevant. Many additional resources and links to good practice in UK institutions can be found on the website: <http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/research/gwil>



## Introduction

*“An underlying theme of this conference centres on the demands of supporting a high quality student experience in a time of change and funding uncertainties.”*

[Report from the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Teaching and Learning in History Conference, 2010]

Such support has always been at the core of the work of this Subject Centre, and indeed the Subject Centre network as a whole. The fears expressed in the conference report of 2010 were more than realised within months with arts and humanities in higher education now facing a very difficult future. Even before the government's funding plans were announced the History Subject Centre recognised that priority should be given to highlighting the value of a degree in history and the high quality of students produced in our discipline. In addition, in the face of the growing employability agenda it is important to discuss some of the challenges facing history programmes and showcase helpful developments in some universities. Concurrently, at the centre of all we must not forget the fundamental importance and value of quality discipline-focused teaching. Such considerations have obviously struck a chord within the academic community, with Subject Centre support sought for investigation and innovation across these themes, building into a varied and robust programme of projects. The factor they all have in common is the understanding and furtherance of 'History Graduates with Impact'. The value of a history education is rich and broad: we should celebrate what our subject has to offer and share examples and experiences of the impact that studying history can involve.

Preparing students and developing their skills for the graduate labour market has become a very hot topic in the last twelve months. How and how far to embed employability skills into the history curriculum is one of the most contested and challenging issues. For example, a useful mechanism for all concerned and one growing in usage is Personal Development Planning (PDP): goal setting; action planning and reflective practice. Academics and students may not see the connection between the curriculum and professional development – should a connection be forced when the QAA's revised PDP guidelines demonstrate a greater emphasis on using PDP to support the student than the curriculum?

Of greater concern here is the underlying value of studying history in preparing graduates for the future. The Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) recently published

a research article investigating employability and graduate identity through employer concepts and expectations of graduate employees, with some surprising findings when compared with the priorities in history HE programmes.

“The first was the very strong endorsement of interpersonal skills in the broadest sense – this outweighed by far any other skill, including cognitive abilities. The second was the very strong endorsement of the importance of written communication skills, which far outweighed presentational skills (and IT skills). The third was that the kinds of things that many students are interested in (e.g. recognition of diversity, sustainability, even culture) are recognised by employers as having some significance.”<sup>1</sup>

And the Higher Education Academy's Learning and Employability report on *Work-related Learning in Higher Education*, when looking at work-related learning within an employability strategy in HE,

“... the concern is not with traditional 'concepts of the person-job' fit (how far a person has the attributes required for a job), but also with the development of graduates who are active and empowered to seek out jobs and organisations that fit their preferences and characteristics. By doing this, work-related learning is concerned with the development of a graduate that better 'fits' the changing economic situation and evolving job markets in ways that assist the individual graduate to respond to society-wide developments effectively.”<sup>2</sup>

This publication draws together case studies, surveys and essays which provide insights into different aspects of higher education teaching and learning in history and share the aim of developing and equipping history students for their study and broader graduate life. In some sections the essays are part of broader research projects and findings, but concentrate here on their most relevant impact in the discipline. A website has been developed to complement this work and provide a base for related material and wider information on individual projects. You are encouraged to visit <http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/research/gwil> for more details.

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1. Geoffrey Hinchliffe and Adrienne Jolly, *Employability and graduate identity*, HECSU, Spring 2010: resulting from a HEA-funded project on 'Employer Concepts of Graduate Employability' - <http://escalate.ac.uk/5233>
  2. Neil Moreland, *Work-related learning in higher education: Learning and Employability Series Two* (Higher Education Academy, 2005)

In **Passion Purpose and Value**, Alan Booth and Jeanne Booth draw upon a UK-wide survey of academic historians in their role as teachers which formed part of their History Passion Project. The responses, alongside accompanying filmed interviews, constitute a large data set on the experience of teaching history in higher education, its inspirations and its intellectual and emotional drivers. In this essay they use this rich source material to cast light on how history teaching can prepare students to thrive in the world of employment. They argue that at its best higher learning through history reflects the realities that history graduates encounter in today's workplace and is congruent with the kinds of lives they are going to be living, as well as with the values and ideals of the history community. And they suggest that historians might use this correspondence to re-shape and amplify the message about the value of their teaching in the contemporary world.

Concern has been expressed about numerical competency amongst graduates, and a study of the situation in history undergraduate programmes formed part of a broader three year investigation into the curricula requirements and support necessary to enhance students' numerical skills. **Every Student Counts: Promoting Numeracy and Enhancing Employability** was completed in 2010, highlighting the current provision of numeracy in university history departments, exploring potential shortfalls and suggesting examples for development. The detailed background, aims, findings and recommendations of the project, along with a portal of best practice can be found on the Graduates with Impact website. The analysis in this publication concentrates on the importance of including numeracy in history programme provision to enable students to develop and practise numerical skills in order to facilitate their studies and enhance their employability prospects.

Although there is a vast literature on work-based and work place learning in higher education, there is comparatively little written on the assessment of this form of learning, and nothing in our discipline: the Subject Centre commissioned a project which aims to address this omission. Section three details the findings of a national survey carried out on **The Assessment of Work Place Learning in UK Undergraduate History Programmes**, and offers examples of best practice to support the central importance of assessment.

Sections four and five provide case studies of how History programmes can be developed to enhance the 'employability focus' whilst maintaining the rigours of the discipline at the heart of study. **Employability in the History Curriculum** follows the transformation of a Community History module

into a more comprehensive Applied History module which aims to expand and embed key employability elements, including work-related projects, lectures from public history professionals and careers management skills, from September 2011. **The Hull History Partnership Scheme** is working to enhance the provision of the city's history education in schools and higher education, aiming to show how the history community can work together to recession-proof history graduates and aid in the revitalisation of recession-struck inner city communities. The case study will explore the development of an 'Applied History: Work and Community' module, to give history undergraduates opportunities to develop and apply skills relating to their history degree subject, useful for future careers in a range of areas.

David Nicholls's existing work, **The Employment of History Graduates** and **The Employability of History Students** has extensively explored the relationship between a history education, skills and employment in answering the question 'What's the Use of History?' In light of the current climate in education and employment David has completed an update to the former publication, revealing the developments since the original report was produced in 2005. A powerful case is made in this final discussion that concentrates on the positive reasons for choosing to study history, rather than (in David's words) railing 'against the marketisation and privatisation of higher education'. Highlighting the careers of famous and high achieving history graduates provides a refreshing perspective on the opportunities grasped by former students, and useful material to inspire school talks and admissions tutors alike.

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## Introduction

Recent shifts in the higher education sectors of Western countries have provoked serious concern among humanities academics about the future of their subjects.<sup>1</sup> Whilst 'crisis in the humanities' is hardly a new refrain, teachers and discipline communities today are facing multiple pressures that are eroding the place of the humanities in higher education.<sup>2</sup> In a growing number of books and articles, recent authors have sought to mount a public defence of the value and relevance of studying these subjects in contemporary higher education.<sup>3</sup> Yet whilst the case for history education in terms of intellectual development, democratic citizenship and personal fulfilment has been vigorously made, in talking about the value of history as preparation for employment historians have appeared less at ease; primarily drawing upon the traditional argument that history graduates are equipped for a wide range of careers in the professions and business and the narrow policy discourse of 'transferable skills'.

1. For trends in British higher education, Malcolm Tight, *The Development of Higher Education in the United Kingdom since 1945* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2009); Mary Henkel and Brenda Little, *Changing Relationships between Higher Education* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1999); Clyde Chitty, *Education Policy in Britain* (Macmillan: London, 2009), ch. 9. For a thought-provoking US perspective, Derek Bok, *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010). In Britain government funding decisions in October 2010 have made the prospects for the humanities appear particularly perilous. See the critique by Stefan Collini of the Browne Report: 'Browne's Gamble', *London Review of Books*, 32, no. 21 (Nov. 2010), pp. 23-5.
2. On some twentieth century manifestations of crisis of confidence in the discipline see John H. Plumb, *Crisis in the Humanities* (London: Pelican, 1964); David Stevenson, 'The End of History? The British University Experience, 1981-1992', *Contemporary Record*, 7 (1993), pp. 66-85; James Vernon, 'Thoughts on the Present "Crisis in History" in Britain' (1999). Available at: <http://www.history.ac.uk/resources/discourse-postmodernism/vernon-paper>. For a critical discussion of the longer-term historical debate about the impact of the arts, see Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett, *The Social Impact of the Arts: An Intellectual History* (London: Macmillan, 2010).
3. For some useful recent discussions of the value of history and the humanities education to public life, see John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (London: Macmillan, 2008); Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010); 'World Crisis in Humanities', *Times Higher Education*, no. 1970 (21 October 2010), pp. 42-45; M. Walker, 'Making a World Worth Living In: Humanities Teaching and the Formation of Practical Reasoning', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 8 (2009), pp. 231-46. Also Anthony T. Kronman, *Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). These contain references to further material. See also, Justin Champion, 'What are Historians For?', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 81 (2008), pp. 167-88; P. Corfield, 'All People are Living Histories – Which is Why History Matters' (2008), <http://history.ac.uk/makinghistory> and, more generally, the many articles on history and its relevance in interpreting contemporary issues and events available on the History and Policy website, available at <http://www.historyandpolicy.org>. For a recent review of recent books on the failings of current higher education that focuses upon the value of the humanities, Steven Schwartz, 'Soul Food in the Age of Money': *The Australian* (4 May 2011), pp. 11-12. On education and economic growth more generally, Alison Wolf, *Does Education Matter: Myths about Education and Economic Growth* (London: Penguin, 2002).

We think that a more authentic and contextualised case for higher learning through history can be made, grounded in the new realities of work that history graduates encounter in the twenty-first century and how these relate to deeply-felt vocabularies of engagement and impact through the teaching of the subject. Using the findings of a UK-wide survey of historians teaching in higher education and recent research on graduate employment, we argue that the, often implicit, values expressed by historians in their role as teachers are more congruent than sometimes recognised with the employment needs of contemporary history graduates, and that history teaching at its best is in fact particularly well-equipped to foster the sort of higher learning required for navigating lives where work and life are not separated and traditional boundaries between economy, society and the individual are collapsing. Finally, we point to an agenda which historians in their role as teachers might seek to address in order to represent learning through history in ways that demonstrate how their teaching makes a difference to students facing the new graduate landscape of the twenty-first century.

## The ‘History Passion Project’: Aims and Methodology

There remains little consideration in the historical literature of academic historians as teachers, and still less about their pedagogic journeys and what they think about this aspect of their professional lives.<sup>4</sup> In an examination of historians’ self-narratives, Popkin notes that in these, ‘if historians are cautious about stressing their scholarly accomplishments, they are even more reticent in discussing their work as teachers.’<sup>5</sup> When they do so what emerges are highly personal perspectives that reflect the dynamic influence of a wide range of variables, including social background, institutional affiliation, gender, disposition and political values.<sup>6</sup> There are multiple perspectives on what it means to be a ‘good’ or ‘effective’ teacher of history in higher education.

Yet if teacher identities are inherently complex and deeply personal, there are also, we suggest, aspirations, ideals, hopes and concerns that go beyond the experience of the individual and have relevance to all historians teaching in higher education. The ‘History Passion Project’, from which the data for this essay is drawn, set out to investigate these by focussing upon the following issues: what motivates teachers of history; what difference teachers think history teaching makes to students; what kinds of teaching are considered to engage students deeply; and what factors influence personal and professional development.<sup>7</sup> These research questions shaped the construction of a UK-wide questionnaire survey of academic historians which,

with the assistance of a number of critical friends, moved from attempting to capture quantitative data through ranking statements and scales to a more ideographic approach, using open-ended qualitative and some oblique questions to attempt to capture something of the complexities of experience.

Figure 1: Survey Questions

1.	About you: title, institution, undergraduate & postgraduate degrees, other higher qualifications, gender.
2.	How many years have you been teaching history?
3.	What do you like most about teaching history?
4.	What has most helped you develop as a teacher?
5.	If you have been influenced by a particular teacher(s) tell us what it is about them that inspired you?
6.	What in your own teaching have you found to be the best approaches or methods for engaging students?
7.	In your view what can students get from history teaching at its best?
8.	How would you describe the value of these things to policy-makers?
9.	What constructive advice would you give yourself if you were starting out now as a history teacher in higher education?
10.	If you weren’t an academic historian what alternative careers might you consider?

This essay is based primarily upon data related to questions seven and eight of the questionnaire.

4. For some reasons for this omission see Alan Booth, ‘Pedagogy and the Practice of Academic History in Late-Twentieth Century Britain’, *Rethinking History*, 13 (2009), pp. 317-44.
5. Jeremy D. Popkin, *History, Historians and Autobiography* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 153-4.
6. There is a growing literature on academic teacher identities. See, for example, Lynn McAlpine and Gerlese Akerlind, *Becoming an Academic* (London: Macmillan, 2010); Carolin Kreber, ‘Academics’ Teacher Identities, Authenticity and Pedagogy’, *Studies in Higher Education*, 35 (2010), pp. 171-94. For historians, see Kathleen Quinlan, ‘Commonalities and Controversy in Context: A Study of Academic Historians’ Educational Beliefs’, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 15 (1999), pp. 448-63.

The final version of the questionnaire survey was designed and tested to ensure that it was possible to complete in twenty minutes, although the depth of reflection evidenced in responses suggested that completing it had often taken significantly longer.<sup>8</sup> The survey was placed online and a link to it distributed to historians in history departments in four principal ways:<sup>9</sup>

- The Higher Education Academy's History Subject Centre distributed a short email containing the link to its UK-wide list of departmental contacts and encouraged them to circulate it amongst colleagues.
- The History Subject Centre also included information about the project and a link to the survey in its October 2010 and November 2010 e-bulletins.
- Information about the survey and a link to it was placed on the History Subject Centre website.
- Personal emails were sent to over a thousand colleagues using a list compiled from individual contact details provided on UK History Department websites.

Two hundred and five completed questionnaires were received which we estimate constitutes around ten per cent of history teachers in UK history departments.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 2: Breakdown of Survey Responses**

<b>Number of completed questionnaires</b>	205
<b>Number of institutions represented</b>	78
<b>Gender</b>	38% female, 52% male
<b>Title</b>	22% professors 36% senior/principal lecturers or readers 27% lecturers 15% other
<b>Experience</b>	13.7% teaching 1-5 years 20.6% teaching 5-10 years 33.8% teaching 10-20 years 31.9% teaching more than 20 years
<b>Holders of teaching qualifications</b>	10%

The questionnaires were analysed using a qualitative research process of clustering data into categories according to similarity of content thus creating themes within the questions,

and these were modified and refined into larger analytic groupings in a review of the data and ongoing discussion of the research and literature by the researchers. This provided a flexible inductive framework in which we were influenced by grounded theory.<sup>11</sup> The analysis was initially carried out separately by the two researchers in order to benefit from the combination of insider research (Alan Booth) with an outsider discussant (Jeanne Booth). Comparisons were then made, themes agreed, and second and third readings undertaken including quantitative analysis on the emergent themes. These were additionally explored using:

- Semi-structured interviews and filmed discussion at the History Subject Centre Conference held at Oxford University in April 2011.<sup>12</sup>

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7. Further details on this project are available at <http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/research/gwil>
  8. This was an early indication of the seriousness with which many historians take their teaching and their level of concern about its future.
  9. Using the survey and questionnaire tool 'Survey Monkey': <http://www.surveymonkey.com>. An incentive was offered to enter each completed survey into a prize draw with the opportunity to win either £100 of Amazon vouchers or equivalent cash donation to the charity of the winner's choice.
  10. It is difficult to be exact about the number of historians teaching on history programmes in UK higher education. For example, while our mailing list was compiled by visiting the websites of all universities with a history department, not all made distinctions between full-time and part-time or contract academics. Similarly, while the Institute of Historical Research year book, 'Teachers of History in the Universities of the United Kingdom' (2010) lists more than 3000 historians, this includes significant numbers in departments other than history.
  11. Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (London: Sage, 1998 edn.); Jonathan Smith (ed.), *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods* (London, Sage, 2004)
  12. For a record of this conference, see the Higher Education Academy History Subject Centre website: available at [http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/library/international/tlc10\\_hsc\\_annualconference\\_20110515](http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/library/international/tlc10_hsc_annualconference_20110515)

- Semi-structured filmed interviews with international historians attending the International Society for Scholarship in Teaching and Learning (ISSoTL) Conference in Liverpool in October 2010 and the 'After Standards' history conference in Sydney, Australia, in April 2011.<sup>13</sup>
- Filmed round-table discussion of international and UK historians at the above ISSoTL conference.

Using these methods we assembled what we believe to be the largest collection of academic historians' views on their experience of teaching to date in the UK. We are nonetheless conscious of its limitations, some of which are inherent in such studies, others we deliberately imposed at the outset and some we became aware of as we proceeded. It is important to acknowledge that despite its scale the data collected is far from comprehensive; it portrays the views of a minority of academic historians and constitutes a snapshot in time of some aspects of an activity (teaching) that is dynamic and pluralistic. The intention was, however, not to present a definitive picture or suggest a (in our view) problematic notion of representativeness, but to illustrate some common perspectives and themes. We would nonetheless maintain that there is significance in the reflections contained in the responses: that while they highlight personal experiences in teaching the subject in higher education the issues they raise have relevance to all teachers of history. Nor does the research explore the voices of students. This would have been helpful not least in adding another perspective on values and practice as well as impact but was unmanageable in a study focused upon the views of history teachers. In terms of the general practical design of the survey questionnaire, we decided not to include any negative questions and focused upon history teaching 'at its best'. Whilst this undoubtedly influenced responses, our rationale was that much has already been written on what gets in the way of teaching and we wanted to provide teachers with opportunities to express their engagement initially untainted by thinking about all the problems.<sup>14</sup> Finally, we limited the information we could derive from the respondents' profile in the 'about you' section of the questionnaire. We did this partly because in our experience it is tedious and time-consuming for survey respondents to fill in copious amounts of personal details and thus a deterrent to completion, but also because we wanted contributors genuinely to feel they could remain anonymous. As we have analysed the questionnaires we have felt some of the disadvantages of not having fuller profiles and have noted these shortcomings where appropriate in what follows.

## History Teaching and Making a Difference

The most often expressed imperatives associated with teaching history are love of the subject and, as one respondent succinctly puts it, 'believing that what you do matters to students'. These are intimately related. A love of history is regarded as integral to the motivation to make a difference to students and an important bridge between teacher and student that can transform the will to learn, while a major factor influencing many academic historians' love of the subject is the opportunity to make a difference.<sup>15</sup>

"I teach history because I love history ... In teaching it you have the sense that you are opening minds to things they never considered previously."

"I really get a kick out of seeing students develop, particularly to the point when they don't need me anymore ... I like the fact that I can make a difference to so many lives."

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13. In total thirty interviews with academic historians on teaching were conducted to supplement the responses to the online questionnaire.
  14. Many of the difficulties of teaching history in contemporary higher education came through anyway in answers to different questions and we also explored them head-on in the interviews and round-table discussions.
  15. On this topic, see Stephen Rowland, Catherine Byron, Frank Furedi, Nicky Padfield and Terry Smyth, 'Turning Academics into Teachers', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 3 (1998), pp. 277-98; Lewis Elton, 'Turning Academics into Teachers: A Discourse on Love', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 3 (2000), pp. 257-60. See also S. Rowland, *The Enquiring University Teacher* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2006); Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of A Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

“I love the interactions with people. I like seeing the changes in them. I like to see the light bulbs lighting up. It’s wonderful when someone has not been able to do something, when you see there’s something they can’t understand then you see that look in their eyes like ‘Oh I can do it’. It’s important not only for the knowledge but for them as people, because people limit themselves and there are things they tell themselves they can’t do, and often the school system has told particular people for their entire lives that they aren’t worth very much. And then when there’s something that’s hard to do and they do it, and something hard to understand and they understand it, I think it opens up a space in their life and that’s one of the most important things you can do as a teacher.”

The personal satisfaction in observing what one historian calls ‘penny-dropping moments’ is frequently expressed. These moments of illumination constitute a signifier of qualitative step-changes in awareness and understanding that are regarded as important to the development of students as historians, learners and people. As one respondent puts it, ‘you can sense that a student has begun to understand the process of thinking historically’. For another, witnessing these epiphanic moments reinforces a conviction that teaching matters, ‘beyond the usual skills [development]. Sometimes there is that flash of recognition when they see the past/their community/their own life/their future differently’.

The responses to question seven in the survey (‘In your view what can students get from history teaching at its best?’) provide more detail concerning the sort of difference that historians believe that history teaching can, at its best, make to students. Here are some illustrations of commonly-voiced views on this.

“History teaching can encourage students to think about the past or distant societies, and reflect what it might mean for both the human experience and for today. History in many ways is uniquely placed to ask the big questions societies face, and arguably to point to solutions, challenges and impacts. It crosses every aspect of human activity – from culture to the environment, to gender relations, economics, welfare, and nation-building ... the list could go on.”

“History education cultivates people useful to a democratic society. It is not enough to have practical skills. How those skills are imparted to others, and how our graduates shape the opportunities for others, are all determined by an ability to be fair, open-minded, see other peoples’ views, to see false or dangerous arguments and to be empowered to act upon those things.”

“They get the realisation that they are the heirs of a vastly complex and messy thing called humanity ... history gives students the understanding that humans are irrational and illogical. That is necessary in coming to grips with the horrors found in history, but it is also essential in the appreciation of great beauties, the great triumphs that we as human beings have been capable of.”



“History students acquire a deep sense of the contours of the past. They realise that events are never simple and straightforward but, instead, highly nuanced. They learn to appreciate that decision-making is fraught with risk because the outcomes are never clear to the participants and they learn to differentiate between what matters and what does not. This helps them to reach conclusions on imperfect information, and remain flexible and to improvise when required. In a fast changing world the creation of a group of people with those capabilities is vital to the future success of the nation.”

“The study of history encourages people to think critically, to refuse to accept things as they appear on the surface. It produces individuals who are aware of the complexity of issues that confront society. History graduates have a greater sense, not only of the world they live in, but how it got there. Ultimately, this can only make for better citizens.”

“[History teaching] encourages not only critical but creative ways of looking, and an ethical imagination. Without history we would be reduced to a society which had deprived itself of a key compass with which to navigate the complexities of our own world or imagine futures in an evidence-based way. Without the self-reflexive qualities history education provides we would be left with ‘traditions’ we could not properly understand or use.”

Whilst the responses to the survey identify some important ‘qualities of mind’<sup>16</sup> gained from higher learning through history, there is also an underpinning conviction that history teaching at its best makes a difference in ways that are difficult to compartmentalise, still-less measure precisely. The ‘thinking in time’ commonly regarded as a distinctive contribution that history teaching can make to student development is not only a core component of historical thinking skills but also key to broader personal development, citizenship and employment.<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that the ‘marketable’ skills traditionally mentioned in university prospectuses as gained through studying history, such as communication, analytical rigour, synthesising information and working independently, are regarded as unimportant; indeed they feature directly in the breakdown of responses to question seven in the survey illustrated in figure 3 below. However, this table also underlines the recurring emphasis upon the kind of person that history teaching at its best helps to cultivate rather than simply the kind of skills they gain, whether those are intellectual, professional or practical to use the common curricular parlance of contemporary higher education. The picture drawn is of a much richer representation of student development: history students as people and learning through history not only as a way of thinking but also as a particular kind of human formation. Here making a difference is not simply about cultivating historical thinking per se, but through this fostering a

16. This is the term used in the UK History Benchmark Statement for undergraduate degree programmes in the subject: available at:

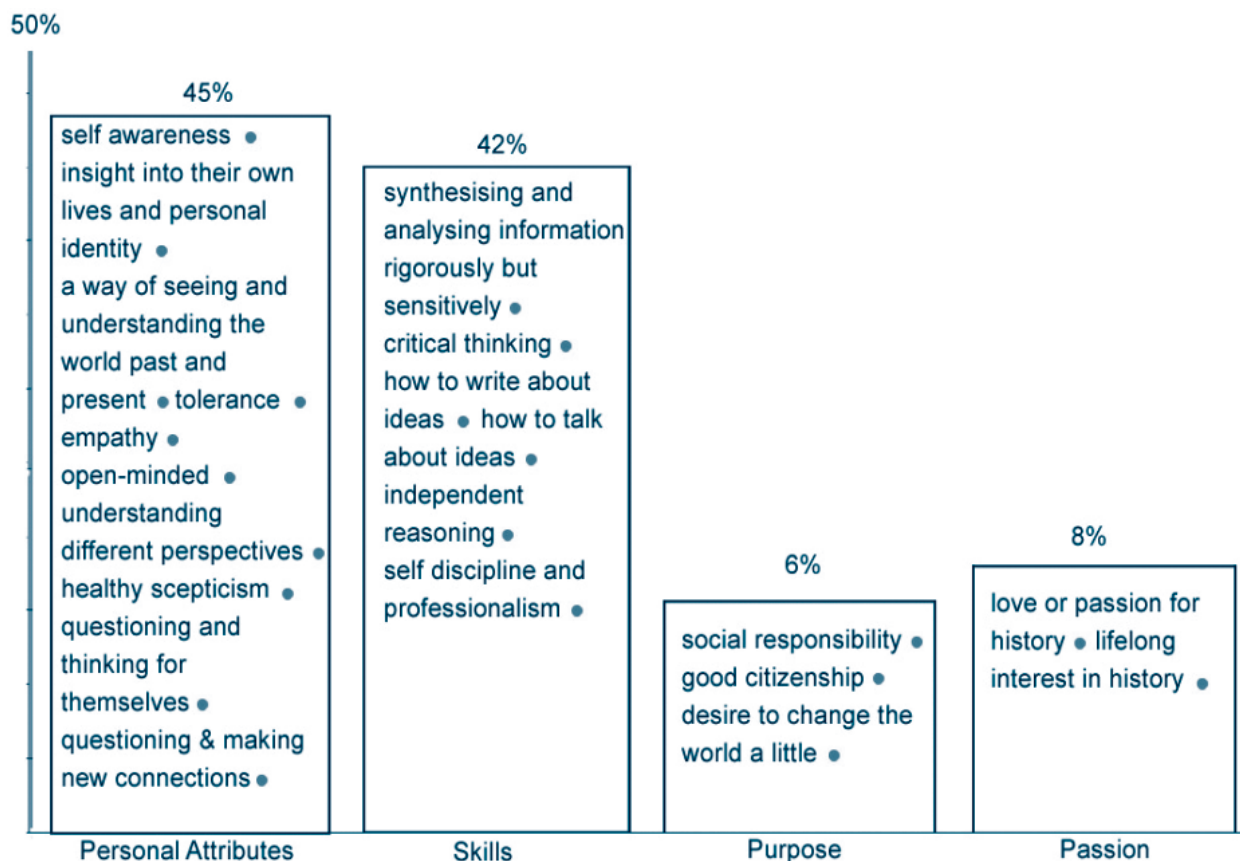
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/honours/history.asp>

17. For an introduction to the literature on historical thinking in a higher education context see Peter Stearns, Peter Seixas and Sam Wineburg (eds), *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2000). Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2001) has been a particularly influential figure in shaping the direction of the scholarship of teaching and learning in the subject in North America. See also David Pace and Joan Middendorf (eds), *Decoding the Disciplines: Helping Students Learn Disciplinary Ways of Thinking* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004); Marnie Hughes-Warrington et al., *Historical Thinking in Higher Education* (Strawberry, New South Wales: Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2009).



way of being in the world.<sup>18</sup> One respondent touches upon this directly: 'I believe', he writes, 'we need a lot more discussion of history's way of thinking - the particularity of the kind of people (as employees, citizens, social and psychological subjects) that a degree in history can (and does) produce.'

**Figure 3: What can Students get from History Teaching at its Best?**



## What Kind of People?

The previous section illustrated some of the benefits that history teachers in higher education regard as accruing from history teaching at its best. One respondent sums up this potential for personal transformation: 'Well – at its best – history teaching can change your whole world view. It can make you think about people and the way they interact with the world around you in a whole new way.' If we extend this to the realm of human formation, the survey responses might be represented in the terms suggested in figures four and five below.

**Figure 4: History Graduates as Particular People: A Multifaceted Awareness**

- Display an understanding of society (and self) in broader/deeper/longer perspective - 'in 3D' one says; 'with expanded terms of reference' another comments.
- View society in multi-perspective, interconnected terms - 'consider economic, political, social, cultural etc. aspects' one suggests; possess 'a holistic study of the world without being beholden to any particular theory', says another.
- Sensitive to the strangeness of others - as different and ultimately unknowable but also human; who are sensitive to very different frames of reference.

18. See Ronald Barnett, *A Will to Learn: Being a Student in An Age of Uncertainty* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2007), esp. chs 2, 3; Peter Jarvis and Stella Parker (eds), *Human Learning: A Holistic Approach* (London: Routledge, 2005).

- Attentive to the complexity of structures, events and circumstances - to the dynamic nature of society; constant change/flux; the messiness of events.
- Aware of contingency – of the contradictions, illogicality, unpredictability of individuals' decisions and the influence of these; that nothing is inevitable.
- Attuned to the particularity and contextuality of information and knowledge, of evidence and explanatory models; of traditions and the taken-for-granted.
- Sensitive to the complexity of making judgements - to considering multiple and often conflicting perspectives; the play of language; the need to connect evidence to context; a reluctance to rush to judgement.

These are closely associated with the characteristic descriptors of what it means to help university students to develop historical thinking.<sup>19</sup>

If we consider these qualities of mind more broadly in terms of personal attributes, we can identify from the data three broad traits or dispositions: a critical spirit; a sympathetic imagination; and a will to learn. Whilst these categories are derived from the recent literature learning in higher education,<sup>20</sup> the descriptors that follow them are those employed by the historians responding to the survey.

### Figure 5: Personal Dispositions of History Graduates

- A critical spirit - a healthy scepticism; independent thinking; rigorous logic; eye for details; flexible thinking; ability to see beyond the taken-for-granted and current fashions; a questioning approach to all information; nuanced judgement; self-reflexivity.
- A sympathetic imagination - tolerance; empathy; humility in never fully knowing; sensitivity to the messiness of human life; openness to the strange and different; fair-minded; curiosity about others.
- A will to learn (and keep learning) - passion; enthusiasm; excitement; intuition; wonderment; awe; intellectual curiosity; openness to new information and experience; resourcefulness; persistence; self-reliance; confidence.

History teaching, this evidence suggests, can foster higher learning that has the potential to help students to become rounded human beings with a particular kind of engaged or practical mindfulness. Whilst there is insufficient space here to discuss this mindfulness in detail, it corresponds closely to the notion of mindful learning (based upon the attentiveness to phenomena and context, continuous creation of new categories, openness to new information and awareness of more than one

perspective) that Harvard psychologist Ellen Langer sees as vital to high-quality learning and to 'living well'.<sup>21</sup> It also resonates with the personal qualities or capabilities advocated by leading researchers in higher education and with the arguments of progressive social theorists.<sup>22</sup> And it aligns with what educationalists Sullivan and Roisin (2008) designate 'practical reason' in their call for a new agenda for higher education capable of responding more effectively to the needs of today's graduates.<sup>23</sup> In short, it is congruent with recent progressive educational thinking about what a forward-looking, high-quality twenty-first century higher education might look like.

The responses to question seven of the survey carry a powerful authenticity and integrity concerning the value of what historians can, and do, achieve as teachers in their subject. At its best, they suggest, history teaching, cultivates people who can think in time and engage with the complexities of self, others and the world in sensitive, purposeful and passionate (and compassionate) ways. When asked how they would convey the value of these things to policymakers, however, respondents falter: they seem to lose confidence in this values-led way of talking and default to a shallower, more routine, and less convincing, skills-based vocabulary:

"I would describe the study of history as a superb method of producing an inquisitive, innovative and flexible workforce with skills valuable to the free market, enterprise economy."

19. See above, footnote 17.

20. We have drawn particularly on the work of Nussbaum, especially *Not for Profit* and Barnett, *A Will to Learn*.

21. Ellen Langer, *Mindfulness: Choice and Control in Everyday Life* (London: Harvill, 1989); *The Power of Mindful Learning* (Harlow: Addison-Wesley, 1997).

22. See, for example, New Economics Foundation, *University Challenge: Towards a Well-being Approach to Quality in Higher Education* (London: New Economics Foundation, 2008).

23. William M. Sullivan and Matthew S. Roisin, *A New Agenda for Higher Education: Shaping a Life of the Mind for Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008). See also Mary Huber and Pat Hutchings, *Integrative Learning: Mapping the Terrain* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2004) which makes similar points.

“Historians are both logical and agile thinkers, giving them a range of transferable skills fitting them for the 85% of graduate jobs which do not require vocational qualifications.”

“History students know how to think, how to question, how to reconcile evidence and how to bring a rational, evidence-based view to complex and controversial issues. That means they are wonderful employees in numerous contexts – the business world, politics, the civil service and in policy-making.”

“History teaches you how to think, how to create innovative arguments, how to use evidence to support that argument, and how to communicate that clearly. These skills are crucial to so many key industries: banking and business; journalism and the media; law and the civil service (all of which have a high number of history graduates) etc. Britain is also highly dependent on history for its tourism. Heritage is ‘packaged’ history – you need historical skills in order to turn a site into a heritage location.”

“Sadly, I would try to speak to policy-makers on their own terms: parroting the seemingly relentless business/skills agenda.”

This final comment underscores the strong vein of scepticism about the prevailing language of value in higher education that runs through the survey responses. Whilst today the vocabulary of employability and skills is ubiquitous in module and programme specifications and institutional mission

statements, and has been accommodated by historians in their role as educators, it elicits considerable disquiet. If this language has conquered higher education policy discourse since the 1980s, to many historians here it voices a narrative of higher learning that manifestly fails to capture the potential of higher learning through history.<sup>24</sup> Familiarity with this vocabulary seems more often to represent a resigned pragmatism than enthusiastic engagement:

“I am worried that we repeatedly articulate the value of what we do in terms largely dictated by the Treasury view rather than seek to challenge the terms of debate.”

“If we instrumentalise the study of history to please policy-makers in 2010, we will simply have to change our language when the policy-makers of 2011 change theirs. Hitching our wagons to transient stars won’t save us – but nor should we loftily trumpet ‘ivory tower’ values.”

“I am extremely concerned that policy-makers and university managers will opt for the measurable and ignore the less tangible, in particular the development of students as independent learners.”

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24 See Paul Trowler, ‘Captured by the Discourse? The Socially Constitutive Power of New Higher Education Discourse in the UK’, *Organization*, 8 (2001), pp. 183-201; Alan Booth, ‘The “Traditional Standpoint of Historians”: Tradition and the Construction of Educational Identity in Late Twentieth Century British Higher Education’, *Contemporary British History*, 24 (2010), pp. 493-509.

“Citizens are not solely economic units. The societies that people want to live in are ones that are able to balance market and money with quality of life and personal actualization. History as a subject to study helps students to find that balance and helps them to make decisions informed by more than just the latest television marketing campaign.”

“I think that leadership within the higher education sector has thought itself tactically very smart in speaking relentlessly in the economic language of its political masters, without quite grasping the scale of the strategic and cultural losses to which this has contributed.”

Such critical views are, of course, not confined to historians. Researchers in the field of higher education have long argued that in such a narrowed conception of higher education, curricular thinking can become sclerotic. The preoccupation with transferable or employability skills development in curricula, they maintain, places an undue premium upon technical and instrumental aspects of learning and being at the expense of richer notions of human learning and development.<sup>25</sup> They further point out that skills development is often abstracted from the discipline ways of thinking in which students become skilled practitioners and from the emotions that motivate the will to learn. One of the respondents to our survey echoes this: ‘The inherent interest which students find in different periods/subjects of history ensures that they are committed to the study, in a way that generic transferable skills training cannot do justice’. Similar critiques have emanated from academics across the arts and humanities where the prevailing higher education policy discourse is attacked for its relentlessly calculative emphasis, its apparent disregard for the humanistic emphasis of learning and its implicit (sometimes explicit) attack on these disciplines as distinctive educational projects.<sup>26</sup>

Tensions between ‘liberal’ and ‘vocational’ conceptions of higher education are hardly new.<sup>27</sup> Nor is the language of employability inevitably univocal; indeed as Nicholls has pointed out it has been used in progressive and emancipatory

ways by some university history teachers.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, it is evident that in reflecting upon how they might convey the value of their work as teachers to policymakers many historians feel compelled to use language that does not come close to adequately reflecting the more authentic voice registered in response to question seven. And yet it is the values expressed there, and the aspirations for the kinds of people cultivated by history teaching at its best, we want to suggest in the following section, that seem better to prepare graduates to thrive in the kinds of lives they will be living. We can begin to analyse this correspondence by first examining the kinds of working lives that face history graduates in the twenty-first century.

## Working Lives and Making a Living

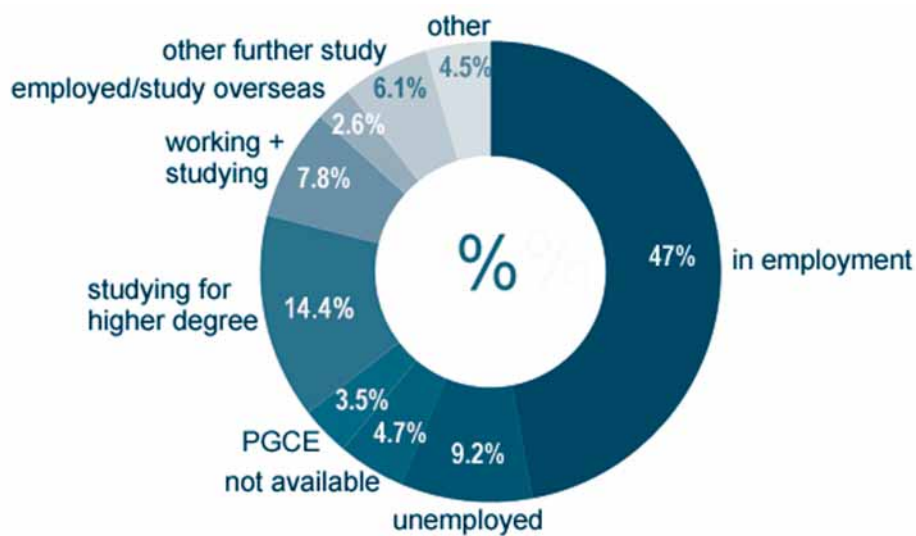
How will history graduates make a living? What are their employment prospects in the twenty-first century? What will they need to be successful and what do they want for themselves in their working lives? These are critical questions for students, their parents, university teachers and managers. We are deliberately using the term ‘making a living’ to signal perhaps the most significant change in graduate employment prospects. Whilst for much of the twentieth century most graduates might anticipate long service with a large corporation or public sector organisation such as BBC or the Civil Service, with few job switches, such career routes are no

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25. For some well-directed critiques, see Ronald Barnett, *Higher Education: A Critical Business* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997); Melanie Walker, *Higher Education Pedagogies* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006); Monica McLean, *Pedagogy and the University: Critical Theory and Practice* (London: Continuum, 2006); Steven Schwartz, ‘Not by Skills Alone’, *Times Higher Education*, no. 2011 (16 June, 2011), pp. 35-38
  26. See Mary Evans, *Killing Thinking: The Death of the Universities* (London: Continuum, 2004).
  27. Harold Silver and John Brennan, *A Liberal Vocationalism* (London: Methuen, 1988).
  28. David Nicholls, *The Employment of History Graduates* (Glasgow: Higher Education Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology, 2005), p.7. Available at [http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/elibrary/interal/br\\_nicholls\\_employability\\_200502xx\\_01](http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/elibrary/interal/br_nicholls_employability_200502xx_01)

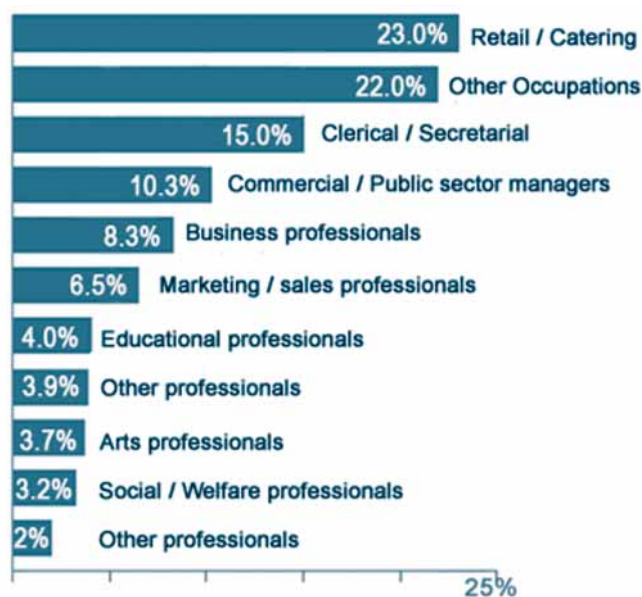
longer the norm. In the twenty-first century there are few 'jobs for life'. New technologies, the internet and globalisation have impacted upon large corporations, which are reducing management hierarchies and outsourcing an increasing number of professional functions. In the UK large scale redundancies in the public sector are affecting both currently employed graduates and the opportunities available for the newly graduated. Any higher education programme that measures success on the basis of their students securing jobs shortly after graduation will be short-changing them unless it can also demonstrate that it has equipped them to navigate and continue to make a living in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing employment environment.

Figures 6 and 7 below show the destinations of history students six months after graduation in 2009, the last available figures at the time of writing.<sup>29</sup> The figures are derived from the annual Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey conducted by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). These indicate that just over 47% of history graduates entered employment, with just under a quarter pursuing postgraduate or some other full-time study including 3.5% studying for a teaching qualification.

**Figure 6: Destinations of History Graduates 2009**



**Figure 7: Types of Work for Those in Employment**



29. Higher Education Careers Service Unit/Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, *What do Graduates Do 2010* (Gloucester: UCAS, 2010).



Of those in employment 23% were employed in retail and catering, 15% in clerical and secretarial positions, just over 10% in management positions and 31.6% in other 'professional' employment. In his 2005 report Nicholls identified these four categories as comprising most of the first jobs of history graduates, and in the 2011 update notes that, whilst this is still the case, the proportion employed in retail and catering increased from under 10% in 1998 to 23% in 2009 with a corresponding fall in managerial, business, commercial, marketing and financial positions.<sup>30</sup>

The picture drawn by the DLHE data can, however, seem bleaker than it may actually be. Whilst that survey provides a useful snapshot of immediate graduate activity, it paints a misleading picture of employment destinations. The methodology was designed when there were fewer graduates and a higher proportion were recruited by employers via the 'milkround' in their final year of study and does not reflect changes in job-seeking, recruitment practices or the growth of 'gap years'. As a census, it records a graduate's activity on the day surveyed and does not count employment or study start dates more than a month in advance.<sup>31</sup> In a study published in 2009, HESA conducted a smaller scale longitudinal study suggesting that 3.5 years after graduation over 70% are in graduate jobs,<sup>32</sup> and Nicholls has examined the longer term career trajectories of famous history graduates and provides an impressive list of historians achieving high positions in politics, media, civil service, law, church, trade unions, museums, libraries and the Arts, universities and business. 'A truly remarkable number of history graduates have gone on to become the movers and shakers of modern-day Britain', he comments, and many of those interviewed confirmed the important role the skills acquired from studying history had played in preparing them for their careers.<sup>33</sup> Whilst this is a more comforting picture, it is important to note that most of these high-achievers began their careers graduating from a limited range of pre-1992 universities and most likely by entering the kind of graduate programme with the BBC, Civil Service or large corporation, that today and in future years will provide pathways for fewer and fewer.

For most history graduates, entering and navigating the world of work in the twenty-first century constitutes a very different experience. The Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) represents 750 mostly large corporations, including 80 of the FTSE 100 and most of the significant public sector recruiters, including health, education and local government. Their annual vacancies now amount to around 30,000 opportunities for 274,000 graduates and only one in four AGR members specify a degree discipline. As its Chief Executive notes, 'three-quarters don't actually care one way or the other what the degree is', so historians find themselves competing with each other and with

thousands of other graduates for a small number of traditional opportunities.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the Office for Budget Responsibility has forecast that 330,000 public sector jobs will be shed by 2015, and these will hit graduate opportunities particularly hard.<sup>35</sup> The 2007-8 graduate destination data suggests that about 40% of all newly employed graduates were working in the public sector - long a favoured destination for history graduates. Job losses will be greatest in the 'non ring-fenced'<sup>36</sup> public sector, and the Higher Education Careers Services Unit estimates that this accounts for around 37,000 graduate jobs a year with history being one of the disciplines disproportionately represented in these 'at risk' jobs.<sup>37</sup>

The recent cuts in the public sector sit alongside longer term changes in the nature of work and the way it is organised. The emergence of global economies has caused large companies to downsize throughout the OECD<sup>38</sup> countries and the pace

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30. David Nicholls, *The Employment of History Graduates: An Update*, contained in section 6 of this volume.
  31. There is in fact remarkably little reliable information on the employment outcomes for history graduates beyond the first six months. Nonetheless the DLHE data will be used for the Key Information Set, comparable sets of standardised information for each undergraduate course to be required by HEFCE to be published on institutions' websites from September 2012.
  32. *Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Institutions Longitudinal Survey of the 2004/5 cohort* (Cheltenham: Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2009).
  33. David Nicholls, *The Employment of History Graduates: An Update*, contained in section 6 of this volume.
  34. Carl Gilleard, 'What Do We Want Our Students To Be?', in Alan Booth (ed.), *What Do We Want Our Students To Be?* (Nottingham: Centre for Integrative Learning, University of Nottingham, 2010).
  35. Jonathan Wright, *The Clustering of Young Graduates and the Role of the Public Sector* (London: The Work Foundation, 2011).
  36. The 'non-ring fenced public sector' defined as the whole public sector minus health.
  37. HECSU blog (1<sup>st</sup> July 2010) Public funding cuts could leave graduates out of work. Accessed at <http://hecsu.blogspot.com/2010/07/public-funding-cuts-could-leave.html>
  38. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) consists of 34 countries, mostly with high income economies and regarded as developed countries.



of change has increased over time as they have become leaner and flatter, making use of flexible working, temporary contracts and outsourcing.<sup>39</sup> The internet and other advances in information and communications technology have also made it possible to outsource a diverse range of professional in-house functions, and increasingly employment opportunities with large corporations have been giving way to much smaller enterprises and self-employment. Although Hart and Barratt suggest that most graduates entering work are still doing so with larger companies, this is in fact difficult to establish accurately on current destination data, and even if true, we would argue, it is unsustainable.<sup>40</sup> In 1980 2.4 million businesses were operating in the UK, but by 2006 there were 4.5 million, with most of this growth in small companies with one or no employees. This figure has fallen only slightly with the effects of the current recession.

**Figure 8: Number of UK Enterprises in the Private Sector by Size (January 2010)** <sup>41</sup>

	Enterprises	Employment (thousands)	Turnover (£ millions)
<b>All enterprises</b>	4,484,535	22,514	3,212,315
<b>With no employees</b>	3290,570 (73%)	3,532 (16%)	211,793 (6%)
<b>1-9</b>	989,845 (22%)	3,717 (16%)	431,378 (10%)
<b>10-49</b>	170,410 (4%)	3,363 (15%)	482,225 (15%)
<b>50-249</b>	27,770 (0.6%)	2,703 (12%)	436,397 (13%)
<b>SME Total (0-249)</b>	4478,595 (99.8%)	13,316 (59%)	1,561,793 (49%)

There remains much that is unknown about the career journeys of history graduates beyond the first six months graduate destinations, and not least about the small enterprises likely to be increasingly the source of most work for graduates.<sup>42</sup> What is undeniable is that the former common pathways for graduates are diminished and much-altered and that there are few rules or predictable ways of making a living anymore. It is also apparent that larger organisations increasingly recognise this and are highlighting attitude and personal attributes rather than technical skills in their recruitment processes. Indeed the representatives of these employers like the CBI (Confederation of British Industry) and AGR have begun to express unease about an increasingly utilitarian approach to higher education in recognition that the work environment graduates enter is in a state of constant flux and employers cannot with any certainty predict future needs. Richard Lambert, former Director General of the CBI, voiced this concern in a speech to the Council for Industry and Higher Education in November 2010.<sup>43</sup>

39. David B. Audretsch and A. Roy Thurik, Capitalism and Democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: From the Managed to the Entrepreneurial Economy', *Journal of Evolutionary Economics*, 10 (2000), pp.17-34.

40. Trevor Hart and Paul Barratt, 'The Employment of Graduates within Small and Medium-sized Firms in England', *People, Place & Policy Online*, 3 (2009), pp. 1-15. The DLHE Survey contains a question asking graduates to specify the size of their employing organisation, within certain bands, but analysis of this data has not found its way into any available publication to date. The Association of Graduate Recruiters' poll of their members in July 2010 reported an average of nearly 70 applicants per vacancy in July 2010: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/jul/06/graduates-face-tougher-jobs-fight>. The High Fliers Survey of the graduate labour market in 2011 suggests an increase in applications of nearly 33%, High Fliers Research, *The Graduate Market in 2011* (London, High Fliers Research, 2011). The latter also suggests one third of vacancies at the top 100 companies will be filled by graduates who have already worked for their organisation.

41. Business Population Estimates for the UK and regions 2010. BIS Statistical Release [http://stats.bis.gov.uk/ed/bpe/BPE\\_2010](http://stats.bis.gov.uk/ed/bpe/BPE_2010). Here, 'with no employees' comprises sole proprietorships and partnerships comprising only the self-employed owner-manager(s), and companies comprising only an employee director.

42. For discussion of how research has emphasised the recruitment needs of larger companies see Hart and Barratt, 'The Employment of Graduates within Small and Medium-sized Firms in England' and on recruitment and demand for higher level skills see James Kewin, Tristram Hughes, Thomas Fletcher, *Generation Crunch: the Demand for Recent Graduates from SMEs'* (Leicester: CFE, 2010).

43. Richard Lambert, annual lecture to Council for Industry and Higher Education, 11th November 2010, London. Available at <http://educationandskills.cbi.org.uk/uploaded/Richard%20Lambert%20CIHE%20Annual%20Lecture%20111110.pdf>

It's impossible to predict what disciplines will be of most economic and social value in a rapidly changing world ... Most of the big breakthroughs in products and services these days come from collaboration among different disciplines. Philosophers working alongside software engineers. Biochemists working with mathematicians and ethics graduates...many of the technical skills that are being taught within universities today will be defunct within a decade or so. What matters is that graduates have the framework that allows them to keep on learning.

In a recent lecture Carl Gilleard, Chief Executive of AGR, presented a list of what employers look for in graduates. This included standard transferable skills such as report-writing, team-working, customer focus, problem-solving, planning and organisation, multi-tasking, and making and accepting decisions. However, most important, he maintained, were personal qualities such as enterprise and enthusiasm, self-reflection and self-awareness, willingness to learn, integrity, emotional intelligence and the ability to relate and adapt to diverse groups in ways sensitive to the people and context.<sup>44</sup> He went on to say that he advised his members to, 'hire for attitude first and for the skills secondary. If they've got the right attitude, you can do a lot more with people. They can have all the skills, but if they've got the wrong attitude, you've got a problem.'

Making a living in an uncertain, constantly changing job market clearly requires more than the ability to apply for job vacancies successfully or the possession of transferable skills. This is underlined in the literature on higher learning and employment. Horne points out that 'employability and earning power will increasingly depend upon initiative and enterprise... Individuals are increasingly expected to seek out their own opportunities and actively create value, rather than reliably follow rules and routines set by others. In many ways we will have to act more as if we are self-employed.<sup>45</sup> Increasingly graduates need to be able to create work opportunities for themselves, and in these conditions Harvey argues that they are going to need to be able to relate to, make and maintain relationships with people at all kinds of levels, inside and outside organisations; collaborate and work in teams, and more than one team at once, and adjust their roles in ever-shifting situations; be willing to learn continually, take risks, lead and deal with change and help others to do so; and self-manage, be self-confident and able to promote themselves.<sup>46</sup> These approaches to securing work are less about the skills and knowledge graduates may have and more about their attitude, the kind of person they are and how they interact with others.

In a recent report on the changing patterns of working, learning and career development across Europe, researchers at Warwick

Institute for Employment Research argue that there has been too great a focus upon employer needs for the knowledge economy, and this has certainly been true in universities and in many academic departments. They suggest that what individuals are going to need to make a living is the ability to re-contextualise their knowledge, skills and understanding and transfer these between different settings. This involves more than transferable skills; it requires being able to combine and promote one's skills, abilities and knowledge (and join with those of others) and apply them to different situations to add value others are prepared to pay for. They introduce the concept of 'flexicurity', meaning that increasingly the only route to job security is being able to flex what one can do in different ways in diverse contexts to create work someone will pay for.<sup>47</sup> An international often quoted truism in business is that people buy from people; and this applies whether it is a business, organisation or individual purchasing a skill, product or service. A glance back at the attributes described by our survey respondents as cultivated through history teaching at its best strongly suggests that these are much closer to what graduates need to make a living in the twenty-first century than narrowly described employability skills.

But making a living is not simply about earning money, although commentary on employability rarely examines what else graduates may seek from their working lives. The Soxedo-Times Higher Education University Lifestyle survey in 2010 found that deciding to go to university was not just about improving salary prospects.<sup>48</sup> Whilst the overwhelming majority in this survey of 2000 full-time undergraduates said that they came to improve job opportunities and 58% said they came to improve salary prospects, only a fraction less 57% said they also came to improve their knowledge in an area that interested them. In the

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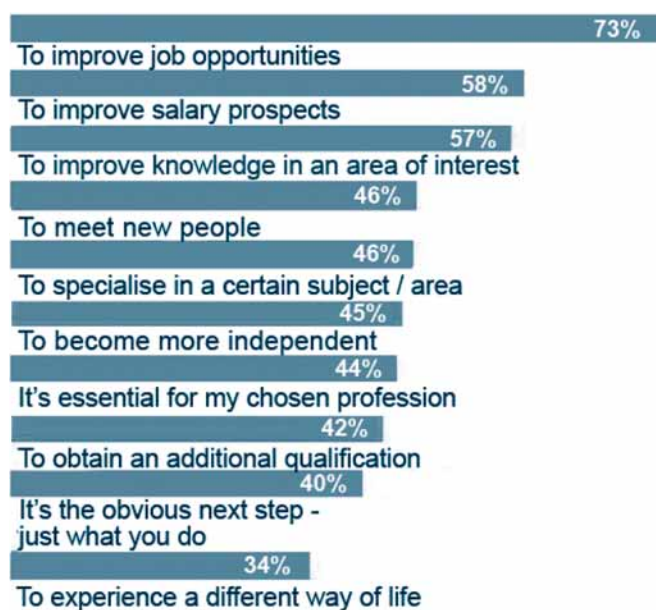
44. Carl Gilleard, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-6.

45. Matthew Horne, *Enterprise Learning* (London: DEMOS, 2000).

46. Lee Harvey, 'New Realities: The Relationship Between Higher Education and Employment', *Tertiary Education and Management*, 6 (2000), pp. 3-17.

47. Alan Brown, Jenny Bimrose and Sally-Anne Barnes, *Changing Patterns of Working, Learning and Career Development Across Europe*, Warwick Institute for Employment Research, Final Report for Lifelong Learning Programme March 2010, Available at [http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/warwick\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/warwick_en.pdf)

48. Soxedo-Times Higher Education University Lifestyle survey, *Times Higher Education*, 18 March 2010. Available at <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=410884>

**Figure 9: Top Ten Reasons to Come to University**

DEMOS report of their survey of the class of 2010 Lexmond also notes that today's graduates view university much more as preparation for life than mere preparation for work, and that respondents voiced progressive aspirations to contribute to a more equal society and to do meaningful work.<sup>49</sup> For those entering the job market this is illustrated by the kinds of qualities they are seeking in employers, including work with ethical organisations that provide early opportunities for taking leadership responsibilities and continuing professional development.<sup>50</sup> Gilleard warns AGR members of the challenges that the Y generation may present as employees, as they seek work that makes a difference with organisations that share their values, run ethical and sustainable operations and provide great opportunities for collaborating and learning with others. For those starting their own enterprises on graduation, research carried out by the Warwick Business School for the National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship reveals more were doing so from the Arts and Humanities than Science, Technology, Engineering or Business Administration and they were motivated more by personal development, job satisfaction and social issues than by money.<sup>51</sup> With decreasing opportunities in the public sector, it is likely more of these graduates will seek to serve by developing social enterprises. Indeed they are increasingly encouraged to do so by initiatives such as the Higher Education Social Entrepreneurship Programme, regional activity to support social enterprise start-ups as a means of retaining graduates, and by government 'Big Society' agendas.<sup>52</sup> Whilst the focus of this essay has been limited to teacher perspectives and how these connect with shifting patterns of employer demand, there is an important agenda focusing upon history students' perspectives on making a good living that deserves more systematic research.

## Conclusion

Since the 1980s, the dominant policy means of articulating the value of teaching and learning has been through a market discourse of efficiency, value for money and employability which has placed most emphasis upon universities and graduates as contributors to the 'knowledge economy' and linked higher learning directly to national economic growth.<sup>53</sup> This has driven the ascendancy of transferable skills as a means of expressing value in the higher education curriculum at institutional, departmental and module level. University historians have maintained an uneasy relationship with this vocabulary of attainment, tending to accommodate it as necessary in institutional statements of learning outcomes but maintaining that it involves an unhelpful compartmentalisation that fragments the learning experience and fails to do justice to the richness and value of a history education.<sup>54</sup>

49. Jen Lexmond, *Class of 2010* (London: Endsleigh, 2010) Available at [http://www.endsleigh.co.uk/Student/Documents/Demos\\_Report\\_2010\\_screen.pdf](http://www.endsleigh.co.uk/Student/Documents/Demos_Report_2010_screen.pdf)

50. UK300: What graduates want from employers, Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/money/2010/oct/16/uk-300-graduates-want-employers>

51. Francis J Greene and George Saridakis, *Understanding the Factors Influencing Graduate Entrepreneurship. Research Report 001/2007* (Birmingham, National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship, 2007). Available at [http://www.wmro.org/displayResource.aspx/7012/Understanding\\_the\\_factors\\_influencing\\_graduate\\_entrepreneurship.html](http://www.wmro.org/displayResource.aspx/7012/Understanding_the_factors_influencing_graduate_entrepreneurship.html)

52. For information on collaboration between HEFCE and Unlimited on the HE Social Entrepreneurship Programme see <http://unltd.org.uk/hefce/champions.html>.

53. See the reflections on this by Lord Dearing, architect of the influential Dearing Report of 1997, in a lecture in 2009: in A. Booth (ed.), *What Do We Want Our Students to Be?* (Nottingham: Centre for Integrative Learning, 2010).

54. This was particularly evident in the debates over standards in the 1990s. See History at the Universities Defence Group (HUDG), *Submission to the National Committee of Enquiry* (London: HUDG, 1997); *Standards in History: Final Report to the Quality Assurance Agency* (London: HUDG, 1998).

Today, government focus upon value, utility and impact in higher education is more than ever to the fore and the demand for universities to foster 'employability skills' has become insistent, with increasing demand for direct employer engagement in the undergraduate curriculum and public statements of employment outcomes. Whilst this agenda provides an inadequate means of expressing the value of higher learning through history, the preparation of history students for the world of work is not a task that historians in their role as teachers can or should evade. In their role as educators they have a responsibility to equip students with means to navigate the complex work and life challenges they are likely to face, and economic value cannot easily be dismissed without appearing elitist and out-of-touch to students contributing ever-higher tuition fees and struggling to find a place in an increasingly competitive job market. This does not mean abandoning the case for value in terms of a fulfilling life or 'an understanding of what makes life worth living' - the appeal to human potential or 'the state of our students' hearts' as Schwartz puts it.<sup>55</sup> This, however, needs to go hand in hand with a strong public narrative (for students and their parents as much as for government and employers) about how history learning connects to the world of employment.

As this essay has suggested, history educators should not despair of the economic argument but rather make the case in terms of the values that they (and many of today's students) hold and how these are of considerable practical value in making a living in the conditions of the twenty-first century. We have used employment data to suggest that employment outcomes for history graduates and the structure and organisation of work more generally are constantly changing, and in ways that make it impossible for even employers to predict the skills needs of graduates in the future. In these circumstances of ultra-complexity, what is and will in future be required, as many employers and researchers into employment have increasingly recognised, are not primarily technical skills or the possession of the sort of 'transferable' skills that routinely appear in bullet-point lists of curricular learning outcomes, but the mindset and dispositions that characterise an 'employable person'. The data from our survey suggests that historians need not feel daunted by this; indeed it indicates that what history teachers in higher education try to do in their teaching and the pedagogic values they hold are much closer to what their graduates need to prepare them to make a living than the more narrowly described employability skills. A strong case can be made that history teaching can at its best provide a particularly good preparation for the kinds of conditions graduates will be living and in which they will increasingly be making a living.

In order to make their case historians need to present what they do in their role as teachers in new ways and for a new context: for working lives as they are, not for the old linear and compartmentalised careers that characterised graduate careers for historians in the previous century. In such a task they might:

- Amplify how teaching and learning in the subject includes but goes beyond skills and employability to prepare graduates to make a good living;
- Draw more strongly and positively upon those values and ideals that anchor them as teachers and are shared by many students;
- Appeal to the emotional as well as the intellectual nature of engagement with the subject;
- Demonstrate the kinds of people that history teaching at its best can help to produce and ask themselves not merely what they want students to know or do but what they want them to 'be';
- Draw upon a richer vocabulary that expresses how history teaching fosters the will to learn and go on learning - a vocabulary that includes words like excitement and love;
- Demonstrate more explicitly and practically how history teaching enables students to navigate the kinds of lives they will be living.

This clearly requires a degree of individual and collective responsiveness that goes beyond the marginal engagement that characterised the discipline's public response to the first phase of the higher education employability agenda in the 1980s, or the dogged defensiveness of the 1990s.<sup>56</sup> Rather it is a call to, and an opportunity for, systematic reflection and rethinking about what history teaching in higher education 'is', what it has been and what it might be. It involves re-imagining the history curriculum and classroom in ways that engage more deeply with what it means to be a student and a history graduate in the world of work in the twenty-first century. In undertaking this critical and creative task there is no better

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55. Schwartz, 'Soul Food in the Age of Money', p. 11.

56. On the 1980s response to the employability agenda, see Maurice Kogan, 'History', in Chris J. Boys, John Brennan, Mary Henkel, John Kirkland, Maurice Kogan and Penny Youll, *Higher Education and the Preparation for Work* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1988), p. 38.

place to start than by drawing on the scholarship of teaching and learning in history.<sup>57</sup> This can provide the tools for systematic reflection and analysis and the evidence-based insights into past-, present- and future-thinking and practice that will enable the strongest possible case to be made for why history teaching makes a significant difference to students, why our subject matters in making a good living and why it deserves to survive (and thrive) in higher education.

**Alan Booth and Jeanne Booth**

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57. This literature has grown rapidly in recent years. For a guide, see Lendol Calder, William Cutler and Mills Kelly, 'History Lessons: Historians and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning', in Mary Huber and Sherwyn Morreale (eds), *Disciplinary Styles in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Exploring Common Ground* (Menlo Park, Ca., American Association of Higher Education, 2002), pp. 1171-92; David Pace, 'The Amateur in the Operating Room: History and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning', *American Historical Review*, 109 (2004), pp. 1171-92 ; Alan Booth, 'Rethinking the Scholarly: Developing the Scholarship of Teaching in History', *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education*, 3 (2004), pp. 45-67; Joel Sipress and David Voelker, 'From Learning History to Doing History: Beyond the Coverage Model', in Regan Guring, Nancy Chick and Aeron Haynie (eds), *Exploring Signature Pedagogies: Teaching Disciplinary Habits of Mind* (Sterling, VA, Stylus, 2008), pp.19-35.





## Introduction

Recent reports from the UK's Quality Assurance Agency note the increasing attention that the country's higher education institutions have paid to enhancing student employability.<sup>1</sup> The involvement these institutions have had with the employability agenda is long standing and was boosted in the late 1980s with the launch of the Enterprise in Higher Education Initiative,<sup>2</sup> a government project that advocated active approaches to learning, as well as student engagement with the world of work.<sup>3</sup> Given that the UK is currently experiencing a phase of macro-economic uncertainty and that a sharp rise in student fees is on the horizon, the interest of the higher education sector in promoting employability remains undiminished, with the awareness, acquisition and application of transferable skills remaining high on its agenda. However, even if university managers and tutors can agree on a common strategy in addressing the matter, the challenge faced by the humanities, a subject area not traditionally associated with high levels of concern over employability, is particularly acute. This essay contributes to discussion on the theme, focusing on numeracy teaching in the UK's undergraduate history programmes.

*Prospects*, the UK's official graduate careers website, contains a section dealing with the type of academic and personal skills that graduate employers require. Based on an analysis of national employer surveys that have been undertaken over the years, the site features a table that divides these skills into four broad areas, namely self-reliance skills, people skills, general employment skills and specialist skills. Some of the skills listed, such as problem solving and communicating, are covered in all degree-level courses and, in one way or another, are taken into account in assessing the quality of the work that students present. Yet there are skills that are more valued in some types of degree course than others. Numeracy is a prime example.

4

A recently-completed research project entitled *Every Student Counts: Promoting Numeracy and Enhancing Employability*, which was based at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), has demonstrated that, in the UK at least and quite probably elsewhere in the world, relatively little attention is being paid in higher education history departments to engaging undergraduate students with numerical matters.<sup>5</sup> Yet given the research skills that the application of numerical techniques can foster and the interpretative insights they can afford, there is a compelling case for so doing. Examples supporting these contentions are easy enough to find in the historical literature, not least amongst that dealing with historical demography. Thus, as a recent study has demonstrated, counting and

tabulating census schedule evidence relating to workhouse inmates in different localities can provide highly-illuminating information about their age and gender composition, as well as their marital status.<sup>6</sup> A crucial point to appreciate here is that no advanced knowledge of mathematics or of statistics is required in order to gain these insights. Undergraduate historians involving themselves with this type of analysis can do so using the numeracy skills they have already acquired.

1. QAA, *Outcomes from institutional audit: work-based and placement learning* (2008) and *Learning from ELIR 2003-07: emerging approaches to employability and personal development planning* (2009). Both can be viewed from links at: <http://search.qaa.ac.uk/results.aspx?k=employability> (Accessed 17 June, 2011).
2. For discussion on the rise of the employability skills agenda, see D.Nicholls, *The Employability of History Students* (Higher Education Academy, 2005), pp. 2-4. It can be viewed on-line at: [http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/library/internal/br\\_nicholls\\_employability\\_200502xx\\_01](http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/library/internal/br_nicholls_employability_200502xx_01) (Accessed 20 June, 2011).
3. M.Laycock, 'Enterprise in Higher Education and Learner Managed Learning; the Use of Learning Contracts' in N.Graves (ed.), *Learner Managed Learning: Practice, Theory and Policy* (Leeds, 1993), ch.3. The chapter is reproduced as part of the Higher Education for Capability project's archive at [http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/york/documents/resources/hecalheca\\_lm03.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/york/documents/resources/hecalheca_lm03.pdf) (20 June, 2011).
4. The table can be viewed on the *Prospects* website at [http://www.prospects.ac.uk/what\\_do\\_graduates\\_do\\_employers.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/what_do_graduates_do_employers.htm) (Accessed 16 June, 2011).
5. V.N.Tariq, et.al, *Every Student Counts: Promoting Numeracy and Enhancing Employability* (University of Central Lancashire, 2010), pp. 89-94 and 97-103. The report can be viewed at: [http://www.uclan.ac.uk/information/services/ldulf/iles/ESC\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.uclan.ac.uk/information/services/ldulf/iles/ESC_FINAL.pdf) (Accessed 16 June, 2011).
6. A. Gritt & P. Park, 'The workhouse populations of Lancashire in 1881', *Local Population Studies*, 86 (2011), pp.37-65.

Whilst the primary reason for incorporating numeracy into undergraduate history provision is to enhance students' historical understanding, additional advantage arises because the employability agenda can also be addressed. Given that employers value numeracy skills, and frequently set numerical reasoning tests for prospective employees, this consideration is important for undergraduates in all academic disciplines.<sup>7</sup> Of course, legitimate anxieties arise about higher education teachers following employers' agendas in too slavish a manner<sup>8</sup> and, in the UK, comfort may be taken from the permissive approach to numeracy contained in the History Benchmarking Statement.<sup>9</sup> Yet students graduating with history degrees have to face a highly competitive labour market and they may be at a significant disadvantage if their numeracy skills are allowed to lapse.

In engaging with this consideration, two key, interlinked questions arise. Firstly, precisely what numerical skills do employers value? The *Prospects* web site is not especially helpful in this respect, merely stating the need for accuracy, quick-thinking and a methodical approach. Nor is the 2008 report from the Council of Industry and Higher Education, which deals with what graduate employers want, though it does rank numeracy as the ninth most important skill that employers look for when recruiting new graduates.<sup>10</sup> Recourse has to be made, therefore, to the numerical reasoning tests that graduate employers set. The form they take has been characterised by Graduate Consulting as 'multiple choice and time pressured', requiring no mathematical knowledge beyond that covered at GCSE level. They involve such tasks as interpreting data from graphs, charts and tables and working with percentages, ratios, fractions, indexes and currency conversion.<sup>11</sup> Adding to this list, and looking beyond graduates, a recent CBI report notes the importance of employees being confident with regard to spotting errors and rogue figures, multiplication tables and mental arithmetic, odds and probabilities and different measures and conversion between them.<sup>12</sup> Even so, more information about which numeracy skills employers *most* value would be helpful if HE historians are to operate from an informed standpoint in appreciating their needs.<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, is there really a need for higher education historians to worry about the numeracy skills of the undergraduates they teach, bearing in mind both historical understanding and employability? After all, the great majority of those attending UK universities will already have achieved a GCSE mathematics award and some will have attained an AS or an A2 award, thereby having demonstrated at least a basic understanding of numerical concepts and applications. And in overseas universities, where less specialization occurs, numeracy will feature in the provision offered outside major programmes in history.

7. An example of a numerical reasoning test similar to those used by employers for recruitment purposes has been devised by the Careers Advisory Service at Kent University. It can be viewed at: <http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/tests/mathstest.htm> (Accessed 12 June, 2011).
8. For discussion on this matter, see, for example, Nicholls, *Employability*, pp. 4-7 and P.Washer 'Revisiting Key Skills: A Practical Framework for Higher Education', *Quality in Higher Education*, 13 (2007), pp. 57-60.
9. The statement lists numeracy and quantitative methods as one amongst several types of skills that are essential in some history programmes and desirable though not obligatory in others. It is strongly recommended that provision should be made for at least one of these skills. The statement can be seen at: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/honours/history.asp> (Accessed 18 June, 2011).
10. W.Archer and J. Davison, *Graduate Employability: What do employers think and want?* (CIHE, 2008), p.7. The survey is based on 233 responses, with 68 per cent listing numeracy amongst the skills and capabilities they required. The report can be viewed at: <http://www.cihe.co.uk/wp-content/.../document.php?file=0802Grademployability> (Accessed 18 June, 2011).
11. Graduate Consulting provides guidance for prospective graduates looking for a career in consulting. The details provided on numerical reasoning tests can be found at: <http://www.graduate-consulting.com/Applications/online-tests/numerical-reasoning> (Accessed 18 June, 2011).
12. CBI, *Taking Stock: CBI education and skills survey 2008*, p.16. The report can be viewed at: <http://www.investorsinpeople20survey.co.uk/Documents%20Hidden/Research/CBI%20education%20and%20skills%.pdf> (Accessed 18 June, 2011).
13. For further comment on the points raised in this paragraph, along with further sources, see Richard Cameron, 'Numeracy Skills and Employability *Learning and Teaching in Action*, 8', (2009). It can be viewed at: <http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/ltialissue18/cameron.php> (Accessed 20 June, 2011).

In addressing these matters, evidence accumulated as part of the *Every Student Counts* project is analysed. A start is made by discussing findings from a survey of graduate employers that asked for details of the specific numerical skills they value. Consideration is then given to undergraduates' perceptions of their ability to apply particular types of numerical skill. At issue here is how closely their perceptions fit with employers' requirements. Finally, the results of a numeracy test undertaken by history undergraduates are considered. These results provide a means of evaluating the confidence students have in their numerical abilities and act as a pointer to how well they are likely to fare in meeting employers' numeracy requirements.<sup>14</sup>

## Numeracy skills valued by employers

As part of the *Every Student Counts* project, an on-line survey was undertaken to obtain the views of graduate employers on numeracy issues. Responses were received from 165 of them. They employed varying numbers of graduates and operated within a range of industries.<sup>15</sup>

One of the questions asked the employers to indicate those numeracy skills in which they would expect their graduate recruits to be competent. The responses covered 14 skills.<sup>16</sup> Of these, the ones most likely to be encountered by history students during their undergraduate studies were selected for further analysis. They are:

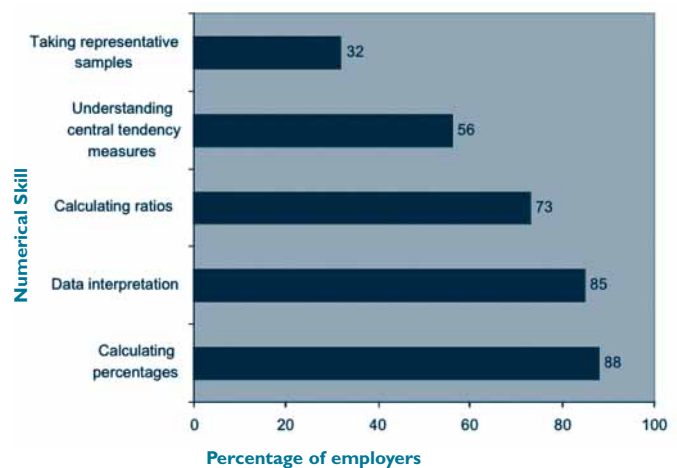
- calculating percentages
- interpreting data
- working with ratios and proportions
- taking representative samples
- understanding measures of central tendency

All are basic numerical skills covered in GCSE syllabi with which, therefore, UK students entering university to study history can be expected to be familiar.<sup>17</sup>

In Figure 1, measures are given of the proportions of employers taking part in the survey who would expect the graduates they employ to be competent in relation to each of these skills. As can be seen, their expectations vary considerably according to the skill in question. Proficiency with representative sampling was expected by fewer than a third of respondents, whereas a majority expected competency in the other four skills, affirmative response rates reaching over 80% with regard to calculating percentages and data interpretation.

A further point may be made about these findings. Respondents were asked whether or not they would be satisfied if those they sought to recruit were technically competent in applying their numeracy skills, perhaps by using calculators or computers, despite lacking a conceptual understanding. A small majority, 56%, stated that they would be satisfied.<sup>18</sup> Such a finding could reassure history undergraduates, who, it might be thought, are likely to be well represented amongst those with limited conceptual understanding of numeracy. Even so, that a sizeable minority of respondents required more than this should provide them, and those who teach them, with cause for thought.

**Fig.1: Numeracy skills in which employers expect graduate competency**



14. We are grateful to Lisa Lavender of the History Subject Centre, and Shane Ewen, of Leeds Metropolitan University, for reading earlier drafts of this article and making helpful comments.

15. For further details, see *Every Student Counts*, pp.25-34.

16. *Every Student Counts*, Fig.10, p.33.

17. See, for example, the specification for AQA's GCSE Maths syllabus at:

<http://store.aqa.org.uk/resourceZone/pdf/mathsAQA-4360-W-TRB-SPG> (Accessed 18 June, 2011).

18. *Every Student Counts*, p.34.

With information to hand on the expectations employers have about particular numeracy skills, analysis was extended into higher education history teaching. Firstly, surveys were undertaken to determine how confident undergraduate history students were about their numeracy capabilities. In particular, information was sought on whether they believe that they have high levels of competency concerning the numeracy skills that are apparently of most concern to graduate employers. Secondly, testing was carried out to assess whether or not the degrees of confidence they expressed are well founded or otherwise. Undergraduate history students may believe they are competent in applying numerical techniques, but whether they actually are may be quite a different matter:

### History students' perceptions of their numeracy skills

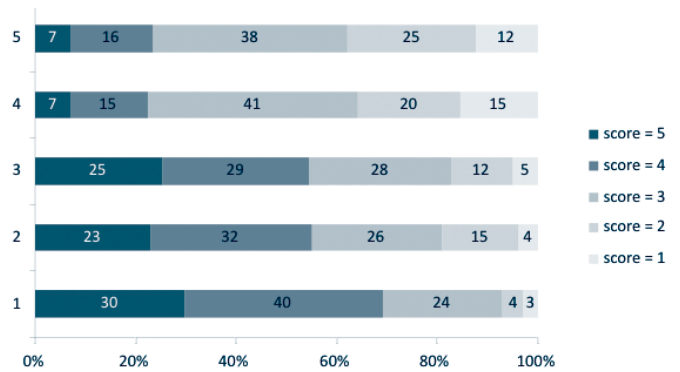
In addressing these matters, the *Every Student Counts* project drew on a survey undertaken by historians at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) and UCLan. To assess how confident history undergraduates at these institutions were about their numeracy skills, a questionnaire was circulated during the autumn of 2007 to most of those who had recently begun their studies. All were enrolled on single-honours history courses, so that they had little if any opportunity to practise their numeracy skills in other subject areas.<sup>19</sup> In total, 162 responses were obtained. Of these, 92 were from MMU, 50 from SHU and 20 from UCLan. The vast majority of the responses (85%) were from students in the 18-22 year age range and most (59%) were male.<sup>20</sup>

That these students were at an early stage in their undergraduate programmes meant that they were not too far removed from having taken compulsory courses in GCSE mathematics and could therefore be expected to recall much of what they had learned. In fact, almost all of them (92%) had obtained a GCE O-level or GCSE award as their highest pre-university mathematics qualification. Nearly 80% had achieved grade C or above, but only nine per cent had secured an A grade. A small minority had studied mathematics beyond the compulsory education years, with three per cent attaining an A/S level award and a further three per cent an A-level award. It was apparent, therefore, that all the students sampled had attained qualifications requiring them to demonstrate their understanding of a range of basic numerical techniques identified by employers.

With regard to the five numerical skills identified as part of the employer survey, the students were asked to rate their

competency levels using a five-point scale, with five equating to 'highly competent' and one to 'not at all competent'. The results are shown in Figure 2.

**Fig.2: Perceived ability of history undergraduates with particular numerical techniques**



#### Key:

1. Interpret graphs and charts
2. Calculate percentages
3. Calculate averages
4. Calculate ratios
5. Take representative samples

Several points arise:

- The most positive rating that the students gave themselves related to the interpretation of data, specifically when presented in the form of graphs or tables. No fewer than 70% gave themselves the two highest scores and a mere 7 per cent grouped themselves in the two lowest.
- Calculating percentages and averages also received high ratings, with more than half the students in each case awarding themselves a 4 or 5 rating and fewer than 20% a 1 or 2 rating.
- As far as calculating ratios and taking representative samples are concerned, much lower levels of confidence were expressed, with, respectively, only 22% and 23% going as high as a 4 or 5 rating.

19. They might have opportunity to take elective modules in other subject areas that involve quantification.

20. For further details of the survey and the results, see *Every Student Counts*, pp. 76-8.



Comparing these findings with those from the employers' survey reveals a high degree of correlation between the numeracy skills that employers emphasise and those in which undergraduate history students perceive themselves to be the most competent. From both perspectives, calculating percentages and interpreting numerical data come top of the list. That the vast majority of the students surveyed had used spreadsheets adds to the apparent serendipity.<sup>21</sup> However, there may still be disquiet since, in general, students did not award themselves higher ratings, even with regard to calculating percentages and interpreting data. Two further concerns may also be raised. One is that the numerical skills first-level history undergraduates possess may deteriorate if opportunity to utilise them does not occur as they progress through their programmes of study. The other is that the students' stated perceptions about their numeracy skills might fall short of reality, a matter that can be addressed by testing.

## History undergraduate numeracy test

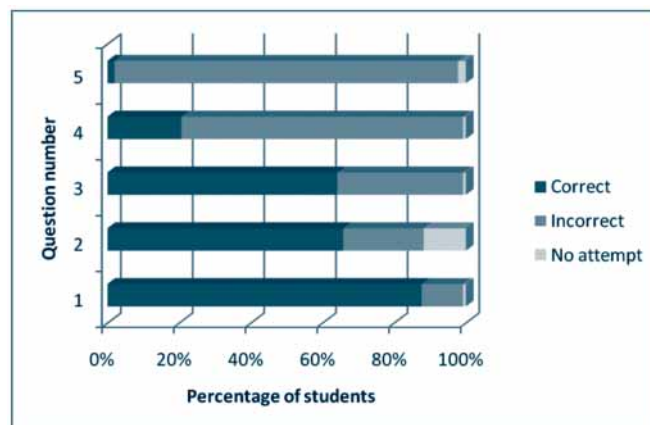
In devising a suitable numeracy test, questions based on four sets of historical data were included. They involved interpreting charts and tables; calculating percentages, ratios and measures of central tendency; and compiling a frequency distribution. Planning the test had to take account of the impact on class teaching time and on the time of staff involved in its administration. Accordingly, the figures in the data sets were selected and, where necessary, slightly adjusted for ease of calculation; students did not require calculators. The test was designed to be completed within 15 minutes, with 14 answers required. Care was also taken to ensure that the questions were set in varying contexts, some of which would be likely to present greater challenges than others. Both multiple-choice and open-ended questions were used, for example. Some credit was given where an answer was incorrect but evidence of conceptual understanding was apparent, to this end, students were encouraged to show any working out they undertook. No marks were deducted if students failed to add to their answers the type of units (£s, years and so on) with which they were dealing. A total of 365 students, most of them at first-year level and taking single-honours history courses, took the test as a class exercise. With consistency in mind, all the scripts were graded by one marker.

### 1. Data interpretation questions

Five questions in the test concerned data interpretation and the results the students attained in answering them are shown in Figure 3.<sup>22</sup> The most striking point to emerge is the marked variation in the success rate achieved in answering the

questions; for question 1, 88% of students gave a correct response, compared with only 2 per cent for question 5. In general, the results scarcely vindicate the students' confidence with regard to their ability in interpreting data, with only a minority (48%) of their responses being correct.

**Fig.3: Test results for data interpretation questions**



The best result (question 1) was obtained with a multiple-choice question. Students were presented with a block graph showing annual sales between 1914 and 1939 of a Sheffield silver-plate manufacturing concern, they were asked to identify the group of three years during which sales were at their lowest, four options being given from which to select. The period in question stands out very clearly in the graph, with the sales level recorded being much lower than those for two of the other depressed periods that were selected as distractors and that were therefore easy to eliminate.

Questions 2 and 3 required students to undertake the same type of task as question 1. Yet they did so with less success, providing correct answers in 66% and 64% of cases respectively. Question 2 made use of the silver-plating firm's data set and again asked for a choice to be made from four options. This time, students were asked to find which group of three years brought the highest value of sales. Since the period again stands out clearly on the graph, it is hard to see why this question posed greater difficulties than question 1. Possibly having only one of the distractors showing a much lower level

21. A total of 156 students responded to a question asking whether they had used computer applications with numerical data. At least 88 per cent had used a spreadsheet (almost exclusively *Excel*) for the purpose. See *Every Student Counts*, p.78.
22. The test results can be found in *Every Student Counts*, pp.81-3.



of sales than the correct option, and thus being easy to eliminate, was influential. Question 3 was based on value figures of UK ship production during the 1880s. These figures, presented as a table, only covered a five-year period and students were asked to find the three-year period during which sales value was highest. That the question did not take the form of a multiple-choice question gave students less guidance than was the case with questions 1 and 2, though the small size of data set should have eased the task of identifying the period in question.<sup>23</sup>

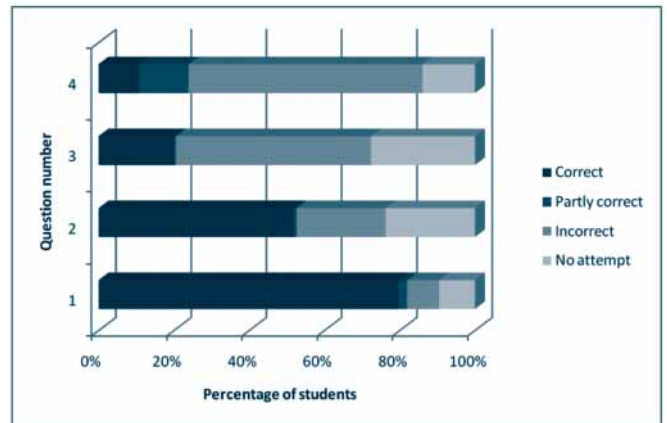
Questions 4 and 5 were both based on the silver-plating firm's sales data. The former was correctly answered by only one in five of the students. Again it required them to find the period – there was only one – in which sales rose over five successive years. As with the two previous questions, they were helped by being given the length of the time period involved, but often they failed to identify correctly the starting year, instead selecting a year in which sales fell to a trough before rising thereafter; they were actually starting from a year in which sales fell rather than rose. The same fault was evident in question 5, which a mere 2 per cent of students answered correctly. In this case, the level of difficulty was increased because they were not given a specified time period to identify, nor several answers from which to select, the task being to find the longest period over which sales fell in successive years.

## 2. Percentage questions

A further four questions in the test involved calculating percentages. The results attained are shown in Fig.4. Again the most striking feature is the inconsistency achieved, though with a somewhat narrower range than occurred with the data interpretation questions. In the case of question 1, 80% of students gave a correct response, compared with just 11% for question 4. However, taking the correct and incorrect answers together, the former were in a slight majority (53%). Relatively few students attained partly correct answers. Again, therefore, the conclusion has to be drawn that the confidence students expressed in calculating percentages is not entirely justified.

Questions 1 and 4 drew on a 1787 balance sheet of the Sheffield silver-plate manufacturing concern noted above. Question 1 asked students to express the debts owing, which stood at £2,500, as a percentage of the total asset value, which amounted to £5,000. To add to the ease of calculation, the debt figure was placed directly above the asset value figure in the table. As would be anticipated with such a basic calculation, a high proportion (80%) recorded a correct response, but that 20% failed to do so is disturbing.

Fig.4: Test results for percentage questions



Question 4 was complicated by combining a percentage calculation with a subtraction, though the percentage calculation was straightforward. Students were asked to suppose that the total value of the firm's fixed assets, which came to a sum of £1,250, was overvalued by ten per cent and to calculate the amount at which the total assets would have then been valued. Whilst only 11% of students provided a correct answer, some of those registered in the partly correct group did compute the percentage part of the calculation accurately.<sup>24</sup> Even so, only a small minority were able to complete successfully both parts of the calculation. In quite a number of cases, the error was made of adding the percentage figure to the total asset value rather than subtracting it.

Questions 2 and 3 were based on value figures of UK ship production during the 1880s, requiring students to work out percentage changes from one year to the next. In the case of question 3, the task was to work out the percentage increase when the output value rose from £8 million in 1886 to £9 million in 1887. Here again, the calculation was straightforward, but only 20% of the students gave a correct answer and 28% gave no response. Difficulty was possibly experienced in expressing one-eighth as a percentage without the aid of a calculator. With regard to question 2, better results were obtained, with just over half the responses proving correct. Students had to cope with computing a decrease in sales, which may have caused some conceptual difficulty, but the calculation was simple enough, involving a decrease of £2 million from a total of £10 million.

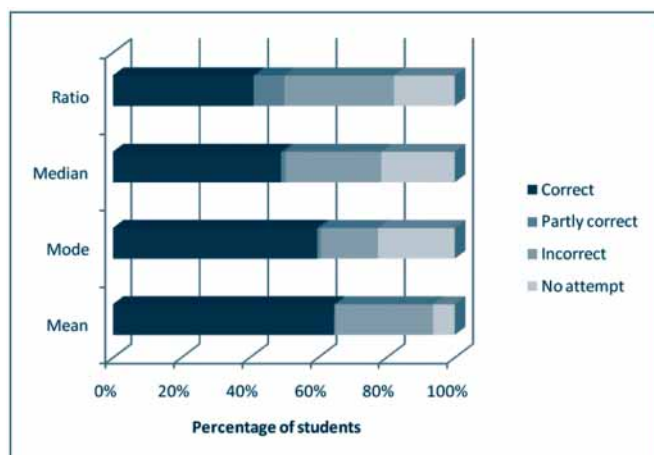
23. The students could have computed a three-year moving average to address the question, though there is no indication from any working out they noted that they did so. The three-year period concerned could be fairly easily discerned.
24. This outcome is reflected in the relatively high proportion of partly correct answers given for question 4.

### 3. Other questions

As Table 1 reveals, a sizeable majority of those companies included in the *Every Student Counts* employer survey valued the ability to calculate ratios (73%) and a small majority the understanding of central tendency measures (56%). Accordingly, questions on each of the three measures of central tendency were included in the numeracy test, along with another on ratios. How successful were the students in attempting them?

The results they achieved are set out in Figure 5. In the case of the central tendency questions, between half and two-thirds of the responses were correct. The mean, which simply required the average value of UK shipping between 1884 and 1886 to be calculated, brought a success rate of 65%, but, even so, nearly three in ten students gave an incorrect answer. The median and mode questions were based on a table giving the lengths of sentence of 11 inmates at Portland Prison in 1849. In determining the median, success was frequently achieved by listing the sentence lengths in order from shortest to longest. However, confusion arose concerning definitions of central tendency, with some students working out the mean length of sentence to give as the answer for the median. In one instance, a student listed the sentence lengths in order to calculate the median, but gave this as the answer for the mode, then proceeded to calculate the mean as the answer to the median. With regard to the ratio question, which was based on the 1787 balance sheet and required the determination of the ratio of fixed capital (valued at £1,250) to total assets (valued at £5,000), only a minority of students (41%) answered correctly. Error arose through stating the ratio the wrong way round and through cancelling down the two value figures incorrectly.

**Fig.5: Test results for ratio and central tendency questions**



The preparation of a frequency distribution was also included in the test. Frequency distributions were not mentioned in the employer survey, but given that they have high use value in

historical study, that students would be familiar with them from GCSE work and that the Portland Prison data could be readily utilised in compiling them, including an example in the test seemed worthwhile. Accordingly, students were asked to prepare a table giving the frequency distribution of the prisoners' ages using ten-year age groups.

Taken at face value, the results can be seen as leaving a great deal to be desired, with only one in ten achieving a fully correct answer. However, a further 38% made partially correct responses, demonstrating some conceptual understanding. Marks were mainly lost through not distinguishing one or more of the ten-year age groups correctly, often designating eleven-year periods that overlapped. Interpreting the figures is further complicated by a high non-response rate (no less than 44%) to the task. At least in part, this may have resulted from the task being placed at the end of the test, giving some students inadequate time to complete it.

## Further considerations

Inadequate and falling levels of numeracy skills amongst UK undergraduates has become a familiar theme in the educational literature. A selection drawn from recent discussion on the matter will serve to make the point. In 1999, on the basis of diagnostic tests given to new undergraduates in at least sixty departments of mathematics, physics and engineering, strong evidence emerged of a 'steady decline' that had occurred over the past decade concerning 'fluency in basic mathematical skills and of the level of mathematical preparation of students accepted on degree courses'.<sup>25</sup> Three years later, it was reported that a diagnostic test given to first-year bioscience undergraduates in 1999 and 2000 revealed high proportions of students (between 42% and 63%) who encountered difficulties with questions requiring an understanding of fractions, indices, logarithms and units of measurement. There were indications, too, that bioscience students were another group whose numeracy skills had declined.<sup>26</sup> The trend has also been detected amongst

25. *Measuring the Mathematics Problem* (The Learning and Teaching Support Network, The Institute of Mathematics and Its Applications, The London Mathematical Society & The Engineering Council, 1999). The report can be viewed at: <http://www.engc.org.uk/lecukdocuments/internet/document%20library/Measuring%20the%20Mathematic%20Problems.pdf> (Accessed 15 May 2011).

26. V.N.Tariq, 'A decline in numeracy skills among bioscience undergraduates', *Journal of Biological Education*, 36 (2002), pp.76-83.

psychology students. A study published in 2004 of psychology undergraduates in Northern Ireland compared cohorts in 1992 and 2002, reporting declining levels of numeracy and mathematical knowledge over the period.<sup>27</sup> An extension of the study to psychology undergraduates in a cross section of UK universities revealed marked deficiencies in their mathematical reasoning ability, with generally poor performances in probability and sampling, estimation and, to a lesser extent, in proportion and ratio calculation.<sup>28</sup> Drawing partly on this research, discussion of undergraduates' deficiencies in numeracy have been extended to other social science subjects, emphasising that quantitative techniques are typically unpopular with students.<sup>29</sup>

Viewed in this general context, the history test results obtained in the *Every Student Counts* project bring no great surprises. History has traditionally attached less importance to the application of even basic numeracy skills than some other disciplines. Besides, any gains that were made in developing numerical approaches in historical study have received a setback from the long-term decline in economic history teaching, which inevitably requires engagement with numeracy, albeit to varying degrees. Higher education historians have an impressive track record in seeking to develop a range of academic skills in their teaching programmes, but not as far as numeracy is concerned.<sup>30</sup>

The limitations of the history test must also be taken into account. Firstly, it was undertaken on an availability basis, and mainly within the post-1992 sector, so that the results are not necessarily an accurate reflection of the numerical abilities of undergraduate history students as a whole. Furthermore, the participating students were taking single-honours courses in history. Yet it must be borne in mind that appreciable numbers of history undergraduates are enrolled on combined studies courses, sometimes with subjects that do require engagement with numeracy, especially those in the social sciences. Possibly, too, the students involved would have benefited in terms of both speed and accuracy had they been allowed to use calculators in taking the test and to have fared better had they been given opportunity to revise for it. The precise impact of these considerations is impossible to know, but they do mean that the results of the test must be treated with caution.

Even if these allowances are made, however, the test results suggest that those taking single-honours history degree courses in the UK commonly share the type of weaknesses with regard to numeracy skills that have been identified in other subject areas. Yet that the history students were capable of scoring highly when they were helped in making numerical calculations or observations of a basic type must be acknowledged, suggesting that their understanding of some

quantitative concepts and methods is not lacking. What they frequently demonstrated in the test was an inability to apply their understanding in addressing the tasks they were set, particularly when the tasks were of a more demanding nature. Selecting the correct answer from a range of options was one thing; having to find a correct answer in an open-ended situation was quite another.

In the world of work, such inability may have profound implications, as Beth Kelly has pointed out, it may be the case that employees are simply required to undertake numerical calculations and record the results. However, taking the calculation of percentages as an example, she goes on to remark that, increasingly, the worker must also be able to decide when it is appropriate to use percentages and which percentages are relevant to the problem. The worker must also know how to communicate the key messages about these percentage calculations in the most effective manner: 'Doing percentages accurately' is just the beginning! The worker needs an additional set of communication and information processing skills.<sup>31</sup>

If, as seems likely, many history undergraduates are not even at first base in grappling with these requirements, questions need to be asked about how far and in what ways the learning and teaching approaches they experience can help to rectify the situation.

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27. G. Mulhern & J. Wylie, 'Changing levels of numeracy and other core mathematical skills amongst psychology undergraduates between 1992 and 2002', *British Journal of Psychology*, 95 (2004), pp.355-70.
  28. G. Mulhern & J. Wylie, *Assessing numeracy and other mathematical skills in psychology students as a basis for learning statistics* (HEA, 2005). The paper can be viewed at [http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/docs/pdf/p2007509\\_Assessing\\_numeracy.pdf](http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/docs/pdf/p2007509_Assessing_numeracy.pdf) (Accessed 18 May 2011).
  29. G. R. Gibbs, 'Mathematics and Statistics Skills in the Social Sciences' in C. M. Marr and M. J. Grove, *Responding to the Mathematic Problem: The Implementation of Institutional Support Mechanisms* (Maths, Stats and OR Network, 2010), pp.44-50. An on-line version can be found at: <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/88791/Gibbs.pdf> (Accessed 23 June, 2011).
  30. For further comment and reading on these matters, see *Every Student Counts*, pp.10-11.
  31. Beth Kelly, *Numeracy Skills, Employability and the Role of Educators* (London South Bank University Paper, 2008). The paper can be viewed at: <http://www.lsbu.ac.uk/lluplus/research/index.shtml> (Accessed 22 June, 2011).

## Conclusion

One of the key questions that this article took as its starting point concerned the numerical skills that UK employers most value. What is clear from the evidence garnered is their concern that those they employ should understand the basic numerical techniques of the type covered in GCSE syllabi and with which undergraduate students in all subject disciplines can be expected to be familiar. That they require speed and accuracy in using these techniques is also evident, as is the need for employees to make decisions about which numerical techniques to utilise in given situations and to communicate the findings that arise in effective ways. Both written and verbal forms of communication are likely to be important in this respect.

The other key question asked was whether there is a need for higher education historians to worry about the numerical skills of the undergraduates they teach, bearing in mind both historical understanding and employability. On the basis of the evidence presented in this article, an affirmative answer has to be given. Whilst the results of one numeracy test have to be treated with circumspection, what is of concern is that history students commonly experience difficulty when applying the basic numerical techniques they have studied during the compulsory years of education, especially in new and different contexts. Furthermore, many undergraduate historians appear to be overconfident in their numeracy capabilities, perhaps not realising that these may have declined through lack of practice or that their success in applying them can be strongly influenced by the nature of the task in hand.

The implications of these observations for undergraduate history provision are clear enough. If undergraduate history courses are to help students extend their range of historical understanding and to achieve their career aspirations, then ways need to be found of giving them opportunity to practice the basic numerical techniques they have previously covered and of rewarding them for the success they achieve. Fortunately, the scope for so doing is wide, whatever type of history is being studied, and, if needed, inspiration can readily be found from the examples of good practise that have increasingly entered the public domain.<sup>32</sup> What is at stake here is the interests of students, not only in terms of developing their insights and competency as historians, but also of enhancing their employability and life skills.

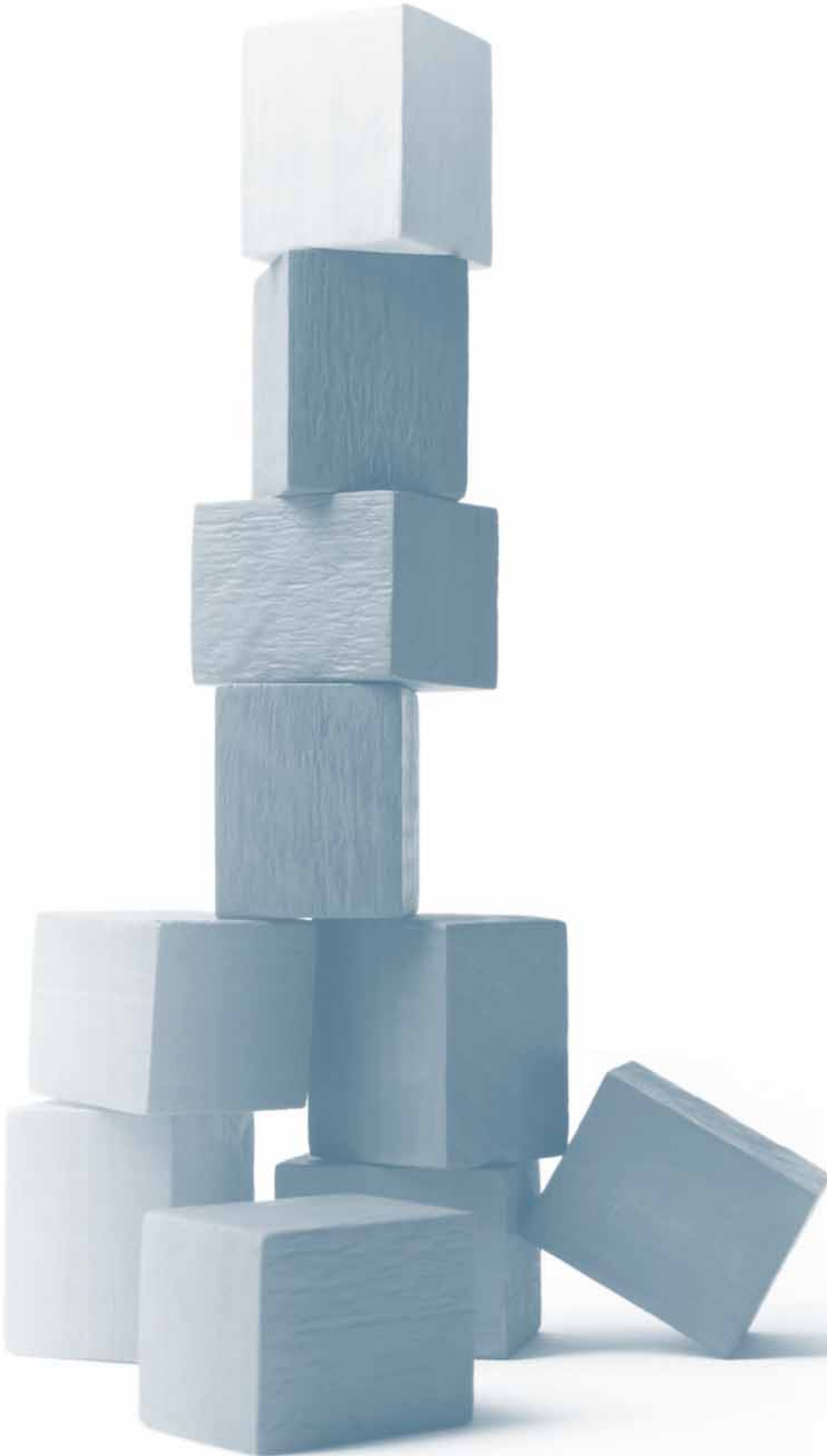
David Nicholls

Roger Lloyd-Jones

Geoffrey Timmins

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32. Several examples of approaches to undergraduate history teaching that make use of numerical approaches form part of the History Subject Centre's *Graduates with Impact* project. They can be seen at: [http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/research/gwiladding\\_value](http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/research/gwiladding_value) Other examples can be found in the history works cited in the background section of the *Every Student Counts* project, pp. 9-10.





## Introduction

Making graduates more employable is not new. Nearly a quarter of a century ago the Enterprise in Higher Education project (1987 to 1996) 'aimed to establish and embed the concept and practice of enterprise within universities, and to increase the effectiveness of higher education (HE) in preparing students for working life' (emphasis added)<sup>1</sup>. Nick Clegg's intervention into the debate of the role of internships<sup>2</sup> gave an unexpected topicality to this part of the History Graduates with Impact research. The Higher Education Academy's Enhancing Student Employability project explored many of the curriculum issues arising from linking higher education with the world of work<sup>3</sup>. The ESE publications are just one example of the enormous literature on work-based, workplace and work-related learning. There is an even vaster literature on assessment and its central role in higher education, as Jennifer Frost and her colleagues have shown<sup>4</sup>. However, although the History Subject Benchmark Statement<sup>5</sup> refers to work placements, there is little published material on the assessment of workplace learning (wpl) in undergraduate History courses in the UK<sup>6</sup>.

The purpose of the *summative* Assessment of Workplace Learning project is to fill this gap in our understanding of how historians assess undergraduate wpl modules. This section reports on the project - its approach and findings - and contributes to the discussion on how wpl in History is assessed. The *History WPL Assessment Practice* website (<http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/research/gwil/wpl/practice>) will complement this chapter by giving specific institutional examples. It will also include topics that space has prevented us exploring here, such as the length and location of placements, the mechanisms for supporting placements and ideas for future research.

## Approach

The UCAS database provided details of the 114 institutions offering History Honours and Foundation degree courses. A search of the institutions' websites identified courses that appeared to offer a wpl module<sup>7</sup>. Every institution was also emailed to confirm whether it offered wpl. As a result of the email survey, we were confident that 25 institutions (22% of all institutions with History courses) have a current wpl module. A further 12 departments' websites indicated that they offered wpl. Thus, nearly a third (32%) of all undergraduate History courses have wpl modules as part of their provision. We recognise that this probably under-represents the number of institutions running such modules as not all departments

responded to emails. Only three of the 37 institutions were pre-1992 universities. This was not unexpected because of the post-1992 universities' experience of providing placement learning across the curriculum.

1. Department for Education and Employment, *Enterprise in Higher Education: Changing the Mindset* (Nottingham: DfEE Publications, 1999) available at <http://tinyurl.com/43ffqsr>. See Michael Sanderson, *The universities and British industry, 1850-1970* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) for the historical background and Nick Wilton, 'The Impact of Work Placements on Skills Development and Career Outcomes for Business and Management Graduates', *Studies in Higher Education*, (iFirst, 2011), pp. 1-18 for a useful summary of recent developments.
2. HM Government, *Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility*, (London: Cabinet Office, 2011) and, for example, Allegra Stratton & Graham Snowdon, 'Clegg admits parental job boost amid crackdown on unpaid internships', *The Guardian*, 5 April, 2011.
3. The publications that resulted from the project are available at <http://tinyurl.com/6a8obel> and <http://tinyurl.com/699r6gl>.
4. Jennifer Frost, Genevieve de Pont, and Ian Brailsford, 'Expanding assessment methods and moments in history', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* (iFirst, 2011), pp.1-12. For challenging overviews, Margaret Price et al, 'If I was going there I wouldn't start from here: a critical commentary on current assessment practice', *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 36, no. 4 (July 2011), pp.479-492 and Mantz Yorke, *Grading Student Achievement* (London: Routledge, 2008).
5. QAA, *History Subject Benchmark Statement* (Gloucester: QAA, 2007). We have followed the definition of wpl in the QAA's *Code of practice: Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* (Gloucester: QAA, 2007).
6. David Nicholls, 'Making history students enterprising: Independent study at Manchester Polytechnic', *Studies in Higher Education* 17, no.1 (1992), pp. 67-80 is a rare contribution to the field.
7. In all institutions wpl modules have the same credit rating as other single History modules.

All 37 institutions were invited to complete a detailed online questionnaire on their wpl module(s). 17 of the 25 respondents to the email survey returned questionnaires, a 68% response rate. An additional response was collected at a later stage. Face to face or telephone interviews were conducted with 15 of the 18 module leaders who completed the questionnaire. Details of module guides and other material distributed to students supplemented the questionnaire and interview data.

### Findings

All the module leaders agreed that wpl gives students an opportunity to confirm the appropriateness of a particular type of work or career; to establish or develop networks of contacts; and to experience a different mode of learning. However, as might be expected from 18 institutions with different histories and cultures, there is considerable diversity in the way the wpl modules operate, with the exception of the assessment methods used, where there is greater homogeneity of approach.

### Context

While almost all of the modules were introduced to enhance students' employability, many predate the recent and present governments' skills agenda and have their origins in earlier debates about students' 'work readiness' and/or about introducing an innovative, more student-centred curriculum. The precise outcomes of these debates have depended on a range of factors including institutional policies, previous departmental practices (some wpl modules have grown out of pre-existing links with schools or other organisation); staffing, for example tutors' previous professional networks have generated fruitful placements.

All the wpl modules require students to bring their historical skills and knowledge to bear on the placement. What differs among the modules is the extent to which history is at the heart of the module outcomes or is a subsidiary element. This spectrum can be represented diagrammatically as:



The modules' aims and outcomes covered this whole spectrum, with the majority tending towards the 'history skills applied to work' end.

There was perhaps greatest agreement among the departments on whether wpl should be compulsory or optional. All but a small minority have made it an optional module. The reasons for this decision are in part pragmatic –

only a relatively limited number of placements are available; additional staffing resources would be required – and in part educational: students who positively choose a placement will be motivated and committed. Furthermore, many students already have experience of 'the world of work'. However, those institutions that have opted for compulsion have overcome the problem of insufficient placements by broadening the scheme to include any graduate level job whether or not it is explicitly related to history. These institutions build on students' previous or current work experience to enhance their students' skills.

Only three institutions offer wpl at more than one level (two at Levels 5 and 6, one at Levels 4 and 5), and one at all three undergraduate levels. Of the departments that have a single level, 8 do so at Level 5 and 6 at Level 6. Just one course gives students the opportunity to replace the final year dissertation with a placement project. Proponents of introducing a wpl module at Level 5 argued that it provides a useful basis for job searching and for dissertations in the final year; having Level 6 modules, on the other hand, was seen as allowing students to bring two years of undergraduate history to bear on the placement. The Level 4 modules were essentially preparations for the later placement modules.

Although there is no one wpl model, it was striking that all the wpl modules are led by historians who are passionate about the educational and personal development value of wpl for their students.

### Assessment

'Students can, with difficulty, escape from the effects of poor teaching, they cannot (by definition if they want to graduate) escape the effects of poor assessment.'<sup>8</sup> David Boud's axiom underlines the importance of assessment in a learning experience. Wpl is no different. The evidence from the responses to the online survey, the module documentation and the interviews indicate that the assessment of the wpl modules has been carefully thought through and has been designed to meet institutional criteria for validity, reliability and affordability<sup>9</sup>.

8. David Boud, 'Assessment and learning – unlearning bad habits of assessment', *Effective Assessment at University*, 1998.
9. For a discussion of these and other related concepts, see Filip Dochy, 'The Edumetric Quality of New Modes of Assessment: Some Issues and Prospects' in Gordon Joughin, (ed.), *Assessment, Learning and Judgement in Higher Education*, (Berlin: Springer, 2009), pp. 85-114.

## Assessment Methods

### ■ Reflective assignments

As noted above, the summative assessment methods adopted by the course teams demonstrate greater similarity than other areas of departmental practice. The dominant modes of assessment are the reflective essay/report and the learning log/diary. Most courses use a combination of the two, often with the log as an appendix to the essay or report.

Though couched in different terms and with varying emphases, the reflective assignments require students to consider critically all or some of three aspects of their placement experience:

- The range of personal and technical skills and attributes they have employed and/or developed during the placement and how they foresee themselves applying those skills in future.
- The ways in which history has informed their placement work.
- The nature of the organization and the examples of good (or poor) practice they have seen.

While all courses give a framework or cues for what is expected under the various rubrics, only very few provide detailed guidance on, or references to, reflection and reflective writing or give opportunities for formative assessment.

### ■ Other assessments

A small number of institutions ask students to make presentations about their placements to audiences that are composed of other students and/or staff other than the module leader. Similarly, a few departments invite placement providers to the presentations. Even if these are group presentations, or the placement project is a group activity, marks are awarded individually, not to the group. A small number of institutions reported that they include portfolios in the assessment regime. On closer inspection, these involved students submitting a collection of items each of which is assessed individually, rather than the sort of holistic portfolio that is used in Health, Education or Social Work, for example. In one institution portfolios in areas other than those in which they are a traditional means of assessment are discouraged because they run counter to institutional policy on module assessment loads.

Little use was made of any form of e-assessment. One department has posting a blog as an optional means of completing the log assessment component and one gives

students the opportunity to run assignments through plagiarism software. A few institutions use their virtual learning environment as an electronic postbox through which students can submit assignments.

There is a reluctance to allocate a mark to the brochures, visitors' guides, posters, exhibitions, learning packs and other outputs that the students produce during the placement. Among the arguments advanced were that the placements are not long enough to permit substantial pieces of work to be completed; not all placements necessarily required a tangible output; the quality of the product might be outside the student's control; it would be difficult to determine assessment criteria that could be applied consistently across very different outputs. Without minimizing the complexity of the task, not including the placement product in the final module mark undervalues the often significant and marketable material students generate.

### ■ The assessors

The majority of institutions do not involve placement providers in the graded assessment of the placement. Concerns are that there would be inconsistency between providers in their assessment, that it would not be possible to quality assure them, and that employers might be less willing to provide the placement if they were required to assess the student. However, four departments incorporate the providers' marks into the overall module mark: the proportions range from 10 per cent (1) to 20 per cent (2) to 25% (1). Providers are given detailed assessment criteria and other guidance material. The four module leaders report that there is a high level of agreement between employers and academics on the marks allocated to individual students. All the departments, though, request providers to feed back on the students' contribution to the placement. Response rates are variable but most employers provide helpful detail about the students and in one department the module leader uses the reports to confirm whether a higher mark should be awarded in borderline cases.

### ■ Student performance

All the module leaders reported that overall the placement students' performance is as good as or better than on other modules, in terms of both the modules' mean marks and the individual students' marks compared with their other modules. This is widely attributed to the students feeling a greater sense of ownership of their work than on other modules.

### ■ Feedback

It is a truism that assessment without feedback is of no use for learning <sup>10</sup>. Where there are small numbers of students on the module it is possible to debrief each student individually or collectively in small groups at the end of the module. Several institutions return marked work by email or through the virtual learning environment. All departments have some form of feedback cover sheet, with varying degrees of detail and specificity. As with other modules, not all students collect their feedback and there is at present no evidence how students respond to emailed comments. None of the departments has used either audio feedback <sup>11</sup> or any form of mobile technology.

Student feedback on the modules is uniformly reported as being extremely positive. This is borne out by the student evaluations and comments we have seen. Students welcome the opportunity to apply their knowledge, to try a new method of learning, to sample the sort of work they (think) they want to take up when they graduate, and to make new and different contacts. There is anecdotal evidence of students who post-graduation not only go into their placement occupation but work for the same organisation.

## Concluding comment and recommendations

Alan and Jeanne Booth's research for their History Passion project and Dave Nicholls' report in this volume reveal that the post-graduation employability of history graduates compares favourably with that of graduates in other disciplines. Work placements are another way of providing the skills which make history graduates attractive to employers and to which Lisa Lavender draws attention in the introduction. Placements also support the current Deputy Prime Minister's belief that accessing different networks can be a key to social mobility. The placement modules in the survey introduce students to historians at work in a range of settings that go beyond the traditional option of teaching. However, it would be misleading to present placement learning solely as a response to the 'employability agenda'. Wpl introduces innovation and diversity into the undergraduate history curriculum.

Based on the evidence we have collected we offer the following considerations as a contribution to the development of assessment of wpl <sup>12</sup> in undergraduate history courses.

### ■ Assessment design

Consider:

- How formative assessment can be built into the assessment regime.
- Whether other assessment methods could complement or replace reflective essays and logs by asking students to produce, for example:
  - an audio- and/or video-recording of workplace practices, with analytical commentary
  - a blog
  - briefing or committee papers
  - critical incident exercises
  - an evaluative guide to work placement for the next year's cohort
  - a funding bid or proposal
  - a patchwork text
  - a portfolio
  - a wiki
  - workplace artefacts

### ■ Feedback/forward on summative assessment

Explore

- Ways of involving providers more directly in the assessment of students' achievements to recognise the significance of the providers' contribution to placement learning.
- The possibilities of collective face-to-face or online feedback/debriefing sessions so that students can share their learning.

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10. For an extensive review of the literature on feedback, Deirdre Burke and Jackie Pietrick, *Giving Students Effective Written Feedback* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2010); for the student perspective, James Williams and David Kane, *Exploring the National Student Survey: Assessment and Feedback Issues* (York: HEA, 2008). Alexandra Cronberg, *History Departments and the National Students Survey 2010* (Coventry: History Subject Centre, 2011) shows that History students score assessment and feedback more highly than other Humanities students.
  11. Tom Lunt and John Curran, 'Are You Listening Please?' The Advantages of Electronic Audio Feedback Compared to Written Feedback', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35, no. 7 (2010), pp.759-69.
  12. Mantz Yorke, 'Work-Engaged Learning: Towards a Paradigm Shift in Assessment', *Quality in Higher Education*, 17, no.1 (2011), pp. 117-30 discusses the issues in detail.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the busy colleagues who responded so unselfishly, openly and enthusiastically at every stage of the project. We also thank Lisa Lavender and her colleagues for their support.

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**Richard Hawkins**  
**Harvey Woolf**





I have been teaching what we now term 'work-related learning' in history at Sheffield Hallam University for nearly a decade. With the support of a Teaching Development Grant from the Subject Centre, I began by exploring ways of making connections with local and community history groups in the region which were proliferating at the end of the 1990s. My idea was quite simple: that SHU history students would produce something 'of use' to an external group, and in so doing would draw upon their history skills but also think about how to communicate their work to a non-academic audience, whether that was in a school, museum or local history setting.

Sometimes this was extremely successful. Highlights include the oral history interviews with women in the former mining community at Kiveton Park and Wales, by student Helen Dobson, which found their way on to the Kiveton Historical Society website (see picture); or the very focused CD produced for teachers planning to take a primary school class to the Traditional Heritage Museum in Sheffield. Others were less successful, marred by lack of commitment on behalf of the student or by outrageously high expectations on the part of the project. But the module was generally a pleasure to teach, and some students found it a life-changing experience, either opening their eyes to new areas of work in heritage, or just engaging them at a level they had rarely felt in academic work.

In the last few years, the popularity of such modules has achieved an all-time high within universities. They are seen to address the issue of 'work-related learning', which is one part of the new 'employability' agenda. As students, parents, employers and lecturers are increasingly anxious about career paths, partnerships and graduate destination data, many universities are now prioritising work-related learning. At SHU, for example, the 'Education for Employability strategy (e4e) 2010-2012' makes a commitment that all students from 2012 will undertake work-related learning as part of their degree programme.

One of the joys for those of us who love this sort of outward facing work, who see real value in student engagement with community-based history projects, and who welcome the challenge to see the relevance of what we do in the 'real world', is that in this climate, there are new resources to support 'employability' initiatives.

This year, I have been developing my Level 6 Community History module into a larger, work-related learning module at Level 5. This development aims to address a number of challenges. Firstly, it acknowledges the difficulty for students of completing a meaningful piece of work in 12 weeks; a bout of

flu, or a project contact who doesn't have student assessment tasks at the forefront of their consciousness, can mean that they struggle. I have chosen Level 5, partly so as not to clash with the stress-inducing dissertation at level 6, but also because students need to be thinking about careers before they reach their last semester in university. I have changed the name, in a bid to get away from the girly, soft-sounding 'community'; the new module is titled 'Applied History'. And I have wrapped the module at both ends with 'careers management' skills.

Applied History will run for the first time from this September, as an elective. The module opens with a lecture programme, which includes lectures by me - on community history, oral history, heritage and history in schools - and by people working in the public history field, in archives, schools, in the museums service and heritage sector, and health. My hope here is that speakers will refer back to when they were history students, and then look forward through the development of their careers - and address some of the challenges their sector is currently facing.

The middle section of the module involves students undertaking a work-related project. This might involve working in a school, doing some research or PR for a museum or heritage project, working as a guide, or undertaking oral history interviews, for example. I have written it into the module descriptor that students are required to find their own project. In actual fact, I have plenty lined up. I am also in the process of establishing a Community History Forum, a partnership between SHU History, the Oral History Society and Barnsley's new museum. This Forum will provide projects for students, who can be employed to interview community history projects and showcase them on our website, or to write short articles about aspects of local history.

The final section at the end of the module involves a focus on careers management skills, to encourage students to reflect on and package their work-related experience for a prospective employer. For this, they are required to do a fifteen minute presentation, write a personal statement and to research an employment sector in order to draw up an action plan: how would they get to that job, from where they are now?

There have been some challenges when setting this up, but none of them insurmountable. My experience of teaching in this field over the years has meant that I have developed a lot of contacts with people happy to provide a project for students or to come to speak to them.

It has been necessary, when making the contacts, to manage expectations. Project contacts who expect that history students can write entire KS2 education packs, or undertake dozens of oral history interviews, have to be told otherwise, and to realise that students are 'learning' and not providing a 'service' and that they have assessment tasks to complete. It is important to clarify what project providers can expect in terms of student time, and what they themselves might give, in terms of meetings and email availability. Similarly, students have to be aware that they are representing the university, and that their attitude, commitment, punctuality etc. all matter. These issues need to be written into the planning stages of the module in various ways.

The biggest challenge is time. While making visits to local museums and community history projects can be immensely enjoyable, it is time-consuming, as is ploughing through university Ethics Checklist, Code of Conduct for Research and also Lone Working Policy. Once done, however, the contacts are made. Similarly, the guidelines mentioned above can be included at the back of the module guide, to be referred to in early seminars.

I have been fortunate at SHU in that the Head of Learning, Teaching and Assessment has championed the need to arrange administrative support, such that a Partnerships Contact is now responsible for arranging CRB checks and for filling in Health and Safety forms for those students who are to go off campus. I will continue to ask students to draw up their own risk assessment, just to make them aware of some of the issues involved.

While these support mechanisms have not been too hard to come by, acknowledgement that such modules have a work-setting dimension has proved trickier to negotiate. Evidence suggests that work-related learning is more resource intensive than more traditional modes of learning. Staff need allowance for additional responsibilities, which will include visiting and liaising with prospective project providers, providing preparation for the placement, health and safety briefings, dealing with and managing expectations of students and providers, fire-fighting and damage limitation when poor relations develop, writing references, etc. as well as the usual concerns of teaching and offering guidance to students.

The main academic challenges concern assessment. Group work is currently under review at SHU and the 'flat mark' for group work has been outlawed. While group projects are desirable, in terms of enabling students to do something they couldn't possibly take on alone, as well as being an employability skill, it has been necessary to develop a mixed assessment diet: if there is a flat mark for a joint project,

differentiation can be made via other pieces of work. Because of my tendencies to develop complex schemes of assessment, I have been quite relieved that Quality at SHU has put limits on the number of assessment tasks I can set for the students. As a consequence, students will produce two reports: a 2000-word interim report, and a 4000-word final report, for which they will have to write to particular headings. For example, the first report will contain a reflection on an employment sector, chosen from school teaching, museums, heritage etc. (1000 words), a reflection on the process of setting up the project and its progress so far (500 words), and a plan of action for semester 2 (500 words). The final report will include a critical reflection on the project (1500 words), an academic discussion of the project (1500 words), a personal statement (500 words), an action plan (500 words). The projects themselves must be added as an appendix. Students also give a 15-minute presentation on an aspect of their project which addresses how they would sum up their experiences and skills gained for a prospective employer.

The other academic challenge which I am preparing for, but which I didn't anticipate when first teaching Community History, concerns the ways in which students use their community history project to critique academic history! Whereas I expected them to be rather dismissive of some local history, their enthusiasm has been boundless. This, they claim, is the reason they loved history in the first place: it is the 'real thing'. This can be a bit disarming at first, but I've learnt to encourage students to place such comments in the context of the debates about heritage in the 1980s, in particular Raphael Samuel's challenge to the anti-heritage stance of Robert Hewison and others. Incorporating academic reflection into the assessment strategy is essential; students need to demonstrate to us that they can both conduct oral history interviews, for example, but also reflect critically on their own practice of doing so through engagement with academic writing. In turn, this can encourage us to think afresh about our practice and about the relationship between academic and more popular forms of history.

**Alison Twells**

## The Hull History Partnership

The original vision of the Hull History Partnership (HHP) was to bring into dialogue and partnership those professionals teaching History who worked across the Hull and East Riding region of Yorkshire. The vision was one of enhanced and enriched history teaching through the opening of better lines of communication between academic historians, school and college teachers, archivists and those working in an education capacity in museums and heritage. The founding partners were the History Department at the University of Hull, which already ran a well-established schools liaison programme, and the newly-opened Hull History Centre (HHC). The HHC brings together vast archival collections, including the papers of prominent political figures, maritime and municipal records and a vast array of local and family history collections. Its educational outreach programme is considerable; in the first six months of it opening in January 2010 it ran workshops for around 1000 primary school children. The idea for the HHP was to triangulate the relationship between the History Department, the HHC and heads/teachers of history in schools and colleges with multiple objectives in mind. Key to these was being able to provide training opportunities for young people wishing to develop careers in history teaching (primary through to HE), archives and heritage work, records management, research in the academy and in workplaces such as law firms and commercial organizations.

In January 2011 the first round table meeting of a wider group of partners for the HHP met and by June 2011 the HHP included heads of history from nine schools and colleges in the region. The development of this network of professionals with an investment in the effective teaching of history was hugely facilitated and accelerated by the award of a Teaching Development Grant by the History Subject Centre in 2010.<sup>1</sup> A number of benefits have already come out of the HHP, not the least of which has been the opportunity gained for direct knowledge transfer between history educators about the changing curricula and teaching imperatives in their professional sectors and about the pedagogical concerns that are most relevant in the transition from school/college to university. Discussions have cohered around strengthening the teaching collaboration that already existed between the History Department at Hull University and the HHC (in provision of a Level 7 module for MA students in archive skills) and instating new teaching/peer observing collaborations that cut across institutional boundaries. For example, the university vision of schools liaison, in which university lecturers go and speak to school and college students, was turned on its head in October 2010 when a local sixth-form teacher delivered a

guest lecture to first-year Hull University students. Establishment of this collaboration has provided an exciting opportunity for observation and discussion about different teaching methods, at the same time as providing first-year History undergraduates with some sense of continuity between their past school/college environment and their new university place of learning.

Mutual teaching arrangements have been just one initiative that has facilitated effective discussion by the partners in the HHP about the strategies that would be most likely to recession-proof History students. Another has been a pre-UCAS day run for AS level students at the University of Hull for the first time in June 2011. The students had a whole day at the university and the offering was deliberately generic – it was about doing history, not doing history at Hull. It began with a short lecture on what to expect of a history degree and the move to a university learning environment. Some of the content used the report on 'Key Transition Issues' carried out by Giles Martin and Matthew Williamson and reported by the History Subject Centre.<sup>2</sup> So, for example, the students were advised that while most history students expected a shift up in gear in terms of workload at university, what they did not expect was the width of intellectual coverage and the degree of difficulty faced in encountering new learning experiences. This introductory presentation was then followed by one on archives and heritage to introduce the idea of how historians work. The remainder of the day was essentially structured as a dress rehearsal for doing history at university, with a first-year lecture (made accessible) followed by work on primary sources from the HHC. The students were encouraged to discuss context, what historians and archivists mean by provenance and how different sources get put to particular uses by historians in their construction of the past. The idea was to get AS level students working as historians and, to this end, they were set loose on the university library on a search-and-find exercise related to the source work. The end of the day addressed specifically UCAS concerns – what to look for in a

1. Presentations on the HHP and the one-year project funded under its auspices by the History Subject Centre have been delivered to Hull University Annual Learning and Teaching Conference (13 January 2011), the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Teaching and Learning in History Conference (4-5 April, 2011) and to a Hull University History Department Staff Development Day (17 May 2011).
2. Giles Martin & Matthew Williamson, 'Key Transition Issues' in *History in Schools and Higher Education* (2009).

history programme, what to write in a personal statement, what questions to ask at open days. The feedback on this pre-UCAS day has been very positive and two of the attending AS level students will be taken on for summer work experience at the HHC ahead of UCAS application.

Two years down the track, the Hull History Partnership has proved the immensely valuable nature of formalising the network of communications that can – perhaps should – exist between professional providers of history teaching in a region. Attaining better understanding of what is taught, how it is taught and what students expect across the school/college-HE divide has not only led to the increased ability of history teachers in schools/colleges and the university to ease the intellectual and classroom transition of students, it has also aided the professional development of the participants through cross-fertilization of teaching ideas and shared teaching opportunities which act as a form of independent and potentially very exciting peer observation.

## Employability: The Pilot Project (2010-2011)

Since the formation of the HHP, the issue of employability of history graduates has taken on a new imperative following the implementation of the Browne report by the Coalition government and the subsequent hike in student fees at a time of deepening recession.<sup>3</sup> Most history departments now recognize that students need to be able to enter the full-time labour market not only with the expected range of transferable skills conferred by a history degree (ability to learn independently and as part of a team, ability to organize projects and work under time pressure, skills of adaptability, problem solving and time management and so on), but also with some very specific work experience on their *curriculum vitae* to enhance and sharpen their skills-set and draw attention to their work-readiness. The main initiative of the HHP designed to address this has been a scheme of rolling internships, which started in 2009 when seven final-year history students helped in the cataloguing and organizing involved in moving the archival collections of Hull University into the HHC. The second stage of development took place with the internship scheme of 2010-11 which has been used as a pilot project ahead of embedding employability more firmly in the undergraduate curriculum at Hull University. The Teaching Development Grant funded competitive bursaries which were awarded to six students, all of whom were about to start their final year.



From L-R: Amanda Capern, Joseph Brereton, Michael Cressey, Rhian Perry, Rebecca Hiscott, Katherine Olivier, Kiri Dowens, Laura Wilson (HHP administrator), Judy Burg (University Archivist and Director Hull History Centre)

At the beginning of the year, the students completed an induction process, both into the expectations and demands of the work and into the HHC where they would all, in one capacity or another, be working. Part of this induction process involved a training afternoon with the HHC's conservator and an 'Inspired Learning for All' workshop run by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. The six interns all also completed a process of self-evaluation to decide which sort of project would best suit their career development plans. The account of the internships which follows has been rendered anonymous in order to report the drawbacks these students recorded as well as their positive feedback on the experience. Quotations are from the journals and end-of-year reports written by the interns themselves.

3. Lord Browne, 'Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education in England; an Independent Review of Higher Education Funding & Student Finance' (2010); David Nicholls, 'The Employability of History Students' (2005) – see David Nicholls' revision and update of this research in his article in *History Graduates with Impact* (2011).



Intern A wanted to combine research on archival material with a community education project to clarify their pursuit of a career either as an academic or in an area of public history. S/he worked on the correspondence and business papers of Hull's wealthiest merchant family in the eighteenth century – the Maisters. The outcome was twofold: the creation of a teaching resource (a 'learning journey') on the MyLearning website used by local teachers of KS1 pupils and web coverage also that would draw attention to the National Trust status of the surviving Maister House. The intention was to use 'the story of the house fire of 1743, as, while tragic, this seemed an ideal doorway to invoking interest in the history of an otherwise under-promoted area'. Intern B was clear from the outset that s/he was interested in archival documents and materials as research artefacts and that s/he wanted a career as a research academic. S/he already had considerable experience apprenticed to a local bookbinder and decided to work on a seventeenth-century woman's recipe book, researching both its conservation needs and its contents, comparing them with similar 'receipt books' digitised by the Wellcome Library and by *Perdita*. S/he described the experience of this as useful from the point of view of 'discovering digital archives', but less useful from the point of view of the conservation talk 'as I have experience already in conservation'. This pointed to the problems of scale in internship schemes – it is not always possible to offer tailor-made training opportunities to many students with varying work experiences already behind them. Interns C and D both expressed an interest in archives and records management, and cataloguing jobs were identified for them. They worked on about ten boxes of unsorted material each and were mentored through the process of sorting, cataloguing to spreadsheet and carrying out the task of data transfer to the database used by the HHC. In researching and summarising provenance and context, one of these interns reported that s/he learned skills that helped underpin the work being done in the special subject dissertation. Both interns reported that they benefitted enormously from the training in conservation techniques. Interns E and F wanted the opportunity to gain work experience with schools. They already had school placements doing classroom assistance. They worked with Esther Farrow, Education Officer of the HHC, to design a school workshop for KS1 pupils. Using a nineteenth-century recipe for biscuits (found in the Hotham family papers) they designed a series of literacy (words to pictures) and numeracy (adding and timing) worksheets to go with a cookery class. The biggest challenge faced was finding a kitchen, which was eventually provided by Collingwood School in Hull. This workshop was very successful and received good feedback from the teachers. The teaching materials created are a further tangible outcome for the HHP, as they will be re-used by the education outreach staff at the HHC.

The pilot project on employability has provided valuable feedback on two things: first, the extent to which the six interns actually had their employability enhanced by their internships and, second, what will work (and what will not) when rolling out the third stage of the internships scheme in the form of a formal module at Level 6. In terms of employability, what seems to have struck all six interns was that their internship gave them the chance for extended reflection on what they wanted to do, though for the two who want to be teachers there has been the added result of gaining PGCE places in a year when these have been like gold-dust. In interview they were able to point to classroom experience that went beyond them 'just helping' to being in a position to design a lesson and lead a class. Three of the others are similarly well placed at the end of the year: Intern A continues on the path to academe with an MA place at Durham. Intern C found that working as an archivist was 'like being an anti-historian – frustrating because you cannot become too interested in the material or it slows you down'. The experience has clarified her/his thinking on career choice and s/he too is applying for MA places and now aims for an academic teaching and/or research career. Intern B's interest in the material artefacts of the past has led to an MA in ancient history and archaeology. Intern D claimed to be 'relieved' to have found a job that s/he liked, but at the end of the internship conceded that being an archivist or cataloguer might not suit after-all. S/he was the only one of the six interns to end the year undecided and the experience of this intern, in particular, has led to reflections on how formalising work placement in a module needs to be combined with theoretical lectures on career pathways in history to facilitate a decision-making process that is as informed as possible. The other lesson learnt was that the labour-intensive nature of working with six interns was such that this would have to be streamlined if it was to be extended to a larger number of students. The pilot project has also resulted in a template on how a university history department can liaise most effectively with work placement/training institutions and this has led to the conclusion that internships and placements work best in smaller partnerships that aim to drive forward a few focused initiatives aimed at transitioning students at the key stages from school/college to university and from university to the labour market.

## Graduates with Impact: Applied History (2011-2012)

In September 2011 the first full undergraduate module to be taught collaboratively by the Department of History at the University of Hull and the HHC will come on stream. The learning and teaching strategy is multi-layered and setting the framework for, and timetabling of, the module has been complex. In the first semester there will be a series of lectures on theoretical principles in public history, teaching history in schools, history in the archives, museums and heritage sector, oral history, the preservation of public memory and the uses of history as a tool of culture and identity. There will be a comprehensive induction process for students to the module, which will include grounding them in knowledge of how the HHC works and organising them into one of three streams for project work. Following what emerged as successful from the pilot project these will be 1. an archives, conservation and heritage stream 2. an education stream 3. an academic and research stream. After the formal lectures, the students' timetable will involve an 'eight hour day', one day a week for six weeks, combined with small group tutorials run at the university in the three streams to support their project work. During the year students will keep an Applied History (My Career) Portfolio which will be worth 100% of the assessment in the module. Students will be required to reflect on their journey through career thinking (not necessarily decision-making) and at the end will attend individual, stage-specific mock interviews.

The process of embedding employability in the curriculum at Hull University will not end with the development of the *Applied History* module. One of my colleagues, Jenny McLeod, argues that not only is running a module to meet the needs of the employability agenda inherently unfair to those students who do not do it (one third of the year or 40+ students applied to take the module in 2011-12, but only 18 have been taken onto it), but that there are good pedagogical reasons for favouring a system of embedding employability throughout the existing curriculum. Jenny argues that there is a difference between the simple spelling out for history undergraduates of what they are gaining from their degrees *en passant* and a more conscious process of engaging students in the acquisition of the skills that will make them employable. <sup>4</sup> However, there are two ways of thinking about employability: one is generic employability, involving a skills-set and a state of mind (intellect, flexibility, social maturity) and the other is the work-readiness revealed by the specifics of a student's *curriculum vita*. As a profession, historians are still rather seduced by the idea of a history degree that builds employability through the holy trinity

of a liberal education – reading, writing and thinking analytically. In the digital age, so-called 'generic' skills and vocational skills have moved closer together. Technology has become the medium through which historical thinking is articulated and it is no longer epistemologically-separable from the intellectual skills that accrue through 'reading' for a History degree. Therefore, the history graduates who have impact understand how that blend of the analytical and technological can be deployed and constantly re-packaged for different jobs to ensure their long-term career success. But, in the short term, and especially during an economic downturn, those history graduates with the most impact combine this with the clear career focus and suite of historical projects on their *curriculum vitae* that will give them an advantage when they are applying for their first jobs. The HHP is currently dedicated to giving history students from 17 years upwards that necessary edge.

Amanda L. Capern

4. Jenny McLeod, 'Employability and a Degree in History' (2011). I am grateful to Jenny for sharing this article with me ahead of its publication.

## Introduction

When *The Employment of History Graduates* was published in 2005,<sup>1</sup> the discipline of history was facing a number of challenges the most significant of which was the pressure on its practitioners to demonstrate its 'relevance' to the economic needs of Britain in the twenty-first century. On the whole, the popularity of the subject had not been significantly damaged by the utilitarian and instrumentalist emphases in higher education policy and the skills-fixated agenda that had come to dominate political thinking about the purpose of higher education in the previous twenty-five years. It was also holding up remarkably well in the face of the introduction of tuition fees and the restriction on its potential market posed by two-thirds of school pupils dropping the subject at age fourteen. Indeed, the number of history undergraduates had risen quite dramatically in the 1990s by around 65%. Although this growth had stalled at the start of the new millennium, it soon resumed its upward trend; progress into postgraduate study remained among the best of all the arts and humanities disciplines; and employment opportunities were generally plentiful.

The challenges of 2005 pale in significance when set alongside those currently facing history. It has been hit with a double whammy: the savage increase in tuition fees recommended by the Browne Report combined with the slashing of the teaching grant to all but the so-called STEM (science) subjects projected in the government Spending Review. This extremely narrow, utilitarian approach to education threatens the very existence of subjects deemed not to have much 'market-value' and, coupled with the hike in fees, is likely to deter all but the most affluent from pursuing courses in the arts and humanities. At the time of writing, these proposals are meeting with fierce resistance and may well be amended, though almost certainly not abandoned, as they pass through parliament. However, if implemented anything like in full, they will almost certainly inflict substantial damage on university history. After an initial surge in applications for entry in 2011 as students seek places before the new fees kick in, the growth in numbers is likely to be put into sharp reverse and some departments may not survive. More critical is the fear that the progressive 'democratisation' of a history education will be halted as all but the well-off are deterred from pursuing a course of study that will saddle them with long-term debt.

It is in this context that the History Subject Centre, which has done so much to promote university history teaching in the last decade and is now itself a hapless victim of the cuts, has decided to issue an updated version of *The Employment of History*

*Graduates*. The natural instinct is to resist and continue to rail against the marketisation and privatisation of higher education and to celebrate the virtues, and the continued importance, of a humane education properly funded by the state. These things are vital and must be done. But it was always a key contention, and a prime objective, of *Employment* to show that history was more than just an interesting subject of study and that, rather, it produced rounded individuals with the skills and talents needed in the modern world and that this claim was borne out by evidence of the great success in diverse walks of life of countless of its graduates. That case was made at length in the 2005 publication and will not be repeated here. Instead, the present short account provides an update on changes in graduate employment since 2005 and on the careers of yet more famous history graduates whose celebrity has come to my notice in the intervening period. I have also departed from my practice in 2005 of focussing only on first degrees from UK HEIs by including here history postgraduates who had pursued a different subject as undergraduates as well as some famous US history graduates. As a result, nearly one hundred names have been added to the repertoire of history's high achievers. While the message of this and the previous publication, of both collective and individual achievement, is unlikely to shake the government's *parti pris* agenda, it will hopefully provide some encouragement to those young people wondering whether the huge investment in a university history education is worthwhile and with some ammunition to teachers to persuade them of it.

## First Destinations

The annual Prospects publication *What Do Graduates Do?* remains the only comprehensive survey of graduate employment. The most recent, published in 2010, provides data on the graduates of 2009.<sup>2</sup> The guide is compiled by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) using information supplied by all UK universities and records the destinations of graduates of all subjects six months after they have received their degrees. Although it provides a useful snapshot of early career choices, it does not tell us nearly enough about longer

1. David Nicholls, *The Employment of History Graduates* (HEA Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology, 2005). A pdf version of this report can be found on the History Subject Centre website: [http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/library/journals/br\\_nicholls\\_employability\\_200502xx\\_01](http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/library/journals/br_nicholls_employability_200502xx_01)
2. It is available on the Prospects web-site at <http://www.prospects.ac.uk>.

term employment. Almost a third of graduates pursue a further qualification when they have completed their first degrees, a sizeable number take casual or temporary jobs and a small percentage have not by then found employment. These limitations have been long recognised but, as yet, nothing has been done to rectify them through the provision of a regular series of statistics on jobs three or more years after graduation when employment patterns are more settled. The cautionary advice in the first edition of *Employment* about using the HESA statistics must therefore still be heeded.

Overall, the number of history graduates has continued to increase quite dramatically year-on-year in the first decade of the twenty-first century apart from slight dips in 2002 and also in 2009 when there was a small decline following a considerable increase in 2008. The total number of history graduates rose by 65% from 3177 in 1989 to 5248 in 1998. By 2009, the total had reached 9800, an increase of nearly 87% on the 1998 figure and more than trebling that of just twenty years earlier. In 1989 there had been 16% more men than women; by 1995 there were virtually the same number of female as male graduates; thereafter the balance shifted in favour of women but the gap has narrowed from 20% in 1998 and 2002 to just 5% in 2009.

The banking-induced recession has had a significant impact on the proportion of history graduates entering UK employment within six months of graduation. This figure had remained steady at around 50% for most years after 1989 and had reached as high as 54% in 1998, but in 2009 it slumped to 47.1%. There was a corresponding rise in the number unemployed from 6% in 1998 during the economic boom to 9.2% in 2009 though this is still slightly below the levels reached in the late 80s and early 90s and, indeed, was less than the previous year. As the Prospects guide observes: 'This is remarkable given the effects of the economic recession in 2009 when graduate recruitment by the members of the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) fell by 8.9% with a proportionate effect on all other graduate employment.' The extremely strong showing of history in terms of the percentage of its students compared with those from other disciplines going on to postgraduate study has continued. 14.4% of all history graduates were pursuing a higher degree, a proportion considerably higher than the national average of 8.1%. When other forms of postgraduate study are included, the figure for 2009 rises to 32.2% which is above the average of 29.2% for the four years analysed in the 2005 edition of *Employment*. The increase may be a product of the rise in the total of those with first and upper second-class degrees but it is perhaps more a reflection of the difficulty history graduates

are now encountering in the jobs market. The high uptake of postgraduate study nevertheless confirms the point made in the previous report – namely, that a history degree provides a firm basis for further career development in a wide range of vocational occupations. Among those cited in the Prospects 2010 report were multimedia broadcast journalism, museum studies, real estate, law, teaching, automotive engineering and pilot training. One change in the way the Prospects Guide now records the numbers engaged in further study that was not present in the statistics for 2002 is the inclusion of the percentage of those who are working while studying – nearly a quarter of the total. This may be symptomatic of the impact of tuition fees and the rising costs of higher education but without comparable data for earlier years, it is impossible to be certain.

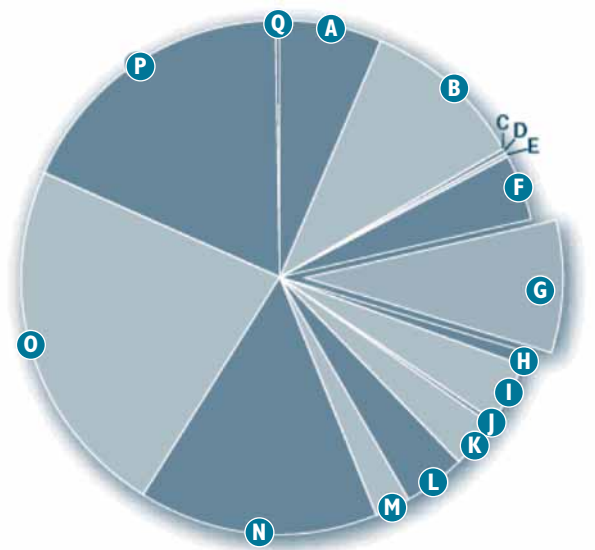
The following pie-chart and data taken from page 59 of the Prospects Guide provide a detailed breakdown of the jobs of the 4445 history graduates of 2009 who told the survey that they were in some form of paid employment six months after completing their courses.

### Type of work for those in employment

**2420** Female

**2030** Male

**4445** Total (Note: Five respondents did not disclose their gender)



Occupations of those in employment	%	Examples
<b>A</b> Marketing, Sales and Advertising Professionals	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>Marketing executive:</b> Capital group
<b>B</b> Commercial, Industrial and Public Sector Managers	<b>10.3%</b>	<b>Management trainee:</b> Enterprise Rent a Car
<b>C</b> Scientific Research, Analysis and Development Professionals	<b>0.0%</b>	
<b>D</b> Engineering Professionals	<b>0.2%</b>	
<b>E</b> Health Professionals & Associate Professionals	<b>0.5%</b>	
<b>F</b> Education Professionals	<b>4.0%</b>	FE Lecturer <b>Tefl:</b> British Council <b>Careers advisor:</b> Connexions
<b>G</b> Business and Financial Professionals and Associate Professionals	<b>8.3%</b>	<b>International manager:</b> HSBC <b>Tax inspector:</b> HM Revenue and Customs <b>Financial crimes associate:</b> RBS
<b>H</b> Information Technology Professionals	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>Web project officer,</b> Political party <b>Librarian,</b> Stockport <b>Games tester,</b> SEGA
<b>I</b> Arts, Design, Culture and Sports Professionals	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>Editorial assistant:</b> History press <b>Gallery assistant:</b> Art gallery in Manchester
<b>J</b> Legal Professionals	<b>0.3%</b>	
<b>K</b> Social & Welfare Professionals	<b>3.2%</b>	
<b>L</b> Other Professionals, Associate Professional and Technical Occupations	<b>3.9%</b>	Police Officer <b>Chef,</b> Brewers restaurants <b>Proof-reader,</b> Global Data <b>Auctioneers assistant,</b> Auction house
<b>M</b> Numerical Clerks and Cashiers	<b>2.1%</b>	
<b>N</b> Other Clerical and Secretarial Occupations	<b>15.0%</b>	
<b>O</b> Retail, Catering, Waiting and Bar Staff	<b>23.0%</b>	
<b>P</b> Other Occupations	<b>17.9%</b>	<b>Personal trainer:</b> Fitness First
<b>Q</b> Unknown Occupations	<b>0.2%</b>	



Category G, Business and Financial Professionals and Associate Professionals, consists of chartered and certified accountants (1.1%), finance and investment analysts/advisers (1.2%), personnel and recruitment consultants/officers (1.9%), and other business and financial professionals and associate professionals (4.6%).

The analysis of the trends in history graduate employment using the Prospects statistics for 1989, 1995, 1998 and 2002 showed a fairly consistent distribution over that thirteen-year period with three sectors accounting on average for over 55% of the first time jobs – namely, the clerical, retail and managerial sectors – and the several types of 'professional' employment creating a fourth with 20% of the total. Because of changes in the way jobs are categorised in the Prospects Guides it is very difficult to make comparisons over time. However, what can be said is that the four general sectors of employment identified in the 2005 analysis still preponderated in 2009 accounting for over 82% of the first jobs of history graduates, though the distribution has shifted somewhat. The most significant change has been the growth in the proportion employed in retail and catering – from under 10% in 1998 to 23% in 2009 – and a corresponding fall in the proportion in managerial, business, commercial, marketing and financial positions. This is probably a result of students holding on to term-time jobs while waiting for employment more suited to their qualifications. The proportion entering clerical positions has also halved from around a third in 1998 and 2002 to a sixth in 2009. The more 'conventional' areas for history graduates such as the library, museum information and educational services have held steady at around 7% as has the proportion, approximately 6%, entering teacher training.

The Prospects Guide observes that the average salaries for 'Arts, Creative Arts and Humanities' graduates in 2009 was £17,387, somewhat below the average salary across all disciplines of £19,695. However, this generic category includes art and design, English, media studies, language and performing arts as well as history graduates and salaries varied from £14,625 for a Fine Arts graduate to £20,012 for a European Studies graduate, the latter subject more akin to history than the former. Also, those graduates entering training schemes with major employers earned on average £25,000 per annum. The most striking change, then, since 2005 in the employment destinations of history graduates six months after graduation is the shift in the balance from managerial and clerical to retail jobs. This is symptomatic of the difficulties they have faced in an increasingly competitive labour market with many of them in jobs (such as waiting and bar staff) that do not require a graduate qualification. This trend is likely to continue for the

foreseeable future where, it has been estimated, there will be an average of forty-five applicants for every graduate job. It is important, however, to reiterate that the non-graduate jobs are usually temporary and casual and many history graduates will, within three years of graduating, as the 2005 report showed, have found employment that is more commensurate with their academic qualifications while some will have embarked on careers that will lead to fame, celebrity and prosperity.

## Famous History Graduates

*The Employment of History Graduates* included a section on famous history graduates designed to show that a history degree is the pathway to a wide-range of careers in which its graduates have been eminently successful. It was followed up with a DVD - *Choosing History at 14* - produced on behalf of the Historical Association that included film of interviews with many distinguished history alumni drawn from different occupations.<sup>3</sup> These famous graduates spoke eloquently about how important studying history had been both to their careers and their life experiences. History graduates were shown to have been successful not only in conventional occupations such as teaching, academic, clerical and administrative, PR, retail and catering, politics, and library, museum and information services but also in some which at first sight might seem more unlikely, such as business, finance and law. A history degree, it was suggested, introduced its students to transferable skills that made them well-equipped to pursue a multiplicity of careers and to do so with great success.

Inevitably, a few famous graduates were missed in the 2005 publication. Several more have attained celebrity since 2005. The following account therefore supplements the 2005 text and, taken together, the two provide a more complete and up-to-date survey of distinguished history alumni, though the cautionary note registered in 2005 still applies, namely that there are no doubt many more still to be identified. The job-categories here are the same as in the 2005 publication and are treated in exactly the same order to ease cross-referencing.

3. The HA kindly made some of the short interviews available to the Subject Centre. These can be viewed on the **Graduates with Impact website** on the 'High Achieving Graduates' page: [http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/research/gwilab\\_out\\_gwilhigh\\_achievers/](http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/research/gwilab_out_gwilhigh_achievers/). Copies are available from the Historical Association.

## ■ Media

History graduates are to be found in all branches of the media and *Employment* furnished examples of famous news and sports journalists in newspapers, radio and television; celebrity entertainers from comedians to more serious documentary broadcasters and presenters; and editors and managers. This last group might just as easily be included in the business category for it embraces individuals with the same entrepreneurial skills. New names uncovered since 2005 in the realm of media management include Mark Damazer (Cambridge), the Controller of BBC Radio 4 and 7; Ilse Howling (international history and politics, Leeds) who, after several years at the BBC, became the managing director at Freeview; Daisy Goodwin (Cambridge), a TV producer and writer and the founder of Silver River Productions; Jane Featherstone (German and history, Leeds) who is the creative director at Kudos Films responsible for such popular television 'hits' as *Life on Mars*, *Ashes to Ashes*, *Spooks* and *Hustle*. Sian Williams (English and history, Oxford Brookes) can be seen regularly on the presenters' sofa of BBC 1's *Breakfast Show*, but those who prefer the radio for their morning's news and light entertainment can tune in instead to Harriet Scott (Hull), Breakfast Show presenter for Heart FM. Dan Snow (Oxford), the son of TV journalist Peter Snow, is a presenter and populariser of history on the BBC appearing most frequently on *The One Show*. There are many history graduates working in the press, and two who have attained senior positions are Martin Ivens (Oxford), deputy editor of the *Sunday Times*, and Lionel Barber (German and modern history, Oxford), editor of the *Financial Times*. Lastly, to the list of high-profile history graduates turned comedians cited in 2005, we can now add the name of David Mitchell (Cambridge).

## ■ Politics

The general election of 2010 produced a large crop of MPs who had studied history at university, some of them entering the Commons for the first time. There are far too many to list here. As in 2005, attention is focused on those who have attained ministerial rank. With the change in government, history lost a prime minister but it gained four new Conservative cabinet members: George Osborne (Oxford), chancellor of the exchequer; Andrew Mitchell (Cambridge), international development secretary; Owen Paterson (Cambridge), Northern Ireland secretary; and Caroline Spelman, environment secretary, whose degree in European studies from Sussex included a large element of history. Those with ministerial positions outside the cabinet are Greg Barker (modern history, economic history and politics, Royal Holloway), minister of state for energy and climate change; Simon Burns (Oxford), minister of state for

health; and Chris Grayling (Cambridge), minister of state for employment. Angie Bray (St Andrew's) is parliamentary private secretary to Francis Maude, the minister for the cabinet office and paymaster general.

The public school, Oxbridge, Bullingdon Club cast of the Conservative cabinet has attracted much adverse comment but the Labour shadow cabinet is only marginally less elitist, demonstrating just how narrowly class-based UK governance is. As many shadow cabinet ministers – six – studied PPE at Oxford as did Tory cabinet ministers. One of the shadow cabinet studied history at university, Rosie Winterton (Hull), chief whip, and for a further four it was a part of their degree programmes: Liam Byrne (politics and modern history, Manchester), work and pensions; Caroline Flint (American literature, history and film studies, UEA), communities and local government; Douglas Alexander (politics and modern history, Edinburgh), foreign office; and Hilary Benn (Russian and east European studies, Sussex), leader of the house of commons and the only survivor from the historians in the 2005 cabinet. Outside of Westminster, mention should be made of Huw Brodie (Cambridge), director for rural affairs and heritage in the Welsh national assembly.

## ■ Civil Service

History graduates enter the civil service as naturally and ineluctably as they do politics but without becoming household names in quite the same way. A historical education provides an excellent foundation for a career in the diplomatic service as evidenced by the number of its graduates who work in the foreign and commonwealth office. A further six ambassadors can now be added to the four noted in 2005. They are: Keith Shannon (St Andrew's), ambassador to Moldova; Alexander Ellis (Cambridge), Portugal; Nigel Baker (Cambridge), Bolivia; Rupert Joy (Oxford), Uzbekistan; Damian Todd (Oxford), Poland; and Patricia Phillips (Cambridge), Angola. In addition, Jolyon Welsh (Cambridge) is the deputy high commissioner in Canberra, and Simon Manley (Oxford) is director of strategic threats at the FCO. Elsewhere, in the civil service, James Drummond (Cambridge) is director of the South Asia division in the department of international development; Stephen Kershaw (Oxford) is director of police reforms and resources at the home office; Alison Drayton (history and politics, Royal Holloway) is a director of the United Nations development programme; Nicola Roche (Birkbeck), at the department for culture, media and sport, is director of strategy on the government Olympic executive planning the 2012 London Games; and Nicholas Joicey (Bristol) is an international director at the treasury.

*Employment* also provided numerous examples of history graduates who were active in, or running, political 'think-tanks', watchdogs, national charities, or more general advisory bodies. More have now come to light. Peter Wanless (international history and politics, Leeds) is chief executive of the Big Lottery Fund; Angela Mason (Royal Holloway) is director of the women and equality unit and of Stonewall and chair of the Fawcett Society; Anne Longfield (Newcastle) is chief executive of 4Children, formerly the Kids Club Network; Alex Bole (modern history and politics, Southampton) is the campaign officer for UUK and former general secretary of NUS Europe; Mike Taylor (Staffordshire) founded the charity First Aid Africa; and Jane Ashcroft (Stirling) is managing director of Anchor Trust, the largest provider of housing, care and support for older people throughout England. History graduates continue as well to find senior posts in the sphere of public health: David Fulligan (Cambridge) is chief executive of Bolton NHS foundation trust. On this, admittedly limited, evidence of history graduates who work in the public sector, the FCO and other branches of the civil service, like the upper reaches of politics, are still the fiefdom of male Oxbridge graduates, while charities attract graduates, including many women, from less privileged bastions of academia. This tells us something about the persistence and character of the Establishment in twenty-first century Britain.<sup>4</sup>

### ■ Church

I have found no new names to add to the 2005 list of history graduates who are pursuing a career in the church.

### ■ Security Services

A small number of history graduates serve in the armed forces, police and prisons but, again, their education appears to be no bar to their rising to the top. In the police service, Paul Hancock (Leeds) attained the rank of chief constable of Bedfordshire, while lieutenant general Sir Alexander Shirreff (Oxford) has had a distinguished career in the army and, in 2008, became commander of the Allied Rapid Reactions Corp.

### ■ Law

Many history graduates go on to study law and many rise to senior positions. Once again, Oxbridge's role in underpinning the Establishment is evidenced by its contribution to filling the judiciary. The following four QCs all studied history at Oxford – James Guthrie, Christopher Butcher, Duncan Matthews and Bankim Thanki, while a fifth – Alistair Schaff – did so at Cambridge (jointly with law). Robert Warnock (UEA) is a circuit judge.

### ■ Trade Unions

As was observed in 2005, it would be wrong to conclude, on the evidence of the career trajectories of its Oxbridge graduates, that studying history inevitably leads to service on behalf of the Establishment. As we saw then, there are many history graduates who pursue more 'radical' careers, though in most cases they have not studied at Oxbridge! Frances O'Grady (politics and modern history, Manchester), the deputy general secretary of the TUC, can now be added to the list of trade union leaders from 2005.

### ■ Museums, Libraries and the Arts

This sector is a major employer of history graduates and many more names can be added to the sizeable number referenced in 2005. The museum and heritage sectors inevitably attract history graduates and several are now running major galleries, managing national collections or organising heritage sites. To the nine named in 2005, we can add six more: Baroness Kay Andrews (history and social studies of science, Sussex) is the chair of English Heritage; David Fleming, who studied at Leeds and Leicester, is director of the National Museums, Liverpool and president of the Museums Association; major-general Jonathan Riley (Leeds) is master of the Royal Armouries, Leeds; Jane Roberts (history and history of art, Queen Mary) is curator of the Windsor Castle print room; Alexander Naime (history and economics, Oxford) is director of the National Portrait Gallery; and lieutenant-general Jonathon Riley (BA geography, MA history, Leeds, PhD modern history, Cranfield), director general and master of the Armouries. Jonathon might just as readily have been included under security services for he had a distinguished thirty-six year career in the army prior to his current position. He is also a prolific author of military histories. Mention should perhaps also be made of Alan Davey, chief executive of the Arts Council of England, who studied English at Birmingham and Oxford before beginning a part-time PhD in history at Birkbeck.

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4. The public schools certainly recognise the importance of a history education to access to important jobs and to employability in general. As the recent Ofsted Report *History for All* (March 2011) acknowledges, while only 30% of pupils in maintained schools took GCSE history in 2010, 50% did so in independent schools. The Report can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). This point should be hammered home to the pupils (and their parents) and, indeed, some headteachers in maintained schools who question the value of history in relation to career prospects.

History, as we know, teaches excellent research and writing skills and many of its graduates go on to pursue postgraduate qualifications in the subject and to teach and write about it. However, as in 2005 I do not intend to include the many well-known authors of academic or popular history as I'm more concerned to show the 'transferability' of historical skills to other careers. But creative writers are fair game. Hence Kate Williams (BA Oxford, MA Queen Mary, DPhil Oxford) appears here not because she is a best-selling author of historical biographies (Emma Hamilton and Queen Victoria) but because she also writes historical novels, securing a £1 million book deal with Penguin in 2010 to write two of them, and because she is also involved in work for stage, screen, radio and television. William Smethurst (Lancaster) is a novelist, BBC journalist and television and radio scriptwriter, with *The Archers* among his credits. Others include the author Anne Fine (history and politics, Warwick) who has written over fifty books for children and was appointed the second Children's Laureate, and John Charles Wilsher (English, history and art, Lancaster), the prolific writer of police and crime dramas for radio and television whose credits include *Between the Lines* and *The Bill*.

There are still very few actors and 'popstars' to report. Sean Gilder (history and geography, Queen Mary), best-known for the role of Paddy Maguire in Channel 4's *Shameless*, is the only UK actor of note I have found, but there are several from the USA who are mentioned below. Phil Selway (English and history, Liverpool John Moores) is the drummer of *Radiohead*. *Iron Maiden's* Bruce Dickinson (Queen Mary) joins Chris Martin and Neil Tennant from 2005 in the category of lead singers of platinum-selling popular musicians. He also merits inclusion as the author of two comic novels and for his sporting prowess as an Olympic standard fencer. In 2005, there were too few sports personalities to merit a separate category and Steve Coppel was relegated to a footnote. Now we can put him in the company of Mike Atherton (Cambridge), the former England cricket captain and latterly commentator, and Martin Cross (history and politics, Queen Mary), who won a gold medal in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games in the coxless fours rowing alongside Steve Redgrave. He is now a journalist for the *Guardian* and a sports commentator. Lastly, we have Carol Isherwood (Leeds), founder and director of the Rugby Football Union for Women and a former captain of the Great Britain rugby union squad.

### ■ Universities

When I first analysed the degree-subject backgrounds of vice-chancellors in post in January 2001, I found that 'the number of historians who had reached this pinnacle of

academic leadership and management was considerably larger than would be produced by a proportionate distribution across all disciplines'. Only economics had produced more - just - 11.5 to history's 10.5.<sup>5</sup> I concluded that 'the capacity of historians to attain such high positions in statistically significant ways says something about their all-round abilities'.<sup>6</sup> But was 2001 a 'rogue' year, unusual in the over-representation of history graduates among university heads? When I looked at the data again in 2005, five of the history VCs from 2001 had gone but four new ones had been appointed thereby maintaining their disproportionately high representation. For the present report, I have examined the subject backgrounds of the heads of 126 HEIs in post in February 2011.<sup>7</sup> History (12.83) has now moved ahead of economics (10.5). Engineering (10) and physics (6.83) occupy third and fourth places respectively, reversing their positions of 2001. Even if the VCs are ranked by counting every subject they studied as one, rather than *pro rata*, the rank order remains substantially the same, though history's overall lead becomes still more impressive with fifteen to economics' eleven. The fact that the top four places are occupied by the same subjects<sup>8</sup> suggests some correlation between degree background and academic leadership, though empirical evidence from a much longer time-span would be needed before any firm conclusions could be drawn.

5. Joint and combined degrees are counted here *pro rata* in order to match the overall total of VCs. This means, of course, that in many cases there are more VCs who have studied each subject at least in part.
6. *Employment*, p. 13.
7. The increase over the ninety-two of 2001 is partly accounted for by the creation of new universities since then and partly by the inclusion this time of the heads of the constituent colleges of the University of London and the vice-chancellor of the independent University of Buckingham. Once again, however, I have excluded the masters and provosts of the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge even though several of them boast historians among their number.
8. There has, however, been some movement lower down the scale. For example, biology with six in 2001 only had 2.5 in February 2011 while psychology has moved the other way from one in 2001 to 6.66. It is interesting to compare history with another humanities subject and one with a larger undergraduate intake, English, which had just one VC in 2001 and has four, counted by the *pro rata* method, at present.

The numerical preponderance of history cannot be explained away by the persistence of the same people in these jobs. Only one (Sir Rick Trainor) survives from 2001 and a further two (David Eastwood and Madeleine Atkins) from 2005. Trainor (Brown and Oxford) has moved from Greenwich to King's College, London and Eastwood (Oxford) from East Anglia to Birmingham. Atkins (history and law, Cambridge) remains at Coventry. The other current incumbents are: Louise Richardson (Trinity College, Dublin) at St. Andrew's; Edward Acton (York) at East Anglia; Clive Behagg (Birmingham) at Chichester; Pat Loughrey (Ulster) at Goldsmith's College, London; Peter John (Swansea) at Thames Valley; Van Gore (history and politics, Sheffield) at Southampton Solent; Geoffrey Crossick (Cambridge) at London; Sir Howard Davies (history and modern languages, Oxford) at the LSE; Robin Baker (history and eastern European languages, London) at Canterbury Christ Church; Joan Stringer (history and politics, Keele) at Edinburgh Napier; Mary Stuart (history and drama, Cape Town) at Lincoln; Steve Olivier (history, philosophy and sports science, Rhodes) at Abertay Dundee; and Graham Upton (history and English, Sydney) at Cumbria. The last two were acting VCs at the time of the survey. Crossick replaced another history graduate, Sir Graeme Davies (Cambridge) as London's VC in September 2010, moving from Goldsmith's to make way for yet another historian, Loughrey. It is interesting to note the diverse range of universities where these VCs took their first degrees; university leadership does not appear to be an Oxbridge fiefdom like many of the top jobs in Britain.

Coincidentally, John Morgan of *Times Higher Education* undertook a survey of the education and pay of the UK's vice-chancellors at much the same time as my own. He covered 157 HEIs, the additional thirty-one comprising mainly university colleges and specialised institutes (such as the Institute of Cancer Research) which I had excluded from my investigation. Nevertheless, even this more extensive coverage yielded the same conclusion regarding history's predominance. It is, wrote Morgan, 'the most commonly read undergraduate degree among the sector's bosses'.<sup>9</sup> Historians were in charge at two of the additional HEIs: Chris Husbands (Cambridge) at the Institute of Education and Margaret Noble (history and geography, Aberystwyth) at University College Plymouth. Morgan's finding that only 16% of VCs had sat their undergraduate degrees at Oxford or Cambridge also confirmed my own regarding the recruitment of VCs from non-traditional elites.

The replication in 2011 of the results for 2001 and 2005 suggests that the capacity of historians to continue to attain

high positions in university management in significantly disproportionate numbers to their representation among the academic profession as a whole is more than coincidental. The managerial, organisational and leadership skills required to run large academic institutions are not dissimilar to those which have led history graduates to similar success in the realms of business and finance.

### ■ Business and Finance

The finding in *Employment* that occasioned most comment, probably because it was not expected, was the great success of history graduates in the world of business and finance. But it isn't so remarkable. As I argued at the time, a history education fosters many of the skills that are intrinsic to entrepreneurial flair and achievement. So, it is no surprise that many more successful business people with history degrees have been identified since 2005. Most of their names will be less familiar, other than to readers of the financial press, than the companies for which they work. Tanya Sarne (Sussex) is the founder and creative director of the fashion company Ghost. Mark Cashmore (Lancaster) is the group chief executive officer of Smith News plc, the news division of WH Smith. Guy Vaughan Black (Cambridge) is the corporate affairs director and chairman of M & C Saatchi UK. Paul Chandler (Oxford) is chief executive of Traidcraft, the leading UK fair trade organisation. Benjamin Page (Oxford) is the chief executive of Ipsos MORI, the market research company well known for its public polls. Thomas Bloxham (politics and history, Manchester) co-founded and is now chairman of the property company Urban Splash. Timothy Matthews (Cambridge) is the chief executive of Remploy, the leading provider of jobs for people with disabilities or complex problems that hamper their employment prospects. In the financial sphere, Ben Hackham (economic and economic history, Manchester Metropolitan) is the managing director of Renaissance Capital, the Russian investment bank; Lindsay Bury (Cambridge) is chairman of the Electrical and General Investment Trust; and Michael McLintock (modern history and economics, Oxford) is chief executive of M & G Group Ltd, formerly Prudential M & G Asset Management. Lastly, the professional services company KPMG employs two Sussex history graduates: Mike Blake, chief finance officer, and David Elms, head of media.

9. John Morgan, 'Identity check: Vice-chancellors' education and pay revealed', *THE*, 24 March 2011. Morgan noted that the degree background of the VCs was 'no guarantee of loyalty'. The fact that 57 had studied the humanities or social sciences did not appear to have led them to vigorously defend these areas from the 'unprecedented attack from the government'.



## Time and Place

For the most part, the famous people identified here and in 2005 studied history at UK universities and are still alive. The list could have been hugely augmented by the inclusion of history graduates of other countries and of those now deceased. This would have entailed a great deal of additional research and was deemed of lesser interest to a UK readership and also unnecessary for the integrity of the central argument about the relationship between a history education and career success, though it would have reinforced it. However, some sense of how widening the scope of the research in terms of both time and place might enhance the overall argument can be gleaned from evidence from the United States. Shortly before *Employment* appeared in 2005, a book entitled *Top Careers for History Graduates* was published in America.<sup>10</sup> The book is nearly four hundred pages long and lists thirty-four careers most of which are equally valid for UK history graduates. They include: teachers from primary to university level; book, magazine and newspaper editors, writers and journalists; archivists, librarians, book conservators and museum curators; anthropologists, archaeologists and ethnoscientists; politicians, political scientists and lobbyists; cultural advisers and information brokers; demographers and genealogists; national and local government agents and officials, including intelligence officers; lawyers and judges; linguists; market researchers; and tour guides. It also lists a few famous US history graduates, some no longer alive and including four presidents (Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Richard Nixon and George W. Bush), three prominent statesmen (Henry Cabot Lodge, George McGovern and Newt Gingrich), four leading business executives (Martha Stewart, Lee Iacocca, Carly Fiorina and Steve Forbes) and a sports broadcaster (Chris Berman). The success of UK history graduates in the realm of business and finance finds echoes in the US where, according to *Fortune* magazine, 38% of CEOs at the time *Top Careers* was published were majors in liberal arts. The careers of US history graduates therefore suggest that the UK experience is by no means unique.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

In 2005 I concluded that a 'truly remarkable number of history graduates have gone on to become the movers-and-shakers of modern-day Britain' and illustrated this by reference to the many top jobs they occupied. That conclusion remains substantially unchanged today. It might be averred that this success in the employment world is purely accidental or coincidental and has little or nothing to do with the education that these big hitters have experienced if it were not for the

fact that, in the interviews with many of them for the Historical Association's DVD, they confirmed the important role that the skills they had acquired from studying history had played in preparing them for their careers. The question that naturally arises is – if a history education is such a boon to employability, why is its place in the curriculum not more widely promoted by the politicians who shape education policy, many of whom are themselves beneficiaries of just such an education? The threat posed by government policies to the future of a history education seems positively contradictory if not perverse. It is not that they don't appreciate its value as the interviews amply demonstrate. Could it be that, having themselves benefited, they are now pulling up the drawbridge? This explanation is too simple. Rather, what seems to be happening is a movement towards concentrating humanities subjects, including history, in a more select number of universities recruiting from an elite that has the capacity to pay the inflated fees that are now being demanded. In this way, that elite will continue to reproduce its control of the key jobs in civil society, the state and the economy. A history education will still play its part in this process but it will be increasingly denied to a large section of society thereby undoing the progress that has occurred gradually over the last fifty years in the democratisation of higher education. This is a depressing prospect for it means that attempts like the present one to trumpet the values of studying history and humanities generally will run up against policies designed to confine these benefits to a select few. Nevertheless, it is important to understand and continue to promote the virtues of such an education in order to encourage resistance to policies designed to restrict access to it.

### David Nicholls

10. Checkmark Book, New York, 2004. Curiously, the only name on the cover is 'Ferguson' but it is not clear if this is the author.
11. The very selective list of famous US history alumni cited in *Top Careers* is indicative of just how extensive any global compendium would be. Without any attempt at systematic research, I've come across other US examples, including Hollywood *glitterati* Katherine Hepburn, Amanda Peet, Stockard Canning, Ed Norton and Ellen Barkin, musician Lauryn Hill, TV host Conan O'Brien, US vice-president Joe Biden and presidential candidate John McCain. Just how far one might press the argument can be illustrated by the case of the Colombian singer Shakira who, though she has never taken a history degree, finds the subject so fascinating that she has attended history classes *in cognito*.

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